

*A Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Tibetan World: Reading Illustrated Mid-19th Century Maps of Tibet*¹

Diana Lange

When Ulrike Roesler asked me to deliver this year's Aris lecture I felt deeply honoured for various reasons. I never had the chance to meet Michael Aris although I did get to know Anthony. At the time of Michael's death, I was just planning my first stay in Tibet as a student of Tibet University (Lhasa) in the summer of 1999. Ten years later, I started following in his giant footsteps when I picked up a research baton from among what he called his "projects in progress": the British Library's *Wise Collection*.

My research on this collection started with my interest in water transport in Tibet. I was introduced to the *Wise Collection* by my supervisor Toni Huber in 2008, at which time I had just finished my PhD on fishing and yak hide boats in Tibet and was looking for historical illustrations of Tibetan ferries and boats for a publication. Several such illustrations appear in the *Wise Collection*'s picture maps of Central Tibet. I first encountered the original maps and drawings in the summer of 2009 during a visit to the British Library. Burkhard Quessel, lead curator of Tibetan Collections, kindly showed me the three 'Wise Albums'. I remember that I was so overwhelmed by the quality and quantity of the material that I decided—on the spot, still in the Prints and Drawings Room—to work on the collection.



Ferries and boats in the *Wise Collection*. Add. Or. 3017 f 4, © The British Library Board

In the very beginning of my research, I contacted Anthony Aris to inform him about my plans and his answer was very encouraging: "I was truly delighted to hear from you about your intentions to study the *Wise Collection*. Michael always considered that it deserves a major piece of research, as well as a publication to be timed with an exhibition. Michael was planning to find the time for this but sadly he died, leaving many projects uncompleted. It is most heartening to know that his work will one day be completed."²

¹ I am very grateful to John Bray and Ulrike Roesler for proofreading this written version of this lecture.

² Email correspondence 25 June 2011.

In a way, the Aris brothers accompanied me in some way or other from the very start of my research. I am sure both would be very pleased to see that I finished the ‘Wise Collection project’ and it feels very natural for me to dedicate my forthcoming book to them both.

Michael Aris noted that the *Wise Collection* “may represent the most ambitious pictorial survey of Tibetan topography and culture ever attempted by a local artist.”³ This ambition is reflected in six large picture maps. Placed side by side, five of these picture maps add up to a 15m-long panorama showing the west-east route between Leh in Ladakh and Lhasa, and the north-south route leading from Lhasa southwards to Bhutan and today’s Arunachal Pradesh in northeast India. The maps are accompanied by 28 related drawings showing detailed illustrations of selected monasteries, monastic rituals, wedding ceremonies, ethnic groups and other topics. Altogether, there are more than 900 numbered annotations on the drawings. Explanatory notes referring to these numbers were written in English on 24 separate sheets of paper.



One of the maps. Add. Or. 3016 f2, © The British Library Board



Two of the accompanying drawings. Add. Or. 3021 and 3033, © The British Library Board

The *Wise Collection* captured my attention in two ways: First, I was fascinated by the things I could see: the material, the colours, the content, the style. Secondly, I was captured by the collection’s history. This lecture presents the results of ‘reading’ and analysing the maps and drawings over a period of ten years. In a way, my research on the *Wise Collection* was comparable to a detective story, and I want to share this tale with you in this talk.

³ Aris 1992: 126.

Let me start with the collection's story in the late 1960s. At that time, the former British Political Officer and Tibetologist Hugh Richardson noticed a collection of drawings in the India Office Library. These were catalogued as the 'Wise Albums', but the circumstances of the origin of this collection were unrecorded. A typewritten note stated that the drawings appeared to be by a Tibetan artist, probably a lama, who had contact with Europeans, and that they appeared to have been commissioned by the writer of the accompanying explanatory texts. The drawings were dated between 1844 and 1862, while the bindings were dated to the late 19th century and inscribed with the name 'Wise'. This was the start of the long search for 'Wise'. Michael Aris and Hugh Richardson corresponded extensively – before the invention of emails – and it has been exciting to go through their letters in Oxford's Bodleian Library, and to follow their discussion of the question 'Who the devil was Wise?'⁴ He was finally identified in the late 1990s by Hugh Richardson as Thomas Alexander Wise, a Scottish polymath and collector who served in the Indian Medical Service in Bengal in the first half of the 19th century. However, while the collection was named after Wise, he was not the one who commissioned the drawings.

When I started my research, I thought I knew where I was going. Being trained in Tibetology, I focused on the stories in the drawings – hundreds of little details – and on a research field that was new to me: the history of cartography. In the beginning of my research, I spent many days in the Berlin State Library making notes from the *History of Cartography*, Volume 2, bound as two separate books.⁵ Later, Anthony Aris made me a wonderful present during one of my stays in London: he gave me copies of these books that had once belonged to Michael. He told me that the books seemed to be more useful for me than for him. Shortly afterwards, I found a note by Michael inside the book stating "a gift from Catherine Delano Smith". By chance, I had met Catherine – one of the leading historians in the history of cartography – the day before I received the books from Anthony. I told her about that note and she answered "how funny – but also how appropriate – that Anthony Aris passed you that *History of Cartography* volume; I remember well giving it to Michael—actually, to his mother in London to pass on to him. (...) I am touched that you have it now."⁶ These books have been accompanying me now for many years; they provided an excellent starting point in studying the history of cartography of Tibet, and I don't want to lose them!

Toby Lester, in presenting his research on the 'Waldseemüller map' – the map that gave America its name – stated: "The map draws you in, reveals itself in stages, and doesn't let go."⁷ This certainly proved true for me and the maps and drawings of the *Wise Collection*. Some of them reveal themselves more easily than others. In drawing the maps, the lama produced a visual account of his travel route, which was more than 1,800km in length. Furthermore, he addressed a range of topics in the accompanying drawings that represent an overwhelming wealth of information on Tibet and the Western Himalayas. In studying the material, I developed both a feeling for the lama's drawing style and an understanding of his way of thinking. The so-called 'scale' used in the maps is not uniform, nor is their orientation. Some are oriented to the south, some to the north, and still others to the east. Buildings on the maps

⁴ Letter by Hugh Richardson to Michael Aris, 3 May 1994, Bodleian Library Oxford, Special Collections, MS. Or. Aris 17/280.

⁵ Harley and David 1994.

⁶ Email correspondence 23 May 2014.

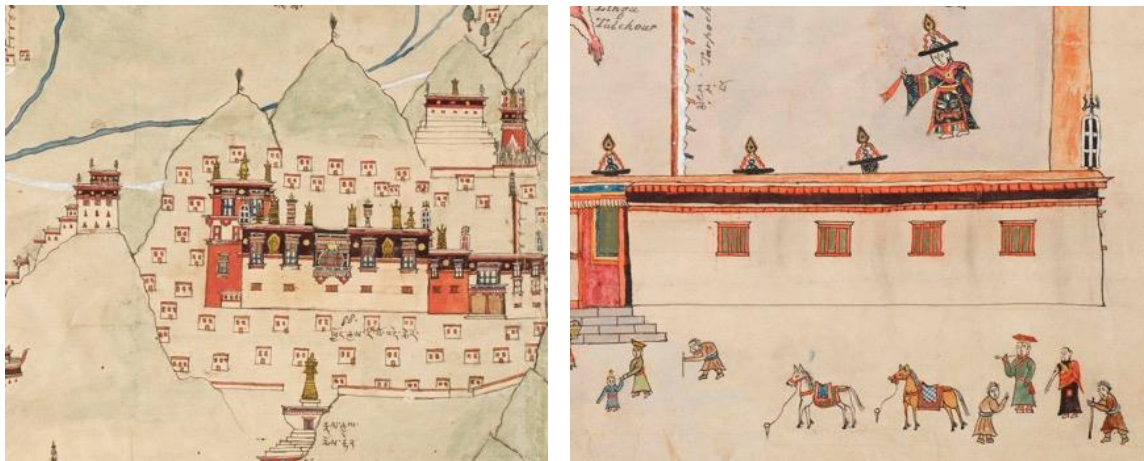
⁷ Lester 2009: xxi.

usually face the viewer, regardless of their actual geographic location. Instead of showing the whole building, only significant architectural characteristics are highlighted. As a result, many people who look at the maps comment that they are ‘wrong’ – especially concerning their geographical and architectural accuracy. While the maps might not always seem accurate from a Western scientific point of view, they can give much information about their maker. If we imagine ourselves shrunk to the dimension of the maps and ignoring scale and cardinal orientation, we could ‘walk’ through the landscape along the travel route shown on the maps. As the most important orientation points are depicted accurately, these maps would pass a test for practicality. The mapmaker himself travelled along this route, familiarizing himself with its topographical and infrastructural details, which he in turn depicted on the drawings.



Detail showing Zangskar’s capital Padum and the nearby Sani Monastery. Add. Or. 3018 f 4, © The British Library Board

Each map and drawing consists of numerous small detailed illustrations such as mountains, rivers, bridges, animals, buildings, trees and people. Upon closer examination, each of these detailed illustrations contains even more minute details. For example, monastic buildings are often shown with specific characteristics, such as different kinds of roof construction, flag poles, or entrance doors. In a similar way, illustrations of people often show not just individual pieces of clothing, such as hats, shoes, and outer garments, but also ornaments and jewellery. Places of strategic importance are depicted on the maps on a larger scale than the surrounding areas. Large and important monasteries and fortresses are shown in great detail. In some cases, the mapmaker used symbols to mark specific sites. For example, he marked government post stations by depicting flagpoles next to black nomad tents, and every illustration of a garrison and Chinese residence includes a yellow banner.



Details from a map and accompanying drawings, showing Chonggyé Riwo Dechen Monastery in the Chonggyé Valley and a group of people at the monastery’s entrance. Add. Or. 3017 f 5 and 3041, © The British Library Board

During my research I conducted fieldwork and travelled along many of the routes shown on the maps. In 2012, I visited Tibet, and in 2014 and 2015 I was in the Western Himalayas in India. My goal, wherever possible, was to compare the illustrations with on-the-ground reality, and to discuss the maps and drawings with local people. Doing research on the spot was not only a great experience, but it enabled me to ‘read’ and understand some aspects of the maps and drawings that I would never otherwise have understood. Let me show you a few examples. Recognizing the Potala is not a difficult task: most of the details depicted on the Lhasa map in the Wise Collection are still recognizable today, such as the pavilions in front of the entrance. They can also be seen on historical photographs. As for buildings that no longer exist, such as the Chinese residences in front of the Potala, historical Lhasa maps help to identify them.



The Potala and nearby Chinese residences in Lhasa. Add. Or. 3013 f 1, © The British Library Board

Similarly, in the case of Samye monastery we can even today find objects and buildings shown on the maps and drawings, such as the famous pillar next to the main entrance or the pulpit that plays an important role during specific ceremonies – I assume that these have been rebuilt since the Cultural Revolution in the style of the originals.



Samye main temple. Add. Or. 3020, © The British Library Board

Monasteries shown with specific characteristics are also easily recognizable. One example is Hanle Monastery near the border between Ladakh and Tibet: it is shown with a kind of defence wall with three towers on the map – the wall and two of the towers still exist today, this is also true for the stupa and the little red temple below. In some cases, even certain kinds of route

markers still exist, such as a red-coloured *lhato* (a cairn or small building for propitiating the deities) in the Indus Valley.



Hanle Monastery and a red *lhato* in the Indus Valley. Add. Or. 3014 f4 and f3, © The British Library Board

One of my favourite examples is Sani monastery in Zangskar, shown in great detail in the Wise Collection. Most of the building's details still exist today, including the famous Kanika (or Kanishka) stupa, the Naropa temple, the *lhato* next to the entrance gate, and also the little stone figure and the lion figures in the temple niches.



Sani Monastery and detail of the drawing of Nechung Monastery. Add. Or. 3018 f 5 and 3043, © The British Library Board

The drawing of Nechung Monastery in Lhasa shows a ceremony in the courtyard, with dancers in costumes full of distinct details – and costumes that are very similar to those that are still worn today. Another interesting detail is the pillar with a little pagoda on top and the nearby tree with the white bird – all these elements are closely connected to a tale of Nechung's origin. In historical photographs⁸ you can still see the tree and the pillar with the pagoda. I think the pillar still exists today.

In many cases historical photographs help one to 'read' a map, as in the case of the Leh bazaar entrance gates that were demolished in the 1950s. In many cases, it is amazing to see how little some things have changed, as in the case of fire exorcism rituals. Some drawings function as

⁸ See for instance the photograph taken by Charles Alfred Bell in 1921 in the Bell Collection in the British Library, Photo 1112/1(215).

keys for others, for example a drawing showing illustrations of dowry objects. We can see smaller versions of these same objects in the wedding drawings. In some cases, it took me a while to recognize details like little ‘circles’ that turned out to be coins and a ‘toilet-paper-shaped’ object that turned out to be a sack of rice.



Details from two accompanying drawings, showing the sack of rice and the coins.
Add. Or. 3035 and 3034, © The British Library Board

I would not have been able to identify one of the objects on a map of Lhodrak Karchu monastery without the help of a Bhutanese colleague. According to legend, the famous Buddhist master Padmasambhava not only meditated at that place but also left an imprint of his body – and, yes, the imprint in the rock face in the drawing looks like a Tibetan monk’s habit and hat.



Detail from a drawing showing Padmasambhava’s body imprint and the censored drawing. Add. Or. 3019 f4 and 3040,
© The British Library Board

There are a few drawings that were most probably censored. According to the Tibetan caption this illustration shows a woman after giving birth. A part of the illustration has been cut out, probably the depiction of the birth itself. Tibetan medical *thangkas* often depicted scenes of birth, but these may have offended Western sensibilities.

There are still gaps: objects and places I could not identify such as an object in a courtyard of a large estate and a monastery shown in great detail with still unidentified objects nearby.



Two unidentified objects on the maps. Add. Or. 3016 f2, © The British Library Board

The longer I studied the material, and the more deeply I understood the collection as a whole, the more new questions emerged. I grew increasingly interested in the story *of* the collection. I sought to find out about the milieu in which the maps were drawn, and how and why they came into being; I wanted to discover the collection's 'biography'. There is no first-hand documentation to tell us anything about the *Wise Collection*, so I had to dig in other fields. I started my research in the British Library but, despite much effort, I failed to find the acquisition file of the *Collection*. Thomas Alexander Wise was born in Dundee in 1802. He entered the Indian Medical Service as an Assistant Civil Surgeon in 1827. During his stay in India and after coming back to Great Britain, Wise acquired a variety of artefacts that he referred to in his will as his "cabinet of curiosities". In 1885, he donated his collections to University College in Dundee. On the assumption that the British Library's *Wise Collection* had been held in Dundee in the past, I looked for information about the transfer to London. In Dundee, I found no evidence that the drawings had ever been in the archive there, but also found indications that the material in the British Library is just part of a much larger 'Tibet collection' with the same origin.

When I started my research, the name of Mr. X – the man who commissioned the maps and drawings – was still a mystery. For many years, I searched for Mr. X. I assumed that he was stationed somewhere in the Western Himalayas, so I compiled a 'list of suspects' that consisted of the names of people who were stationed in that area in the mid-19th century. Michael Aris's favoured candidate was the geologist and official Frederic Drew but I was not able to find conclusive evidence to support this attribution. I remember giving my first talk about my *Wise Collection* research here in Oxford in May 2013. On that occasion I met Anthony for the first time and I felt a little bit nervous having him in the audience because I was wondering: can I really dare to disagree with Michael Aris and say that I do not believe that Frederic Drew is our candidate? Well, in the end I did say that, and it was fine because Anthony understood my comments as a positive contribution to the investigation that Michael had been so passionate about, and we all enjoyed a wonderful dinner after my talk.

Much later I did find Mr. X. William Edmund Hay was one of the people on the list of 'suspects', but it was hard to find evidence to connect him to the collection. Finally, in the spring of 2016, I discovered a paper published in 1873 by Charles Horne⁹ that represented a

⁹ Charles Horne (1823-1872) became Assistant to Magistrate and Collector of Saharanpur in north-western India in 1848. In 1849 he was appointed as Junior Assistant to the Commissioner of Kumaon, where he stayed until 1853. He worked for the Bengal Civil Service between 1843 and 1870. In 1857, he was stationed in Azamghar,

breakthrough in my research; it allowed me to identify Hay as the man who had commissioned the maps and drawings. In his paper “On the Methods of Disposing of the Dead at Llassa, Thibet etc.,” Charles Horne introduced two drawings that had once been part of the (later) *Wise Collection*. Referring to the source of these drawings, he states: “In the year 1857 one of the travelling Llamas from Llassa came to Lahoul, in the Kûlû [Kullu] country on the Himalêh [Himalaya], and hearing of the mutiny [refers to the Indian Mutiny (Great Rebellion) of 1857] was afraid to proceed. Major Hay, who was at that place in political employ, engaged this man to draw and describe for him many very interesting ceremonies in use in Llassa, (...)”¹⁰ The style of the drawings and the Tibetan handwriting correspond with those in the *Wise Collection* and thus were obviously made by the same hand. After discovering two long letters written by Hay in the British Library, I felt as if I was meeting an old friend because his handwriting had become so familiar to me during my research. The *Wise Collection* and the name of William Edmund Hay were reunited around 140 years after Hay handed over his collection to Wise. When I informed the historian John Bray about this breakthrough he said “I wish Michael Aris could share this...” I very much felt the need to call Anthony and tell him the news, but by then he too had passed away. However, as John Bray also stated, “Somehow – I don’t know how – I think they *are* celebrating.”¹¹

So, who was Mr. Hay? William Edmund Hay was born in 1805 of an aristocratic Scottish family. Writing many years later, his younger sister’s daughter-in-law said of him: “He was Major Hay and the only surviving son of Mr James and Lady Mary Hay. He had gone out to India as a young subaltern in 1820, with his father. He was a handsome man, and a great sportsman and very popular. He made an unfortunate marriage, and left no family.”¹² In fact, Hay joined the army of the East India Company as a cadet in 1821. From late 1842, a series of events took place that eventually led to Hay’s departure from the army. In a letter to a friend written after he had returned from extensive travels in the Western Himalayas in 1845 he said: “I shall merely say that my wife disgraced me, and to hide it tried to poison me with arsenic: it pleased God to preserve me in a most providential manner but foresaid disgrace added to this completely upset me, and sent me on a long travel, from which I returned, determined to retire from a Military life, (...)”¹³ In the late 1840s, Hay was appointed as Assistant Commissioner of Kullu in the Western Himalayas, an appointment that enabled him to travel and explore. At that time, the Kullu Valley was one of the transit corridors on the journey from Shimla northward—it formed a gateway to the north on the way to Lahaul, Spiti, Zangskar and Ladakh. These regions, as well as parts of Western Tibet, were accurately depicted on the imperial maps of the British Empire at that time, in contrast to other parts of the Tibetan Plateau, especially in Central Tibet. At a time when exploration of the region north of the Himalayas and beyond the borders of British India was one of the most pressing aspirations of British officials and scholars, a travelling lama from Lhasa must have been regarded as an excellent informant who could provide insider knowledge about his homeland. Hay was definitely associated with the

where he witnessed the Indian Mutiny and provided a detailed report (see British Library Mss Eur F90/77: 1857-1858); later he worked as a judge in Benares (see India Office Library/ India Register and Indian Army and Civil Service Lists 1858-70, British Library reference ST 1227).

¹⁰ Horne 1873: 28.

¹¹ Email correspondence 14 March 2016.

¹² Arbuthnot 1937: 10.

¹³ British Library, India Office Records and Private Papers, Mss Eur F335/6: 1845.

ongoing exploration of the Himalayas and took the opportunity to ask this lama to draw maps of the main artery of Tibet for him.

The maps were made in 1857—the year of the Indian Mutiny. This rebellion is closely connected to the creation of the collection because the travelling lama from Lhasa interrupted his journey after hearing of the uprising and decided to stay in the Western Himalayas. Here he met Hay. Although the British were experienced in surveying mountainous regions, entering Tibet was no easy undertaking for them, mainly because Tibet was largely closed to Europeans until the early twentieth century. Not only were the Chinese present in Central Tibet, but the Tibetans themselves – suspicious of Europeans – persistently defended their borders. Hence British knowledge of Tibet was not always the result of direct observation of nature and society, but often depended on indigenous people who were able to pass the border freely in both directions. As a result, the region was occasionally culturally represented and visualized by locals – as was the case of the *Wise Collection*. Most Europeans tried to get access to information about Tibet and to the area itself from the Tibetan border areas, such as the Indian Himalayas. For a long time, I had assumed that the British official who commissioned the *Wise Collection* must have been stationed somewhere in that area, and this was eventually confirmed: Hay was stationed in exactly that region.

Hay retired as Assistant Commissioner of Kullu in 1858. Shortly after his return to England, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society in 1859 after being hailed as “a man who could increase our knowledge of that country [Tibet] more extensively than anybody else.”¹⁴ It is clear that Hay was regarded as an expert on Tibet. One can speculate what would have happened if Hay had published the *Wise Collection* material. The lama from Lhasa provided him with information about a region that was inaccessible for him and most other Europeans. Much of this information was presented in later publications as ‘new discoveries’ but actually it had already been present, if hidden, for decades in the India Office Library. We don’t know under what circumstances Thomas Alexander Wise acquired the maps and drawings that were later catalogued as ‘Wise Albums’. It is very likely that Hay knew Wise, and that he sold the material to Wise before his death. At that point the name ‘Hay’ disappears or gets lost – the drawings become the *Wise Collection*.

Like many other mapmakers and painters, the man who made the drawings in the *Wise Collection* has so far remained anonymous. We do not yet know his name for sure, but we know a lot about him. We can collect information from different arenas: from primary sources such as the maps and drawings themselves, the Tibetan captions and Hay’s English explanatory notes. Horne’s statement about “the travelling Llama from Llassa” most likely confirms that the man who produced the maps and drawings was a Tibetan lama from Central Tibet. This hypothesis is supported by further indications. First, the extent of the collection means that the lama had in-depth local knowledge about many of the places he depicted, in particular Lhasa and Central Tibet. Most of the accompanying drawings refer to places in Central Tibet. The lama evidently knew Lhasa well. He was clearly experienced in drawing and he was familiar with Tibetan cartography and visual representation of different elements of Tibetan environment and society. According to Horne’s comments, the lama came to Kullu in the

¹⁴ Letter from the records of the Royal Geographical Society (dated October 1859, addressed to Norton Shaw), Reference: ar RGS/JHS/1/14.

Western Himalayas in 1857 and decided not to continue his journey after hearing of the Indian Mutiny. This shows that he planned to continue travelling and had no previous intention of staying in the area. It therefore seems that his stay in Kullu was a matter of historical accident. He had not been commissioned by Hay to gather information on Tibet before he started his westward journey from Lhasa. Rather, he seems to have been asked to “draw and describe” Tibet from memory. As an educated lama, he was trained to memorize texts and, as testified by the *Wise Collection*, he was gifted with an uncommon visual memory.

What can be said about the lama’s intention to produce the maps and drawings for Hay? In the mid-nineteenth century, the provision of information on Tibet to foreigners without official permission was a dangerous undertaking at least in Tibet itself and not done by locals without good reason. Horne’s statement that Hay had engaged the lama to “draw and describe” Tibet means that the lama was probably paid for producing the drawings and for providing information.

In his explanatory notes accompanying the drawings, Hay refers to the draughtsman only as “my Lama.” ‘Lama’ is also often used in the wider sense of ‘monk’ by Western writers of this period – indicating a well-educated monk. The extent of the *Wise Collection* – its large number of images that address religious topics, and the breadth of detail – means that the lama had in-depth knowledge of religious life in Tibet. He was most likely a follower of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism because of his focus on ceremonies and places that are closely linked to the Nyingma tradition.¹⁵ Other drawings represented insider knowledge of a small group involved in administrative and governmental matters. I assume, therefore, that the lama must have been in contact with such circles or even been a part of them. We do not know why the lama travelled from Lhasa to the Western Himalayas – perhaps he was on a pilgrimage; pilgrimages to the Western Himalayas were very popular during this period. We know practically nothing about the lama’s life after Hay left India. We do not know if he returned to Lhasa, stayed in the Western Himalayas or continued the journey to his initial destination. We only know that he was obviously also engaged to produce drawings for the Moravian missionaries in Keylong near Kullu, such as an illustration of tortures made by the same hand as the *Wise Collection* drawings, preserved in the Unitätsarchiv/Moravian Archives Herrnhut. We know that Hay was in close contact with the missionaries during and after his stay in India.

We do not know with certainty why the lama shared his knowledge of Tibet and his travel routes with Hay, especially at a time when the door to Tibet was closed to foreigners. With his maps and drawings, the lama opened this door, first for Hay and later for many other people. He opened a door into a time that is now long past, and this has given us the chance to experience what Michal Aris called a “unique view from within”.¹⁶

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, we are used to taking pictures of everything and requesting information from the Internet round the clock. Most of us grew up with a clear vision of the earth’s physical geography, and there exist today very few ‘hidden places’. We are able to fly around the world and cover long distances within hours. In this context, it can sometimes be difficult to imagine that in the mid-nineteenth century, a ship’s passage between Europe and

¹⁵ Furthermore, in the explanatory notes Hay stated that his ‘lama’ was a follower of Padmasambhava, who is considered as the root teacher of the Nyingma lineage.

¹⁶ Aris 1992: 126.

British India took many weeks, that information about specific topics was mainly available – if at all – in the form of the written word and that there have been places and areas about which we would have had no information at all. Before the invention of photography, visual accounts had to be drawn by hand; before printing, travel accounts likewise had first to be written by hand, and paper was a product of great value. Writers and draughtsmen had to select the information they wanted to record carefully. The first (European) Age of Discovery was marked by the extensive exploration of the world’s coasts. The second age involved the intensive exploration of the interior of the respective continents. The aim was to fill the ‘blank spaces’ on the maps. The amount of knowledge gathered and collected in this period – between 1750 and 1850 – was staggering, especially the knowledge collected by Europeans about the flora, fauna, geography and history of other parts of the world. It was the period in which Alexander von Humboldt conducted his expedition to South America and Charles Darwin travelled around the world – journeys that represented the basis for the development of their fundamental new theories on nature. It was the period in which the Rosetta Stone – the key to deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs – was found.

As the historian Peter Burke stated: “much information comes in fragments, and part of the process of the production of knowledge consists in fitting those fragments together as if in a jigsaw puzzle.”¹⁷ This is also true for the knowledge about Tibet and the Tibetan Plateau. By what paths did we reach our present state of knowledge on Tibet? As the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss suggested, it may be useful to think of information as ‘raw’, while knowledge has been ‘cooked’.¹⁸ Hay acquired information on Tibet through images and objects and oral information from the lama. Based on his training, the lama systematically recorded this diverse material. Over the years, Tibetology has developed into a discipline with many facets, and slowly opened itself towards other disciplines such as history, cultural anthropology, linguistics, material culture studies and art history. There are many experts in these fields of research. From today’s point of view – now that we are able to benefit from more comprehensive knowledge on Tibet and all the references to specific topics – it is easier to understand the maps and drawings that the lama produced for Hay than it was for Hay himself. From our present point of view – being able to benefit from geographical knowledge in the age of Google Earth – it is easy to recognize that specific waterways or mountain ranges run parallel to each other. The lama who made the maps in the *Wise Collection* did not have access to this information. But that does not mean that his representation of Tibet and the Himalayas is less ‘accurate’. He produced the largest panoramic map of Tibet of its time, based on the knowledge available at that time and based on his personal life experience. This is also true for Hay, who compiled the captions on the maps and drawings and the explanatory notes to the best of his knowledge. He conducted what we would today call ‘fundamental research’, and in this context he belongs in the forefront of Tibetan Studies as an early pioneer.

Discovering the life stories of Wise and Hay enabled me to understand the historical context in which the maps and drawings of the *Wise Collection* were commissioned, produced and purchased. It also enabled me to understand their ambitions to ‘collect Tibet’. There is not much that remains from their lives. Of course, we can find their names in various official lists and

¹⁷ Burke 2012: 58.

¹⁸ Burke 2012: 5.

records, we know when they left for India as young men and when they returned, we know the names of their spouses and their children (if there were any). There remain just a few personal letters and official reports that give us an idea about their personalities, about their thoughts, worries, and dreams. The strongest trace they left is their publications and the material things that remained: objects that these men collected during their lifetimes. These objects are part of the record of their life in British India: things they had chosen to collect, things that were given them as presents and things that they explicitly commissioned.

The *Wise Collection* can be studied through the eyes of different disciplines. The main corpus of the collection consists of maps that can be assigned primarily to Tibetan cartography. The map historian Joseph Schwartzberg stated about Tibetan mapping, “one cannot ignore the possible influence of the physical environment on the development of cartographic sensibility and on the propensity to use and understand maps. Over most of Greater Tibet, there exist high vantage points from which largely barren expanses of land stretch before the observer, who would see them through the clear mountain air as if they were living maps.”¹⁹ This statement reminds me of my own visit to Ganden Monastery in Central Tibet and the overwhelming view from the hill behind the monastery, across the plateau and down to the Kyichu Valley and numerous neighbouring valleys. How can such a landscape not influence its inhabitants’ mapping skills and their visual representation of this environment?

The *Wise Collection* is the result of a collaborative project between two players from different cultural backgrounds – a Buddhist lama and a British official. Traces of this collaboration can be found at various points. The lama developed his own style of drawing and created maps with a unique hybrid character. In drawing these maps, he combined a traditional Tibetan painting style, with an accompanying text in response to a demand for European-style accuracy. We can assume that Hay oversaw the production of the maps and drawings. Nevertheless, he played a relatively passive role in their production. The lama was the more active member of the team, providing his ‘insider-knowledge’. Hay’s role was to create explanatory notes for the ‘pictorial survey’. Every time I look at the *Wise Collection* in the British Library, I am overwhelmed by the quantity and quality of the material, by the beauty and vivid colour of the illustrations and by the map-maker’s attention to detail. Every time I have worked with the originals, I have felt very close to the Tibetan lama and to Hay. When the whole collection lies displayed on the tables in the British Library, this considerable examination of the material by Hay is visible, but of course also – and much more – the lama’s amazing work.

I wonder how Hay regarded his ‘Tibet collection’ and what it meant to him. Did he regard it as ‘curious’? Did he value the collection in terms of its scientific significance? I wonder if he was aware of the true value of the maps and drawings. He had no opportunity to compare the maps with other maps of the area since such maps simply did not exist in the late 1850s. In general, the British surveyors in British India believed that their own sketches and descriptions were true and correct representations of the environment. European standards of measurement were taken as being perfectly natural and the Indians were criticized for the variable length of their customary units. As the map historian Matthew Edney stated: “In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Westerners used cartography’s geometrical essence to distinguish themselves from the Asians and Africans whom they colonized: the geometrical nature of Western cartography

¹⁹ Schwartzberg 1994: 673.

marked Westerners as innately rational, while the apparently non-geometrical maps of colonized peoples marked them as innately irrational and therefore properly subjects to Western rule.”²⁰ The lama who produced the *Wise Collection* was probably a pilgrim, not a surveyor or explorer. The atlas he produced reflects his Tibetan conception of space. Would any other British person have been able to ‘read’ the set of detailed maps showing the ‘great road’ between Lhasa and Gartok made by a Tibetan ‘insider’? The most comprehensive set of knowledge on Tibet of its time was obviously underestimated in the mid-19th century, as there are no traces of a reception history of the maps and drawings at the time.

In contrast to many other visual representations in Tibet that are closely tied to a textual corpus, such as wall paintings in monasteries and *thangkas* of all kinds, the maps and drawings in the *Wise Collection* do not represent the illustration of a specific textual corpus. It has never been my aim to search for a text that could possibly be the basis for these maps and drawings. They do not replace written words. They reflect the lama’s knowledge about Tibet in a visual way, and at the same time they represent a complex interpretation of Tibet. I compared the maps and drawings with texts, but rather than using various texts to ‘read’ and interpret the stories in the drawings, I preferred to compare the maps and drawings with other visual representations of Tibet, to get an idea of what influenced the lama’s drawing style. I compared countless details in the maps and drawings to determine if they were all made by the same hand, and I am convinced they were.

At the beginning of my research, I was asked by a colleague how I could dare to work on the *Wise Collection*, not being an art historian. In this context it has been very encouraging for me to read Janet Gyatso’s Aris Lecture about “Opening Ways for Tibetan Studies” in late 2015: “The focus of current Tibetology is also turning, increasingly to source materials that are not textual at all, and even in those cases where we have long considered such materials, such as the visual arts, we are subjecting them to new kinds of analysis that go far beyond the art historical as such.”²¹ Since I wanted to understand the *Wise Collection* as a whole, I chose a holistic approach to examine the maps and drawings. I focused on the individual topics represented in the *Wise Collection* and on the numerous details. I had to overcome the sharp lines between different disciplines, such as area studies, art history, cartography, history and religious studies. By doing so, I was able to develop a broader view of the material, and finally I saw many connections and relations between the specific topics addressed in the maps and drawings.

About maps, the geographer and map historian John Brian Harley stated: “Among the many classes of documents regularly used by historians, maps are well known but less well understood. We could compile an anthology of statements that categorize maps not only as ‘slippery’, but also as ‘dangerous’ or ‘unreliable’. Historians have rendered to relegate maps—along with paintings, photographs, and other nonverbal sources—to a lower division of evidence than the written word.”²² I hope I have demonstrated that the *Wise Collection*’s maps and drawings are not ‘slippery’ at all, and that the collection as a whole represents a reliable historical source. The documents are – like texts – human creations full of meaning and with

²⁰ Edney 2019: 5.

²¹ <https://www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/annual-aris-lectures>

²² Harley 2001: 34.

world-views hidden between their lines. If we start decoding their ‘language’ we realize that they are a construction of the reality of the societies of their time. As Matthew Edney stated, “maps are not just graphic images or things but are variously integrations of words, graphics, numbers, gestures; installations of multiple objects; and even intangible artifacts. Maps are not simply, self-contained ‘objects’ but multicomponent things.”²³

In a letter to Michael Aris, Hugh Richardson wrote in July 1995: “I hope the Wise colour prints will lead to a book.”²⁴ Well, the book is on the way now: *An Atlas of the Himalayas by a 19th Century Tibetan Lama: A Journey of Discovery*, to be published in Brill’s Tibetan Studies Library series. I very much hope that the book will present my work in a meaningful way to an audience beyond Tibetologists. Just as it is hard to assign the Wise collection’s drawings to a single genre, so it is hard to assign my forthcoming book to a single category. Broadly speaking, it is about knowledge production, including sub-categories such as the history of exploration, collecting history, cartography and cross-cultural interactions. The book’s subtitle *Journey of Discovery* refers to different journeys that intersect as if the enterprise were all one enterprise over two centuries, including the lama’s journey, Hay’s journey, the collection’s journey to Great Britain and my own journey of research. Quite a while after I made my decision to use ‘Journey of Discovery’ as a subtitle, I came across an email Anthony sent me during my stay in Ladakh in July 2014. He wrote: “You have chosen an amazing path to wander on. I feel like sending you a solar-powered satellite web camera to put on your hat so that I can be with you on each step of this journey of discovery while whispering encouragement in your ear.”²⁵ So, in a way, the subtitle is also closely linked to Anthony.

One book is not enough to share all of my findings. So many doors – hidden in the details of the maps – opened for me. I would like to travel along some of the corridors that lead from these doors and enter some of the rooms that open off the corridors. Another door was opened just recently when I was contacted by a descendent of Thomas Alexander Wise, his great-great-great-granddaughter, now living in the USA. Her mother inherited a few things belonging to Wise through her grandmother, including portraits of Wise and the ‘Wise chair’ with the family crest that was given to him when he left India in 1851. The family had the chair reupholstered in Antwerp in 1972 but I am of course more interested in what they call the ‘treasure trove’, the box with Wise letters and memories of his last years. So the journey goes on...

REFERENCES

Arbuthnot, Evelyn. 1937. *A Short Story of a Long Life*. Chelsea, Fulham: printed by J. B. Shears.

Aris, Michael. 1992. “The Buddhist Monasteries and Rituals of Tibet: A Unique View from Within.” In: *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 12, no. 1: 126.

²³ Edney 2019: 40.

²⁴ Letter by Hugh Richardson to Michael Aris, 4 July 1995, Bodleian Library Oxford, Special Collections, MS. Or. Aris 18/7.

²⁵ Email correspondence 12 July 2014.

- Burke, Peter. 2000. *A Social History of Knowledge. From the Encyclopédie to Wikipedia*. Croydon: Polity.
- Edney, Matthew H. 2019. *Cartography. The Ideal and its History*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Harley, John Brian. 2001. *The New Nature of Maps. Essays in the History of Cartography*, ed. Paul Laxton. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Harley, John Brian and David Woodward (eds.) 1994. *History of Cartography*, Vol. 2, Book 2, *Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Horne, Charles. 1873. "On the Methods of Disposing of the Dead at Llassa, Thibet, etc." In: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 6, pp. 28–35.
- Lange, Diana. forthcoming. *An Atlas of the Himalayas by a 19th Century Tibetan Lama: A Journey of Discovery*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lester, Toby. 2009. *The Fourth Part of the World: An Astonishing Epic of Global Discovery, Imperial Ambition, and the Birth of America*. New York: Free Press.
- Schwartzberg, Joseph E. 1994. "Maps of Greater Tibet." In: J. B. Harley and David Woodward (eds.) *The History of Cartography*. Vol. 2, Book 2. *Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 607–681.