

*This Volume is dedicated
to the memory of
Erberto Lo Bue (1946-2022),
outstanding scholar of
Tibetan and Himalayan Art History
and sorely missed colleague.*

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FONDATA NEL 1950 DA GIUSEPPE TUCCI

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Traditions, Translations
and Transitions in the Cultural History
of Tibet, the Himalayas and Mongolia

edited by Donatella Rossi (editor in chief), Davor Antonucci,
Michela Clemente, Davide Torri



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TUTTI I DIRITTI RISERVATI

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Via Alessandro Malladra, 33 – 00157 Roma
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e-mail: info@scienzelettere.com
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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i> by Donatella Rossi, Davor Antonucci, Michela Clemente, Davide Torri	VII
F. Armand, <i>Transitions in Gurung Shamanism(s). Ethnographic Notes and Shamanistic Initiations into the Wilderness among the Eastern Gurung of Laprak (Gorkha District, Nepal)</i>	1
C. Bellini, “ <i>I Hope for Nothing, I Fear Nothing, I Am Free</i> ”. <i>My Memory of Erberto Lo Bue (1946-2022)</i>	19
K. Blancke, <i>In Search of Mi la’s Collected Songs. Back to the Basics. A Comparative Study of Stories and Songs of Mi la ras pa in Tibe- tan Texts from the Twelfth through the Fifteenth Centuries</i>	41
N. Breda, <i>Wetlands in Mongolia. An Emerging Theme for an Anthropological Approach</i>	63
M. Clemente, <i>A Preliminary Analysis of Title Frames in Bon po Ma- nuscripts and Xylographs: Examples from the Tucci Tibetan Col- lection</i>	87
E. De Rossi Filibeck, <i>Tibet’s Material Wealth in the 19th Century Re- flected in Offerings to Monasteries: the Case of Samye (bSam yas)</i>	109
M. Erschbamer, <i>Mother within the ‘Ba’ra ba bKa’ bryud Tradition: Recollecting Mother and Their Socio-Religious Roles in Tibetan Buddhism</i>	123
F.A. Geisshuesler, <i>Framing the Sky of Skullward Leap: Meditation as a Contemplative System</i>	143

F. Lunardo, <i>Vision of the Sacred: Figure and Space. The Style of Woodcut Illustrations in 16th Century Xylographs Made in the Kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang. Introductory Notes</i>	161
F. Maniscalco, <i>Notes on the Relationship between Bon Religion and Shamanism in Response to a Review</i>	187
C. Mascarello, <i>The Tibetan Mind Training (Blo sbyong): An Ancient Exercitium for our Contemporary Era</i>	203
L. Rogora, <i>The Bal yul rang byung mchod rten chen po'i lo rgyus by Si tu Paṅ chen Chos kyi 'byung gnas (1700-1774). Summary and Notes on a Cultural Endeavor</i>	221
D. Rossi, <i>Consolidating the Practice of Bodhicitta in an Epoch of Historical and Religious Transitions. Notes on the Byang chub bsgrub pa'i thabs tshigs su bcad pa sum brgya nyi shu pa'i sa bcad Preserved in the Bon po Collection of the G. Tucci Tibetan Fund</i>	239
C. Simioli, <i>Aphrodisiacs, Rejuvenating Recipes and Spellbinding Formulas preserved in the Brang ti Great Measure of Gold: The Case of Medicinal Herpetofauna and Their Long Enduring History in Tibetan Medico-Alchemical Sources</i>	259
F. Tormen, <i>Tibetan Dream Yoga and Its Contributions to Science. Some Insights into the New Field of Contemplative Research</i>	277
D. Torri, <i>Far Away Drums. Some Notes on Affinities and Divergences Between Contemporary Examples of Shamanism in Nepal and Mongolia</i>	297
S. Tosi Cambini, <i>Moving from East Europe to Mongolia: Lessons from "Nomads" Relational Perspective of the World in a Time of Change</i>	315
C. Turini, <i>Cultural Variety along the Last Offshoots of the Himalayan Plateau: Transmission and Transformation of the Naxi Dongba Culture Between Past and Present</i>	333
<i>Contributors</i>	353

FOREWORD

It was a pleasure and an honour to organise the second seminar of the Italian Association of Tibetan, Himalayan, and Mongolian Studies (AIS-THiM) at Sapienza University of Rome (July 7th-9th 2021) thanks to the generous support and funding from ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies which extends to the publication of this volume.

We would like to take this opportunity to once again express our gratefulness to the members of the scientific and operative committee, to the volunteers, and to the Marco Polo Building staff for helping us materialise one of the very first onsite and online academic events for the Department of Oriental Studies (DISO) after the outbreak of the pandemic.

The conference theme was Traditions, Translations and Transitions in the Cultural History of Tibet, the Himalayas and Mongolia.

Culture is about change. There are no cultural traditions which can survive without changing, adapting, and transitioning over time and across space. Traditions are constantly reinvented, creatively interrupted, or imaginatively reinvigorated. Finding themselves in a permanent state of transition to something new and to something different, ‘traditions’ and ‘innovations’ are historical and cultural processes far from opposite to each other. There is a growing consensus among scholars and researchers that they are, on the contrary, very interconnected. Through the establishment of corridors, correlations, and connections, this global phenomenon of interdependence of tradition/innovation can be examined as a process of cross-fertilising acts of ‘translations’ and ‘transitions’. Not just linguistic translations or material transitions, but also the translatability of symbolic tools and images, the transferability of cultural capital and the fortunate trajectory of philosophical concepts and religious practices have begun receiving a great deal of attention.

However, despite the transcultural turn affecting many disciplines, not so much has been published on the cultural history of Tibet, the Himalayas, and

Mongolia. In these areas, the cultural transmissions from one person to another, the inheritance of a cultural memory from a group to another—across generations and across spatiality—is at stake for various reasons, which are linked to the historical and political conditions of the countries of these vast Asian area, the effects of globalisation on the social and economic conditions of the populations that inhabit it, and the linguistic and cultural hegemonies that risk to obliterate many languages, literatures, and art productions.

Since researchers on the transitional processes and insight into the cultural trajectories of Tibet, Mongolia, and the Himalayas are still few in number, there is a pressing need to develop more work on the shifting cultural, religious, artistic, and linguistic patterns of meaning, symbolism and ‘tradition’.

We invited to the conference scholars of Tibetan, Himalayan, and Mongolian studies to try and fill this gap, by reflecting on the changes that have transformed the cultural traditions of these countries in the past as in the present.

Following the welcome speeches of Prof. Mario Casari – Deputy Director of DISO, Prof. Adriano Valerio Rossi – President of ISMEO, and Prof. Giacomella Orofino – President of AISTHiM, the seminar benefited from the contributions and lively debates of thirty-eight speakers, eighteen of which are featured in this volume.

There were seven major panel focused upon the topics of Masters and Lineages (three lectures); Theories and Praxes (six lectures); Texts and Translations (eight lectures); Environment (three lectures); Transitions and Interactions (six lectures); Art and Architecture (three lectures); Himalaya and Trans-Himalaya (nine lectures).

We decided to arrange this volume in alphabetical order without maintaining the original panel structure due to the substantially decreased number of delivered contributions vis-à-vis the actual number of participants to the conference, which, regrettably, was mostly owed to impediments linked to the pandemic and post-pandemic climate. Nevertheless, we trust that the articles presented here demonstrate and express the continuing liveliness of Tibetan, Himalayan, and Mongolian studies in Italy.

In his contribution titled Transitions in Gurung Shamanism(s) Fabio Armand, drawing from ethnographic literature and data collected during his own fieldwork in Gurung villages of the Gorkha District (Nepal), focuses on shamanic initiations involving, alternatively, hereditary lines of transmission of knowledge and the engagement with a non-human source of power represented as a supernatural forest-shaman.

Chiara Bellini, in her “I Hope for Nothing, I Fear Nothing, I Am Free”. My Memory of Erberto Lo Bue (1946-2022), presents a touching account of her memory and an exclusive correspondence of the scholar to whom the

Editors decided to dedicate the present Volume, and whose demise deeply moved Tibetanists (and not just them) who had the opportunity to meet Erberto and appreciate both his research creativity and rich humanity.

Kristin Blancke, in her In Search of Mi la's Collected Songs. Back to the Basics, explores the body of literature dealing with the life and feats of the great Buddhist master Milarepa. Focusing on the diverse textual sources, she researches how the standard narrative was produced and refined between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, culminating with the tradition of gTsang smyon He ru ka and his circle of disciples.

In this paper titled Wetlands in Mongolia. An Emerging Theme for an Anthropological Approach Nadia Breda focuses her attention on a little-known topic: the wetlands in rural and nomadic areas of Mongolia. Wetlands represent areas that are very rich in biodiversity but that are also among the most threatened. The author shows the importance of wetlands in nomadic culture and the attempts to safeguard these areas.

Michela Clemente, with A Preliminary Analysis of Title Frames in Bonpo Manuscripts and Xylographs: Examples from the Tucci Tibetan Collection, offers a captivating investigation on a hitherto neglected codicological element, that is to say, title frames, asserting the importance, within the broader framework of book culture, of a comprehensive scrutiny addressing all codicological elements for identification of provenance and dating as well as conservation purposes.

Marlene Erschbamer in her Mother within the 'Ba' ra ba bKa' brgyud Tradition: Recollecting Mother and their Socio-Religious Roles in Tibetan Buddhism provides readers with a fascinating study of some mothers associated with the 'Ba' ra ba, a still alive tradition founded during the fourteenth century and spread across Tibet and the Himalayas. By presenting excerpts from Tibetan, Sikkimese and Bhutanese hagiographies, the author offers a different perspective of these sources - devoted to Buddhist male masters - and investigates these texts in search for the socio-religious roles of mothers and the multifaceted aspects of motherhood within this Buddhist tradition.

Elena De Rossi Filibeck in her contribution titled Tibet's Material Wealth in the 19th century Reflected in Offerings to Monasteries: the Case of Samye (bSam Yas), investigates the topic of Tibetan past material wealth through the dkar chag or guide books of monasteries and monuments, where lists of donations were recorded, presenting a partial translation of the dkar chag of bSam yas that was compiled in 1854.

Flavio A. Geisshuesler, with his Framing the Sky of Skullward Leap: Meditation as a Contemplative System, introduces the Tibetan practice of thod rgal (lit. skullward leap) which represents the zenithal practice for the

rNying ma and the Bon traditions, arguing that “the tradition’s fascination with the sky is fundamentally driven by a Tibetan ethos of vitality.”

In his contribution Vision of the Sacred: Figure and Space. The Style of Woodcut Illustrations in 16th Century Xylographs Made in the Kingdom of Mang yul Gung thang. Introductory Notes, Filippo Lunardo presents a study of the style of illustrations realised by artists mainly associated with the sMan ris painting school. By analysing peculiar features of woodcut illustrations, the author offers some insights into stylistic language and personal styles of artists involved in the production of Mang yul Gung thang xylographs.

In his article, Notes on the Relationship between Bon Religion and Shamanism, Francesco Maniscalco engages with the literature on the possible relations between Bon and shamanism (and Buddhism, too), taking into account several, if not all, of the voices who took part in the debate, and adding his own view to it.

Chiara Mascarello dedicates her contribution – The Tibetan Mind Training (Blo sbyong): An Ancient Exercitium for our Contemporary Era – to that fundamental Buddhist teaching, suggesting that future researchers should explore the “immunological efficacy” of the modern forms of such an exercise as an anthroprotective tool for fostering and safeguarding individual, collective, and ecological prosperity.

Luigi Rogora devotes his article entitled The Bal yul rang byung mchod rten chen po’i lo rgyus by Si tu Paṅ chen Chos kyi ’byung gnas (1700-1774). Summary and Notes on a Cultural Endeavor to the eight chapters of this polymath’s Svayambhūpurāṇa’s translation, by offering a summary and highlighting the main details of its narrative. The author also provides an introduction on Si tu Paṅ chen’s critical approach to the earlier geographical literature which, according to this master, was responsible for spreading false knowledge on Nepalese sacred sites.

In her contribution, Consolidating the Practice of Bodhicitta in an Epoch of Historical and Religious Transitions. Notes on the Byang chub bsgrub pa’i thabs tshigs su bcad pa sum brgya nyi shu pa’i sa bcad Preserved in the Bonpo Collection of the G. Tucci Tibetan Fund, Donatella Rossi entirely translates a text which appears to be a succinct taxonomy of acknowledged Mahāyāna tenets. She suggests that it might represent a sort of pedagogical outline, with relevant themes often singled out in the inter-linear notes with the support of ‘key words’, to be used by mentors and instructors.

Carmen Simioli in her Aphrodisiacs, Rejuvenating Recipes and Spell-binding Formulas preserved in the Brang ti Great Measure of Gold: The Case of Medicinal Herpetofauna and Their Long Enduring History in Tibe-

tan Medico-Alchemical Sources, *provided a well-documented overview on pre-modern Tibetan aphrodisiacs and rejuvenating therapies as found in the gSer bre chen mo, analysing ancient recipes and procedures that are considered to be in continuity with tradition.*

Francesco Tormen, in his Tibetan Dream Yoga and its Contributions to Science. Some Insights into the New Field of Contemplative Research, explores this special praxis, contextualising the phenomenon of lucid dreaming within the philosophical and soteriological Buddhist framework and describes discoveries, applications, and its contributions to science, considering possible future developments that “cooperation between these two different epistemological universes” may generate.

In his essay Far Away Drums. Some Notes on Affinities and Divergences Between Contemporary Examples of Shamanism in Nepal and Mongolia, Davide Torri investigates some elements of shamanic practices observed during fieldwork in Nepal and Mongolia over the years and highlights similarities and differences, also taking into account some of the current socio-cultural dynamics in order to underline the role of shamans in both countries in contemporary times.

Sabrina Tosi Cambini presents a reflection on some aspects of the nomadic life related to the landscape and environment in her Moving from East Europe to Mongolia: Lessons from “Nomads” Relational Perspective of the World in a Time of Change, focusing her attentions on the challenge represented by neo-liberal economies and climate change for the nomads.

Cristiana Turini with her article – Cultural Variety along the Last Offshoots of the Himalayan Plateau: Transmission and Transformation of the Naxi Dongba Culture Between Past and Present – offers an insight into the modern status of the Naxi Dongba ritual life, showing how Naxi religious practices over time have undergone a process of impoverishment and simplification, also linked to the development of mass tourism, which threatens the intangible Dongba cultural heritage.

We wish that this volume will be of interest to both academic and non-academic recipients and that it may represent a constructive input to international specialised debates in the relevant interdisciplinary fields.

Rome, October 2023

The Editorial Committee
 DONATELLA ROSSI (EDITOR IN CHIEF)
 DAVOR ANTONUCCI (CO-EDITOR)
 MICHELA CLEMENTE (CO-EDITOR)
 DAVIDE TORRI (CO-EDITOR)

“I HOPE FOR NOTHING, I FEAR NOTHING, I AM FREE”.¹
MY MEMORY OF ERBERTO LO BUE (1946-2022)

CHIARA BELLINI

I met Professor Erberto Lo Bue in 1999, and fate wanted me to be his first student at the University of Bologna, where he had just been called to teach.

Since I had read some of his books, recommended to me by Professor Giorgio Renato Franci (1933-2012),² which I was very passionate about—*The Precious Garland of Teaching Birds* (Adelphi, Milan 1998), *Life and Songs of the Sixth Dalai Lama* (L'Angolo Manzonei, Turin 1983), the *Canti d'amore* by the Sixth Dalai Lama, translated and edited by him (Sellerio, Palermo 1993)—I went to meet him in his studio in via Zamboni as soon as he took up service, even before he officially began his course on the History of Indian and Central Asian Art.

Lo Bue was my professor, the supervisor of my degree and doctoral thesis; in summary, he was my teacher, a strict but always loving teacher.

I had the honor and pleasure of collaborating more closely with him from 2001 to 2013. From him, I learned not only concepts, but I received a very structured training ranging from field research methodology—we traveled together in Ladakh (2001, 2002, 2003), in the Nepal Valley (2008), and in Mustang (2008)—to the editing of scientific essays, which he patiently and meticulously reviewed and annotated in his so legible handwriting, as soon as I submitted one of my writings to him.

My passion for the cultures of Himalayan Asia was nourished by his teachings, but also ‘rebalanced’ thanks to his detachment, that distance that

¹ Epitaph on the grave of Nikos Kazantzakis (1883-1957), Greek writer.

² Professor Franci, then director of the Department of Oriental Studies, had strongly wanted Erberto Lo Bue in Bologna. When I was able to biennialise the Indian and East Asian Philosophy exam, I asked Franci to present a programme on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism. It was on that occasion that Franci recommended Erberto’s books to me and only after I had taken the exam did he announce that, shortly thereafter, Lo Bue would come to teach in Bologna. The esteem that Franci had for Lo Bue was amply matched by the latter, who really loved him. Franci, over time, became a confidant for him.

a scholar—he maintained—must be able to put between himself and what arouses his interest, which must investigate with a critical eye and as objectively as possible.

In 1999 I started studying the Tibetan language with him, not at the university but at his home in Cesena. At the time, in fact, the Tibetan course had not yet been activated; but I wanted to learn that language so much that I asked him if he would be willing to give me private lessons. Obviously he tried to dissuade me, if not to discourage me, arguing that the lessons would ‘cost too much’, and so his wife, Stella Rigo Righi, offered to follow the lessons with me, dividing the cost. It was a sweet ploy that I will never forget, because Stella, who dropped out of the private course at the second lesson, had done all this to help the penniless young student that I was to make a dream come true.

For years I joked with Lo Bue comparing the relationship between me, Erberto, and Stella, to that between the famous Tibetan mystic Mi la ras pa, his master Mar pa, and the latter’s wife, bDag med ma (albeit with due distinctions), who protected the young man from the intransigence of his teacher, who nevertheless loved him.

Thanks to those lessons, I had access to his private library which, following the example of Giuseppe Tucci, Erberto generously kept open for all of his students.

After completing our studies, our teacher/pupil bond turned into a friendship, based on an intense and profound dialogue, but always respectful of each other’s roles. Erberto only started calling me ‘you’ in 2008, during a trip to Mustang with Amy Heller, Luigi Fieni, and Luciano Monticelli.³ We travelled in spartan circumstances and we also shared some risky situations—at the time the capital, Lo Monthang, could only be reached on foot or on horseback after a few days of trekking—so that kind of formalism now seemed out of place.

In our almost daily train journeys, which for years took us from Romagna—I from Rimini and he from Cesena—to Bologna, to the University, I pressed Erberto with questions about his experiences as a scholar and traveller, avid for his stories that were never garnished of hyperbole, yet so daring. Above all, he loved to remember the Nepal Valley of the 1970s and 1980s, a land that meant a lot to him. He liked to indulge in those memories, but without ever mythicising them; every time he referred to his innumerable stays in Asia, he loved to sarcastically reiterate that by now he had had enough and that to trips to Tibet he now preferred trips to the seaside location of Pinarella di Cervia or “shopping at the Coop”.

³ The outcome of that research trip, which lasted about a month, was the publication of *Wonders of Lo. The Artistic Heritage of Mustang* (Marg, Mumbai 2010), the first publication on the history of art of Mustang, which he edited.

And yet, I will remember his excitement in retracing the stages of our research expedition to Mustang (Figs 1-4): a particularly significant journey for both of us,⁴ as we found ourselves immersed in an almost unexplored artistic universe of extremely high value, before which we were moved several times.

Erberto was happy to joke, even about his old age and death, with that typical English cynicism and humour that characterised him. On one of these occasions, I asked him what kind of obituary or remembrance he would expect from the scientific community. He joked about it and didn't take me too seriously, but a few days later it was clear to me that he had given it some thought and asked me if I was still interested in the answer. At that point he told me that, just in those days, he had written a letter to his nephew on the occasion of his eighteenth birthday. He let me read it and then, in the following days, he sent it to me by email.

It was November 19, 2010. He told me that in that letter, in which he told the boy how he spent his eighteenth birthday, there was everything that most characterised his approach to life, his spirit, his personality, independent and sometimes rebellious. He told me "publish that letter, if you want, when I'm gone."

Here it is, then. He told me that he was not interested in having someone write about him as a scholar, since his books and articles would have been enough to speak for him, together with his curriculum vitae.

You will not find any sensational news in this letter, but those who have known Erberto will find his exuberant personality and nonconformity reflected in the words.

I won't add anything else, as he would have liked, except a truly personal note: the emptiness that Erberto left inside me is equal only to the immense fullness of everything he taught me, and for which I will always be grateful to him.



Fig. 1 - Erberto Lo Bue and Chiara Bellini in Mustang (Nepal), 2008. © Chiara Bellini.

⁴ Surely it was the field experience, and the research, gained during that trip that guaranteed me the possibility of obtaining the role of Postdoctoral Researcher (2017-2020) at the Department of History of Art and Archeology of SOAS, School of Oriental and African Studies, within the AHRC project "Tibetan Monastery Collections and Museums" led by prof. Christian Luczanits, which focused on the art collections present in the monasteries of Ladakh and Mustang.



Fig. 2 - Field Research in Mustang (Nepal), 2008. © Chiara Bellini.



Fig. 3 - Erberto Lo Bue and Chiara Bellini in Mustang (Nepal), 2008. © Chiara Bellini.



Fig. 4 - (From left to right) Luigi Fieni, Luciano Monticelli, Erberto Lo Bue, Chiara Bellini and Amy Heller in Mustang (Nepal), 2008.

THE LETTER

Caro nipote,

Spero tu abbia ricevuto la mia lettera del 2 gennaio, che si concludeva così: “Hai ripreso a suonare? Quanto all’amore, te lo auguro in ogni caso di tutto cuore!”

Diffido delle liturgie, compresa quella dei compleanni. Stento a capire il senso di cerimonie e anniversari, e dei compleanni in particolare, tenuto conto della transitorietà e pochezza della nostra vita. Del resto i compleanni non vengono celebrati, se non in casi eccezionali, nel mondo buddhista e per tale motivo mi sono trovato spesso in difficoltà nel tentativo di accertare le date di nascita degli artisti tradizionali da me intervistati, che non le ricordavano o non le conoscevano, anche perché fino a qualche decennio fa in alcune regioni dell’Asia le anagrafi erano sconosciute o non utilizzate.

I miei amici e parenti hanno la proibizione di festeggiare il mio compleanno, che oltre ai concetti sopra espressi, indica etimologicamente il compimento, cioè la fine, di un anno di vita, per cui mi sembra ci sia ben poco da festeggiare: caso mai dovrebbe essere una giornata di lutto.

Il giorno del compimento del mio diciottesimo anno di età mi trovavo su un treno diretto a Parigi, dove cambiai stazione per proseguire alla volta di Calais donde mi imbarcai per Dover, raggiungendo Londra il 31 luglio 1964. Qui mi recai all'associazione di volontariato cristiana — United Nations Association, che nulla aveva a che fare con l'ONU — presso cui avrei prestato servizio in un campo di lavoro e proseguii in autostop alla volta di Bournemouth, dove risiede una zia, sposata a un'inglese, purtroppo deceduto il mese scorso. Il 1° agosto gli zii mi portarono a visitare il tempio preistorico di Stonehenge e la cattedrale di Salisbury, e il giorno successivo partii in autostop alla volta di Castle Donington, sede del campo di lavoro, che raggiunsi in giornata.

A Castle Donington scoprii che il mio lavoro consisteva nel tinteggiare le pareti e verniciare gli infissi delle stanze del castello — abitazione provvisoria di figli di esuli della Germania orientale — insieme ad altri giovani e sotto la guida di un altro volontario, un gentile medico francese.

Durante quel soggiorno incontrai un simpatico palestinese, studente di medicina, e altri asiatici: era un campo internazionale. Una sera ci recammo a teatro a Nottingham, per vedere uno spettacolo comico.

Il campo terminò il 22 agosto e il giorno successivo partii in autostop alla volta della Scozia in compagnia di una gentile ragazza scozzese che mi ospitò a Glasgow, dai nonni. Il 24 agosto riprendemmo la strada per Elgin, dove soggiornai con i suoi genitori, che avrebbero gradito che mi trattenessi più a lungo; ma io volevo continuare il mio viaggio verso settentrione, coltivando l'idea di recarmi in Islanda.

Proseguii dunque in autostop fino a Thurso, dove pernottai in un ostello della gioventù, istituzione della quale cominciai a servirmi abitualmente, e poi mi imbarcai per le isole Orcadi e successivamente per le Shetland, dove fui intervistato da un giornalista che pubblicò un articolo sul quotidiano di Lerwick: era da un ventennio che un italiano non metteva piede su quelle isole, che avevano ospitato prigionieri italiani durante la guerra.

Essendo io determinato a continuare il mio viaggio a nord, il giornalista si premurò di accompagnarmi al porto, dove non trovai alcuna imbarcazione che partisse per l'Islanda o per le isole Færøer, da cui avrei potuto raggiungere più facilmente la prima. Chiedemmo dunque al capitano di un peschereccio norvegese che stava completando il rifornimento d'acqua se era disposto a darmi un passaggio per la Norvegia. Accettò di portarmi gratuitamente.

Impiegammo un paio di notti per attraversare il mare del Nord. Il capitano mi invitò nella cabina di pilotaggio, mostrandomi il funzionamento del radar e di altre apparecchiature; mi offrì da bere, credo del porto, e chiacchierammo un po'; ma la situazione diventò imbarazzante; era ubriaco, mi

pare anche di whisky, e il nostromo mi accompagnò nel dormitorio sotto prua.

Di notte vedevo dal ponte le luci lontane di altri pescherecci che tornavano in patria. Mi sembrava di volare, dopo avere lasciato in Italia una madre apparentemente aperta di idee, ma in realtà intellettualmente limitata, appartenente alla vasta schiera di coloro che, per evitare di confrontarsi e mettersi in discussione, giudicano e classificano fatti e persone in base a rigide e rassicuranti categorie di tipo manicheo.

La mattina presto il peschereccio cominciò a risalire un lungo fiordo e approdò a un'isoletta, su cui sbarcai. Traghettoi e partii in autostop in direzione di Trondheim, ma non riuscii a raggiungere un ostello prima di notte e fui costretto a dormire in una capanna di legno nel bosco vicino alla strada.

Cominciava a far freddo e presto rinunciai all'idea di proseguire per l'Islanda. Iniziasti dunque il viaggio in autostop verso mezzogiorno, attraversando i fiordi sotto un bel sole, e raggiungendo prima Oslo e poi Stoccolma, che trovai carissima.

Lasciasti la Svezia attraversando il braccio di mare che separa Helsingborg da Helsingor, dove vidi il castello di Amleto, proseguisti per la graziosa København e poi per Amburgo. Nel frattempo avevo deciso di mettere alla prova anche la mia capacità di cavarmela da solo anche sul piano economico e spedisti in una busta alla tua bisnonna materna le sterline che mi aveva regalato per la mia promozione, con buoni voti, dalla seconda alla terza liceo.

Ad Amburgo cercasti invano lavoro al porto. Come mi spiegò il cuoco di una nave italiana in cui mi imbattei e che a bordo offrì del pane da lui appena sfornato, ciò non era possibile in quanto ero minorenne (all'epoca la maggiore età si conseguiva ai 21 anni compiuti). Tornato in centro, incontrasti per strada un gentile signore con problemi di salute, dovuti al suo internamento in un campo di lavoro nazionalsocialista, che mi suggerì di rivolgerti al magazzino di materiale fotografico Agfa dove lavorava anche lui.

Il giorno dopo ero assunto. Trovasti alloggio in un alberghetto nel quartiere di Altona, dove dividevo la stanza con due lavoratori turchi che facevano turni di notte e dormivano di giorno in un letto matrimoniale al di sopra della cui spalliera era appesa la bandiera turca.

Volevo risparmiare e mangiavo poco altro che pane e latte: una dieta assurda, visto che dovevo trasportare scatole di materiale fotografico con un carrello.

Una mattina caddi svenuto in magazzino; un ragazzo più vecchio di me mi raccomandò di nascondere la cosa perché rischiavo il licenziamento. Mi portò a casa sua per rifocillarmi e durante una chiacchierata mi mostrò

sulla parte superiore del braccio un foro dovuto a una pallottola dell'esercito sovietico contro il quale aveva combattuto giovanissimo, credo sedicenne, in quanto coscritto dal regime nazionalsocialista, contro il quale peraltro non sembrava nutrire alcuna avversione, come del resto i suoi datori di lavoro.

Ne avevo avuto abbastanza. Ormai la scuola era iniziata e decisi di spendere quasi tutto quello che avevo risparmiato per acquistare un biglietto ferroviario per Torino.

Fu un inizio di diciannovesimo anno di età memorabile, ma soprattutto l'inizio di una nuova fase della mia vita, durante la quale il fossato che aveva cominciato ad allontanarmi da mia madre fin dall'età di quattro anni si approfondì, sfociando in una ribellione che mi spinse a lasciare definitivamente casa e successivamente, dopo che mi aveva ritirato il passaporto in quanto ancora minorenne, a emigrare clandestinamente in Francia passando dalle montagne a diciannove anni, a lavorare in nero in Svizzera dal 1968 al 1976, e a compiere viaggi sempre più avventurosi, a cominciare da quelli in Turchia (1969 e 1970), Iran e Afghanistan, dove mi recai, sempre via terra, all'età di 24 anni.

Pur apprezzandone sempre la compagnia e la frequentazione, cominciai a sentirmi sempre più diverso da tutti i miei amici italiani, e da tutti i compagni prima di scuola e poi di università italiani conosciuti, nessuno dei quali scelse di vivere esperienze simili. Questa sensazione di diversità rispetto agli altri, non di solitudine né di superiorità, non è mutata 45 anni dopo; anzi si è estesa al confronto con i colleghi di lavoro italiani.

Nutro sfiducia nella conoscenza libresca e credo che le "verità" raccontate dagli altri debbano essere verificate sul campo e, se necessario, sulla propria pelle. Questa convinzione non mi ha mai abbandonato e spiega perché la ricerca sul campo, talora avventurosa e perfino pericolosa, abbia sempre accompagnato quella sui testi, per me faticosa, dato che non amo leggere e fatico a studiare.

Credo che la vita, nonostante di per sé priva di senso, debba essere concepita come un'opera d'arte, che può darle un senso.

Ti auguro buon lavoro nella realizzazione della tua e buon inizio del tuo diciannovesimo anno di età: domani il diciottesimo sarà compiuto. Se per caso l'anno prossimo non avessi voglia di festeggiare il tuo compleanno, ci potremmo incontrare a Modena o Parma e trascorrere insieme una giornata di lutto alla messicana, mangiando e bevendo, o di non-compleanno, in un ristorante, dove sarò comunque lieto di invitarti in qualunque momento, fatti salvi i giorni in cui sono impegnato con il mio lavoro in Italia o all'estero.

*Ad majora,
Erberto*

Dear nephew,

I hope you received my letter of the 2nd of January, which ended as follows: “Have you started playing again? As for love, I wish it to you with all my heart!”

I distrust liturgies, including birthdays. I struggle to understand the meaning of ceremonies and anniversaries, and birthdays in particular, given the transience and paucity of our lives. After all, birthdays are not celebrated, except in exceptional cases, in the Buddhist world, and for this reason I often found myself in difficulty in trying to ascertain the birth dates of the traditional artists I interviewed, who did not remember or did not know them, also because until a few decades ago in some regions of Asia the registry offices were unknown or not used.

My friends and relatives are prohibited from celebrating my birthday, which in addition to the concepts expressed above, etymologically indicates the fulfilment, i.e. the end, of a year of life, so it seems to me there is very little to celebrate: if anything, it should be a day of mourning.

On my eighteenth birthday I was on a train bound for Paris, where I changed stations to continue on to Calais from where I embarked for Dover, reaching London on July 31st, 1964. Here I went to the Christian voluntary association — United Nations Association, which had nothing to do with the UN — where I served in a labour camp and hitchhiked on to Bournemouth, where an aunt lives, married to an Englishman, who sadly passed away last month. On August 1st, my aunt and uncle took me to visit the prehistoric temple of Stonehenge and Salisbury cathedral, and the next day I hitchhiked to Castle Donington, the site of the labour camp, which I reached within the day.

At Castle Donington I discovered that my job consisted of painting the walls and varnishing the window frames of the rooms of the castle—temporary homes for children of exiles from East Germany—together with other young men and under the guidance of another volunteer, a kindly French doctor.

During that stay I met a nice Palestinian, a medical student, and other Asians: it was an international field. One evening we went to the theatre in Nottingham to see a comedy show.

The camp ended on the 22nd of August and the next day I hitchhiked to Scotland in the company of a kind Scottish girl who hosted me in Glasgow, at her grandparents. On the 24th of August we resumed our road to Elgin, where I stayed with her parents, who would have liked me to stay longer; but I wanted to continue my journey northward, cultivating the idea of going to Iceland.

So I hitchhiked to Thurso, where I spent the night in a youth hostel, an institution I began to use habitually, and then I embarked for the Orkney Islands and later for the Shetlands, where I was interviewed by a journalist who published a small article in the newspaper of Lerwick: it had been twenty years since an Italian had set foot on those islands, which had hosted Italian prisoners during the war.

As I was determined to continue my journey north, the journalist took care to accompany me to the port, where I found no vessel leaving for Iceland or the Faroe Islands, from which I could have reached the former more easily. So we asked the captain of a Norwegian trawler who was completing the water supply if he would give me a passage to Norway. He agreed to take me for free.

It took us a couple of nights to cross the North Sea. The captain invited me into the cockpit, showing me the operation of radar and other equipment; he offered me a drink, I think it was port wine, and we chatted a bit; but the situation became embarrassing; he was drunk, I think also on whisky, and the boatswain took me to the dormitory under the bow.

At night I could see from the deck the distant lights of other fishing boats returning to their homeland. I felt like flying, after having left in Italy a mother who was apparently open to ideas, but in reality intellectually limited, belonging to the vast group of those who, to avoid confrontation and questioning themselves, judge and classify facts and people on the basis of rigid and reassuring Manichean-type categories.

Early in the morning the trawler began to sail up a long fjord and landed at a small island, where I disembarked. I ferried and hitchhiked to Trondheim, but was unable to reach a hostel before nightfall and was forced to sleep in a log cabin in the woods near the road.

It was starting to get cold and I soon gave up on the idea of continuing on to Iceland. So I began the journey by hitchhiking around noon, crossing the fjords under a beautiful sun, and reaching first Oslo and then Stockholm, which I found very expensive.

I left Sweden crossing the stretch of sea which separates Helsingborg from Helsingor, where I saw Hamlet's castle, went on to pretty København and then on to Hamburg. In the meantime, I had decided to test my ability to fend for myself even financially and I sent in an envelope to your maternal great-grandmother the pounds she had given me for my promotion, with good grades, from second to third high school.

In Hamburg I looked in vain for work at the port. As the cook of an Italian ship I came across explained to me while offering us on board bread he had just baked, this was not possible as I was a minor (at the time the age of majority was achieved at 21). Back downtown, I met a kind gentleman on the street with health problems, due to his internment in a National Socialist labour camp, who suggested that I go to the Agfa photographic material warehouse where he also worked.

The next day I was hired. I found accommodation in a small hotel in the Altona district, where I shared a room with two Turkish workers who worked night shifts and slept during the day in a double bed above which hung the Turkish flag.

I wanted to save money and ate little else than bread and milk: an absurd diet, given that I had to transport boxes of photographic material with a trolley.

One morning I passed out in the warehouse; a boy older than me advised me to hide it because I risked being fired. He took me to his house for refreshments and during a chat he showed me a hole in the upper part of his arm caused by a bullet from the Soviet army, against which he had fought very young, sixteen years old I believe, as a conscript from the National Socialist regime, against which, however, he did not seem to have any aversion, as indeed did his employers.

I had had enough. By now school had started and I decided to spend almost all of my savings to buy a train ticket to Turin.

It was a memorable beginning of my nineteenth year, but above all the beginning of a new phase of my life, during which the gulf that had begun to distance me from my mother since the age of four widened, resulting in a rebellion which prompted me to leave home for good and subsequently, after she had withdrawn my passport as a minor, to emigrate clandestinely to France by passing through the mountains at nineteen, to work illegally in Switzerland from 1968 to 1976, and to embark on ever more adventurous journeys, starting with those in Turkey (1969 and 1970), Iran and Afghanistan, where I went, again by land, at the age of 24.

While always appreciating their company and attendance, I began to feel more and more different from all my Italian friends, and from all my Italian classmates, first from school and then from university, none of whom chose to have similar experiences. This feeling of being different from others, not of loneliness or superiority, hasn't changed 45 years later; on the contrary, it extended to Italian work colleagues.

I have no faith in bookish knowledge and believe that the "truths" told by others must be verified in the field and, if necessary, on one's skin. This conviction has never left me and explains why research in the field, sometimes adventurous and even dangerous, has always accompanied research on texts, which is tiring for me, given that I don't like reading and I struggle to study.

I believe that life, although meaningless in itself, should be conceived as a work of art, which can give it meaning.

I wish you good luck in realising yours and a good start to your nineteenth year: tomorrow your eighteenth will be completed. If by chance next year you don't feel like celebrating your birthday, we could meet in Modena or Parma and spend a Mexican-style mourning day together, eating and drinking, or a non-birthday day in a restaurant, where I'll be in any case happy to invite you at any time, except for the days when I'm busy with my work in Italy or abroad.

Ad majora,
Erberto

ERBERTO LO BUE AND HIS ACADEMIC CAREER

Erberto Lo Bue was Associate Professor in Indology and Tibetology at the Department of Oriental and Linguistic Studies of the University of Bologna, where he taught History of Indian and Central Asian Art as well as classical Tibetan.

He obtained his Ph.D. in Tibetan Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) in 1981 with a thesis on Himalayan sculpture in the 20th century. After the first of a number of journeys to Nepal, in 1972 he established the Aniko Collection of Tibetan and Himalayan art in Geneva; since then, he has organised fifteen exhibitions of Asian art in Italy,

Switzerland, and England. In 1978 he carried out fieldwork in Ladakh and the Nepal Valley under the sponsorship of the Central Research Fund of the University of London; and in the period 1980- 1982, he extended his research to art collections in UK museums as well as to Sikkim and Tibetan settlements in India, thanks to a grant from the British Academy. In 1987 he carried out fieldwork in south-western, southern and central Tibet under the sponsorship of CeSMEO (International Institute for Advanced Asian Studies, Turin), concentrating his research upon the monastery and the Great Stupa of Gyantse; he returned to Tibet in 1995, 1996, 1997, and then 2003 and 2004 thanks to funding from NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation).

Between 1983 and 1996 he taught Tibetan language, literature as well as cultural and art history at the universities of Turin, Milan, and Bologna, and at CeSMEO; from 1997 to 1999 he taught in Istanbul on behalf of the Italian Foreign Office. He qualified as research associate at the University of Bologna in 1999 and as associate professor in 2002. Under the sponsorship of the University of Bologna he has carried out fieldwork in Nepal (2000), including Mustang (2008), as well as Ladakh, Spiti, and Kunavar (2001, 2002, 2003, and 2005). In 2003 and 2004 he was a member of the temporary committee for acquisitions for the future Museum of Oriental Art in Turin.

Most of Erberto's over 150 publications are related to Asian studies, and in particular to Tibetan, Newar, and Indian art, with a special interest in contemporary religious artistic traditions in the Himalayas; they include books and exhibition catalogues, articles and reviews in international periodicals—*Acta Orientalia*, *Arts Asiatiques*, *Asiatica Venetiana*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, *Bulletin of Tibetology*, *East and West*, *Marg*, *Oriental Art*, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and *The Tibet Journal*—as well as entries for encyclopaedic dictionaries.

Erberto Lo Bue has been a member of the International Association for Tibetan Studies as well as a Guest Researcher at the Department of the Court History, Palace Museum, Beijing.

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