A significant addition to earlier scholarship on Boro religion and culture

Halfdan Siiger’s work on the Bodos, recently rediscovered and presented here for the first time, deserves a favoured place on the bookshelf of every person who wishes to understand an important indigenous community from Assam.

This work fills a massive gap in the literature in several senses. It was produced by a scholar driven purely by intellectual curiosity, separating him from earlier writers whose missionary zeal at times clouded their scholarly judgements. In addition, this work fills an 80-year gap between such earlier work and more recent scholarly interest, thus enabling readers to draw a more nuanced line between what it meant to be a Bodo at the turn of the 20th century and what it means to be a Bodo at the turn of the 21st. Siiger fills this gap brilliantly. The depth of his insights, clarity of presentation and innovativeness of research method are unparalleled in his generation; some of his techniques feel new even today.

Much contemporary research has gone into understanding the Bodo and their aspirations. While Siiger does not engage directly in the intellectual debates more common today, he does provide information that might be relevant to such debates.

The importance of Halfdan Siiger’s ethnographic material, based on fieldwork carried out in 1949–50, is given even greater relevance by the inclusion of rare archival photos and more recent material contributed by the editors and other modern-day scholars.
THE BODO OF ASSAM
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The Bodo of Assam
Revisiting a Classical Study from 1950

Halfdan Siiger

Edited by Peter B. Andersen & Santosh K. Soren

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Halfdan Siiger’s work on the Bodos, presented here for the first time, deserves a favoured place on the bookshelf of every person who wishes to understand this community. This work fills a massive gap in the literature, in several senses. First, it was produced by a scholar who, in our view, was driven purely by intellectual curiosity. This separates Siiger from Sidney Endle, whose classic 1911 study on the Bodos can be criticized for letting missionary zeal cloud some of his scholarly judgements. Second, this work fills an 80-year gap between Endle’s work and more recent scholarly interest, thus enabling readers to draw a more nuanced line between what it meant to be a Bodo at the turn of the 20th century what it means to be a Bodo at the turn of the 21st. While he does not engage directly in intellectual debates, he does provide information that might be relevant to such debates. Third and most important, Siiger fills this gap brilliantly. The depth of his insights, clarity of presentation and innovativeness of research method are unparalleled in his generation; some of his techniques feel new even today.

Siiger focuses on life in the village, Patkijuli, he called home for three months in 1949–1950. This village had been founded only 10 years earlier and its residents included members of a variety of tribal communities and Nepali families. Patkijuli was also religiously diverse, in ways Siiger found difficult to describe. While he made no attempt to conduct a religious census of any kind, his manuscript includes descriptions of ritual behaviour: some seems to be consistent with ‘traditional tribal’ practices, some with ‘Hindu’ practices, and some with Christian practices.

As an editorial principle, we present Siiger’s text as he wrote it. However, the journey from Siiger’s work to the volume you are now
The Bodo of Assam

reading contains some turns and curves. Siiger took careful notes and photographs and, during the first four years after his return to Denmark, put considerable effort into preparing a manuscript. Six chapters were typed, four of which included hand-written revisions. After 1953, however, other demands and opportunities captured Siiger’s attention.

In 1979, the year of his retirement, Siiger was approached by a youngish scholar, Svend Castenfeldt, who shared interest in another community, the Kalasha (Kafirs) in Chitral, that Siiger had explored prior to his stay in Patkijuli. During this collaboration, which continued through Siiger’s death in 1999, Castenfeldt happened upon the Bodo notebooks and manuscript. He reviewed and organized them, but then returned them to their comfortable home in the Archives until 2008, when he mentioned their existence to us along with Professor Esther Fihl. When we saw the quality of his work, we understood immediately that those interested in Bodos as well as those interested in ethnographic research method would benefit from its insights.

We formally agreed to take on the project in 2010 and the two of us have been equal partners throughout. We realised that getting the book into publishable condition would require scholarly judgement. Siiger was not always clear about which notebook excerpts he intended to have inserted into the manuscript, nor was it always clear that the referenced notebook existed. Some of this detective work was completed by Kristine Tophøj, yet we continued to find materials and locate their appropriate position in the text throughout the publication process. We pondered how to approach apparent inconsistencies and, in the end, decided that we would leave them as presented by Siiger – unless we were certain of his meaning, in which case we would note our work in a footnote. (One can be both certain and nevertheless mistaken.)

Our most substantial editorial intervention comes in the form of additions to Siiger’s text. We invited Professor Anil Boro of Guwahati University to write a general introduction regarding the Bodo people, in order to provide a broader social context to Siiger’s very specific presentation. We ourselves have written a chapter that explains Siiger’s intellectual development as well as
Preface

an overview of the village in which he found himself. In addition to providing a context for the general reader, we hope this exposition will enable specialists to evaluate Siiger’s credibility as a scholar and the relevance of information drawn from Patkijuli to the Bodo experience elsewhere. Finally, we wrote a chapter that Siiger surely would have been delighted to include: a description of the 96 objects, ranging from a pair of earrings to a working loom, for which he arranged purchase and transport to the Danish National Museum. This chapter does more than describe objects; Siiger’s curatorial decisions also illuminate his analytic perspective and the specific objects illuminate his descriptions throughout the book.

We are grateful to a number of fellow travellers on this journey. In addition to writing a chapter, Professor Boro has consulted extensively on the catalogue entries presented in Chapter 9. A trip to Brede to evaluate the objects was made possible by a generous grant from the Asian Dynamics Initiative. The National Museum of Denmark has been helpful throughout. Curators Jesper Kurt Nielsen and Inge Damm have followed the project for years, and curator Bente Wolff and the chair of collections of recent times and the world, Christian Sune Pedersen, have offered continuous and invaluable assistance. During our visits to inspect and evaluate physical objects, museum assistants Anja Blok Jespersen and Suzan Mephail were both capable and professional, as was museum photographer Arnold Mikkelsen, whose work appears throughout the volume.

At Danmission Jørgen Nørgaard Pedersen, former general secretary of the Danish Lutheran Mission to the Santals (Dansk Santalmission) has rendered his help and advice, as well as opened the Danmission archives to us.

For projects like this, the advice and encouragement of Senior Fellow Ida Nicolaisen at the Nordic Institute for Asian Studies is of the greatest importance, and as always she provided these with grace and charm. Thanks also to editor-in-chief Gerald Jackson and the team at NIAS Press for bringing this work to the attention of scholars around the world. Not least, we thank desk editor David Stuligross for all his feedback and improvements during the final editorial process; the result has been a far more engaging and accessible work.

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From India, Dr. Ranjit Bhattacharya, former director of the Anthropological Survey of India, visited Siiger’s collections at the National Museum of Denmark and has been part of the support and collaboration rendered by the Indian Museum under the Government of India. Director Mr. B. Venugopal and former director and Professor K. K. Misra have encouraged the project; deputy keeper, Dr Mita Chakraborathy has followed the project over the years. We hope to create a small poster exhibition in collaboration with the Indian Museum as a kind of immaterial repatriation of the Bodo and Indian objects that the Danish National Museum is grateful to study and display.

In Guwahati, the designer, Ms Mwanabili Brahma advised Peter B. Andersen on the weaving patterns of some textiles, and the students and colleagues of Professor Boro at the Department of Folklore in Guwahati University have also rendered most invaluable help, as have Assistant Professor Pranab Jyoti Narzary, Pandu College, Guwahati and Research Scholar Viswait Brahma, Guwahati University. Finally, Bishop emeritus N. Borgaory in Bongagaion deepened our understanding of the historical and present organisation of the Lutheran Church.

In Denmark, the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen, the Danish National Museum, Moesgaard Museum and the Department for Culture and Society, Århus University organised a conference to celebrate Halfdan Siiger’s birth centenary in 2011. It was convened by Ulrik Høj Johnsen, Svend Castenfeldt, Armin Geertz and Peter B. Andersen. We are happy for the continuous support and advice from the all the organisers of this conference. Insights from the volume that emerged from this conference – In the Footsteps of Halfdan Siiger: Danish Research in Central Asia (fuller details in References section) – appear in the book you are reading.

A number of colleagues at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, have engaged in discussions throughout the long editorial process. We offer our special thanks to Associate Professor Kenneth Zysk for help in identifying the Sanskrit quotes in the Mahabharata. And at other moments, Associate Professors Trine Brox and Ildiko Beller-Hann
Preface

have offered valuable advice. Peter B. Andersen wants to express his gratitude to the Department for allowing him to allocate some research time to this project and for support for trips to India to prepare the publication of the book.

Finally, we thank, with great respect, the four foundations whose generous support made publication of the present book possible: Dronning Margrethes og Prins Henriks Fond, G.E.C. Gads Fond, Lillian og Dan Finks Fond and VELUX FONDEN in memory of Half-dan Siiger’s work.

Peter B. Andersen and Santosh K. Soren
May 2015
The Bodo of Assam
Contributors

Halfdan Siiger (1911–1999) held a MA in Theology and a Magisters Degree (comparable to a PhD) in the History of Religions from the University of Copenhagen. From 1947 to 1950 he participated in the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia, during which he performed major studies of the Kalash (Kafirs) Chitral in Pakistan, the Lepchas in Sikkim and the present study of the Bodos of Assam. On his return, Siiger was appointed curator at the National Museum of Denmark and professor in the History of Religions in a newly created chair at Aarhus University in Denmark. He held this professorship until his retirement in 1979. Siiger’s main publication is *The Lepchas. Culture and Religion of a Himalayan People*. Part I, *Results of Anthropological Field Work in Sikkim, Kalimpong and Git*, Part II, *Lepcha Ritual Texts and Commentary*, by H. Siiger, *Phonetic Transcription of Lepcha Ritual Texts with Introduction* by J. Richel (1967).

Peter B. Andersen holds a PhD in the sociology of religions and is Associate Professor at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies at the University of Copenhagen. His main research interest is religion and modernity. In India, he has investigated the changes from oral to printed transmission of culture among the Santals, one of India’s Scheduled tribal communities. His publications include *From Fire Rain to Rebellion. Reasserting Ethnic Identity through Narrative*, (ed. and transl. Peter B. Andersen, Marine Carrin and Santosh K. Soren) (2011).

Santosh Kumar Soren holds a Master of Science (Agricultural Extension) from the University of Allahabad and an education as librarian from the Danish School of Library Studies (Dansk
Biblioteksskole). He worked until his retirement as librarian at the Roskilde University Library in Denmark. Among his publications are *Santalia. Catalogue of Santali Manuscripts in Oslo* (1999) and the joint publication of *From Fire Rain to Rebellion* (see above).

**Anil Kumar Boro** holds a PhD in Folklore from Guwahati University and is Professor at the Department of Folklore Research at Guwahati University. Among his numerous scholarly publications may be mentioned *A History of Bodo Literature* (2010). He is also a prominent Bodo fiction writer and, in 2013, he won the Sahitya Academy award for literature in Boro language for his poetry volume, *Delphini Onthai Mwdai Arw Gubun Gubun Khontha*. 

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*The Bodo of Assam*
Halfdan Siiger conducted three months of field work among the villagers of Patkijuli on the border with Bhutan, in Assam’s Kamrup district. At that time, in 1949–1950, the Bodos were mostly an oral society rich in oral traditions; their language was first written by missionaries in the late 19th century and first introduced as medium of instruction in schools in 1963. By the beginning of the 21st century, it was possible to study in and engage in research on Bodo language, literature and culture at the university level. The Bodo community is now on the verge of entering into a new era of social and economic development, keeping their ethnic identity intact. They have developed a rich written literature and, since 2003, their language has been officially recognized at the same level as Assamese and other major Indian languages.

Historical background

The reader may ask: who are the Bodos? The Bodos, who numbered approximately 1.3 million in Assam in 2001, are a very important piece of the cultural mosaic that is Assam, one of India’s

1. Missionaries had adopted a variation of Roman script for the written language, but many Bodos wrote and published in the Assamese or Bengali scripts. Beginning in 1963, schools used Assamese script for Boro language. However, schools began to use Devanagari script for the language beginning in 1975.


3. A more comprehensive discussion of early Bodo history, language and migration is found in Anil Boro 2010.
most ethnically diverse states. Their language, Boro, is related to Tibetan and many words may be recognised even though Bodos and Tibetans cannot understand each other properly. Their physical features are clearly Mongolian, but attempts to pigeonhole their ethnicity via physical, linguistic and cultural categories have led to scholarly debate. Scholars have classified them variously as Indo-Mongoloids or Indo-Tibetans, or just as Kiratas as they were called in old Indian scriptures.

The term ‘Indo-Mongoloid’ was coined by the linguist S.K. Chatterji, on the model of ‘Indo-European.’ He explains that this ‘defines at once their Indian connection and their place within the cultural milieu in which they found themselves’ (S.K. Chatterji 1974: 38). Regarding the distribution of the Bodos, Chatterji was of the opinion that they had populated ‘the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley and North Bengal as well as East Bengal, forming a solid block in northeastern India’ at the time ‘when the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were taking shape, between 500 B.C. and 400 A.D.’ and that they ‘were the most important Indo-Mongoloid people in Eastern India, and they form one of the main basis of the present-day population of these tracts.’ (S.K. Chatterji 1974: 45–46).

It must be acknowledged, however, that these peoples had close contacts with other groups of people at various moments in their history and civilization and, through interaction and even intermarriage, they influenced each other’s culture (S.K. Chatterji 1974: 13). Despite the processes of cultural assimilation and physical fusion, the Bodos have maintained their distinctive identity through

4. Estimating the Bodo population in a way that is both accurate and politically sensitive proves to be a challenge. The Census of India (2001) indicates that 1,296,162 Bodo people live in Assam, which is the only place where Bodos are recognized as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) and hence the only place where Bodo persons are counted. However, the Census also reports on languages. The number of Boro language (mother-tongue) speakers throughout India is 1,350,470. Both numbers are potentially misleading. One could reasonably expect that some Bodos (ST) in Assam do not report Boro language as their mother tongue, thus overestimating the number of people in Assam who identify themselves, culturally, as Bodo and also underestimating the number outside Assam whose first language is Boro. Similarly, it is plausible that some people outside of Assam identify themselves as Bodo even though their mother tongue is something else.
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In old Sanskrit scriptures the term *Kirata* was used as a pejorative designation for people belonging to other cultures. The most common historical references to the Kiratas are to the epic *Mahabharata*, which was told and codified during the 800 years surrounding the birth of Christ. Here, Bhima, one of the five Pandava brothers, made conquests in the country of Videha in the eastern Himalayas southeast of present day Nepal: ‘The Pandava hero, son of Kunti, coming to the Videha land also to the Indra mountains, defeated the seven Kirata rulers.’ (quoted in S.K. Chatterji 1974: 30 from the *Mahabharata*, Sabhaparvan 2: 27: 13; J.A.B. van Buitenen 1975: II: 81).

Another reference in the *Mahabharata* is to the ruler of Pragjyotisa, the Sanskrit name of the capital and country in what is now western Assam, near the present day Guwahati and about 80 km south of the village where Siiger collected his data. One of the gods changed himself into a Kirata, and Cina [Chinese] soldiers are described as appearing ‘to be in gold’, that is, not of a dark or black complexion like the Dasyas and the other people living in India before the arrival of the Indo-Europeans. Bhagadiatta, the king of Pragjyotisa who took part in the great battle portrayed in *Mahabharatha* was definitely described as a ruler over *Mlecas* or non-Hindu barbarians.

Even if the proper origin of the word ‘Kirata’ is open for scholarly discussion, there is little doubt that ‘the term Kirata [in the old Sanskrit texts] indicated the wild, non-Aryan tribes living in the mountains, particularly the Himalayas and the North-eastern areas of India, who were Mongoloid in origin. These Kiratas were connected with the *Cinas* or the Chinese, the *Bhotas* or the Tibetans and other Mongoloid people.’ (S.K. Chatterji 1974: 26).

The Bodos are also called Bodo-Kacharis or just Kacharis. The missionary scholar Sidney Endle (1911) called them Kachari, but

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5. Chatterji references a Bengali edition of the *Mahabharata*. I have supplemented these with references to a later critical edition. The reference to J.A.B. van Buitenen’s translation have been added for the convenience of the non-Sanskrit reader who wishes to see the passage in context in a new translation.

there is no agreement on the origin of this word. Some suggest that Kachari is derived from the Sanskrit *Kaksata*, meaning *Kirata* (B. Kakati 1948; B.K. Baruah 1966) or that it is derived from the ‘*Kacha*’ referred to in the *Mahabharata* (N.K. Barman 1972: 6–7). Others interpret Kachari as a corruption of *Kossari*, where *Koss* refers to Koches and *Ari* means ‘a clan from Bod’ (J.D. Anderson [1895]). It may also have originated early in the 19th century, when the king of Tipperah gave his daughter in marriage to the king of Maibong in North Cachar; the people of North Cachar were called Kacharis by the Assamese people (B. Grierson 1903: 1). A final opinion is that the word has been derived from *Kachai Khaiti* or *kacha khaori* (the goddess who eats raw flesh) (M.M. Brahma 1960: 8).

But it must be frankly admitted that the Bodos call themselves neither Kiratas nor Kacharis. These terms were used by the high castes, especially outsiders, who regarded them inferior. They rather call themselves Boro or Bodo or Borofisa. The term ‘Bodo’ denotes an ethnic group speaking the Sino-Tibetan Bodo language. Some authors have used the term in space-specific sense: ‘The Bodos are a race of the Mongoloid people who are described to be the inhabitants of a country north of the Himalayas and west of China. This land is known as Bod. The word Bod is supposed to mean a homeland.’ (K. Brahma: 2009: 13).

Brahma argues that the prevalence of words like *Horbod* and *Kurbod* make the existence of the Bod country feasible. R.M. Nath is of the view that, when Buddhism spread into Bodo areas, especially in the southern parts, the Buddhist Lamas were first known as *Bsti*. They came to be known as Bod and, later on, a transformation took place as follows: *Bstibod* → *tibod* → *tibbot* → *Tibet* (Nath 1978: 15). How closely this term ‘Bod’ can be connected to Boro or Bodo is only a matter of speculation. It seems that the term was not applied to the Bodos before in the middle of the 19th Century and it has been taken over as a self designation only after that time.

7. All of these opinions, regardless of their authors’ intentions, have worked their way into debates about which ethnic community or communities can claim a common heritage with those whose bravery is described in the *Mahabharata*.
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When examined as a political community, Sanskrit and Assamese texts suggest that Bodo (Kirata) rule waxed and waned, particularly in competition with Burmese (Ahom) rule:

The Bodo people including their western and eastern branch [in Assam and northern Bengal] had royal glories as we gather from the records of history. The western section of the old Bodos (Kacharis) occupied the thrones of Koch-Behar, Bijni, Darrang and Beltola. An eastern branch in the name of Chutiya has also established a powerful kingdom with its capital near Sadiya. ... And then section of the eastern Bodos maintained their kingdom with capitals at Dimapur, Maibong and Khaspur against the continuous invasion of Ahoms and neighbouring powers upto the advent of British rule in Assam. This section of the Bodos is known to us as Dimasa or Dimasa Kachari (Hills Kachari). (P.C. Bhattacharya 1977: 16)

Judging from the geographic range where their language is spoken, the Bodos appear ‘first to have settled over the entire Brahmaputra valley and extended into ... Bengal (in Kochbehar, Rangpur and Dinajpur districts). They may have pushed into North Bihar also’ (S.K. Chatterji 1974: 46). Today, most Bodos live in western Assam north of the Brahmaputra river, but they can be found in scattered pockets throughout Assam, West Bengal and Nepal.

Siiger himself observed that the history of Bodo population movements continued into his present. In his autobiography (see Chapter 4) 45-year-old Pasařū Boshumatari explains that he has lived in 11 different villages spanning 300 kilometers. When Siiger enquired, Boshumatari explained that many factors can force a move: if there are too many sons to work on the family farm, some sons will have to go out on their own; if serious illness ‘comes to a house,’ then the whole family might move; if drought or flooding damages fields, then one must move. Farm life depends on water, firewood, and grazing. If any of these factors become problematic, then the family must seek a better place.

Social structure

In their family or domestic life the Bodos follow a patriarchal family pattern. The senior male member is the head of the family and owner of all family property. Nevertheless, female family members
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are not kept under the suppression and excessive male domination for which South Asia is known. Bhattacharya (1977: 16) describes the Bodo social structure as ‘primarily patriarchal with a few elements of matriarchal characteristics.’ (P.C. Bhattacharya: 1977: 16). Seven decades earlier, Endle (1911: 12) offered a more comprehensive comparative description:

Among the Kacharis [Bodos], women do not perhaps occupy quite the same influential position as seems to be enjoyed by their sisters [among the Khasis] in the Khasi hills, where something like a matriarchate apparently holds the field of social and domestic life. Still in this interesting race the position of the wife and mother is far from being a degraded one. The Kachari [Bodo] husband usually treats his wife with distinct respect and regards her as an equal and a companion to an extent. As matrons, the wives enjoy a large measure of freedom.

Bodo social life is closely compact and well-organized and members are bound (or at least guided) by certain strict rules and regulations in their social life. Family-based groupings (mahari or clan) have specific occupations associated with them. Community living, teamwork, fishing and collective merrymaking are still prevalent among the Bodos. A council-based method of social governance was prevalent among them until the recent past, as Siiger also reports when his informants in their narrations offers hints regarding the traditional Bodo society of former days. The council was a democratic set-up under the leadership of the village headman, where every member of the society had a say.

The gamini brai (old man of the village) is the all-in-all in the social organizations of the Bodo village. In the traditional village council (mel), he had a leading function and took decisions in case of discussions and trial in cases of fights between the villagers or in case of adultery. There is no evidence of traditional educational or economic institutions. The age-old social institutions (aphats) organized all the activities that are now organized by educational and economic institutions, which themselves evolved over the course of the last century. This process was initiated by the socio-religious reform launched by the Bodo reformer Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. Nowadays there are libraries, socio-cultural
associations and clubs even in the remote areas. This institutional evolution is perhaps the clearest sign of a social transition that also manifests itself in other aspects of Bodo life. Weekly markets, daily markets and shops have popped up, along with government and non-government financial agencies. The emergence of these new institutions earmarks the growth of consciousness and political awareness among the Bodos, who since the 1960s have launched a continuing series of movements to assert their distinct socio-ethnic, cultural and political identity.

**Traditional Bodo religion**

The religion of the Bodos is now called the *Bathou*, after the name of the supreme god Bathou brai. As Siiger’s own collections attest, religion and agriculture are closely intertwined. The main annual festivals focus *mainau*, which literally means wealth but is measured by the harvest’s bounty. *Mainau* is part of the seasonal offering in the spring, as well as several harvest festivals. The word’s fundamental meaning is evident from the *mainau disonai*, which is celebrated when a man considered his harvest too meagre (Figure 1.1).

Bathou followers believe the number five is very significant for religious belief and worldview. This is evident from a hymn performed in *Kerai* worship:

- The wood apple fruit has five ridges
- Siju plant has five edges
- The flute has five holes
- The alter of Bathou has five rings
- The Bodos have five principles.

‘Ba’ in the name Bathou is understood as the number five, an important number in the religion. The universe consists of five elements: soil, air, water fire and sky (S. Brahma 2011:18). Also,
five principles must be followed by every devout person. These principles are morally interpreted as 1) to procreate; 2) to wed; 3) to live a life that balances sorrow and joy; 4) to trust the gods in times of sorrow, and address sorrows through worship; and 5) to achieve ultimate salvation through devotion (*ibid.*).

The Bodos have no fixed place meant for the purpose of communal worship, like a temple, church or mosque. But one can see a *siju* plant (*Euphorbia splendens*) on the Bathou altar in every Bodo household. While there are named deities, there is no place for idol worship in Bathou religion. As Endle described a century ago, ‘in the typical Kachari [Bodo] village as a rule neither idol nor place
of worship is to be found; but to the Kachari mind and imagination earth, air and sky are alike peopled with a vast number of invisible spiritual beings, known usually as Modai [spirits].' (S. Endle 1911: 33) Endle continued that the Modai all possessed, ‘powers and faculties far greater than those of men and almost invariably inclined to use these powers for malignant and malevolent rather than benevolent purposes’ (ibid.).

This general interpretation was consistent with Endle’s missionary approach and typical for the missionaries of his time. Animism or ‘spirit worship’, as missionary anthropologists preferred to label it, was described as the worship of evil and malevolent spirits. Later scholars have comprehensively refuted this interpretive aspect of Endle’s work, which in no way minimizes the contribution of his
non-interpretative descriptions and collections to our understanding of Boro language and lore. More recent scholars explain that the ‘Bodos are not animistic. They are worshippers of Bathou, the Supreme God.’ (P.C. Bhattacharya 1977: 17). It must be acknowledged, however, that the traditional religion of the Bodos has undergone some changes and innovations, which offer material for interesting case studies of the fusion of pan-Indian religious trends with specific indigenous religious traditions. Many Bodos have chosen to leave the traditional ways of Bodo life rather than fusion: with the passing of time, one sizeable section of the Bodos has converted to Christianity and another to confessions within the broad Hindu umbrella.

Aspects of Bodo Culture
The Bodo culture is rich and multifaceted. It is part and parcel of the great Indo-Mongoloid or Kirata culture. The Mongoloid Bodo culture and Indo-European culture have influenced one another to a great extent, especially in the northeast. In his monograph on the linguistically related tribe, the Ao Nagas, W.C. Smith demarcates thirteen outstanding features of Mongoloid culture. Of these, the Bodos share five characteristics: (i) the habit of betel chewing; (ii) the aversion to milk, other than mother’s milk; (iii) the use of simple loom for weaving cloth; (iv) the habit of using a large type of shield in warfare (v) periodic change of residence in rhythm with slash and burn agriculture (W.C. Smith 1925: 120). Today that kind of warfare is gone and agriculture is predominantly settled, but some of Bodos shared these traits until the recent past.

The Bodos follow certain traditional customs with regard to house building. Their main house is built on the northern side of the homestead. The main house has a door facing to the south, stretches from the east to the west, and contains three divisions. The easternmost portion (ising) of the main house is meant for cooking and worshipping. The courtyard also provides the altar of the Bathou, the Supreme God, with a siju plant parallel to the easternmost portion of the main house.

The Bodos observe rituals and ceremonies related to their life cycles, especially birth, death and marriage. They observe some
seasonal, agricultural and religious festivals. *Baicagu* is the main seasonal festival of the Bodos. It is a springtime festival and is similar to the Ahom/Hindu festival *Bihu* (Bishu). Feasting, dancing and merrymaking go on for seven days. The young ones dance jovially and sing songs of love and yearning and middle-aged and old folk also join in. *Domaci* and *Katigaca* are two other major seasonal festivals of the Bodos, corresponding to the Ahom/Hindu *Magh Bihu* and *Kati Bihu* respectively. These festivals are inextricably linked with the agricultural calendar and peasant rituals. Other seasonal festivals prevalent among the Bodos are *Mohoho, Anthicua*, and *Phuthli Haba* (doll marriage).

Of the religious festivals current among the Bodos, mention must be made of the *Kerai*. The *Kerai* is the greatest religious festival of the Bodos. It is celebrated for the well being of the people and the harvest. There are four different kinds of *Kerai* out of which the first three are celebrated by the whole village in accordance with the agricultural year, and the last is celebrated in the family in case of need.

1. *Darchan Kerai* or *Lakhi Kerai* is performed for the goddess *Mainau* in order to obtain wealth (*mainau*).
2. *Umrao Kerai* (*Achu Kerai*) is performed for the crops.
3. *Phalo Kerai* (*Danchran Kerai*) celebrates the autumn harvest.
4. *Noaoni Kerai* (family Kerai) is performed when a family is in need.9

The Bodos worship a number of different gods and goddesses during *Kerai* worship, including *Bathou brai, Ailen, Agrang, Khoila, Karzi, Razkhandra, Song raza, Alaikhungri, Bhandari, Ranchandi, Bulliburi, Laokhar gosai, Nowab badchah*. *Kerai* dances are performed to the accompaniment of the musical instruments, notably *kham* (drum), *siphung* (flute) and *jotha* (cymbal). These dances are performed to satisfy the gods and goddesses like *Bathou brai* and the other gods of the pantheon. As many as 18 dance forms are said to have originated from the dance of the *dōdînî* (priestess) during the *Kerai* festival.

Indigenous religious belief and practices are part and parcel of Bodo culture. It is difficult to say how old ‘traditional Bodos religious practices’ are. Scholars from within the Bodo community

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9. *Noa* = individual family.
The Bodo of Assam

claim that Bodos have been practicing the Bathou religion since early times. The tradition of Bathou worship suffered a jolt when Bodo reformer Kalicharan Brahma launched his socio-religious movement and preached a new religion called ‘Brahma dharma’.\(^\text{10}\) This happened at a time when large scale conversion of the Bodo population to neo-Vaishnavism was going on. The Brahma movement gained momentum at this juncture and the educated section among the Bodos came forward to support this. But it cannot be said that the newfound Brahma religion could block the way for the practice of the traditional religion called Bathou.

Most Bodos still adhere to their traditional religion, although in a way that might appear to be unorganised. This is because the village is the religious locus and knowledge is handed down from one priest to the next. Hence, variation among villages is the rule rather than the exception. Thus, one can see different types of Bathou worship, including Gudi Bathou, Bibar Bathou, Moni Bathou and Zangkhrao Bathou, which are now accepted as different forms of Bathou. The most ancient and original form of Bathou worship is Gudi Bathou (also called Bwli Bathou), where the deities are worshipped with the sacrifice of animals like goat, fowl, chicken or pigeon. Bibar Bathou, the reformed and more popular religious practice, does not require animal sacrifice. It is a simple form of religious practice which came at the initiative of All Bathou Religious Union (Bathou dhwrwmari gouthum), which was formed in 1992.

**Halfdan Siiger’s study of Bodo culture and religion**

Bodo society has undergone vast changes since the time when Professor Halfdan Siiger undertook his field study in Patkijuli. In 2012, Peter B. Andersen and I visited the village with our students. The photographs taken by Siiger at the time of his field study still capture a village far away from modern communication, transport and other amenities. The village is much different now. Perhaps most dramatically, all villagers are now Christians. We were for-

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10. In the village where Prof. Siiger conducted his field collections, Hindus (Bromos, as he called them) were well known. See for example ‘Tanesår’s autobiography in Chapter 4.
The Bodos of Assam

tunate to meet and interview 'Tanesår, one of Siiger’s key contacts and informants.

Perhaps the greatest strength of this manuscript is its demonstration of the integrity of academic ethnography. The main prior study, which has been the exclusive source of knowledge about traditional Bodo culture, was written by Sidney Endle in 1911. There is much to be praised in Endle’s work, but it also cannot be denied that he was first and foremost an evangelist and a missionary. This priority cannot but have blinded him to some aspects of the culture he sought to observe. By contrast, Halfdan Siiger was an intellectual of the highest order. His sought to understand by means of observation and collection. The power of Siiger’s writing lies in his willingness to allow his subjects’ point of view, and even their voice, to permeate through the text. To an extraordinary

Figure 1.3: Siiger’s informant 'Tanesår in his home, Sunday 15 April 2012 (photo: P. Andersen)
The Bodo of Assam

extent, Siiger has removed himself from the conversation; he is the medium through which his subjects communicate with us.

As a folklorist, I find special interest in the folklore and traditions Siiger describes. He presents nuances, details and even complete stories that have eluded scholars even sixty years later. Meticulously prepared, the manuscript contains many oral narratives, including myths, legends, folk tales and personal histories. The charms, songs and sayings are of tremendous academic interest and some of the songs documented are like new exploration to the world of Bodo folklore. The manuscript contains valuable information and insight into the customs and religious practices as seen through the eyes of the Siiger’s Bodo collaborators and informants. I invite all of you to enjoy the brilliant ethnographic account that follows.
CHAPTER 2

Danish Interest in Bodo Areas

Halfdan Siiger’s Journey

*Peter B. Andersen and Santosh K. Soren*

The first chapter sought to answer the question: who are the Bodos? Here we ask: in what ways did Christian missions in Bodo areas affect what Siiger reported about the Bodos and how he reported it; why would the Danish National Museum wish to study the Bodos; and why Halfdan Siiger would have such an interest. We also introduce Patkijuli, the village Siiger used as his base, and address methodological and editorial concerns.¹

Missionary Impact on Bodo Areas

A fascinating confluence of events led the Danish National Museum to focus on an otherwise unremarkable village, Patkijuli, in the 1940s. It approached the village from hundreds of kilometres to the north and also from hundreds of kilometres to the south. Looking toward the village from the north, Patkijuli turned

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¹ The sources for Siiger’s arrival to the village draws on Correspondence in file C.6480–6512, 38/49 (1944–1949) at the Danish National Museum as well as letters at Moesgaard Museum. The description of the village at Siiger’s time is based on Siiger’s notebook, Boro Book A, titled ‘Various tribes, Boro *haris*, headmen, history, agriculture and domestic animals’, which is held in the Danish National Museum archives. Kaj Birket-Smith did not sign the draft letters we found in the Danish National Museum; he is safely identified by the responses from the Danish Santal Mission, which are addressed to him.
The Bodo of Assam

out to be the endpoint of a series of exploratory missions that had started in Mongolia. Looking toward the village from the South, the Lutheran Christian Mission sought to extend its collections related to the communities served by the Santal Mission to the Northern Churches (SMNC).\(^2\) The SMNC’s predecessor was established in 1867 with the intention of converting inhabitants of India’s central tribal belt to Baptist Christianity, but it turned gradually to a Lutheran position. Just as these missionaries arrived, British entrepreneurs and colonial administrators were engaged in a process of enticing members of these communities to work in newly established tea plantations in Assam. Also, as a result of a famine in the tribal belt in 1873, numerous Santals, Mundas and others made their way northward. As new converts migrated to their new homes, some missionaries migrated with them. For this reason, the IHM established an outpost in Goalpara District in Assam in the early 1880s (J. Nyhagen 1990: II).\(^3\) While there were European managers (superintendents) stationed here for long periods of time, it was managed by Bengalis in some periods.

Missionary outreach to the Bodo community was initiated by the Santal converts who had settled in Assam. The spiritual leader of the settlement was Siram, whose baptism on Easter Day in 1869 made him one of the first Santals to be welcomed into the Lutheran church. Two decades later, he summoned the settlement’s Lutheran Santal families and persuaded them to fund a mission to the Bodos in Rajadhabri (J. Rod 1947: 14; H.F. Jørgensen 1940: 102–108). One of the founding European missionaries expressed his delight

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2. The Indian Mission to the Santals was established in India and intended to be funded from Indian sources. Later, independent missionary societies in Europe and the USA dispatched groups to India. These included, among others, the Danish Santal Mission and the (Norwegian) Santal Mission, and support from the USA and Scotland. The mission in India changed its name a couple of times over the years: Indian Home Mission to the Santals (IHM) 1869–1911, The Santal Mission to the Northern Churches 1911–1950, The Ebenezer Evangelical Lutheran Church 1950–1959 and the present name Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC) since 1959 (O. Hodne 1992). The IHM was founded as a Baptist society, but changed gradually its position to a Lutheran position.

3. In those days it was called a Colony; a term which may still be found in the histories of the Christian mission.
with this indigenous Christian evangelism: ‘When the light begins to burn, no European Missionary shall have the praise’ (Børresen quoted in J. Rod 1947: 14).

Lutherans were hardly the first missionaries to arrive in north-east India; indeed, they were among the last. There seem to have been small pockets of Catholics in Assam perhaps dating back to 1745, when the Catholic Capuchins were expelled from Tibet (F.S. Downs 1992: 90–91). Other Christian missions started in the 1820s, when the (British) East India Company began to assert more direct administrative control over the region (R.C. Majumdar 1970a: 34–37; 1970b: 96 passim). Welsh Presbyterians had proselytized among the Garos since 1819 and the Khasis since 1854. The American Baptist Mission was established in lower (western) Assam during the 1830s. The ecumenically-minded British administration generally supported missions from its seat in Guwahati. Anglican (Church of England) chaplains in Assam mostly looked after the spiritual needs of the European members of their own denomination. They were appointed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), which was strongly critical of Lutherans and Baptists. Hence, Anglican evangelical work focused on conversion of Indian Lutherans and Baptists to Anglicanism (Downs 1992: 86–87) in a process sometimes referred to as sheep stealing.4 For example, Bahadur, a Bodo man

4. As early as 1848, one of the Baptist missionaries to Assam reported that the Anglican missionaries belonging to Anglo-Catholicism had converted several prospective converts to the American Baptists by telling them that the Baptists ‘have no authority to preach and baptize’ (Brown 1848, quoted in Downs 1992: 87). Later on, it is evident that there were a number of conversions between the different churches, but the Baptists and the Lutherans divided some areas among themselves in order to be able to take care of the Christians in their respective areas. Regarding the Lutheran mission to the Bodos carried out through The Santal Mission to the Northern Churches, European Lutherans complained that the Catholics aggressively sought to convert Lutherans. Leaders of the various missions described the competing creeds as religiously inferior, but competition often occurred at a more mundane level. An agreement on dividing the missionary field among the churches was reached by The Free Church of Scotland, the Lutheran Mission and the American and Australian Baptist missions, but the year of the agreement is not reported (J. Rod 1947: 23–24).
Figure 2.1: Baptisms in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the area under Bongaigaon Mission.

(Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports)
Danish Interest in Bodo Areas

who had been ordained as a Lutheran priest, was disciplined for drinking (described euphemistically as ‘falling into sin.’ Rod 1947: 20). Bahadur simply renounced Lutheranism and walked with his entire congregation, minus one family, into the Catholic Church. Individual Bodo converts seemingly moved from one faith to another without bothering about issues that European and American church personnel considered to be fundamental impediments to salvation. In Bahadur’s case, an entire congregation displayed a greater devotion to their minister than to what European missionaries would describe as their faith. This reflects another aspect of what some might call the indigenization of Christianity in India (Frykenberg 2008).

Figure 2.2: Baptised members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the area under Bongaigaon Mission

(Source: Compiled from the Annual Reports)
The Bodo of Assam

In some respects, Christian missions were more interested in the hill tribes than in the Bodos, who lived on Assam’s plains. However, as all missions made their headquarters in the (relatively) comfortable Assam Valley as they managed their missionary enterprises in the hills, many of them soon appealed to the Bodos who lived nearby. Bodo social pressure proved to be strong and, in the early years, only the few individuals who had close contact with missionaries through work or business actually converted. Some of these later became the first Bodo priests, catechists and ‘bible women’, who sought to bring the Christian message to other women. Through our eyes, reports sent to the home European societies might have given the impression that there had been very few converts to Christianity, but in fact these few individuals were of the highest importance: they were in positions of authority and could convince large numbers of Bodos to convert in the next phase, during which Christianity became an Indian religion, known throughout India and disseminated by Indians (Frykenberg 2008). By this time, each mission organised itself into congregations that included a central church surrounded by a number of smaller congregations whose families’ spiritual needs were met by elders or a catechist.5

Religious exploration and competition in northeast India was not limited to ‘indigenous’ and ‘Christian’ traditions. Proponents of several forms of Hinduism had woven themselves into northeast India’s cultural fabric for centuries. Vaisnavism had expanded in Assam in the 16th century and, by the time Siiger arrived, Bodos whose religion and ritual seemed to be consistent with traditional practices nonetheless described themselves as ‘Hindu.’ Much later, the Brahma Dharma movement made its way among the Bodos. It was established in 1906, when a Bodo man named Kalicharan Brahma returned from Calcutta, where he had been initiated in the Hindu reform movement Brahmo Samaj (S. Brahma 2011: 65–75; A. Boro 2010: 20–21 and Chapter 1 in this volume). This is evident in Siiger’s records about some villagers who were described as

5. This structure may be illustrated by the fact that there were 24 congregations with about 2,500 Christians around Bongagaion in 1956 (Anna and Haakon Halvorsrud in The Ninetieth Annual Report, 1957, pp. 93–94).
Danish Interest in Bodo Areas

*Bromos*, a designation for individuals that had been initiated in the Brahma Dharma.

**The Danish National Museum in an Era of Discovery**

The Danish National Museum had a long interest in studying and documenting the areas where Danes had settled, and Danes had a long history in India. In 1621, the country’s first trading outpost was established in King Christian IVs name at Tranquebar, in present day Tamil Nadu. A second trading outpost was established 153 years later at Serampore, near present-day Kolkata. These sites, as well as the missionary areas that developed near them, were a significant source of museum collections (P. Anker 1806, L. Edelberg 1958 and N. Nagaswamy n.d.). Hence it is not surprising that the museum broadened its interest when Danish missions worked their way into Assam. In 1944, Kaj Birket-Smith, Head Curator (Keeper) of the museum’s ethnographic collection, contacted Marius Hansen, the chairman of the Danish Santal Mission in Copenhagen:

> As you must know, the museum has had the benefit from the mission’s readiness to help from time immemorial, and we have by now a really outstanding collection of materials to illuminate the mode of life and culture of the Santals. But our collections are totally blank with regard to another area where mission works, that is, the Bodo tribe in Assam. This is so much more unfortunate as they live in an ethnographically very interesting area, which is nearly without any representation in the museum.

The collaboration developed slowly, with reminders (28 September 1945), telephone calls (24 June 1946) and further correspondence (25 June 1946), in which Birket-Smith repeatedly assured the mission that the museum would cover the costs of buying items ‘up to about Rs 500 per year for a period of two or three years,’ and a list of desired items. In 1948, the mission proposed that Rev. Aksel Kristiansen organize and personally supervise the collection process in Assam. Kristiansen had worked among the Bodos in Assam for a long time. He was actively involved in the creation of the first two missions at Gaurang and Bongaigaon, and

6. K. Birket-Smith to Rev. Dr. Theol. Marius Hansen, 26 February 1944 (translated from Danish).
directed the planning and early construction of the third mission at Patkijuli, whose location was chosen as part of a strategic aim to reach into Bhutan (O. Hodne 1992: 394–399). He had been in Denmark during the war but was back in the area in 1949 to revise a Boro language translation of the New Testament (O. Hodne 1992: 351–371). After Kristiansen formally accepted the task (10 October 1948), he was asked to collect

ethnographical items from the Bodos, as you have been so kind to take upon you. As you will understand, it is the aim to establish a collection – as comprehensive as possible – of all articles for everyday use among the Bodos: clothes and jewellery, weapons, agricultural and hunting equipment, fishing supplies, furniture, tools, and items used in religious and social life, and so on. Old, beautifully produced, and used items are much more interesting than newly made material, and ‘modern’ items produced for sale [in the market] are to be avoided.7

Kristiansen collected 33 items and the first 22 were sent to Calcutta on 31 March 1949. The (Danish) East Asiatic Company had agreed to ship them from Calcutta to Copenhagen free of charge. As it turned out, Halfdan Siiger was unexpectedly available to assist.

The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia
As the museum’s collections were following a missionary trail from central India to Assam, they were following a more scholarly trail from points north. In the mid-1930s, the museum completed two Central Asian Expeditions to Mongolia and Kazakhstan under the leadership of Henning Haslund-Christensen. In 1944, Haslund-Christensen began to organize the Third Danish Central Asian Expedition, under the patronage of H.R.H. Prince Axel as president and supervised by the museum. The Expedition intended to have ‘Danish scientists of all branches’ explore ‘the vast, practically unknown space lying in Upper Asia between Alashan and the Pamirs and stretching over north Tibet and the Hindu Kush.’ (Peter 1954).

7. K. Birket-Smith to Rev. A. Kristiansen, Bongaigaon 10 November 1948 (translated from Danish). Birket-Smith also suggests that A. Kristiansen may consult ‘a small instruction’ which had been enclosed in an earlier letter dated 15 January 1948, but this instruction is not found in the file.
Danish Interest in Bodo Areas

The study group included, among others, a cartographer, a geologist, a botanist, a zoologist, and a young ethnographer named Halfdan Siiger. Siiger’s specific assignment would be to write the ethnography of the peoples of the area before their original cultures were lost due to the expansion of the modern states (Edelberg: 1958).

Halfdan Siiger was born in 1911. He graduated from the University of Copenhagen with a Master’s degree in theology in 1936 and continued to earn a Magister degree (comparable to a PhD) from the same university in the History of Religion in 1942. Siiger’s work follows two scholarly traditions. First, Siiger was influenced by the myth and ritual school of the History of Religions, which sought to demonstrate a direct relationship between ‘ritual practice’ and ‘ritual text.’ Perhaps more important, he was inspired by his mentor in the History of Religions, Vilhelm Grønbech, who urged Siiger to take a holistic approach to situating and understanding a culture. This second perspective reverberates through his work on the Lepchas (H. Plaisier in press). His notebooks reveal that his approach to understanding the Bodos was similar yet, for many reasons that we will discuss, incompletely realized. Siiger was especially attracted by the possibility of finding ‘unknown ways of life still flourishing in many of the remote, secluded mountain valleys’ which ‘might retain many old traits of Indian and Central Asian influences.’ (Siiger 1956: 7). In preparation for the expedition, Siiger studied Tibetan, which he expected to be the major focus of his activities.

Political events in and near China forced a major revision of the itinerary. The Expedition was denied access to Inner Mongolia and Tibet, and security concerns rendered Nepal off limits as well. In a remarkable example of flexibility and accommodation, Henning Haslund-Christensen redirected the Expedition to Afghanistan with the intention of working east through the Himalaya Mountains in the hope that, at some point, the team would receive permission to enter Tibet. Siiger landed in Kabul in December 1947 and moved

on to Chitral, Pakistan, where he studied the non-Muslim Kalash Kafirs. During the summer of 1948 he continued to Sikkim, where he would live for 15 months. This work culminated in the publication of *The Lepchas. Culture and Religion of a Himalayan People*, a masterpiece of ethnographic and linguistic research.\(^\text{10}\)

10. In addition to this work, he published several minor reports from this period. A complete bibliography can be found in Institut for Religionshistorie (1981). A list of his work published in English and French works is presented in U.H. Johnsen et al. (in press). Concurrently with our volume on the Bodo, H. Plaisier is completing Siiger’s third and analytical volume on the Lepchas and Castenfeldt is preparing Siiger’s collections from the Chitral Kalash Kafirs for a publication that includes updates based on Castenfeldt’s own
Danish Interest in Bodo Areas

By the summer of 1949, Siiger realized that he would complete his work in Sikkim well in advance of his last-best hope of gaining entrance into Tibet. H.R.H Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, who carried both scholarly and regal credentials, would arrive in northern India in February 1950 and attempt to use his personal influence with the relevant authorities. Siiger sought a project that could occupy him productively for a few months and work among the Bodos seemed to be an attractive option. As he explained in retrospect, he had ‘conducted all his collections among ‘hill-peoples’ and wanted to study some peoples living in the low-lands.’11 Kaj Birket-Smith proposed a trip to the Bodo area and also wrote to inform Aksel Kristiansen, who was already in Assam, of the possibility that Siiger would visit.

There is a certain – even if it is only a weak – chance that you will be visited by a young Danish historian of religions, magister Halfdan Siiger who at present conducts ethnographic studies among the Lepchas in Sikkim. He is a member of the Danish Central Asian Expedition … He has plans other than to travel to Assam, but in case those plans fail (and his funds allow it), it is possible that he will make a short visit among the Bodos. In that case, the museum would be grateful for any help you may render him if it happens that he visits Assam. But, as said, no decision has yet been made.12

Kristiansen endorsed the possibility that a ‘specialist’ might visit the Bodos and recommended that Siiger should take contact to Rev. Johannes Toft-Krogh in Bongaigaon (Goalpara District) as his own stay in India was about to come to an end.13

work. All of Siiger’s manuscripts and notes are housed in the archives of the National Museum of Denmark and at Moesgaard Museum, Moesgaard.

12. K. Birket-Smith to A. Kristiansen, Bongaigaon, 27 May 1948 (translated from Danish).
13. A. Kristiansen, Calcutta, to K. Birket-Smith, 6 June 1949. Siiger and Kristiansen cannot have met in India as Kristiansen hoped to leave India in September 1949 to be back at his pastorate in Denmark in November 1949. Toft-Krogh’s address was sent to Siiger 13 June 1946 (note attached to A. Kristiansens letter), but it cannot have reached Siiger in time as he addressed his application to visit the Bodos to A. Kristiansen (H. Siiger,
We do not have details about Siiger’s journey, but even during the dry and cold season (November–February) the trip northwards from the Brahmaputra River to Patkijuli must have been difficult. A Norwegian missionary who visited this village during the cold season some years later described how they had been ferried over rivers in small ferryboats that were punt ed across the rivers, how their jeep drove along other dry riverbeds, and how the jeep had forced its way through jungle and elephant grass up to three meters high (H.E. Wisløff 1959: 132–133). During his three-month

Tingbung to A. Kristiansen, Bongagaion Mission, 15 June 1949), and ended up with the Toft-Kroghs as his sponsors in the Christian mission, as well foreseen by Kristiansen.
Danish Interest in Bodo Areas

stay, Siiger visited all three main Lutheran mission stations to the Bodos: Gaurang, Bongaigaon (where Johannes Toft-Krogh and his wife, Magda, lived) and Patkijuli, where he conducted his main collections. At his arrival in Patkijuli, the Bodo priest Mākōrăm Mosahary gave Siiger basic information on the village and its inhabitants, and helped him to settle in. Although Siiger certainly was in contact with the Toft-Kroghs, and European missionaries might have visited Patkijuli on occasion, Siiger was essentially dependant on his village hosts for the duration of his visit.

Patkijuli

The village Siiger found did not match his vision of one in which ‘unknown ways of life still flourish’ unless, of course, unknown ways can flourish in a village that includes an established Catholic compound, a Lutheran compound that was in the beginning stages of construction, and a population in which every resident over the age of 12 had experienced life in a different village.\[14\] In an

\[14\] Construction of the Lutheran compound began in 1949 and would be completed in 1951 (Wisløff 1959: 133). When we visited in 2012, Believers and Pentecostals were also represented.
interview in 2012 with Siiger’s informant 'Tanesår he reported that Siiger lived ‘in the Lutheran compound,’ but we do not know exactly what this means.

Siiger estimated Pakjuli’s population at 2,500–3,000 individuals who lived in approximately 500 houses.¹⁵ The village and the surrounding fields was said to cover about 6 miles if you walked around them. In general the extension of the village was said to be from east to west about 3 miles, from north to south about 3–4 miles. At least six cultural groups were represented in the village, five of which had migrated to Assam within the previous century. The Santals were the largest group (~ 300 houses). In 1937, two Santal men, Suna and Tă'kŭr, founded the village. They simply

¹⁵. When we visited in 2012 we were told that the village was much reduced due to a flood. The Census of India (2001) lists the population as 823. The remaining village has been renamed East Patkijuli, yet the post office carries the old name Patkijuli.
Danish Interest in Bodo Areas

arrived and declared the village to be founded.16 Two other Jharkhand-based groups, the Munda, occupied 30–40 houses and approximately 20 Orang [Loraon] families. The village included approximately 10 Nepali families, and a single Taru family. The Bodo, the only village community with deep historical roots in Assam, comprised the second-largest group (~ 100 houses).

The Bodos are divided according to their family names, or haris. Some have viewed haris as equivalent to sub-septs or clans, but Siiger appropriately recognised them as ‘almost equal to families.’ The haris were not structured as a full-fledged clan system, even though each hari has a long and detailed origination myth. Siiger presents these as the first legend in Chapter 6. Mākōrām was aware of 12 Bodo haris, eight of which were present in Patkijuli. It is evident that Siiger saw the village as constituted by core families rather than extended families. He stressed that each nuclear family cultivated its own fields: ‘Each man will cultivate his own fields… [but if] some work is too difficult for the man, he will get assistance from some others. … Another day he will then assist the other people in their fields.’19 Larger collective enterprises in agriculture were limited to when they made draining (or irriga-

16. Although Patkijuli was rather new, it would be inappropriate to infer that the entire area had been uninhabited. Indeed, it seems that there had been an influx of peoples from the Gangetic plain for some time. Siiger’s informants refer to a ‘old village’ of 150 houses, where Bodos live side by side with Santals and Nepalis. This village, Sessapani, is reported to be ‘nearby’ Patkijuli.


18. Mosahari (~30 houses), Boshumatari (~25), Nadjari (~15 houses), Gājāri (5), Bārgavari (4), Dajmari (4), Gvari (2), Sūmpră’mări (1) and Døj’mări (4). Mākōrām includes four additional Haris in the origination myth documented in Chapter 6: Kăklăvāri (also called Lākāri), Hădjo’āri, Ishår’āri and Lăj’făng’ară. Apparently, these were not present in Patkijuli in 1950.

19. Siiger should have been aware that much cultivation work was done by women.
Figure 2.7: Plan of Common Boro House with Names of Holy Places.

Note: Siiger wondered if the arrangement of the Bodo house could have elements in common with Bengali houses (Notebook A), but he never followed up on this issue in his collections.
Danish Interest in Bodo Areas

tation) canals. On the fields, the Bodos cultivated paddy, mustard, jute, sugarcane and other sorts of vegetables. They also cared for cows, buffalo, horses, goats, chickens and pigs. In addition to these activities, the Bodos hunt and eat jungle-pig and deer, which are important for their diet, even now, and are eaten with delight even by many people (including many Bodos) who avoid beef.

When the village was founded, only the Bodos were allowed to settle in the jungle. All others had to obtain permission from the Government, but it seems that such permissions had been given as the Government had officially acknowledged the village. This acknowledgement came in the form of appointing Mākōrām’s brother, Surdju Mosahari, headman of Patkijuli and 40 other villages. He controlled the villages directly as well as through 12 sub-headmen selected by the villagers themselves. Once appointed the position of headman became an inherited privilege that would be passed down within Surdju’s family. Contrary to the experience of many more or

20. Siiger describes the infrastructure as ‘draining channels,’ but adds that another scholar had reported ‘irrigation channels’. The discrepancy may rise from the fact that, while channel work clearly was visible in Patkijuli, its purpose was not apparent during the winter months while Siiger was resident in the village. As irrigation was rare, we share Siiger’s scepticism about irrigation channels.

21. Although the language had not been fully developed in Siiger’s time, the Bodos had special privileges because they were recognized as a ‘Scheduled Tribe’ (ST) in Assam. Many other Patkijuli villagers, Santals, Mundas and Orangs, for example, came to be recognized as ST in their home states but not in the states (Assam, in this case) to which they migrated.

22. There is surely a story behind this choice. Why was the village founder not appointed? If not the founder himself, why wasn’t a member of the largest community, the Santal, appointed headman? Siiger offers no insights on this question. Surdju and his sub-headmen may have performed some of the roles which were traditionally performed by the self-appointed councils for tribes and castes even if they were appointed by the Government, but it is significant that Mākōrām, in his role as Lutheran priest, took personal responsibility for mediating and adjudicating marital quarrels among Patkijuli’s (Lutheran) Christian residents.

We are not certain about what constituted a ‘village’ of the sort that was governed directly by a sub-headman. We imagine that some were tiny hamlets with only one or a few houses, some were larger, and the entire area governed by Surdju was 50 square miles or less.
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less self-appointed councils of tribes and castes throughout India, Surjju was appointed by the government and he had authority over all ethnic groups in all 40 villages. Siiger himself underscored that Surdju ‘ruled over all the six different peoples in Patkijuli’…’ he was ‘headman for all of them, non-Christians and Christians.’

Surdju’s title was Găubŭră; confusingly, the sub-headmen were also called Găubŭră.23 Once a month, Surdju dispatched a written report to the Government concerning village life (childbirths, deaths, and so on). He was also the local judge and he had authority to organize villagers in order to perform ‘necessary collective work.’ The sub-headmen arranged the work in their villages; if any difficulty should arise, they would ask Surdju for assistance. The sub-headmen each selected two or three to assist them as cooperating judges. Finally, each sub-headman appointed a messenger (Hălma’djī) who carried messages for the Găubŭrăs.24

Methodological concerns

As Siiger set about gathering information and artifacts, he faced two methodological challenges. First, and less problematic, is a concern raised by the great anthropologist Bronislow Malinowski: ‘The anthropologist must relinquish the comfortable position in the long chair on the veranda of the missionary compound, Government station, or planter’s bungalow.’ (Malinowski 1926: 126). Siiger was indeed housed in the missionary compound, but how comfortable and how removed this position was is open to speculation. The condition of the compound, which would not be completed for more than a year, is unclear, as is its relationship with the rest of the village. Siiger was presented as a ‘paying guest’ of the Santal Mission to the Northern Churches, so his institutional relationship with missionaries was clear to everyone, yet he most likely stayed in an ordinary Bodo or Santal house at the compound.25 He hired Dinesh Boshumatari, who may have be-

23. gau = village; bura = old man; in fact the same word as in Assamese gao bura.

24. Siiger notes that, in former days, these messengers were called tăn’deį-găz’lön (tăn = difficulty, gă = to step, găz’lön = to rise on tiptoe).

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longed to one of the village’s several Boshumatari families. Dinesh served as an interpreter and accompanied Siiger on trips to other Bodo villages. Siiger also commissioned him to purchase several objects from nearby villages (H. Siiger 1956: 57). We know that Siiger had a rudimentary understanding of Boro language, which is two steps removed from the Tibetan he had learned before his departure from Copenhagen and one step removed from Lepcha, which he had learned earlier in the expedition. English was also at least somewhat useful. Mākōrām was well-versed in English and, when we met him in 2012, ’Tanesår spoke fluent English.26 Besides Patkijuli, we know that Siiger visited both of the other Lutheran settlements created for their mission to the Bodos: Gaurang and Bongaigaon.27 Hence, we are confident that Siiger was immersed in the society he studied. The quality of his manuscript demonstrates that he developed trusting, open relationships with his informants. They provided honest descriptions in response to Siiger’s queries and Siiger reported those descriptions with integrity.

Second, however, Siiger’s text demonstrates that his aim was to report on a society that was different from the one he and his informants experienced directly.28 From our group interview in Patkijuli in 2012, we know that all except one informant had converted to Christianity either by the time of Siiger’s visit or later in life.29 With a single exception,30 Siiger limits his report to aspects

26. In his book on the Lepchas (Siiger 1967, I–II) Siiger often identifies his interpreter for a collection, but this is not the case in his collections on the Bodos.
28. This was certainly not his only aim. His chapter on autobiographies places his informants in their contemporary social context, as they understood it, and his very careful work on texts and translation is intended to form the foundation for a linguistic analysis of Boro language as it was in 1950.
29. The exception is Lóki’ram Bårgavari. The informants in the collective interview, Sunday, 15 April 2012, are shown in Figure 2.4.
30. Siiger provides the text of a song that was part of a temperance movement which sprang from the Brama Dharma, and must have been disseminated
of ‘traditional Bodo culture’ as he understood it. He makes mention of 19th and 20th century Hindu reformation movements, but with the exception of the autobiographies, there is no mention of a Lutheran presence – and absolutely no mention of a Catholic presence.\textsuperscript{31} Siiger’s reliance on informants who had abandoned aspects of the culture they reported on does not live up to current standards of ethnographic methodology (Spradley 1979). Indeed, as early as 1916 Malinowski argued that it is impossible to write a relevant history of a lost culture on the basis of survivals because, to Malinowski, any myth had to have a contemporary function in the society where it was told. This function might be very different from a myth’s meaning and function in the past, so it would be impossible to deduce a myth’s past meaning from its current function.\textsuperscript{32} Further, it is possible that neither ethnographer nor informant can be aware of how outside influences have influenced a society. For these reasons, one might choose to read Siiger’s descriptions with a sceptical eye.

Perhaps more confusing is Siiger’s treatment of one aspect of traditional Bodo culture: bride kidnapping or marriage by capture as one among several processes by which a couple can become engaged. While Siiger faithfully reported in the autobiographies chapter that one of his informants had found himself a bride in this way, the practice is not included in the chapter on periods of life where one would have expected it to be included among various forms of marriage. As the chapter is built on the informants’ narrations about the traditional culture, the omission may be due to the fact that Bodo culture for a long time had deemed it kind of out of date, but Siiger could have posed further questions to his informants after he learned that one informant had married in this

\textsuperscript{31} To be sure, the autobiographies are an important exception. In them, Siiger’s informants provide deep insights on relationships among Christianity, their village and themselves.

\textsuperscript{32} Malinowski 1982, [1916]; a more sophisticated version of the argument appears in Malinowski 1960.
way.\textsuperscript{33} From the methodological point of view, this is evidence that the picture of the traditional Bodo culture was not as complete as Siiger hoped that it should have been.

While scepticism is appropriate, the effects of these methodological challenges should not be exaggerated. The social distance between Siiger’s informants and the culture they describe was much closer than contemporary missionaries and ethnographers believed. One of the great insights that shines through the entire manuscript is how ‘modern’ Bodo culture was. Interaction with migrants (from Bhutan, central India, Nepal, and elsewhere) was the rule rather than the exception. Population movement, both in the broad sweep of time and by individuals, was also the norm, all of this over the course not of decades but of centuries. And engagement with a variety of ideas and philosophies was quite common as well. In one autobiography, 'Tanesår describes his religious exploration and it is evident that his conversion to Christianity touched only some aspects of his world view. For example, he was asked about earthquakes. He might have given an old-testament Christian explanation, or perhaps even a modern scientific explanation, but instead he chose to describe an aspect of the Vaisnava belief system supposedly also integrated in the traditional Bodo religion: the world rests on a tortoise and ‘whenever the tortoise moves, the whole earth will shake.’ Reading carefully, one can understand that 'Tanesår does not claim the tortoise to be part of his belief; he is reporting on what he understands others’ belief-systems to include. Similarly, 'Tanesår describes the followers of the old Bodo-religion as mādai hōgras, which Siiger translates as God givers, or ‘givers of sacrifice to the gods.’ This description says much more about how reformists of the Brahma Dharma (the Bromos) presented ‘their’ religion than it says about many forms of Vaisnavism or Shaivism itself, many traditions of which are rich in rituals of sacrifice and offerings. Interestingly, practitioners of what Siiger, Christian converts, and newly-identified Hindu

\textsuperscript{33} Pastor Mākōrām had also married in this way once, but this information was not part of Siiger’s collections. We discuss how far the actual marriage by capture or kidnapping was on the way out of Bodo society in our introduction to Chapter 3.
Bromos consider the ‘old Bodo-religion’ call themselves Hindus. This shows, perhaps, that understandings of what one or another religion represents, and how religion is relevant to individual and society, are in constant flux. With this in mind, we accept Siiger’s informants’ descriptions of the old religious rituals and ritual texts as reliable and accurate, although incomplete. The informants’ own identities and their own religion are much richer than Siiger’s notes on their response to his questions.

Notes on the Manuscript

Halfdan Siiger returned to Denmark in 1950, excited to begin work on the Bodo manuscript. However, pressures to publish the results of other portions of his research tour, combined with increasingly heavy obligations as Keeper at The National Museum of Denmark, led to delays. As he explained to his hosts from Bongaigaon in 1953:

My work is moving apace. Although there is more on the Lepchas than the Boros, the reason that it is urgent to publish the Lepcha materials is that I have found something of particular interest which was hitherto unknown. But to state it plainly, the Boro Materials are almost written up, and if I could just get a couple of months in peace to work on it I could soon finish it for publication. The only obstacle is continuous time for work, but it will come for sure.  

At the National Museum of Denmark, one can still meet employees who express their great respect for Siiger’s diligent and precise work as Head of Collections. When one reads correspondence in the archives, his influence on the shape of the museum’s growing South Asia collection becomes clear. In addition to his work at the museum and his scholarly publications, Siiger engaged himself in the development of the History of Religions as a discipline, which led to his appointment as professor in a newly created chair at Aarhus University in 1960. He published his main work on the Lepchas in 1967 and deposited his primary research on the Kalash of Chitral at the Moesgaard ethnographic museum.

34. H. Siiger to Rev. Johs. Thoft-Krogh, 12 December 1953 (translated from Danish)
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in Aarhus, apparently intending to leave his materials for others to evaluate and disseminate. This changed in 1989, ten years after his retirement, when he met a young scholar named Svend Castenfeldt. Castenfeldt persuaded Siiger to work together on the Kailash collections and Siiger also took another look at his planned (3rd) volume on the Lepchas. Neither project was completed by the time of Siiger’s death in 1999, but both are expected to be published this year. Castenfeldt has taken the lead on the Kailash volume and Heleen Plaisier is editing the Lepcha work.

While curating Siiger’s materials at the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen, Castenfeldt observed a written and partially revised manuscript as well as extensive field notes on the Bodo. Via Ester Fihl, Castenfeldt persuaded us to take on the task of publishing the Bodo manuscript. As both of us have worked on the Santals, on Santali folklore archives and on the Lutheran mission to the Santals, we had a sense of the landscape and were excited by the proposal.

At first glance, publication of the manuscript, clearly untouched since at least 1960, seemed to be a straightforward task. The typed manuscript seemed to be complete and, in addition, Siiger had inserted hand-written revisions on portions of the typescript. One of Peter B. Andersen’s students, Katrine Tophøj, worked on the collections for 3 months, during which she identified some notebooks that had not been included but were referred to and clearly were intended for inclusion. We saw to their proper placement in the text. At a later point, we found additional notes that we deemed worthy to include and knitted these into the text.

In addition to locating and placing Siiger’s own materials, we have chosen to situate his work in its social and academic contexts. We invited Anil Boro, professor in folkloristics at Guwahati University, to write a general introduction to the Bodos. Dr. Boro visited Copenhagen in January 2013 and personally supervised our investigation of Siiger’s physical collections at the National Museum of Denmark. Peter B. Andersen took short trips to Assam in 2012 and again in 2013, during which Anil Boro arranged for a visit to Patkijuli village and the Gaurang mission, which gave a new appreciation for Siiger’s efforts and accomplishment. We
have included ‘data’ from these visits in photos and comments, but they cannot be considered as fieldwork in any sense of the word. We can only hope that the publication will inspire local scholars of Bodo culture, religion and Boro language to engage in further studies based on proper fieldwork.

On reading the manuscript, it was clear that Siiger’s work transcends that of Sidney Endle’s classic 1911 work in many ways. Despite his relatively short stay (Endle lived and proselytized among the Bodo from 1865 to 1907), Siiger’s presentation is, in many senses, both more comprehensive and more precise. As we describe at the moments they appear, Siiger clearly was not blinded by being a missionary in ways that sometimes misled Endle in his description of the Bodos. To be sure, Siiger had advantages over Endle, whose work he admired: Siiger was a trained anthropologist, a discipline that had evolved between Endle’s time and Siiger’s, and Siiger had read Endle’s book and hence could build upon Endles insights.

The manuscript presented certain editorial challenges as we prepared it for publication. We have chosen to respect Siiger’s intellectual integrity as our editorial priority. With few exceptions, as described here Siiger's work stands as it is. We are sensitive that the manuscript, which had been typed and subsequently revised by Siiger himself, was not intended to be viewed as publication-ready. At some points, there are large (10 centimetres or more) open spaces that Siiger might have intended to fill with additional text or a diagram. In addition to those we identified in the notebooks and had redrawn for the book. As the paragraphs, as written, seem to follow meaningfully from one side of an open space to another, we have closed these spaces without comment. At other points, Siiger types a string of one- or two-sentence paragraphs. We have combined these in ways that make sense to us, again without comment.

Linguistic analysis is a part of Siiger’s project. On hundreds of occasions, he provides transliterations, an English translation, and often phonetic transcription to a Bodo language word, sentence, or song. At moments in the text where the main intention is something other than linguistic analysis, we have moved the lin-
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guistic documentation to a footnote. The manuscript demonstrates extraordinarily care about retaining the voice of his narrators as well as himself. We are sensitive that his editorial choices might be valuable to linguists as a supplement to Siiger’s direct contributions to understanding Boro grammar and syntax. For this reason as well, we have chosen to approach his text with delicacy.

When we were confident that we were faced with a typographical error, we have corrected it, but when we had the slightest doubt as to what Siiger intended, we have retained these inconsistencies. We have also chosen to describe the people and culture consistently as ‘Bodo’ and the language as ‘Boro.’ Place names in Assam have been brought in line with the spelling in modern maps or search engines, and in some few places we have decided to describe confessors of Islam as Muslims rather than retaining Siiger’s word choices. We have explained our choices in footnotes and identified ourselves as (Eds). Notes that do not mention (Eds) are written by Siiger himself. We certainly hope that Halfdan Siiger would be pleased with the result.
CHAPTER 3

Periods of Life

Introduction

Compared with the 19th-century colonial and Christian tendency toward generalization, Halfdan Siiger’s field methods were far superior. He focused his collections in specific sites and made no claims to their broader relevance – although he was open to revisiting his data in comparative perspective and historical analysis. In this regard it is significant that, in later years when he had become professor in the History of Religions, Siiger described himself as a ‘religio-ethnographer’. That is to say, that he preferred to identify himself with the descriptive discipline of ethnography rather than the synthesising discipline of anthropology.

Siiger’s diligent and specific approach also resulted in a significantly larger volume of both notes and physical collections than the earlier synthesising scholars on the Bodos. For example, Endle’s famous book on the Bodos only offers five pages on the description of marriage relations (S. Endle 1911: 29–30 & 43–46). We observe a difference in one aspect of Bodo culture as reported by both Endle and Siiger: marriage by capture. Endle reports that the practice was much in vogue among the Bodos (S. Endle 1911: 43), but the practice is not mentioned in the chapter we now introduce. We know that Siiger knew of the practice, because

1. As Siiger entered the Bodo society through the The Santal Mission to the Northern Churches, it has to be stressed here that two of the missionaries in its predecessor missionary society the Indian Home Mission to the Santals were among those missionaries who were extremely specific on their informants, they were Rev. Lars Olsen Skrefsrud (1840–1910) and Rev. Paul Olaf Bodding (1865–1938). Their approach is discussed by P.B. Andersen, S.K. Soren and M. Carrin (2011: 17–30, 34–37). (Eds)

2. Personal communication from Svend Castenfeldt (see also S. Castenfeldt: in press). (Eds)
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he faithfully reports Ādi'rām’s life story and must have known of Mākōrām’s experiences (see Chapter 4). Both men report that their marriages observed this custom. One can say that Siiger accepted the assertions of his informants with regard to traditional Bodo culture and religion, but also that he did not confront them with the evidence of other customs when they offered it to him in other narratives as in the case of their biographies.

The first half of this chapter reproduces Siiger’s manuscript, in which he synthesizes information from several informants into a continuous text. This expository technique is a bit of a puzzle, because Siiger was fastidious about precisely naming his sources in all other chapters (and he does offer specific references at moments in this chapter as well). We imagine that Siiger chose in this case to emphasise expository clarity, especially since the descriptions he provides might well have been repeated by many of his informants. The second half of this chapter, as is clearly indicated, is our effort to present Siiger’s continued descriptions that appear in his notebook. (Eds)

Pregnancy and Childbirth

When a woman discovers that she is pregnant she informs her husband, but they won’t do anything such as performing a ceremony and the like. During pregnancy, the woman may not eat certain vegetables and khar’dōi, a powder put into curry. If she does, it is believed that her milk will fail to appear. But she may do her normal work and go everywhere as usual.

When the time for her delivery has come, some old women from the village will be sent for. They have no special midwives. The birth takes place in the sleeping room of the home. The woman kneels down resting with her knees against the floor and keeping her hands round a mortar, and in that position she gives birth to the child. If it is difficult for her to bear, they try to find out if some of the gods may be angry. They summon a man who is able to see the will of the gods from the cowries.³ He throws nine cowries on the

³. Cowries are sea shells that were once used as currency throughout Northeast India. Some communities also believed they contained spiritual powers. They continued to have symbolic value at the time of Siiger’s visit. (Eds)
Figure 3.1: A large mortar and pestle (item 71, photo Danish National Museum, 2015)

Figure 3.2: A man demonstrating the use of a large mortar and pestle (photo H. Siiger, 1949)
Periods of Life

Meals and nutrition

In Patkijuli, the common Bodo will take his first meal shortly after sunrise in the summer months and at about 6:00 a.m. during winter. In summer, people usually rise at about 3 a.m. and go to bed at about 5–6 p.m. The first meal, called 'Pūngnī 'dzānāj (phuṇni janai; 'pūngnī = morning; dzānāj = eating, meal), does not change with the seasons and is the same for Bodos of all religious groups. 'Pūngnī 'dzānāj includes rice and tea. Only more well-to-do families can afford to use sugar and milk in their beverage. The rice, boiled the night before (except in Darrang district, where it is not fried in the morning), is normally fried without ghee. Some people will drink rice-wine instead of tea. The children will get the same as the grown-ups, also rice-wine. Men eat before women. Very young children can eat with either parent, but girls older than six always eat with the women. The Non-Christians will greet the goddess Bū'ṛā bā'tō (bura bathôu; bū'ṛā = old; bā'tō = name of goddess) by lifting the hand from the plate and up to the forehead, just as saying ‘Salam’ to the goddess. The Bromos will throw a few grains of rice on the earth as an offering. They wash their hands and clean their mouth with water before and after eating. Thereafter they start their work.

The next meal is called Sāndzŭ'pūnī dzā'nāj (shanjuphuni janai; sāndzŭ'pū = noon; ni = of; dzā'nāj = eating, meal). The menu includes boiled rice with a vegetable curry, boiled or fried meat, or boiled or fried fish and fresh fruit, depending on family habits and wealth. Sometimes cakes are made from rice flour; these might be steamed in an earthenware water pot or baked like a pancake. When rice is scarce, cooked and fried maize is common. Also, in season (autumn) potatoes (tha shombli) and sweet potatoes (tha gôdôi) are enjoyed in place of rice. Well-to-do people might drink milk and others will drink water. Tea and rice-wine are not common at this meal. Some people don’t like to drink milk at all. They say they will catch cancer from it.

The evening meal called Mohabilini dzā'nāj and eaten at sunset or later, is the same as the noon-meal. Usually they will go to sleep immediately after this meal.
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Many Bodo women collect wild plants in the fields and in the jungle, and use them for the meals. From the rivers they get small fish, snails and shrimps. Nowadays (1949–1950) they often cultivate vegetables, chili peppers, and a wide variety of trees near their houses, including mango, jackfruit, mulberry, guava, lemon and lime.

Siiger collected most of this information on 25 November 1949 from Bålsing, Patkijuli’s schoolmaster. He collected details about cultivation and variety in second and third daily meals from A. Kristiansen – either in India or after both had returned to Denmark. Siiger’s text has been revised for clarity. (Eds)

ground and ascertains which god is discontent. The cause may be that the woman has been angry with someone without reason, or has behaved badly in some way or other. The man summoned takes an egg into his hand and mentions the name of all the twenty gods. Thereupon he cracks the egg with a knife and pours the contents onto the floor. If the woman is still unable to give birth, they give her some country medicine (The informant who told me about this does not know what). If the woman is still unable to give birth they are at their wits’ end and she will die. (They are ignorant of any sort of surgical operation). The assisting women may try to hasten the birth by strokes on the woman’s womb. If the child is stillborn it will be buried or burnt in the usual way. The child is not disconnected from the mother until the afterbirth has taken place. It is the husband’s duty to bury the afterbirth in the fields.

When the navel string has been cut, the child is washed and put onto a piece of cloth in a winnowing basket (chôngrai) generally used for husking rice. The child is wrapped in the cloth with its arms and hands kept tightly down along the body. Most children – but not all – have got the Mongolian blue spots on the back. (They are called laha spots. This word is used only for babies). They say that these spots will disappear within two or three years. With strong babies the spots will disappear faster than with weak babies.

The child is then passed on to the mother to be nursed. After childbirth the woman may rest if she wants, but generally
the women don’t feel much tired and it is not uncommon that a woman carries out her usual work a few hours after delivery. It is not the custom that the women take special rest during the period of pregnancy. There is a common saying that if a woman takes rest during her period of pregnancy difficulties will arise at the time of delivery; and I [Siiger] was told of an instance where a woman was alone at home when she gave birth. She managed to arrange everything herself, cutting the navel string, etc., and a few hours after the delivery she was up working with the big pestle.

In case the mother dies during childbirth, no one – not even the family – will take care of the child. They leave it alone and let it die. They are afraid of the baby because they believe that it has caused the death of the mother. If another woman would take care of it, her children would die. There are no religious or moral prohibitions on sexual intercourse during the period of pregnancy or the days immediately after the birth. It is the woman who may decide in that matter according to her own will. There seem to be no omens or signs connected with the events of the child birth.

**The Baby**

A few days after a child has been born, the women that assisted at the delivery are invited to partake in a meal of pork, rice, curry and wine. At that occasion, the assisting women give the child its name. They can give the child any name but often they choose the name of the day in the week on which the child was born, i.e., Tuesday. This will then be its name for the rest of its life. Often nicknames are used instead of the real name. Often ugly names are chosen as nicknames in order to keep away evil spirits. In case of twins, they are interchanged so that the eldest one is taken for the youngest one. They say that this is done in order to protect them against death. Usually the babies are suckled for about a year, but there are instances of children being unweaned up to the age of four. Generally they get their first teeth when they are five to six months old.

If the newborn child is a boy, the parents invite their relatives to a family feast when the boy is two to three years old. The guests are treated to eat and to drink, and the boy’s maternal uncle cuts the
boy's hair so close that he becomes completely bald-headed. The first time the maternal uncle takes a newborn child into his arms he must give it a quarter-Anna coin.⁴ In case he omits it the uncle’s hands will become shaky when he grows old.

**Childhood**

When the child has been weaned it gets to eat the same food as the grownups. When the boys are about 7 years old they are sent out to watch the cattle. Generally they accompany the village shepherd in the morning into the fields and return with him and the cattle at sunset. Later on, when they have grown strong enough they are sent in to the rice fields to cultivate the rice, and from that time forward they have to participate in all sorts of work. When the girls are about 6–7 years old they start helping their mother in the house, cleaning, sweeping, and so on. Should the parents die, it is the duty of the paternal uncle to take care of the children. He will take them to his own house and bring them up together with his own children.

**Youth**

Usually the boys reach puberty at the age of 13–14, and the girls when they are 12–13 years old. There are no special rules or regulations for the women as regards their periods of menstruation. A couple of years after having reached puberty they generally start their sexual life. In former days,⁵ betrothal among children was

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⁴ One-quarter Anna, also known as one Paise, is a coin with mostly symbolic value. An Anna was a currency unit formerly used in India, equal to 1/16 Rupee. It was subdivided into 4 Paise and each Paise was subdivided into 12 Pies (thus a Rupee was the equivalent of 16 Annas, or 64 Paise, or 192 Pies). India’s currency was decimalized in 1957: one Rupee = 100 Paise. The Anna and pie were discontinued. In this chapter, Siiger describes the value of a Rupee in a variety of ways: a day labourer earned Rs. 2 per day; if an unmarried girl becomes pregnant, then the baby’s father must pay Rs. 5 as a fine. If a married person (man or woman) is unfaithful, they must pay Rs. 50 as a fine. (Eds)

⁵ ‘In former days’ is a rather vague description for the typically precise Siiger. From his notes, it is clear that he asked his informants to describe life in the old days. Each informant might have interpreted this question differently. (Eds)
in practice. The betrothal could be arranged by the parents when
the children were 6–7 years old. A bracelet was given to the girl’s
father as a token of the betrothal. The parents cannot, however,
force their children to marry against their own will.\(^6\) If the boy does
not want to marry the girl the engagement is broken off. If the girl,
however, does not want to marry the boy a fine has to be paid to
the boy’s father. Generally this fine is limited to the expenses for
some wine or a meal for the boy’s parents. In case an unmarried
girl becomes pregnant she is questioned as to who is the father,
and he is then requested to marry the girl, but even if he is willing
to do so he is fined to pay Rs. 5 to the headman of the village, and
furthermore he must give a pig to the villagers. The girl, too, is
fined to pay Rs. 5 to the headman of the village.

**Marriage**

In former days, marriage was arranged by the parents but the young
couple had the right to reject any proposal. When a father has found
a girl suitable for his son, a series of preliminary ceremonies com-
mence.\(^7\) The Bodos may not marry others than Bodos unless they
pass through a purification ceremony. The only exception is the

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\(^6\) These ideas might reflect the considerable influence of Hindu caste society
on Bodo culture at the time of Siiger’s collections, but the fact that his infor-
mants told him about rules regarding marriages between people of different
ethnic groups indicates that such marriages took place from time to time
and, therefore, Bodos did not feel bound by the still more restrictive Hindu
marriage criteria. (Eds)

\(^7\) Siiger’s vague observation that marriage was arranged but that the young
couple had the right to object to the proposal ‘in former days’ refers to
the idea that the young people had some influence in these decisions, as
was already reported by S. Endle, who reported that young couples may
elope (S. Endle 1911: 43–46). In this chapter, Siiger seems to describe his
informants’ presentation of an ‘ideal’ arranged marriage as the right and
only proper marriage in traditional Bodo society of ‘former days.’ Siiger’s
presumably Christian informants may have suppressed information on mar-
rriage by capture, *bonanoi lainai haba* which S. Endle 1911: 43–44) had
reported was in vogue at the beginning of the 20th century. Later scholars
have described other forms of traditional Bodo marriage customs (e.g. K.
Bhutanese, with whom they may intermarry without going through a purification ceremony.

*Hinjao Shônanai.* The boy’s father goes with a friend to the house of the girl’s father, with whom the friend in question must be well acquainted. They bring with them rice-arrack and a bracelet. On arriving at the house they present the rice-arrack, and the friend explains the intention of their visit. In case the girl’s father approves the proposal he asks his daughter if she will agree. Should she refuse, the plan comes to nothing. In case she agrees, the visitors give the bracelet to the girl’s mother, who passes it on to the girl. Thereafter the visitors go back home with the good messages.

*Khobor lańnai.* Two or three weeks after the first visit, the boy’s father and his friend again call on the girl’s father and bring some rice-arrack with them. The purpose of their visit is to ask the girl’s father on which date the engagement ceremony is going to take place. The date is fixed in mutual consultation and they return home with the message.

*Biban lańnai.* Between two and eight weeks after the second visit the boy’s father, his relatives, his friends and their women, as well as other friends and neighbours go together to the house of the girl’s father, where the girl’s family, her relatives, friends and neighbours are assembled. The guests bring with them rice-arrack and betelnuts. Along with them come two women called boiråthi

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9. Siiger almost certainly borrowed the word ‘arrack’ from his understanding of other Indian languages. He refers to a fermented beverage, which is enjoyed at each of several stages of the fermentation process. First, it can be described as a rice beer. It then evolves into a liquid the color and texture of butter, containing a higher alcohol percentage than the beer. After this is aged, it becomes a darkish-brown liquor. In the context of this paragraph, the groom’s father probably presented this final product. (Eds)
11. *biban* = load, burden, i.e. taking load, burden, probably because they carry loads of gifts with them. It may also be called gôj khaonai, gôi = betelnut, *khao* = cut, i.e. cutting betelnuts. The visitors feed the girl’s family with betelnuts.

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jôra. These women serve the betelnuts. When the guests have arrived all of them drink the wine and eat the betelnuts. Without any particular declaration, this party is considered to be the official announcement of the engagement. The girl’s father asks the boy’s father to bring a pig in the near future. Thereafter the guests return home.

Between three and five weeks after the last visit, the boy’s father and his friend again proceed to the house of the girl’s father. This time they consult the girl’s father the pig feast (oma jahônai). They discuss and fix the date of the oma jahônai and he returns home with the message. Between five and six weeks after the last visit, the boy’s family and their friends and neighbours go to the house of the girl’s father and bring with them a pig, some betelnuts and rice-arrack. On that occasion the bridegroom accompany them for the first time, and he is greeted by everybody. The pig is killed and they eat and drink. On that occasion, the girl’s father informs the boy’s father whether he will be able to give his daughter that year or the marriage has to be postponed to the following year. And he informs the boy’s father what he wants him to bring to the wedding party, i.e., pigs, wine, liquor, betelnuts, rice, dal, and so on. Thereafter they return home.

If the girl’s father has decided to give away in marriage his daughter that very year, the boy’s father and his friend again go to the house of the girl’s father 5–6 weeks after the first visit, and they take with them some rice-arrack. They drink the rice-arrack with the girl’s father and fix the date of the wedding. If the girl’s father has decided to postpone the marriage until the following year, they won’t return until that time.

Haba. When the fixed day has arrived, the bridegroom’s family, his friends and the two women called boirâthi jôra go to the bride’s home. They bring with them presents consisting of rice, pigs, betelnuts, etc., and two pots of wine. These pots are carried

12. boirâthi from boira = to welcome, to give honour, ūi = feminine gender, jôra = pair of girls, thus indicating women, girls appointed to give welcome and especially to escort the girl.
13. oma = pig, ja = eat, jahô = feed, i.e. feeding with the pig.
14. haba, ‘wedding’.
by one man, who has tied them to a yoke across his shoulder. On one pot is painted a circular figure indicating the sun, on the other pot is painted a similar figure indicating the moon. The difference in the appearance is only that the sun is decorated with rays. The pot with the sun is hanging in front of the carrier, the pot with the moon behind him. Each of the pots is fastened to the stick by the means of a rope, tied in a special knot. This knot is used at wedding ceremonies only.

When the party arrives at the house of the bride’s father, they stop at the gate where two men await them. These men carry in a jug a sort of fluid made of arum leaves which have been chopped and pestled in a mortar and mixed with water. This mixture, which they sprinkle on the guests as soon as they enter the gate, is very itching to the skin. When the guests have passed the gate and placed their belongings in the courtyard, they hurry to go and take a bath in order to clean themselves from the itching arum.

The girl’s father now examines all the things that have been brought and, if he considers them all right, he orders the pigs to be killed and all the other things to be prepared for a meal. The wine is served to the guests by the wine carrier and the betelnuts are served by the two boiráthi jôra women. The wine and betelnuts are served three times. When the meal is ready they eat it, drink wine once more and get betelnuts. The bride’s father now sends for some girls from the village and asks them to fetch the bride out in the house. She puts on a new dress and a veil covering her face. The girls now draw and push her out of the house while she is making resistance and crying while taking leave of all her relatives and friends. Thereafter the girls bring her to the bridegroom’s house, and they are joined by the whole party, also the bridegroom.

On arriving at the bridegroom’s home, they stop at the gate and a woman from the house brings some water and washes the bride’s feet. Further she takes some grains of rice and passes them three times around the bride’s head and throws them away. This is done in order to drive away any evil spirit that might have caught hold of her on the way. She then takes a cup of water, a ring and some twigs of basil (thulushi). The twigs and the ring she dips into the cup and sprinkles some drops of water on the bride. This is done
in order to make the bride holy and to give her peace.\(^{15}\) When the bride enters the gate, the accompanying girls leave her and some girls from the bridegroom’s house take her into the kitchen-house, where they ask her to kneel down and bow her head in front of the altar. Thereafter she salutes her parents-in-law by touching their feet and finally she salutes her husband in the same way. Then the whole party goes out into the courtyard and the bridegroom’s parents prepare seats for the guests. The seats are arranged at the east side of the courtyard. In front of the bride’s father they place four-legged stool which previously has been thoroughly scrubbed. On that stool are placed some banana leaves, and some grains of rice. The bridegroom’s father puts two Rupee-coins onto the leaves. Beside him they place two pots (called dumshu) with wine.

The bridegroom’s father now asks the bride’s father, ‘What do you want?’ The bride’s father replies, ‘I want Rupees and food in return for my daughter.’\(^{16}\) Then the bridegroom’s father gives the things to the bride’s father. If the bride’s father is satisfied he orders the people to kill the pig and to prepare a meal and bring wine. He can do so, as on this occasion he has the authority in the house of the bridegroom’s father. When the pig has been killed they put it in front of the bride’s father and he orders them to divide it into two equal parts. From one part they prepare the meal but the other half the bride’s father takes along with him when he returns home.

\(\therefore\)

Siiger’s manuscript for this chapter ends here, but his meticulous notebooks enable us to identify his intentions and reconstruct the chapter. Seen on the background of most other field collections, it is noteworthy that Siiger had the final book in mind already in the field situation. This is not common, particularly when the chapter is clearly a synthesis of several interviews. We can imagine that the information was gathered during a group interview, which enabled a synthesis in the field, but we cannot know. (Eds)

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15. Gôthar khalamnai and Shanti hônai, (gôthar = holy, khalamnai = making, shanti = peace, hônai = giving).

16. Môdômni thaka janai (môdôm = body, thaka = Rupee, janai = eating).
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When the meal is ready the people assembled sit down in a circle in the courtyard and eat the meal. After the meal they will drink wine. Thereupon the bride’s family and all the guests that followed them will take leave and return home. They will hire a man to carry the half pig. As they leave, bridegroom and bride will come out and salute them by touching their feet.\(^{17}\) If the departing guests want to give gifts to bridegroom and bride, they will do it now. Thereupon they will depart. When they return home, they will prepare the pig for a meal and feed the guests. The bride’s father will give the man who carried the half pig some money for his trouble. Thereupon the man will return home to the bridegroom’s father’s house.

In the bridegroom’s father’s house, the bride in the evening of the wedding day will prepare a special meal for her husband. When the meal is ready the Mādønøngj rajnø (madai rainô görôn) will go in front of the Ba’tō (bathôu) and will recite the wedding ritual.\(^{18}\) The young may stand anywhere. There is no ceremony combined with the ritual. That meal is called ‘hătă 'sunî hŏ‘nāj’.\(^{19}\) The intention of the meal is to drive away any sunî injurer. By injurer, harmer is implied the influence from any girl with whom the husband might have fallen in love before the marriage (‘Tanesăr).

This meal only consists of rice and curry without spices, turmeric and oil and a little salt. When she has prepared the rice in the hatha and the curry in the other dish, she will serve the meal on banana leaves. She will bow down on her knees in front of her husband and salute him, and hand him the food to eat. When he has eaten the ceremony is over, and they will retire and go to bed together. Next day, the bridegroom’s father will feed all the people

\(^{17}\) The tradition of touching feet in greeting and farewell is common throughout India. Siiger offers no suggestions about where, why or how this behaviour has become a part of Bodo tradition. (Eds)

\(^{18}\) From Siiger’s translations, we can understand that the ritual begins with an invocation to the main Bodo gods, requesting that they bear witness to the marriage. As Siiger’s presentation of this text demonstrates (see Chapter 8, Text 4), it is nearly impossible to translate this invocation into fluid English. (Eds)

\(^{19}\) hatha shuni hŏnai; ‘hă tă = wooden dish, used for distributing rice’; ‘sunî = a) lime, b) harmer, injurer; hŏ’năi = giving).
that have assisted in arranging everything for the wedding, and he will give them some money.

Figure 3.3: Cattle are sometimes given to the bride as dowry during the ‘Atī’māṅgāl ceremony (photo H. Siiger 1949)

All about Bulls
At some point during his fieldwork, Siiger received a letter from Kaj Birket-Smith requesting him to collect data on the cattle among the Bodos in order that Birket-Smith could use the information for comparative analysis. Siiger replied that cattle are never used as sacrifice. They are kept for milk and manure; bullocks for ploughing and threshing. Old animals are sometimes sold to Muslims, who eat them, but the old ones often die in the field and their corpses are then eaten by vultures. Sometimes, skinners or shoemakers (but nobody else) come and take the skin.

The Bodos use four cow breeds:
1. Bhutanese cows (Båtangni mōsōg; Botangni mōshōu; Båtang = Bhutan; -ni = of; mōsōg = cow). This type is a very big one, bigger than the common country cow. The bulls of this type
have got a big and broad skull. Sometimes, but not always, the bulls of this type can be seen with hump.

Bhutanese cows and bulls usually live on leaves from the trees. They are not often used by the Bodos but, when domesticated, can be habituated to live on grass. Their skin colour might be black, spotted, striped, or white-on-black.

*Siiger’s drawing shows that the two horns spread from the points of attachment at an approximate angle of 45° from the base line. Siiger has not seen that type himself and has no photographic evidence. (Eds)*

2. ‘Western’ cows ‘Pāssimā (pāssima). Pāssimā is an Assamese word for ‘western’, meaning that this breed has been brought from the west, that is, from India. The skin colour of this breed is mostly white.

The shape of the horn: *Siiger’s drawing shows that the two horns rise up from the points of attachment making a half-moon like structure. (Eds)*

The normal i.e. un-castrated bulls have got a hump. They live on grass in the fields but will also be fed on grains of rice, mustard-seed, Chickpea and grāṃ (a sort of rice-shells poured together with water and made to a paste.)

This is the most common type of cattle among the Bodos (*see Figure 4.6*).

3. Common cows are called Dæ’sī mō’sōg (deshi môshôu; dæ’sī = country). Skin colour might be black, white, red or mixed. Horn shape also varies. Common bulls normally have a hump; this breed lives on grass and straw.

4. Buffalo: Common Indian type. Wild buffaloes can still be found in Assam. They are hunted and tamed. To tame a buffalo takes three months.

For Birket-Smith’s comparative analysis, Siiger noted that there were no taboos or use restrictions for clay and metal vessels; while butter is used only as food, ghee can be used as a body ointment after it is too old to eat.
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'Ātĭ'mângâl sîpâjnâi.\textsuperscript{20} The bride’s parents will give her some property, endowment, if they are satisfied with the marriage of the married couple. A week after the wedding ceremony, the bridegroom and bride with his relatives and a few friends will go and visit her parents, bringing a pig, some wine etc. on which things a meal will be made. Having eaten, the bride will take her own belongings, such as dresses etc. and her father will give her as a dowry what he may like, such as cow and money. Then they will return home. This is the end of the ceremonies and festivals around wedding. No more will take place in that connection.

Monogamy, Divorce and Infidelity

Monogamy is the norm but polygamy can be found. Polyandry does not exist. Ādi'rām knows of a few cases only where one man has got two wives. He is aware of one single case where a man has got three wives, but that is all. There is, however, no prohibition for having more than three wives. He does not know if there are any differences in wedding ceremonies with wife no. 2, and wife no. 3, but he supposes it is the same as with wife no. 1. In case of polygamy, each wife will have her own house. They won’t share with one another.

Divorce can take place, but is very rare. Infidelity by either husband or wife is not a cause for divorce, but both parties can be fined in case of infidelity. The common word for infidelity is bihi hagra kā'nāj\textsuperscript{21} and bis'hāj hā'grā kā'nāj.\textsuperscript{22} In case infidelity is discovered, the insulted party can complain to the village headman, gaũ būra, who will collect the villagers. In common they will fine the guilty party, usually about Rs. 50. The fine will go the village community.

In case of constant mutual matrimonial quarrel, a divorce can take place. The villagers or the panchayat (village council of

\textsuperscript{20} Athi Mongol Siphainai; 'ātĭ = bundle, here the eight days or one week is considered as a bundle; 'mângâl = good, refers to the good news; sîphâi = to break; sîpâi'nâi = breaking. Editor’s translation: The good news that the marriage has survived its first week.

\textsuperscript{21} bihi hagra khanai; bihi = wife, hā'grā = jungle, kā'nāj = tying from kā = to tie; ‘tying a wife in the jungle’.

\textsuperscript{22} bis'hai hagra khanai; bis'hāi = husband.
five men) will decide the case and fine the guilty party or both of them. Thereafter the divorce will get its official legal expression in this way: Before the village authorities the husband and wife will take hold on each side of a leaf from a betelnut tree. They will draw each to his side until it breaks. Thereby is indicated that the marriage has been dissolved and they now have right to marry another person. Infidelity involves no right of the insulted party to

23. In the traditional Bodo society the panchayat or “village council of five men’ was constituted by Bodos who also took care of the social behaviour of the Bodos within the families, and it is evident that Siiger here refers to the structure in a traditional Bodo village where the Bodos all or mostly all belonged to the same religious group. Our interpretation of this process is as follows. If villagers heard ‘constant’ shouting coming from a house, they would call a meeting. One of a wide range of outcomes from such a meeting could be divorce. After interviewing both husband and wife, the panchayat would determine if divorce was an appropriate choice and, if so, who (if anyone) is more responsible. (Eds)
Figure 3.5: Hand-held fish trap as used by women (item 81, photo Danish National Museum, 2015)
Figure 3.6: Basket used by women to carry fish home. The basket is tied at the hip so they can have both hands free to manipulate the fish trap (item 83, photo Danish National Museum, 2015)
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24. After carefully reviewing Siiger’s notebooks, we interpret the divorce rules as follows. Neither husband nor wife has the right to demand a divorce. However, if their behaviour attracts the attention of the panchayat, then the panchayat may summon the couple and make any of a number of judge-
Sickness and Disease

In case of serious diseases, the family may call the 'dô\text{"}ri, the dô\text{"}dînî and the må\text{"}dâj râj\text{'}nø go\text{'}røng. The 'dô\text{"}ri will prepare himself by taking a bath and putting on clean clothes. Then he will go to the house where the sick person is lying. In the courtyard, he will make ready an offering to the gods. On a banana leaf he will put a small branch of basil and some grains of rice. A stool will be placed close to the banana leaf, and the dôudînî will sit down on it. The må\text{"}dâj râj\text{'}nø go\text{'}røng will stand behind her and will mention the names of the gods, one by one.

This is done in order to find out which god is unsatisfied and has caused the disease. When the dô\text{"}dînî in her enumeration comes to the unsatisfied god, she will start shivering and later on trembling,
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and at last falling into ecstasy. During this performance it is supposed that the unsatisfied god has entered her body and is speaking through her mouth. She will tell what has caused the sickness, i.e. in which way the sick person has insulted the god. During a sacrifice to the gods he may have forgotten to mention the name of one of the gods, or he may have neglected to worship the gods at some or other occasion, or he may have had a ‘jungle wife’, or may have done something wrong against some or other persons, etc. Then she will tell what must be done in order to satisfy the god again. As a rule he must perform some or other ceremony, i.e. sacrificing a pig or the like. When she has finished her prophesying, she will fall down to the ground in unconsciousness. That is end of the ceremony. The 'dô'ri, the dô'dînî and the mā'dâj râj'nô go'røng will be served with some wine as a gratuity, and the dô'dînî will get a little money, varying from 8 Annas to about 3 Rupees. The sacrifice won’t take place until the sick person has recovered. Then he will call the 'dô'ri and the mā'dâj râj'nô go'røng, and they perform the ceremony on his behalf.

Death

When a person is going to die, the family will collect around his bed. He will console them in their sorrow and tell them that they should not be unhappy; his life has by now come to an end and he must pass away, and perhaps he will admonish sons and daughters to live in peace and not to quarrel. The dying person may instruct them if he wants to be buried or be burnt. If he does not say anything, the family will themselves take the decision after the death. When a person has expired, the family will be mourning. They will collect around the deceased; relatives, friends and neighbours will come and join them in their sorrow.

Outside in the courtyard, they will clean a place and make a bāï'sang (boishaṅ; bamboo bed) on which the corpse will be placed with his head toward the south end. He will be wrapped in new clothes that have never been used and his head will be covered. A cotton string will be wrapped sometimes round his left wrist.

25. We can imagine two interpretations of ‘jungle wife’: a human mistress, whom the man meets in the jungle, or a spiritual being. (Eds)
A meal will be prepared and placed in a cup on the bed stand. A member of his family will then take away the cover from the head and three times hand some food towards his mouth, just as feeding him. In the same way he will get something to drink three times. This feeding and drinking will first be done by the right hand and then by the left hand. The acting person will say, ‘Don’t be angry with us. Your death has not been caused by us!’ (In former days it so happened that people were poisoned by their meals). And three times he will say ‘eat’ and three times ‘drink,’ and he will add, ‘You may become hungry and thirsty on the way.’

Lying on the bed, the corpse will then be carried away by two or four men, followed by the male members of the family, relatives and friends. They will go to the cemetery, where the corpse will be buried or burnt. In Kamrup district, it is not the custom to bury or burn the corpse, but it is merely placed on the ground. In case of mere placing on the cemetery, the body will remain uncovered, lying naked on the bed. The head will be towards the south end. Beside the head they will place in the ground a bamboo stick with a white flag on the top. If the deceased has been unmarried for the whole life, they will plant a banana tree beside the bed. In case of burying, they will dig a grave 5–7 feet deep. In this the deceased will be placed wrapped in the clothes, lying on the earth with the head towards the south end. Thereafter they will pour earth down on the body. Also in case of burying, there will be put a bamboo stick with a piece of white cloth at the south end of the grave. When the grave has been filled up the ceremony is over and they will go and take bath. In case the deceased has been unmarried for the whole life, a banana tree will be planted beside the grave.

In case of cremation they dig a small depression in the cemetery, about 0.35 m deep. In that they will collect a heap of firewood up to the height of about 1.00 m. On the top of that the corpse will be

26. 'Djā'dō (jadō = eat); long’dō (lōndō = drink).
27. The decision regarding whether a corpse is burned, buried or placed on the ground seems to be determined by traditions that vary from village to village. Forty years earlier, Endle (1911: 46–49) described the options of burial and cremation. Endle did not mention the option of placing the deceased naked on a bed. (Eds)
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placed, naked. On the corpse they will put firewood again. Then they will light the firewood, and when it is burning, they will pour some seeds of mustard in the fire. When the fire has been extinct, they will collect what is remaining of the body and carry it to a certain place near the river side. Here they will bury it and erect a bamboo stick with a white flag on the spot. Then they will take a bath in the river.

'Nādjī årgār'nāj. This ceremony is probably an expression of breaking all connection with the deceased. The same words can be used if two persons leave one another, breaking any connection between them. In whatever way the funeral ceremony will take place, it will be always be finished in the following way: When the members of the procession have taken bath, they will collect near the riverside. Here the 'dô'ri will take two banana leaves and put them on the ground. On one of the leaves he will put some dry leaves of jute. On the other leaf he will put some grains of rice. Nearby they will light a fire.

Each man will now go to the dry leaves of jute and thereafter touch the fire. Then he again will go down to the river and take bath. He will now return again and touch the grains of rice. Thereupon the 'dô'ri will sprinkle him with water from a cup made of banana leaves. In this water has been mixed some grains of rice, and a ring will be lying down in it. By help of some twigs of basil, he will sprinkle some drops on the man. Thereafter the man will be clean again. The same ceremony will be continued with all the remaining men. Thereafter they will go home together.

Sărăd’ū (sharadu, name of a ceremony, origin and meaning unknown. The Bengali name is almost the same). About a month after the death, the leading male member of the family will take a piece of new clothes and carry them out in the courtyard to the south end. He will put them on the stool saying as to the deceased, ‘You cannot get those clothes which we have given you on the day of your death. So, I am offering some clothes in your name!’ Thereafter he will take back the clothes into the house, and they can now be used by anyone. The he will feed the members of the

28. nadrji orgarnai; 'nā djī = dry jute leaf; årgār'nāj = giving up, from âr = to bite, gıär = to throw away, gıär'nāj = throwing; ‘giving up eating dried jute leaf’.

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family and friends and neighbours, killing a pig. And if he wants, he can take a measuring basket containing grains of rice and small Anna-coins. He will then throw them towards the people giving them these things in the name of the deceased.
CHAPTER 4

Bodo
Autobiography

Introduction

Autobiography is thought to be a quite new form of ethnographic presentation. The concept was first discussed in 1979, when American Ethnographer J. Spradley, in his reader on the Ethnographic Interview, stated that the autobiography is the closest an ethnographer can come to the members of any culture. The method had been in use earlier; Spradley himself used the approach a decade earlier, in his famous book on a Kwakiutl Indian in the American northwest (Spradley 1969). Siiger’s innovation, collecting autobiographies from several informants, predates Spradley’s work by a full two decades. The differences between Siiger’s and Spradley’s approaches are evident. Spradley used the details of the lived life in the autobiography to open the culture for ethnographic analysis. He used the life story of the successful Kwakiutl fisherman James Sewitt to highlight the challenges most of the members of the Kwakiutl culture faced as modern society began to encroach on them. It is only seldom one hears the voice of Sewitt in first person in his own several-hundred page autobiography. In Siiger’s three short autobiographies, the reader seems to be hearing the interview directly. We have examined Siiger’s notebooks as well as his manuscript; his informants’ voices ring true and authentic throughout. In the case of Ādi’rām, Siiger notes that ‘This autobiography (...) was told by himself without interruptions from Siiger.’ Siiger chose to add what he considered relevant information, like
After Siiger’s three autobiographical presentations, we offer a biography of his fourth main informant, the local priest Mākōrām. This biography gives a sense of the mind-set of one of Siiger’s main gatekeepers and helps to put his contributions in their social context. Siiger’s notes, missionary histories, and the work of subsequent historians all describe Mākōrām as an extraordinary man. For Siiger’s purposes, what makes Mākōrām most extraordinary is his ability to provide honest, unvarnished access to a perfectly ordinary village. (Eds)
Near the end of Pasa’rū’s narrative, Siiger was clearly struck (as are we) by the extent to which individual Bodos moved from one place to another, sometimes covering distances of several hundred kilometres, during the course of their lives. Siiger seems to have asked more than one informant about this tendency and combined their responses into the following note:

1. In the paternal home there may be so many brothers that they cannot live all of them of the old farm. Therefore, some of the brothers will have to move to another village and build a farm there.

2. If there is too much illness in a house the people do not want to go on living there and they will move to another village.

3. If a man experiences too much trouble on his fields on account of the river, he will move to another village.

The farming is depending mainly on three factors: (1) water, (2) firewood, and (3) grazing. If the villagers consider that these three factors have deteriorated considerably, they prefer to move and, furthermore, in many places they can take over the uncultivated land for nothing. Consequently it is often more profitable to move to a new land and bring that under cultivation than to stick to the old land. If a man has got many sons, it may also prove profitable to move to another place, where he can get more land, or perhaps he can sell his old land at a higher price and buy the new land cheaply or get it for nothing.

As for the fact that there has been a Bodo movement eastward during the last twenty years the reason for this must be found in the more fertile land in the east. The same movement can be observed among the Santals and the Muslims.¹

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1. Here Siiger summarizes the continuation of the Santal migration from present-day Jharkhand and West Bengal. The Muslim migration towards the east to which Siiger refers had taken place gradually during the decades before Independence in 1947. Immediately after independence, there was a dramatic cross-migration of Hindus and Muslims between India and Pakistan. (Eds)
Siiger introduces his first autobiography of Ādi'rām with some background information. Ādi'rām was born in Bårkusi in the district of Kamrup. His father, Bholai ('Bhältai), and mother, Naratī, raised two sons and five daughters in. (...) He belongs to the Boshumatari and 'Sandjari tribe. In those days, Bårkusi was not linked by road or rail and hence was quite isolated.

Autobiography by Ādi'rām

Patkijuli, 28 November 1949
My father was a landholder. I was ten years old when he died. Four years after my father’s death, I went to a tea garden named Hadigār in the district of Dorong. There I worked one year and a half as a dafar'dār. After that I came to a tea garden named Kursi'bīl, where I worked as a dafar'dār. I stayed there for two years. Then I went to the tea garden named Tannijhar where I worked for one year as a dafar'dār. After that I went to a tea garden called Lau'ka and worked there for one year as a dafar'dār. After that I returned home to Bårkusi, where I stayed on for three years, occupied with the cultivation of the land. After that period, I went to a forest office called Ka'sīto'ma. There I worked as a supervisor with Mr. B. 'Kuri. I was with him for about twelve years. There I earned 2 Rupees daily.

During my first year as a supervisor, I married. In the last year of my stay there, my wife died. After I had stayed there for twelve years, Mr. B. 'Kuri was compelled to take his leave because he had done something wrong to a higher officer. In that same year, I too, gave up my work. After that, for three years I cultivated my own

2. One may note Siiger’s uncertainty regarding the relations between names and larger groups among the Bodos. He describes surnames as family names in his notes on the village (Chapter 2), but seems to have conceptualized them as tribes/subtribes and septs/subsepts when he took notes in other situations. (Eds)

3. Dafar'dār = a non-commissioned officer in the former Indian army or police. The title was also used for a person who acted like a police in some rural areas. (Eds)

4. Rupee = monetary unit of India (= 100 Naya Paisa, formerly 16 Annas). (Eds)
land in Ka'sīto'ma. Here I got acquainted with a Nepalese. One day this man took me with him travelling out into the country. We came to a village where people knew me and where they were aware that I was a widower. They asked me, therefore, to stay with them as a school teacher. The name of the village was 'Kagra-Bari. The villagers were willing to give me 15 sers\(^6\) of rice a year for each pupil, beyond my daily meals. And I agreed to their proposition.

The villagers then built three buildings: one to serve as a school, one for my living room and one for kitchen. For three years I worked there as a teacher and I had fifteen pupils. One day while

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\(^5\) 'Kagra = a type of jungle with reed; bari = garden.

\(^6\) Ser = a seer, a measure of liquids and dry stuff equivalent to about 1 kilogram or 2 pounds. (Eds)
I was working there, a school inspector came to visit the primary school at Nimagaon. This school inspector now summoned me and I went down to Nimagaon. The school inspector asked me how many pupils I had. I answered, ‘I have fifteen pupils in my private school.’ Then he instructed me to get more pupils and said, ‘Then I will grant your school in local board.’ But, unfortunately it proved impossible for me to get more pupils and, furthermore, the villagers by and by moved on to other places and gradually the pupils left and the school had to close down.

I acquired a piece of land from some people who went away and I cultivated the land myself. One day the village divan\(^8\) called on me and proposed that I remarry, and I then decided to marry again and chose a girl. Secretly I made some wine and brought that

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7. This means that Āḍī’rām would become a salaried government employee and the school would become a ‘public’ school if he successfully recruited the necessary number of students. (Eds)
8. *Devan (Diwan)* = a council of state in the Mughal era of India, also its chief officer; here, a member of the village council in rural areas who acts like a messenger or Jack of all trades. (Eds)
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Figure 4.3: Hay stack in Patkijuli (photo Peter B. Andersen, April 2012)

Figure 4.4: Harrow and rake (item 88 and 89, photo Danish National Museum, 2015)
with me to the girl’s father. But the father did not intend to give me his daughter. He had sent her away before I arrived and, some time
later on, a man from another village took the girl away. All this the father did in secret as somehow he had learnt of my intention. Then one day I brought some wine to the divan in order that he take it to the girl’s father, but the divan refused to take the wine as the girl had been moved away already. He said to me, however, ‘I shall try to get another girl for you from another place.’ And he found a girl for me, but that girl also was already engaged to be married to another man.

All at once in the middle of the night, the divan turned up at my house with a girl he had brought for me. I was asleep when the divan suddenly came to my courtyard and called me. When I went out, the divan said to me, ‘I have brought you a girl. Now you must keep her and marry her.’ And I saw the divan standing in the courtyard with a girl. I was very astonished as I had not known anything beforehand. The divan told me, ‘You must keep her with you tonight and go to bed with her.’

Now it happened that a policeman was my guest this particular night and he was sleeping in the sitting room, and the girl and I had to sleep in the kitchen. I was compelled to sleep with her as there was no other house and no other room. As soon as the divan had delivered the girl and told me to take care of her he returned to his own house. On his way home he woke up two men in the village and told them, ‘Ādi'rām has got pain in his stomach. I have fetched a doctor for him. Don’t disturb him tonight; let him have a good night’s rest. Tomorrow you may go to him and ask him, ‘What is the matter with you?’”

Next morning, the two men called upon me and said to me, ‘How do you feel? Have you still got pain in your stomach? Why didn’t you tell us yesterday, we might have been able to help you?’ I told them, ‘No, I haven’t got any pain in my stomach.’ Then they said to me, ‘But, why then did the divan tell us last night?’ To that I answered, ‘I have had a girl with me. He was joking then.’ Then they remarked, ‘Well, if you have got a girl, then it is good for you.’ Thereupon they went home.

Now this very day much noise could be heard in the village at the place whence the girl had come, because she had disappeared. The villagers went out to search for her and discovered that she had been
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taken to my house. When they asked me from where I had got the
girl, I answered, ‘The divan brought her to me.’ They then went up to
the divan and asked, ‘Why have you stolen that girl and brought her
to Ādi'rām? Certainly you knew that she was engaged to be married
to another man.’ To that the divan replied, ‘I did not bring the girl by
force. You may go and ask the girl whether I forced her to go with
me or whether she went with me of her own will.’

The men then went to the girl and asked, ‘Did the divan force
you to go to Ādi'rām, or did you go of your own will?’ And she re-
plied, ‘No, he did not bring me by force. I followed him to Ādi'rām
of my own free will.’ The men said to her, ‘You know very well
that you are engaged to another man. Therefore you must return
home!’ But the girl answered, ‘No, I won’t go back! I did not come
here to go back home.’ Then they said to her, ‘Who is to pay the
fine?’ She replied, ‘The man with whom I’m staying now will pay
the fine.’ On hearing that, they went back and informed her father
that she would not return home.

The father now summoned the villagers and consulted them
about the girl. They also summoned me and the divan. At the
meeting it was decided that I should pay Rs. 132 as a fine and, as
I had this money at my disposal I paid the full amount two days
later.9 From now on I lived for twelve years10 in happiness with
my wife in the 'Kagra-Bari village. Thereafter, I came to a village
named 'Kokla-Bari. There I stayed for five years earning my living
by cultivating the land. Then the villagers of 'Kokla-Bari11 moved
away in all directions, and therefore I had to go to the Sessapani
village.

Having settled in the Sessapani village, I became a Christian
because my two daughters were very anxious to become Christians.

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9. In Chapter 3 (Periods of Life), Siiger reports that the prescribed fine for car-
rying a girl away for marriage was Rs. 50. We do not know why the amount
reported here is Rs. 132 – which amounts to 66 work-days as a supervisor.
(Eds)

10. Throughout the book we see that the Bodos have several references to 12
years and one may wonder if 12 years just means ‘for a long time’, but we
are inclined to consider it as 12 years of time in this case. (Eds)

11. The villagers of 'Kokla-Bari had come from the Jolpaiguri district.
In 1341 Bengali-year (1935 A.D.), Pastor Surendra baptised me. There was a primary school at Sessapani, but after two years the school teacher ran away. Then Kristiansen Sahib\textsuperscript{12} came and asked me to become a teacher at that school. In that school the majority of the pupils were girls. When, some years later, the parents sent their children to the Gaurang Girl H.E. School, the Sessapani School had to close down. For six years I stayed in Sessapani, and after that I moved to a village called Chaibari. Here I stayed for three years cultivating my own land. Towards the end of my stay there, Pastor Mākōrām came to me and asked me to come to Patkijuli village. So I went on to Patkijuli.

Three years later, Rev. Westborg\textsuperscript{13} sent me to Digoldong\textsuperscript{14} village to become a preacher. While I was working there as a preacher, The Christians of Digoldong moved away. Therefore, after one year I had to come back to Patkijuli. Since then I have earned my living by cultivating my land.\textsuperscript{15}

\textit{Autobiography by Pasa'rū (Boshumatari)}

\textbf{Patkijuli, 5 December 1949}

I was born in 'Kumar'dungā in the district of Goalpara about 45 years ago. My father, 'Hråtona (Rothona) was a farmer. My mother’s name was Tāu'kri (Thaokhri). We were five children,

\textsuperscript{12} This is the same Aksel Kristiansen (1896–1967) who assisted Siiger in purchasing his collections for the Danish National Museum. A Danish missionary, Kristiansen came to India in 1927 and worked in Joema (near Gossaigaon), Gaurang and Bongaigaon for several periods. He finally returned to Denmark in 1949 (O. Hodne 1992: 500). The term ‘sahib’ can mean a European as in this case, but in general it is an indicator of high respect in North Indian languages. Such indicators will usually be added after the first name only, as the second name refers to the group or the person’s origin rather than a surname as in the European languages; but in this case it is added to A. Kristiansen’s surname. (Eds)

\textsuperscript{13} David Westborg (1909–1975), a Norwegian missionary, came to India in 1942 and worked in Gaurang, Bongaigaon and Patkijuli. He returned to Norway in 1969 (O. Hodne 1992: 503). (Eds)

\textsuperscript{14} Digoldong (\textit{digol} =long; \textit{dong} = water channel).

\textsuperscript{15} Siiger explains in his notebook that Ădi'rām narrated his own autobiography, without interruptions from Siiger. (Eds)
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four brothers and one sister who died when she was four to five years old. My father owned 22 bighas of land.\textsuperscript{16} We had 22 cows, 4 geese, 9 goats, and two or three pigs, but no buffalo. We lived there for about 22 years; then we moved to Bångaldoba in the Goalpara district. At that time I was still unmarried and lived with my father. When I was 25 years old we moved again back to Kumar'dunga, but to another farm than the original one. Here we stayed until I was about 31 years old. From there I went on to Mojabari.

Here I married when I was 31 years old. My wife’s name was 'Dårlai (Dorlai). We got three children. With the exception of my elder brother, we all lived together with my father. My elder brother was soldier in Dacca. When I was 34 years old, I started the training to become a 'dō'ri (local Bodo priest). I was trained by a må'dāj rāj'nø go'røng.\textsuperscript{17} The selection took place outside the village.\textsuperscript{18} (It may be done at any place). The place will be tidied up until there is only bare soil. It will be washed with a little water. A stool will be put there, on which the dō'dĭnĭ will take her seat, her untied hair hanging down her back. The må'dāj rāj'nø go'røng and the old 'dō'ri will also be present. The dō'dĭnĭ will call the gods. All this will be done while they face towards the east. The villagers will gather behind them towards the west.\textsuperscript{19}

While the må'dāj rāj'nø go'røng is calling the gods in a mass-tone, little by little the dō'dĭnĭ begins to tremble heavily, mentioning the name of the god that is taking possession of her. Suddenly, she

\textsuperscript{16} Bigha is a common term for measurement of land in large parts of north India, but it may represent different areas even within the same jurisdiction. In Bengal it is reported to have been changing from \(\frac{1}{4}\) to \(\frac{3}{8}\) acre (R.M. Maephail 1988 [1933] 88). (Eds)

\textsuperscript{17} må'dāj rāj'nø go'røng; rainø = to speak, to seek; gorøn = knowing, rainø gorøn = one who is able to speak.

\textsuperscript{18} The next four paragraphs change from 1\textsuperscript{st} person singular to 3rd person singular or 1st person plural as referring to the Bodos as a collective. So one may feel that it is Siiger who comments, but we are inclined to think Pasa'rū himself continues to explain the culture in general terms to Siiger. The parenthetical comments are Pasa'rū’s, rather than notes interjected by Siiger. (Eds)

\textsuperscript{19} This means that the villagers have their faces in the same direction (east) when they assemble behind the dō'dĭnĭ who also faces the east. (Eds)
jumps to her feet and takes small vessel with water that has been standing on the ground. She will look around her while sprinkling water as a token that that the god has told her who is to be the future 'dō'ri. If he is not present in the assembly, she will go and look for him. If she finds him at home, she will sprinkle some water on the doorposts of the entrance door. She continues to tremble and shiver while doing this, which continues until she is again back at the place where they started. A little later she collapses on the ground and loses consciousness. The former 'dō'ri will now take the water and sprinkle some on her. After a little while, she recovers and the ceremony is over.

The above mentioned ceremony, however, will only take place if the villagers themselves fail to find a 'dō'ri. As it is a difficult and strenuous task to be a 'dō'ri, nobody wishes to become it. In case they fail to find a man who is willing to become a 'dō'ri, the above mentioned ceremony will take place and the man chosen will now have to become a 'dō'ri as he has been chosen by the god. A 'dō'ri may retire after one or two festivals, but he may remain a 'dō'ri for the rest of his life. The average time is two to three years. Among the seven prohibitions the 'dō'ri has to obey, we may mention that he is forbidden to eat with anybody else; if he goes out, he must collect his food himself and prepare it himself; on the night before a ceremony he may not take any food and he must abstain from any sexual intercourse with his wife.

I, Pasa'rū, was a 'dō'ri for three years. I first acted as Gar'ja Gøsøgm. He is a male god causing illness. Once every year during the month of asēn katik (approximately September–October) this god is worshipped in order to prevent diseases. But I, Pasa'rū, cannot remember how the ceremony was carried out as I knew nothing when I began and was instructed to act by the mā'dāj rāj'nō gø'røng. I cannot remember any more of my days as a 'dō'ri. A 'dō'ri gets nothing from the people for his work as a 'dō'ri.

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20. We interpret this change from 1st person singular to 1st person plural as Pasa'rū's own generalized comment on Bodo culture. (Eds)

21. Garja Goshom; gar'ja = the name of a god; gøsøgm = black; Gar'ja Gøsøgm = the black god
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When Pasa'rū had been a 'dō'ri for three years, he went to the 'gāubura' of the village, and informed him that he did not want to be a 'dō'ri any longer. A new 'dō'ri was selected in the above mentioned way. Pasa'rū proceeded as a common villager cultivating his land.23

In the village of Mojābari in the district of Goalpara, I lived for four years. Then I moved on to the village of 'Tīrimari also in the Goalpara district. There I stayed for five years. From there I went to Shingāu in the district of Darrang. Here I stayed for four years and then I moved on to the village of Biju'ībari in the district of Darrang, where I stayed for two years. Then I moved to the village of Laudungur in the Darrang district, where I only remained for one year, whereafter I moved to the village of Pašergāu in the district of Darrang. There I only remained for one year. Then I moved to the village of 'Kātribari in the district of Kamrup. Here I remained for two years. Thereafter I moved to the village of Patkijuli in the Kamrup district. Here I have now stayed for seven years and I intend to stay on here.

Autobiography by 'Tanesår (Taneswar)24

I was born in the village of Dongaon in Goalpara district, about 1925. I belong to the Boshumatri. My father’s name was Sonarām (Boshumatri). He was about sixty years old when I was born. My mother’s name was 'Mūlati (Bårgavari). She is still alive and is now about seventy-five years old. My father died when I was about ten years old. I am my parents’ youngest child. We were seven children and I had three elder brothers and three elder sisters. Of these, now my eldest brother and one of my sisters are still alive. My grandparents had died before I was born. My mother has one brother and two

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22. *gaobura*, an Assamese word; 'gāu = village, bura = eldest.

23. The change from 1st person to 3rd person may be Siiger’s comment to introduce the following paragraph, which is evidently spoken by Pasa'rū. (Eds)

24. Siiger collected this history in January 1950, in Bongaigaon. It seems that Siiger has inserted his own comments in parenthesis. We have moved these parenthetical comments to footnotes both to indicate the change of voice and to improve the flow of the text. (Eds)
sisters still alive. At the time I was born, my father had two brothers and two sisters, of which only one sister is still alive.

A few days after my birth, I was given the name 'Tanesâr by my mother. Tan is a Bengali word meaning ‘temple’, and sâr is an abbreviation of ishâr (god), i.e., the temple of god. Later on, my mother told me that I was given that name in order that, when I grew up, I would become a god fearing man, a worshipper of god.²⁵ From the time when I was about two to five years old I was called 'Târsin', because I could not walk properly.²⁶ Since that time I have got no other nickname. I was sucking my mother until I was about six years old. That I could do as I was the youngest child.²⁷ This is a common custom with the youngest child. As a rule, we begin to get other foodstuff besides mother’s milk from the time when we are about six months old.

When I was about one year old, I got a cord round my neck and a cord round my waistline. These cords are made according to the reci-

25. That name is not frequent among the Bodo, but I know of two other men who have got that name.
26. târ = to totter, in = ending with no specific meaning.
27. Siiger notes that his translator, Dinesh, interrupted to observe that his own youngest brother was sucking his mother until he was about five years old.
Figures 4.9 and 4.10: 'Tanesår’s farmhouse (above) is built in concrete but a shed built in the traditional bamboo structure (below) is also in active use (photo P. Andersen, April 2014)
tations of the mantras performed by the 'ādzā (oja). To each of these cords there was connected a metal amulet box. Inside these boxes were a few pieces of bones of certain animals. The bones have been taken by the 'ādzā from the graveyard when the vultures have eaten the flesh off. It is presumed that the spirits of the deceased ancestors will come during the night and harm the family. When I was about two years old my maternal uncle named Saguā (Borgavari) gave me the 4 Anna coin (I have experienced nothing as regards hair cutting). My eldest brother taught me how to talk and I was taught a children’s song by my eldest sister. (Chapter 8, Text 19)

Oh, moon! What are you looking for?
I am looking for a half-broken needle.
Why a half-broken needle?
To repair the ragged clothes.
Why will you mend the clothes?
To dress the buffalo with red clothes.
Why dress the buffalo in red?
To bring it to Goalpara.
Why bring it to Goalpara?
To perform a puja.

From my early childhood, I remember that once there was an earthquake. It was not a severe one and nobody was killed. I recall the people saying that the earth was lying on the back of the tortoise. Whenever the tortoise moves the whole earth will shake. My mother has told me that, when she was a young girl, a great

28. Siiger explains that ‘Such bones may be pieces of bones of man, tortoise, and of the jahamalāi animal. The translation of this animal is unknown. It is a small, four-footed jungle animal of the size of a small cat. The animal has a very strong odour and it is assumed, therefore, that when pieces of the bones of that animal are put into the amulet box, the gods will be able to smell it and will not cause the child any harm.’ (Siiger collected a couple of such amulet covers, see Chapter 9, p. 265). (Eds)

29. The text was not easy for Siiger to translate. He used parenthetical additions to clarify the meaning and context. Goalpara district, which is mentioned in the Boro language text of the song, bordered to West Bengal. There is a Goalpara town as well, but Bodos were (nearly) absent in that town around 1950, so it is not reasonable to assume that the song refers to the town. (Eds)
earthquake had taken place. Rivers were turned into floods, the ground was breaking, animals disappearing into the interior of the earth, many casualties and many people killed. She was afraid lest another earthquake might occur again. Some people said, ‘Dāhāi, Gandhi Rajā,’ (Help, King Gandhi). They assumed that Gandhi as a great king might be able to help them.30

When I was five years old, a huge swarm of locusts ravaged the country. It was in the months of katik and agan.31 It was like a big cloud and the sun became invisible. The locusts ate all the bamboo trees, vegetables, paddies the entire crops and so on. We were unable to do anything to prevent this. We took some of the locusts, fried them and ate them. For about one month they arrived and disappeared again several times. This caused famine in some places. The locusts came from the southwest. When I was about fourteen years old a heavy hailstorm destroyed all the mustard fields, the tobacco fields and the harvested paddy which was still in the fields. Cows and goats were killed partly because of the hailstones and partly because of the cold. The single hailstones could be as big as a fist. It happened in the night and all the domestic animals which the Nepalese had outside in their fields were killed.32

When I was about ten to twelve years old our village was very much alarmed on account of rumours about kidnappers hunting the country. My mother, therefore, kept me inside the house and did not allow me to go outside. From among the Santals, a cowherd was in fact taken by the kidnappers. At that time, three to four families would sleep together in a house and village patrols were appointed. The villagers complained to the Government, but it seems that the Government did not take

30. Indian freedom fighter Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948) was generally addressed as Gandhiji, Mr. Gandhi or Mahatma, a ‘great soul’ indicating his spiritual advancement. Unlike the Abrahamic religions, Hindu gods often have intimate relationships with humans. It is not uncommon for living humans to be revered as gods. This country-wide tradition is illustrated in 'Tanesār’s recollection in which some people invoked ‘Gandhiji’ in hopes that his spiritual power could protect them against the earthquake. (Eds)
31. Katik, October–November and agan in November–December. (Eds)
32. Siiger added the explanation that, ‘The Bodos do not keep their animals outside during night-time.’ (Eds)
proper measures to prevent these crimes. The person who was
kidnapped would be tied up and brought to a place where a big
house, a bridge or some other big project was to be built. Here
the man would be sacrificed to Kali and the dead body would
be buried under the foundation of the house or the bridge. It
is told that, recently, some Mawaris were building a house in
Charrapunti (Cherapunji, in Meghalaya). At that occasion a man
was kidnapped and sacrificed. If something is going wrong with
a machine, a dynamo, a cinema projector, etc., the people will
often bring a sacrifice of some animal or perhaps cut their finger
and give the blood as a sacrifice to Kali.

Another thing is that girls sometimes may be kidnapped for
marriage purposes. I know of several examples from my child-
hood. If a man has got a wife but wants still another, or if a man
cannot get a wife in the normal way because the woman in question
refuses him, he may try to kidnap a girl. He will then bribe some
men to perform the kidnapping. When he is found out he may be
fined. Sometimes the girl will be taken back, and sometimes he
may keep the girl and give fine. Polygamy is not uncommon,

33. The goddess Kali does not usually receive human sacrifices, but over time
some groups have sacrificed humans in her name or the name of other
goddesses (K.A. Wagner 2014: 143–151 [2007]). Human sacrifices have
been outlawed and prevented by police action since the 19th century. (e.g.
C. Bates 1995, who describes laws and police action even as he argues that
human sacrifices did not occur). Yet, 'Tanesår’s narrative provides evidence
that such human sacrifices might have continued into the 20th century. The
present description indicates that the sacrifices were performed as part of
the inauguration of a building or a bridge; this purpose is different from the
human sacrifices to Kali described elsewhere. Rumors of similar human
sacrifice conditions, in which a living human is deposited within a build-
ning’s foundations, have been reported in S. Boswell (2015). (Eds)

34. The word probably refers to the trading caste ‘Marwaris.’ The Bodos may
have pronounced it slightly differently. 'Tanesår’s report here seems to
suggest that, ‘recently’ (1949–1950), Marwaris or people working for them
carried out a human sacrifice. We observe that Cherrapunji is 250 km away,
on the far side of the Brahmaputra river valley. Hence, we interpret this
report as evidence for the presence of a rumour, but not as factual evidence
for a specific human sacrifice. (Eds)

35. This description is consistent with Ādi'rām's autobiographical account his
second marriage.
generally up to three wives, but there are instances where a man has got seven wives. There is no kind of legal prostitution among the Bodos. Polyandry is unknown, so is legal promiscuity.36

Play

In my childhood we children played various games:

'Badoa Gel'æna': Unclean Playing37

A children’s game that is only performed when they go to take bath in the river. They will stand in a circle, and one will be the leader who will recite a chant (Text 20). While reciting the chant he will point at the boys, one by one. He will begin with himself, and start to chant slowly, word by word, as he points at the boys.

'ēṅbør 'toṅbør 'kailabök
dausā katī mohabør
kukūṟ katī dom38

The boy who gets the keyword (Dom) of the chant will be considered unclean.

Then they all jump out in the river, and the unclean boy has to touch all the other boys. But the last he won’t touch. That boy will now be considered unclean, and has to touch all the others. In this way the play can go on for a long time in great merriment. When they want to finish they will catch each other’s hands in a big circle.

Kær'ka Mo'ti39

The player will close their fists and hold them up. A leader will take a match-sized piece of wood in his hand. With that hand he

36. 'Tanesår means that neither prostitution nor polyandry were present among the Bodos, and that both were considered to be unacceptable. (Eds)
37. badoa gelenai, 'badoa = unclean; ge'læna = playing.
38. Dom is a name for a community that is not recognized as ‘twice born’ and hence is outside of the Hindu caste system. Traditionally, cremations were conducted by members of this community; but the rhyme is not translatable. (Eds)
39. kherkha mothi, kær'ka = ? of metal; mo'ti = feast, song. Siiger indicates that this was something of metal, but he seems to have been in doubt exactly what sort of metal; and the pieces used in the game is clearly of wood. (Eds)
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will touch the other’s closed fists, at the same time reciting a chant (Text 21).

kerkā moti kerkā jāi
dumni moti dumni jāi
kāi boli jāi

While doing so, he will press the small piece of wood down into one of the closed fists, as he likes. That he will do unseen by the others. Another boy will be appointed as Dāu’bō (daobo: Dāu’bō = crane). He will take in his hand a piece of wood with a hook. He will let the hook go down into that fist where he supposes the leader has pressed the small piece of wood. If he is right, the play will be repeated and he will be a leader. If he is wrong, another player will be Dāu’bō.

Ǎ’mā’i dzŭ’mā

A hide-and-seek game. The meaning of the name is unknown, a well-known fact that the children like to play with their maternal uncle. In the play one boy will be leader, another will stand close to him and close his eyes. Meanwhile the children will run behind his back and slap him on the head with their hands, saying Ǎ’mā’i dzŭ’mā, Ǎ’mā’i dzŭ’mā’… etc. Then they will run away and hide. When all of them have hidden, he will open his eyes and search for them. By turn they will all be the blind man.

Da“’na Si’la Bird and Kite

The kite often flies from house to house taking the chickens. One player will be appointed a kite, another will be a hen and the rest will be chickens. The chickens will collect a circle round the hen. Thereupon the kite will try to catch one of the chickens and draw it out from the circle. He will take the chicken by ear and drawing him he will ask: Are you a chicken or a kite? As long as he replies that he is a chicken, he will be pulled by the ear. This may develop into a friendly fight between the two players. When he replies that he is a kite, he will be released. The released boy is not allowed to join any party. The kite

40. The rhyme is not easy or possible to translate.
41. amai jumai; ā’mā’i = maternal uncle; dzŭ’mā’i = first state of the preparation of rice-beer.
42. dao na shila, da“ = bird, hen; na = or; si’la = kite.
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will then try to catch a new chicken, and so the play will go on, until at last, the hen is caught. If the kite is very weak, he may be caught by the hen and chicken, pulled by the ear and asked if he is a chicken or kite. If he says that he is a chicken, the play will be over.

Daʻdoi Ge'læna: Egg game

The players will divide into two parties and a leader. Each party will make a ditch; the leader will be in the middle. While all the players are turning their backs to the leader, he will throw a stone (the egg) in the opposite direction. Thereupon the players will run and try to fetch and bring it back to their own ditch. There will, of course, often will be fighting between the two parties. It will go on until one party has won by getting most stones (eggs).

Gor Ge'læna

This is a game with played five small stones. Each player must throw the stones up in the air – single, two, three or four at a time according to certain rules. The purpose is not to lose a single stone. The winner is given a Gor (a point). At last it will be counted up who has got most points.

Ki'kår Ge'læna

Two players will make ten holes in the earth divided in two rows with five holes in each. Five pebbles will be put in each hole, fifty pebbles in total.

The starting player, A, will take up all the pebbles from one of the holes of his own row and place one pebble in each of the following holes. When he has come to an end with his own row, he will proceed with the opposite. When he has got no more pebbles in his hand, he will pick up all the pebbles from the following hole, and go on in the same way. In this way he will continue until he has put the last pebble in a hole followed by an empty hole. It is then his right to jump over the empty hole and take all the pebbles in the following hole. These pebbles are his gain. Now it is the

43. daodoi gelenai, daʻ dø = egg; ge'łæna = playing).
44. gor gelenai, gor = point.
45. khikhor gelenai, kiʻkår = a small hole in the earth or ditch.

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opponent’s turn to play. He can begin wherever he wants, but only from the holes in his own row.

The purpose is to get as many pebbles as possible. When the game cannot go any further, all the pebbles will be redistributed; the losing player borrows from the winning in order to fill up his remaining holes.

* A'sog Bi'soe (No meaning of the words) 
The players will sit in a circle, the leader in the middle. The players will put forward their hands, on which the leader will beat in turn (the hands are palm-down). At each beat the leader will recite the following chant:

A'sog, Bi'soe, Gømrri'sog,  
Sal'dang, Mal'dang, Awa'dang, 
Dzosai'pani, 'Sring, 'Srai, 'Go

The only word with any meaning is 'go, which means ‘released’. The player, who gets 'go will go out, and thereupon the whole performance will be repeated again. So it will go on, until the last player gets his 'go with peculiar emphasis.

**Honor and Faith**

As a boy I was taught to honour the old people by saluting them, which was done by bowing down and touching their feet. We also had to give our stool to old people.

When I was about six to seven years old I began to help my father with the cows. The cows are looked after by boys in turn who are chosen for that purpose by the villagers. The buffaloes on the contrary are always looked after by the same cowherds, who get a monthly salary. While watching the cows, we often sing well-known songs for own pleasure and we play the flute.\(^{46}\) I also sometimes helped my parents with various sorts of work in my leisure time when I was free from school.

When I was about seven years old I attended the local private village school. At school we were taught to read and write

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\(^{46}\) The Nepalese have got special tunes used by the shepherds; the Bodos have not got any.
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Assamese vernacular and some mathematics. We had nothing in Boro language. The teacher was a Bodo. Both boys and girls attended the school. We wrote on banana leaves with a reed pen and ink. For three years I attended that school. Thereafter I went to a private school in another village and stayed in the hostel. That school I attended for two years.

Thereafter, when I was about twelve years old, I was engaged in assisting my elder brother with his work in the fields – ploughing, harvesting, etc. At that time, I heard about Christianity and some Bodo preachers were preaching in our village. The most striking feature about Christianity was the singing.\(^{47}\) They sang about Christianity and this impressed me very much. One of our neighbours had become a Christian and he told me about Christianity, the

\(^{47}\) The other Christian informants led Siiger to write that, ‘Originally the Bodos only sing when they are drunk and then only feigned or grotesque songs’, but in fact there are a lot of songs among the Bodos as it is established by the literature (e.g. A. Boro 2010 [2001]: 116–117) and as just stated by 'Taneså. (Eds)
missionaries and their work, and how they took care of orphans and gave them education. In that way I was attracted by Christianity.

When the Bodos first are attracted by Christianity, this is because they can get off all the heavy expenses connected with the old religion, the expenses for the sacrifices, for officiating priests, etc. One of the next arguments is that all people die and the Christians can manage without spending money for worship. Then later on when they come to learn more about Christianity they come to know about Christ, etc. The most common criticism among the Bodos against Christianity is that it is a foreign religion and by being converted to Christianity one disregards the ancestors. It is also much criticised that the Christians eat beef and spoil their original caste. Furthermore, there are the social difficulties. If a man becomes a Christian he cannot stay any longer in his village but will have to move as he has become unclean by accepting the foreign religion and by eating beef. The eating of beef is the main reason. Even if he does not eat beef himself, he has still got mixed with the beef eaters. Any Christian visiting a Bodo worshipper will have to have his meals outside in the courtyard. He is not allowed to enter the nomano (the room where the home-gods are worshipped). Consequently, if a man is converted to Christianity he will be expelled from the community; and, persecution against single Christians may take place. For instance the non-Christians may burn his fowl house, destroy his crop and sometimes when they are drunk they may beat him. But, of course, they cannot persecute a large community of Christians.

To the former Bodo-worshippers, various difficulties as regards Christianity represent themselves as follows:

48. The expenses of the traditional religion must mostly have regarded sacrifices and the costs for the yearly feasts; the various officiating priests were unpaid (as Pasa’rū stresses about his time as a ‘dōrī, above, in his autobiography). (Eds)

49. Note that this proscription apparently is not transitive. Adherents to traditional Bodo religion were welcome in multi-religious Patkijuli, a village founded by Santals. (Eds)
1. The Christians keep Sunday holy and do not work, but how can they then be permitted to prepare their food on Sundays? To prepare a meal is also a kind of work.

2. Christianity is not a pure religion as it is divided up in many branches – Catholicism, Baptists, Lutheranism, etc. Some keep Sunday holy, others keep Saturday. How can that be? It cannot be pure religion.

3. Monogamy is very good, but how can it be that out in the villages many Christian men have got several wives? And, why cannot the Christian community force such a man not to have more than one wife? Among themselves, among the Hindus and so on they can force a man to obey his religion.

4. Many Bodos think that the wine that the Christians drink at the Lord’s Supper is mixed up with cow blood. And some think too that the eating of beef meat is necessary for being a Christian.

5. From more educated people you may meet that argument: How can the Christians assert that there is only one God, when Jesus Christ claims himself to be a God?

When I was about twelve years old I was once told that the following story by one of my relatives. It is a true story and it took place in the village of Sam’tāibari in the district of Goalpara almost at the time it was told to me. Everybody in the village talked about the incident. In Sam’tāibari there lived some Bromos and some mådāi høgrā.51 One day, a Bromo had a dispute with a mådāi høgrā. The Bromo wanted to demonstrate that the old ... religion was nonsense, but the mådāi høgrā strongly opposed this. The

50. Shamthaibari. (samtaj = grass seed hanging in the shrubs, bari = place. Sam’tāibari is an ‘old’ village that some Patkijuli residents were familiar with. (Eds)

51. mådāi = god, høgrā = giver, a man who gives sacrifice, a worshipper. Mådāi høgrā is the common indication used by the Bromos and the Christians for the followers of the old Bodo religion. They call themselves Hindus (Siiger). Here as elsewhere, we see that religious communities are fluid and still under formation. The followers of the old Bodo religion are distinguished by their ritual acts as those who give sacrifices, but not as people belonging to a community. (Eds)
Figure 4.12: 'Adzā medicine bag. Siiger reports that Mākōrām’s father served in this role (item 15 – image detail on p. 259, photo Danish National Museum, 2015)
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*Bromo* therefore proposed to make an experiment. He said, ‘I shall pretend to be suffering from stomach troubles, as if a god were attacking me. You can then go to the ’âdzā and ask him to study the cowries in order to find out what god is attacking me, and what is to be done to cure me.’ The *mâdâî hôgrā* agreed to the experiment and went to the ’âdzā.

The ’âdzā studied the cowries and declared that the man was attacked by Kûbîr Mâdâî (a god who is satisfied only with the red cock). The ’âdzā therefore visited the sick man, recited the mantras and sprinkled water on the red cock which was to be sacrificed if the man would recover. (This is the common promise to: sacrifice a red cock in case of recovery). As soon as the ’âdzā had finished his performance, the sick man jumped to his feet and declared himself to be all right. The ’âdzā was very much surprised when he recovered so quickly. As a rule it took several days to recover. Then the man pretending to be ill declared that he had been all right the whole time and said, ‘From that you can see that your religion is not worth anything. You are worshipping in vain and spending money for nothing by your sacrifices.’ From that day forward, the *mâdâî hôgrā* became a *Bromo*.

That event impressed me very much. When I was not converted to the *Bromo* religion but to Christianity, it was because of my neighbour was a Christian and because the *Bromos* drink wine and sometimes go into the jungle and make sacrifices, i.e. chickens, that is to say, they are not true *Bromos* but still attached to the old Bodo religion.52

Before I became a Christian, I heard of another incident that impressed me very much. It was about Mâkôrâm, a pastor who in those days lived in celibacy as a Christian. It was told that he was able to go out into the jungle where the tigers would not do him any harm. Once he went to preach in a non-Christian village and was pursued by some men. When leaving the place he gave the

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52. ‘*Tanesår* is the only informant who has offered a comprehensive report on his conversion to Christianity. Rather than focusing on Christian doctrine he compared how the followers of *Brama Samaj* and Christianity practised their religions. (Eds)
curse that their houses would burn, and even before he had left the village the houses were indeed burning.\textsuperscript{53}

Another miracle was also performed by Mākōrām. Once, when visiting a village he was pursued and attacked by a man who started to beat him. Mākōrām said, ‘Oh! God gave you your arm with the purpose that you should work with it and not for beating with it and in that way you would get a result.’ Thereafter, Mākōrām left the place, but the man who had attacked him got a swollen arm.

Since Mākōrām got married he has not performed any miracles. Later on when I had become a Christian (my conversion took place when I was sixteen years old), I heard of a miracle performed by 'Sotis Boshumatari. (He has now become a member of the Hindu sect called So'natân 'Darmø, i.e. Golden Religion).\textsuperscript{54}

He had been a teacher at the High Primary School, the Darjeeling Mission School and for some years worked as a preacher in our denomination. But before he joined our denomination he once lived in a village in the Goalpara district. It was a mådāi hōgrā village. He was asked by the villagers just to do a sign as a testimony of Christianity. At first he felt at a loss and refused, but when they continued asking him he relied upon God and prayed for a long while to God. After having prayed he gave order to a box of matches lying on the ground at some distance. He said, ‘Give fire!’ And, the box of matches caught fire and burnt up by itself.\textsuperscript{55} The villagers were astonished but were of the opinion that the Christians might have special mantras.

\textbf{Appendix}

\textbf{The biography of Mākōrām Mosahary}

Mākōrām Mosahary was one of the main informants for Siiger’s collections in Patkijuli. He was also the Evangelical Lutheran priest for the Bodos in the village and, in fact, the local authority

\textsuperscript{53} Siiger adds in parentheses that his translator, Dinesh, ‘has heard of the same event.’

\textsuperscript{54} Sanatan Dharma e.g. ‘eternal religion’ or ‘eternal order’ is common denominator of a number of movements that tried to reform Hinduism throughout the last century (J. Zavos 2010 [2008]). It is not possible to identify which specific movement 'Tanesår refers to. (Eds)

\textsuperscript{55} Siiger notes that his interpreter also ‘has heard of that incident’.
who had the power to open doors for Siiger to work with other Bodos. Mākōrăm’s choice to do exactly this made the entire manuscript possible. For this reason, to fully understand Siiger’s work, we should understand Mākōrăm as a gatekeeper and as a person. Siiger does not make this task easy: his comprehensive notebooks do not include an autobiography or other vivid descriptions of Mākōrăm -the-man. We have compiled this biography on the basis of Siiger’s own few notes, as well as from sources to the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and recent works on the history of Bodo religion, where Mākōräm’s significance as a Christian writer and theologian is recognised.  

The Biography of Mākōräm Mosahary

The following has been compiled by Peter B. Andersen and Santosh K. Soren.

Mākōräm Mosahary was born in approximately 1903 (and died on 24 October 1976, O. Hodne 1992: 513) somewhere up in the mountains, where his father was an oja (medicine man) and was raised in the traditional Bodo religious system. He remembered that his mother had taught him rules of proper behaviour, but also that she died early. From Siiger’s collections, it is clear that Mākōräm had a deep understanding of the traditional religion as he became an important informant on several issues, also on the work and rituals of the ojas. He never attended school, but he taught himself to read and write. Hans Edvard Wisløff, who chaired the

56. O. Hodne 1992: 365–366, 370–371, 513; H.E. Wisløff 1959: 134–137. Hodne’s description is based on relevant references regarding Mākōräm for the larger understanding of the History of the Norwegian Santal Mission whereas Wisløff’s is partly based on his conversations with Mākōräm during his visit to Patkijuli in the 1950s. Wisløff’s narration follows Mākōräm ‘as he himself told it’ [to Wisløff] (H.E. Wisløff 1959: 134) and count as a biography within the church, but it carries also the problems of reinterpretation of autobiographies, so the two presentations have been collaborated into a statement that allows the reader to know Mākōräm and to estimate his authority as an informant for Siiger. Mākōräm’s importance as a writer is recognised by S. Brahma (2006: 55). The files have not been searched for Mākōräm, and there may also be more in the Annual Reports than have been found in the secondary references utilised here. Printed photos of Mākōräm Mosahary are found at O. Hodne 1992: 366, 388. (Eds)
Norwegian Santal Mission and met Mākōrām in late 1958, reports that Mākōrām wrote and spoke Boro language, Hindi and English. At the age of 16 he was married but, as Mākōrām told Wisløff, his wife ‘went insane’ and ran away into the jungle. During these years, which may have been just before or after Mākōrām turned 20, he seemed to be a philosophically curious or, in Wisløff’s words, a religious seeker. On the one hand, Mākōrām read the Hindu scriptures while, on the other hand, he seemed to turn back to the traditional Bodo religion once again.

57. Mākōrām might have been reading in the old Hindu scriptures; he also might have been attending events hosted by the Hindu revivalist Brahma Dharma movement. Wisløff’s summary is not clear on this point. (Eds)
The Bodo of Assam

Măkōräm remarried in the *bonanoi lainai haba* form of marriage (K. Brahma 2009: [1998]: 66), in which a man proposes to a woman he has kidnapped.\(^{58}\) This ‘kidnapping’ often was not forceful. In a case described some 20 years earlier, Endle concluded that there seemed to be some ‘previously private understanding between the young people concerned’ (S. Endle 1911: 43). In any case, the marriage would only become official after the woman freely accepted the proposal and the appropriate ceremonies were completed (K. Brahma 2009: 66 [1998]). Măkōräm’s second marriage is more interesting for the way it began than the way it ended. It did end, but we cannot find any further details.

When Măkōräm got the opportunity to read in the Christian Bible at a house where he stayed, he found the Bible ridiculous at first. However, as he read more he became more convinced and decided to become a Christian. Given his history of religious exploration, however, the Christian missionaries doubted Măkōräm’s sincerity,\(^{59}\) so prior to being baptised he travelled around and preached as a Christian sadhu (H.E. Wisløff 1959: 135 and 'Tanesår’ s autobiography in this chapter).

During these travels he came to an empty village where the villagers had left a girl to die of cholera. Măkōräm nursed her to health and sent her to the Christian girls’ school in Gaurang. Some years later he married her into what came to be a happy marriage. Wisløff described her as ‘an intelligent person, pious and warm and with considerable abilities as a preacher’ (H.E. Wisløff 1959: 135).\(^{60}\)

Măkōräm was baptised in Gaurang in 1931. He told Aksel Kristiansen, the missionary who baptised him, that ‘God tells me

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\(^{58}\) Wisløff (1959: 135) describes this marriage as a *kvinderov* (Norwegian) or abduction or carrying away but does not consider it to be an accepted form of marriage among the Bodo. Whether Wisløff’s error is due to a blind spot in his rather meagre knowledge about Bodo culture, or whether it reflects a Christian bias, is not relevant for the present discussion. (Eds)

\(^{59}\) We do not know whether this doubt related to Măkōräm’s ‘seeking’ approach to life (Wisløff reported that Măkōräm had changed between Hinduism and traditional Bodo religion), or whether it was a result of a Christian check on Măkōräm’s sincerity by compelling him to show his disposition in more ways before accepting him for baptism. (Eds)

\(^{60}\) All the quotes from H.E. Wisløff 1959 are translated from Norwegian. (Eds)
that I shall go to the mountains near Darjeeling’ (H.E. Wisløff 1959: 135). It took him a month to travel to that point and, by the time he arrived, the Spirit had left him. After fasting for three days, he heard a voice that ordered him to ‘go to the nearest Bodo village’. Wisløff states that this was the way Mākōrām happened to come to work with the Bodos (H.E. Wisløff 1959: 135–136). In 1941, the local European priest suggested that Mākōrām should be ordained as a priest:

The Bodos continue to send for him when there is any kind of gulmal (quarrel or trouble) among them, and they have a strong confidence in his decisions. It is not only due to his clear intellect, but far and most due to his wholehearted surrender to the cause of Christ. There are few Christians who have abandoned all for the sake of Christ. This is presumably related to a very strong

61. This refers to the Holy Spirit in the Christian Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Eds)
62. As we will see, Mākōrām became a successful farmer and priest, so the statement that he had ‘abandoned all’ may be understood in the context of
vocational identity. This conviction renders him with a great authority in his behaviour, which may offend others, but which [the Bodos] bend for – due to the power of truth that is in his words (H. Halvorsrud to J. Gausdal 16 March 1941, quoted in O. Hodne 1992: 366, Translated from Norwegian)

After being ordained on 1 July 1945, the mission tried to install him as a priest in Bongaigaon, but the congregation did not want him as he was not native to the district (O. Hodne 1992: 365). The mission then sent him to Patkijuli. By the time Wisløff visited Patkijuli at the turn of the year between 1958 and 1959 Mākōrām ‘had a large farm when considering the conditions in India, and he was a relative wealthy man’ (H.E. Wilsøff 1959: 136). Wisløff compared Mākōrām to the Norwegian lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771–1824), for whom his Norwegian readers had great sympathy as Hauge had indirectly influenced on one of the founding missionaries of the Lutheran Mission to the Santals, Lars Olsen Skrefsrud (1840–1910).

Mākōrām resembles Hans Nielsen Hauge somewhat. On his many and long travels, he assists people by word and deed in practical issues at the same time that he preaches the Gospel. He helps poor people to obtain farmland and, if there is a quarrel between a husband and wife, he calls to help them through the difficulties. (H.E. Wisløff 1959: 136, Translated from Norwegian)

But Wisløff could also confirm that Mākōrām was strict with regard to religious discipline. Once, when a drunken man came for the Eucharist, Mākōrām sent him home, saying, ‘No, stop! You must not join. You are drunk. Before you come here, you must take control of your life and stop drinking.’ The man had sinned and wanted to get forward, but Mākōrām was adamant (H.E. Wisløff 1959: 136).

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63. Both Siiger and Wisløff base their presentations of Mākōrām’s story on direct interviews with Mākōrām himself, but they offer different chronologies on when he settled in Patkijuli. We cannot ascertain which version is more accurate. (Eds)
Religious events and the stories in the Bible had a large influence on Mākōrām. One Easter Sunday, he was so overcome by the story about the women who had found Christ’s empty grave after resurrection that he had difficulty in speaking for tears. This was interpreted as the power of the Scripture rather than any weakness in Mākōrām. As Wisløff reports (1959: 137), ‘It is very seldom anyone sees a Bodo cry.’

From the late 1930s through the early 1950s, Mākōrām and the missionary Håkon Halvorsrud published several Christian texts in Boro language (S. Brahma 2011 [2006]: 54). In 1957, the joint board that represented the missions of five Protestant Churches decided that the Old Testament should be translated from Hebrew into Boro language and that the translation of the New Testament should be revised in order to bring the full text out in a coherent form. The board nominated Mākōrām to help Halvorsrud with this work (O. Hodne 1992: 370–371). At the time of Wisløff’s visit, Mākōrām had become the chairman of the Lutheran mission’s church council for the Bodos (Wisløff 1959: 137).
CHAPTER 5

Religion

Introduction

In Europe, the disciplines of ethnography and history of religions have worked to develop terminology that enables Europeans to understand concepts of other cultures. Halfdan Siiger was actively involved in this disciplinary movement during his years as professor in the history of religions at Aarhus University from 1960 to 1979. A general aim of the movement has been to let the translated terms reflect the concepts of the cultures they originate in, rather than reflecting external cultural evaluations as forwarded by missionaries or colonial anthropologists. Hence, it is interesting that Siiger uses the term ‘she-devil’ for one of the goddesses. Despite our awareness of and sensitivity to the many religious cultures present in the Assam, we have not attempted to update such translations to more value-neutral terminology.

The main informants were Āḍī’rām (from Patkijuli), Lōkī’rām Børgayari (visiting Patkijuli, from the Sessapani oil district), and the priest Mākōrām (also from Patkijuli). (Eds)

Names of the Bodo Gods

Informant: Āḍī’rām, Patkijuli, November 29, 1949

In his childhood, Āḍī’rām attended the following religious ceremonies and heard of the following gods, etc. He was an idol worshipper up to the age of about 54, when he was converted to

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1. As indicated, this movement began long before E. Said’s critical approach to Western conceptions of the Orient, which he outlined in Orientalism (1978). (Eds)
Religion

Christianity. He asserts that the non-Christian Bodos still perform the following ceremonies, etc.\(^2\)

1. Kåri'ā Bē'rāi, Bura Bā'tō Mā'hārdja, male (kharia)
2. Aj'lõng, female (ailôn; ai = mother, probably the Ai river)
3. A'grāng, male (agran; at the kerai the do'dinį represents A'grāng and dances as A'grāng at the Do'son kerai)
4. Kā'dzī, female (khaći)
5. Kūn'gri, male (kungri)
6. Bū'rā-Ā'lı, male (bura-ali)
7. Rādza 'Pūtrā, male (raj puthra)
8. Rādza 'Khāndrā, male (raj khandra)
9. Sandjā'ni 'Mōnās, female (shanjani manas or monas; name of a river in the Goalpara District)
10. Bē'rāi 'Bāgrādzā, male (borai bagraja)
11. Sāṅg Bē'rāj, male (shoŋ borai)
12. Sāṅg Bū'ri, female (shoŋ buri)
13. 'Kūmarī Bā'handāri, female (bahandari)
14. Ā'shū Māj'nāu, female (she-devil) (ashu mainao)\(^3\)
15. Shā'lı Māj'nāu, female (she-devil) (shali mainao)
16. 'Būlı 'Bū'ṛī, female (buli buri; būlı = sacrifice, būṛī = old; she-devil, witch)
17. 'Lājlūgā, male (lailuga)

\(^2\) Ādīrām’s autobiography is found in Chapter 4. Siiger informs that ‘The number of gods can vary with each ’dō'ri, but the ’dō'ri that Ādīrām used would worship 19 gods.’ (Eds)

\(^3\) Ā'shū Māj'nāu. In common Indian mythology, the Asuras are in eternal warfare against the gods. Later scholars have settled on ‘demon’ as the appropriate translation for asura. However, it is difficult to criticize Siiger’s translation from an orientalist perspective; he is representing a local normative sentiment in the Bodo religion rather than projecting a value judgement of his own. (Eds)
18. Taj’tăm 'Bŭlĭ, female (thai tham buli; thai = tham = three)
19. 'Bŏrŏ Gām, male (boro gam)
20. 'Sŏtŏ Gām female (shoto gam)

To these gods the following things were sacrificed:
To No. 1: Rice and chickens,
To Nos. 2–9, 11, 13: Chickens and eggs,
To No. 10: Cocks,
To Nos. 14 and 15: Eggs,
To Nos. 12 and 16: Pigs.

They have no idols or images of the gods.

Religious Calendar

'Sâklărī Hé'năi
New Year (almost April) is called Bŏi'săk (boishag). The New Year festival is called 'Sâklărī Hé'năj. The Bodos do not have a calendar of their own, but get information from the Hindus to fix the date for the celebration of the New Year. On the evening before New Year’s day, the 'dô'ri (douri = priest) does not take any supper, and during the following night it is prohibited for him to have sexual intercourse with his wife.

On the following morning of the 'Sâklărī Hé'năj festival (=New Year’s Day) the 'dô'ri (douri) washes and cleans himself at sunrise and puts on clean clothes. He eats nothing in the morning but

4. Presuming that Siiger used the Danish convention, he refers here to hens. (Eds)
5. In the Darrang District, New Years is called 'Bĭhŭ, the name of the month corresponding to April. Another name of April is Buisa'gō. The same name is used in the Assamese language. The Bodo in the Goalpara District call it Bŏi'săgū (buisja'gō). Please refer to Figure 1.2, Bodo Ritual Calendar.
6. When the festival is over he takes off his dress. It is washed and cleaned and put aside until the next festival. That special dress is used at religious festivals only. It has got no special features but looks like a common clean dress.
starts at once to build the bă'tō'g (= altar) (bathou). The bă'tō'g is built in the courtyard. The farmhouse is always placed with the kitchen-house facing towards the north (Figure 5.1). The 'dō'ri builds the altar to the east of the kitchen-house.

Before cleaning and washing, the 'dō'ri goes outside and takes some bamboo sticks and some clay. Then he goes inside and washes and cleans himself and puts on his new clothes, or he may also order a man to get the bamboo and the clay while he himself is dressing. That man places the things somewhere in the courtyard.

He builds the bă'tō'g in the following way (Figure 5.2). The bă'tō'g is built round the holy tree (Euphorbia splendens neriifolie) which is always standing to the east if you stand in front of the kitchen-house. The common name for a holy tree is sī'dzo (shi-

7. Siiger is describing a ceremony in one family’s courtyard. There are of course many families in the village. The reader might wonder if every family performs the same ceremony. Siiger offers no guidance on this question. (Eds)
The Bodo of Assam

The tree standing in the courtyard and used for religious purposes is called \textit{bă'tō'g}. This name is used not only for the plant but also for the surrounding ground.

The 'dō'ri builds a row of bamboo sticks round the tree. These sticks must have a height of about one meter. Toward the north from that row of bamboo sticks he will build a long elevation of mud, about 20 cm high and 30 cm wide. On that elevation he places a row of banana leaves, each for one of the numbers 2–10 named in the above list.\footnote{For gods Nos. 11–20 an altar will be made inside the kitchen-house.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{bato_g_arrangement.png}
\caption{\textit{Bă'tō'g} arrangement for New Year’s celebrations}
\end{figure}
As illustrated in Figure 5.3, there is a permanent elevation of mud to the north of the fireplace. When the 'dô'ri has finished the preparing of the outdoor altar, he arranges this indoor altar by putting ten banana leaves on this mud shelf. (This place has no special name.) To the west of the holy tree he places three banana leaves directly on the ground. On all the leaves he puts some grains of rice. When this has been done, the altar is ready and the real ceremony can begin. Firstly, the 'dô'ri kneels down (the spot is marked x on Figure 5.2). He rests with both knees on the ground with his body kept upwards and his head turned towards the three leaves and the tree. He then says a prayer (Chapter 8, Text 2):

Oh, angry and sick old gods,  
and subordinate gods,  
For you, we and our widows have sold many bracelets and earrings.  
We have brought chickens and eggs  
And we give this sacrifice.  
Now you ought to keep all of our generations well and in peace.  
As you have eaten chicken and egg,  
You may not forget us.

When he has finished the prayer, he cuts the head of the chicken and places the head on the middle banana leaf, and sprinkles the blood on the three leaves. Thereupon he throws some of the feathers of the chicken on the leaf in the middle.

Thereafter he goes to the long row of leaves and repeats the same ceremony in front of the first leaf nearest to the tree. This
time, however, he begins the prayer by mentioning the goddess Āiløng (God No. 2 in the list). After having finished the prayer, he cuts the head of the chicken with a knife. He places the head of the chicken on the leaf and sprinkles some blood on that leaf.

To the next god Ā'grāng (God No. 3 in the list) he says the prayer and offers an egg. Carefully, without cracking it, he puts it on the leaf. He then sprinkles the leaf with some of the blood from the slaughtered chicken. To the following god Kā'dzī (God No. 4 in the list) he again sacrifices a chicken in the same way. In this way he proceeds to all the gods varying the sacrifices between chicken and eggs. When he has finished the ceremony outside in the courtyard he enters the kitchen and goes to the row to the north of the fireplace (Figure 5.3). There he continues the same ceremony as outside, varying the sacrifices between chicken heads and eggs.

Having finished the last sacrifice inside the kitchen-house, the 'dô-uri goes outside in the courtyard and prepares a meal of the bodies of the chickens killed outside in the courtyard, some rice and some curry. He places a new banana leaf in front of each of the other leaves outside in the courtyard. (Not the leaves inside in the kitchen-house). Anew he kneels down in front of the leaves, first in front of the leaf. He says no prayers but distributes the chicken meat, some rice and curry to the new leaves in front of the original ones.

The 'dô-uri then takes a water pot and a 'tūlūsī leaf (thulushi, the holy basil leaf) and uses the 'tūlūsī leaf to sprinkle some water on all the banana leaves. Ādīrām gives the following explanation: ‘as the gods now have finished their meals, they are driven away again by the sprinkling of water.’ Thereafter the 'dô-uri collects all the things distributed on the banana leaves: the chicken heads, the eggs, the chicken meat, the rice and the curry, and the 'dô-uri and the members of the family eat it as a meal.

The 'dô-uri won’t perform any new ceremony inside in the kitchen, and the things placed on the leaves there may be eaten by the family without any prayers or ceremony. When the meal is finished they drink rice wine, bake some cakes and prepare some sweets, which they eat. Then they make music, sing, dance and make merry. The women will partake. In the morning on the
Figure 5.4: Recent hen sacrifice at a family bā’tōug (photo anonymous, 2010)

Figure 5.5: Musicians playing at a public New Year’s celebration organized in Guwahati one day before the proper religious Šāklārī Hē’nāi was to be celebrated with families in their villages. Note that all men in the photo wear vests sewn from cut cloth; Siiger’s collections include no garments of this variety (photo P. Andersen 2012)
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Figure 5.6: Male jömbaināi, red and white checked silk. Note the similarity with this garment, collected by Siiger, and that worn by the flute player, above (item 7, photo Danish National Museum 2015)

Figure 5.7: Bodo women dancing at a public New Year’s celebration (photo P. Andersen 2012)
Religion

second day, the head of the family cleans the place outside in the courtyard. This place is called D in Figure 5.2, towards the south end of the courtyard.

Here he places a banana leaf for each member of the family who is dead, from the grandparents down to the present generation. On each leaf he puts some meat, rice and curry as a meal for the dead person. And he puts a cup of wine for each of the deceased. If he has not got cups he can make small groove in the ground and

Figure 5.8: A stringed instrument (serja) played at a public New Year’s celebration. Note the musician’s scarf. Today, such scarves in green, yellow or red are typically exchanged between hosts and guests at solemn occasions, but there are not any such scarves in Siiger’s collections, and this kind of ceremonial exchange may have begun more recently (photo P. Andersen 2012)
use that. While doing all this he will face towards the south. (This is because the dead are buried in the direction north-south, with the head at the south end). And while performing the ceremony he mentions the names of the deceased.

Later on he collects the food and the drinks again and distributes them to the members of the family, who will consume them. Thereafter they bake cakes and make sweets, which they eat. Then they go out in the village and visit the other families. They sing and dance in the courtyards and ask for small presents such as eggs, rice, wine, etc. They go on like this for all the remaining days of the festival, that is to say the afternoon of the second day plus the following five days.

**Nævån**

This festival is said to be the next one after the New Year’s festival. It takes place during the months Ā’sār or ’Sāwån (approximately May–June). This festival is called ‘Nævån (= new) (naion, Bengali word). During this festival they worship the goddess Ā’su Māj naw (Āshu Mainao; āsu = early rice, rice that can be harvested early in the year.
Religion

The āsu rice is sown in the spring season, approximately February–March, and can be harvested in May–June; Māj'nāu is identified with the goddess Lakshmi). This festival is a harvest festival.

When they have harvested the new rice and have consumed all the old rice they are going to begin eating the new rice. The 'Nævån ceremony is celebrated before they begin eating the new rice. The head of the family will call the 'dô-uri and inform him that the next evening they will eat the new rice for the first time.

The 'dô-uri goes through the same preparations and ceremonies as in the New Year’s festival up to the moment of sprinkling water on the banana leaves. Then the 'dô-uri recites the prayer, which begins with invoking various divine powers and then carries on by a statement regarding the costs of the ritual (Chapter 8, Text 1). From now, the head of the family proceeds with the ceremonies. In the evening when they are going to eat their first meal of the new rice, the head of the family will place in the eating room of

9. Although Siiger refers to ‘Text 1,’ an examination of the texts reveals that Text 1 and Text 2 are two parts of the same prayer, which begins ‘Khâria Børai Māharaja,’ and is presented in full above. (Eds)
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the kitchen-house, the tools used in the rice fields. They must be placed along the east wall of the room.

The four tools are generally placed on the ground one beside the other (Figure 5.10), but some people place them one on the top of the other. They may do as they like. The head of the family now puts some rice, curry, vegetables and meat on the banana leaf in front of these things, whilst saying some ceremonial words. When the head of the family has said this, he will beat each of the tools three times and recite (Chapter 8, Text 3A)

Oh hoe, knife, axe and sickle
We have worked too much with you
And without cutting, you have kept our feet and hands nicely
We gave you newly harvested Spring rice
Eat! Eat!

Then he goes outside into the courtyard to the assembled people, leaving the tools and the meal untouched behind him. Outside, all of them take a meal consisting of the food prepared by the 'dô̄ri. There are no ceremonies. When they have finished the meal, the children run into the eating room of the kitchen-house and eat the meal laying on the banana leaves in front of the tools. There is an old saying that children eating that meal will become brave.

Now the head of the family will think that as the people have eaten and the tools have eaten too, the oxen that pull the plough ought to have something to eat. He then makes some bundles of paddy, goes to the cowshed and gives each of the oxen two bundles and each of the cows one bundle. And he says, ‘We gave to gods and to tools as well.’

You too, eat!’ At this event there is no dancing and no singing.

'Nævân II
This festival is the next one after the 'Næwân that celebrated the May-June rice harvest. This 'Nævân is celebrated for the second rice harvest, in the month of 'Pōüs (approximately December).

10. Siiger notes: the tools have not cut the feet and hands of those using them when working with them in the past season.
11. This implies, ‘now we give also to you, oxen and cows.’ See Text 3B.
Religion

This time, they worship a goddess named 'Sālī Māj'nāu (shali; 'Sālī = winter rice). Originally, the full name was 'Mājsali (maj = paddy). ('Sālī Māj'nāu is mentioned as No. 15 in the list of gods). The ceremony takes place exactly in the same way as during the 'Nævân ceremony described above.

*Bælă’gŭr său’năi (Belagur shaonai)*

Informant: 'Tanesår, 20 January 1950

It is the name of a festival performed by the cowherds in the month of Māg (approximately January). The name indicates something like ‘sacrifice by the burning fire’. In the month of Māg, the cowherds finish their annual terms. In the month of Păgŭn (approximately February), they begin their new term. The main purpose of the festival is to burn away all troubles, abuses, curses and so on which they have experienced and caused during the past year as cowherds.

The festival takes place on the first day of the month of Māg. During the last week prior to that day the cowherds go from house to house collecting eggs and rice. While asking for these things they play their flutes and sing songs of their own free compositions. When they have collected sufficient eggs and rice, they walk out to a place beside the river. When the sun sets, they collect some wood, stack the branches on a big pyramid and set it on fire.

They fry the eggs and cook the rice and take a meal. After the meal one of the cowherds will light the fire and will lead all the cowherds in the recitation of the following chant in a sort of mass-tone. (Chapter 8, Text 15 a. & b).

To all who have been kind and helped us,  
even in the big jungle,  
may they eat with their children and grandchildren,  
and live a long life.  
Let the men last long who let us stay  
in their huts during the rainstorms.  
Let there be sons and grandsons  
for those who fed us.

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12. *Bælă’gŭr* = sacrifice by fire, burnt offering; *Său’năi* = to burn, from *său.*
Let there be many buffaloes and cows for our good masters.

Let those who did not feed us die childless.
Let everything be finished for those who have chased and beaten us.
Let the lords who did us injustices live without many buffaloes or cows.
Let the man who did not share his hut have the same experience we had when the rain was falling.

When they have finished the recitation, they will go back home. Early next morning, they assemble again at the same spot. Here stands a hut, which they have made the day before. Before the crow cries in the morning they will set fire to the hut. When they take care to get up before the crow cries, it is a sort of promise that in the period to come they will be early risers and active men. (The meaning of the burning of the hut is unknown.)

**Bø'tør Mâ'dāj Hé'nāj:** Seasonal Offering

This ceremony takes place in the month of 'Pālgūn or 'Shroïtrŏ (springtime; approximately February–March). When the time for this festival approaches, all the members of the family gather in the house of the father. If any members are living in other places, messages will be sent to them to summon them. When they are all assembled, they discuss the ceremony with the 'dô'ri of the family. Each family has got its own 'dô'ri. When the day for the ceremony has been fixed, the 'dô'ri begins by preparing the outside altar as well as the inside altar in the same way as described for the New Year festival (above), with the only difference that furthermore he

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13. bôthôr madai hônai; Kamrup-type. bo'tør = season, time; mā'dāj = god, goddess; hê'nāj = give (he) (nomen) sacrifice, offering (nah); modaaj hônaj = offering, idol worship; bo'tør modaaj hônaj = the offering of the season.

14. This statement indicates that the 'dô'ri is related to the family and not to the village, that is, each village has several 'dô'ris, each of which caters to one or a few families. This characterisation may or may not be accurate. We leave the question of 'dô'ri organisation open. (Eds)
Religion

will take some leaves of the kāng’klā grass (khoŋkhla; a kind of jungle grass used by some [but not by Bodos] as thatch) and plant some pieces of that grass behind each one of the banana leaves for the gods but not behind the leaves inside in the kitchen house. Thereupon the 'dō‘ri takes some powder of ground rice and sprinkles it in the spaces between the leaves. He acts in the same way inside the house.

In the southwest corner of the courtyard (Figure 5.11), they have built a special place for the goddess 'Bŭlī 'Bŭ‘rī (No. 16, list of gods). During this ceremony, the goddess is not together with the other gods; she comes alone. From the figure, it can be seen that they have put the three bamboo sticks down into the ground and covered the two distances between the sticks with bark from the banana tree, while the third distance towards the west is uncovered. Inside that space, the 'dō‘ri places banana leaves and sprinkles rice powder in the two

Figure 5.11: Bo‘tør Må‘dāj Hé‘nāj
spaces between the leaves, and to the east of each leaf he plants some pieces *kāng’kłā* grass. He sacrifices a hen and puts its head unto the middle leaf and sprinkles some of the blood on all three leaves.

When the 'dō'ri sacrifices in front of the *bā’tō’g*, he says a prayer adapted to the ritual. When he sacrifices in front of the 'Būlī 'Bū'rī' place he says the same prayer (as in the 'Sāklārī Hē’nāj Text 2), only this time beginning with 'Būlī 'Bū'rī and not with Khåri’ā, etc.

When he has finished the sacrifices, he takes some rice powder and mixes it with water. This paste is sprinkled on the wall to the east of the entrance door to the kitchen-house. When these ceremonies are done with, they take the meat of the sacrificed animals and prepare a meal and eat it. When the meal is over they drink wine and begin dancing and singing. (Âdî'rām cannot recall any songs). They dance among one another in the courtyard, but only the men. The women won’t take part; neither in the ceremony nor in the dancing. They serve the meal for the men and carry on their usual daily work inside the houses.

While dancing the men stop with intervals in front of that wall which is to the west of the entrance door of the kitchen-house. Here they knock their elbows against the wall until it has become broken and a hole is made. This is greeted by loud cries of joy and, if the head of the family has got some wine (rice beer) on the *a’tal* (*athal*; shelf) in the eating room, they take it and drink it. Having finished drinking the festival is over.15

**Ŏmrāu Kĕ'rāj**

Informant: Lŏkî'răm Børgavari (Lokhiram Bôrgavari), from the Sessapani oil district, Patki julı, December 18, 1949

The **Ŏmrāu Kĕ'rāj** (*omrao kherai*) festival is celebrated during the month of 'Søîtrø (approximately March). It is a festival for the entire population. This festival might also be called the ‘Shepherds’ Kĕ'rāj. When they want to celebrate this festival they first assemble in a certain place and deliberate upon the matter. It is only the shepherds that will assemble.

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15. The rice beer (*jōu*) prepared by the Bodos is very intoxicating when consumed in fermented or perhaps even distilled form. (Eds)
Religion

When they have made up their minds, they collect rice, wine, chickens and eggs, which they carry to the grazing field. In the grazing field they make the altar, bă’tō,\(^{16}\) according to the instruc-

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\(^{16}\) From this point forward, including subsequent chapters, Siiger writes ‘bă’tō’ rather than ‘bă’tŏg’ without explanation for the change. (Eds)

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Figure 5.12: Ėmrāu Kērāj

When they have made up their minds, they collect rice, wine, chickens and eggs, which they carry to the grazing field. In the grazing field they make the altar, bă’tō,\(^{16}\) according to the instruc-
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The construction given by the 'âdzâ (oja). The bâ’tō is of the common and well-known construction i.e., the mud wall for the gods will face towards the north (Figure 5.12). But of course there is no dwelling outside in the field upon which they could build the wall. Instead of the real cactus tree they will take a branch of a cactus tree and plant it down in the ground like a real tree. When everything is ready, they summon the 'âdzâ, two 'dô’ri, the 'dō’dînî, the 'gîtăl, the pâssî, drummers, flute players and wine distributors.

At the beginning, the dō’dînî takes a sword in front of the gateway to the bâ’tō. Thereafter all the other people take the places as illustrated above. The sword is stuck into the ground with the edge towards the west. They use an ordinary sword. The 'dô’ri has milk in the pot and nine grains of rice and nine leaves of bent grass. In his hands he has a ring and nine twigs of basil. The two oil lamps are burning in front of the altar.

Măj’nău Dîsjŏ’năj¹⁷

Informant: Măkōrăm, Patkijuli, 8–9 December 1949

This festival takes place in the months of Pagun and Sôîtrọ. If a man has got for instance 300 mounds of rice in his storehouse, he considers whether it is sufficient for himself and his family. If he comes to the conclusion that it is insufficient, he says Măj’nău Kăr’baj.¹⁸

Thereupon he goes to an 'âdzâ to get information of what may be the reason. The 'âdzâ looks into the nine cowries and tells him whether Măj’nău has disappeared or not. If he learns that Maj’nău has disappeared, he asks the 'âdzâ whether it will be necessary for him to call a 'gîtăl and a 'dô’ri. If the 'âdzâ says that it is unnecessary to call a 'gîtăl because the 'âdzâ himself is able to sing, the man will call a 'dô’ri only. But for the ceremony, he will also call a dō’dînî, flute players and a pâssî.

On the fixed day, he cleans the kitchen-house with mud and cow dung (this is the common way of cleaning up) and he cleans the bâ’tō. He puts new mud on it and plasters it with new cow dung, and surrounds the bâ’tō with new bamboo poles and bamboo

¹⁷. For the myth behind this festival, see Chapter 6, 163–170.
¹⁸. Mainao kharbai; kâr = run away, i.e. Măj’nău has disappeared.
Religion

sticks. On the night preceding the ceremony, the 'dô-uri abstains from any sexual intercourse with his wife. The next morning the 'dô-uri and the dô-dinî both take a bath and put on new clothes and then they and the 'ådză go to the bâ'tô. Here the dô-dinî takes a seat on the chair facing towards the east. The 'dô-uri squats a little to the north of the dô-dinî, facing towards the east. In front of him he places a banana leaf and puts some grains of rice and some basil leaves on it. The 'ådză squats behind them.

The 'ådză opens the ceremony by calling the gods, mentioning their names one by one (as in the list in the beginning of this chapter). When the 'ådză has finished calling the gods, the 'dô-uri cuts the neck of a chicken, places the head on the banana leaf and sprinkles some of the blood on it. This is called 'sălămî. The 'ådză then begins to recite the legend of Mâj'nâ Dîsjînâj, up to the point where 'Băsor 'Bănîa asks the girl if she agrees to go with him or not. From this point, the 'ådză changes his voice into singing and recites two songs. (Chapter 8 Texts 8 and 9)

I won’t go, I won’t go
to your house, elder brother.
Your wives have harassed and troubled me
and left me feeling depressed
As the small piece of cloth
hides in the rickstand, so
the wound of my heart
hides within me

Come! Come along, younger sister!
Let us go to Ră’dză Bă’tô!

19. The meaning of 'sălâmî is not quite clear. This word is known from a few other ceremonies. In former days, when the members of Mosahari were informed that a tiger had been killed they would clean their houses and perform a ceremony called 'Sălâmî. When a man moved to a new house he would perform a ceremony called 'Sălâmî before entering the new house. As editors, we point to the Arabic word 'salaam', indicating peace and used as a greeting, but as Siiger himself did not point to this obvious link, it may be because he did not accept the linguistic link between Arabic and Boro. (Eds)

20. Rickstand, an antiquated word even in Siiger’s day, is a mounted, open-air storage construction for hay or grain. (Eds)
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Rā’dzā Bā‘tō has made a road of gold.
He has a pond of rice-beer,
a road of rice and plenty of meat.
You will have children
and grandchildren.
You will be surrounded
by servants and cattle.
He has brought a pair of bridesmaids,
a pair of flutes, and a pair of cymbals.

While the ‘ādzā is singing (or the ‘gūṭāl if the ‘ādzā cannot sing) the other walk very slowly round the bā‘tō in the following order: the ‘gūṭāl, the pāssī (phashhi), the dō‘dĭnī and the ‘dō‘ri. The ‘gūṭāl and the pāssī both have a cymbal (djota, jotha), the dō‘dĭnī walks with a stick used in the loom (this stick is called gūnt’sā, gunsha) and the ‘dō‘ri with a water pot (called hlā‘tā, lotha) with water and a basil twig. The flute players remain standing to the east of the bā‘tō. While walking they sing over and over again: Tū binanau tū‘ū, Tū binanau tū‘ū: ‘Come along younger sister, come along, younger sister, come along.’ (Text 8) Meanwhile the ‘ādzā (or the ‘gūṭāl) is singing the two songs. He repeats those songs several times, while the flute players will play their flutes.

It comes to an end when suddenly the dō‘dĭnī jumps out of the row (it is said that when Māj’nā is satisfied with their offerings, singing and dancing she goes into the dō‘dĭnī and takes possession of her, and at that moment the dō‘dĭnī jumps out from the row), runs down to the river and dives into the water searching for Māj’nā. She takes the first thing she gets hold of, it may be a grain of rice that the people have thrown out into the river secretly beforehand, or it may be a snail from the river bottom. She is followed by all the people who remain standing at the river bank, while the ‘gūṭāl is singing and the flute players playing.

When the dō‘dĭnī emerges again from the water the ‘dō‘ri goes out into the water and embrace her. From his water pot he sprinkles some drops of water on her (It is said that when she jumps out into the water she becomes senseless. When she emerges the ‘dō‘ri must
therefore embrace her and sprinkle water on her in order that the goddess may leave her and she may recover to her senses again). Thereafter they all of them walk back to the bā'tō.

When returning, the dō’dinī gives the object she has found in the river to the head of the family, who keeps a measuring basket ready with some grains of rice in it. The dō’dinī puts the object in question down into the basket which the head of the family holds out. He then carries the basket into the kitchen-house (i’sjīng) and keeps it there hanging down from the ceiling in a small water pot called tīng’kli (thinkhli). It is hung up in the northeast corner. Thereupon the dō’dinī again takes a seat on the chair in front of the bā’tō and the ‘dō’ri and the ‘ādzā once more take up their original positions. The ‘ādzā now mentions the names of the gods again and the ‘dō’ri takes his water pot and sprinkles water on the dō’dinī with the basil twig. The dō’dinī role in the ceremony is now over and she withdraws.

Thereupon the ‘dō’ri sacrifices the chickens, pigs and goats according to instructions given by the ‘ādzā, and he sprinkles some drops of blood unto the leaves. The head of the family and the ‘dō’ri now salute the gods, while kneeling down facing towards the east and raising their hands in the ‘Indian salute’. This indicates the end of the ceremony and they begin eating and dancing. The officiating persons get their baksheesh in the same way as at the kērāj festival. They now make merry and entertain themselves by singing and sometimes dancing.

**Amthisū’ā**

Informant: Mākōrām, Patkijuli, 13 December 1949

This ceremony takes place during the month of Ā’sār (approximately June). It is performed by the families themselves. Amthisū’ā means the period of the menstruation of the earth. 21 (There is only one such period during the year). On the Amthisū’ā day the families

21. This idea is consistent with Assamese/Ahom Shaivite traditions which states that Shiva carried the dead body of his first wife Sati (later reborn as Parvati) around. Body parts fell in various places, each now marked as a Hindu pilgrimage site. Her vagina is said to have fallen near Guwahati. A centuries-old underground temple for Kamakhya stands on the spot. Once
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clean their houses and their clothes. They plaster the bă’tō with new mud and summon the ’dō’ri and the ’âdzã (oja). The ’dō’ri makes a bowl from banana bark, pours some water into it and further puts some grains of rice and pieces of bent grass into it. Then the ’dō’ri and the ’âdzã go to the bă’tō and squat there facing towards the east.

The ’âdzã then calls all the gods, one by one. Then the ’dō’ri sprinkles some water on a chicken, which he keeps ready in his hand, whereupon he kills the chicken and places its head in front of the bă’tō. Then again, the ’âdzã calls the gods and the ’dō’ri sprinkles water on the banana leaf. Thereafter, they walk round the house and sprinkle its walls with water, and sprinkle some water on the members of the family. Afterwards, they all of them drink wine.

The ritual functionaries and their tasks

The ’dō’ri (dōuri): family priest

Informant: Măkōrăm, Patkijuli, 13 December 1949

The meaning of the word ’dō’ri is said to be ‘priest’. Among the Bodos there are three kinds of ’dō’ri.

The ’nōnĭ ’dō’ri (nönî ’dōuri) (’nōnĭ, no = house, ni = of, ’dō’ri for the family). This ’dō’ri is selected by the ’âdzã among the members of the family. He must be a grown-up man. If they cannot find any married man, an unmarried man can be selected. When the ’âdzã selects a man to be the ’dō’ri, the latter must be purified early in the morning. He must take a bath and appear in wet clothes in front of the bă’tō. The ’âdzã goes close to the bă’tō and calls the gods and informs them that this man has been selected a ’dō’ri. Thereupon the ’âdzã instructs him to make sacrifices. The new per year, red water is said to flow from a natural spring within the temple. (Eds)

22. Siiger implies that a family might come to an agreement about whom their next ’dō’ri will be. Text 10 (which is otherwise not referred to in the manuscript) is translated as follows: ‘We have selected this man to minister to you. Now he is standing before you. Please accept him, selected nicely by yourselves.’
Religion

'dō'ri takes banana leaves and places them on the altar (the mud wall of the bă'tō). The 'ādză tells him what is going to be sacrificed to the various gods and the 'dō'ri makes sacrifices according to the instructions.23

After the sacrifices, the 'dō'ri kneels down in front of the bă'tō and salutes towards the east. And the 'dō'ri takes a small pot with water and a basil twig and sprinkles drops of water on the bă'tō and the altar and upon himself. This is the end of the inauguration. From now on the 'nōnĭ 'dō'ri has the duties to perform the ceremonies for the family. His routine duties will be to lead the private ceremonies and festivals. Should it at other occasional events be necessary for the family to invoke the gods, the 'nōnĭ 'dō'ri will perform the ceremonies.

The 'nōnĭ 'dō'ri must always sleep in the 'nŏmănō (kitchen-house, probably the same as khopra, but this is not certain). He may not sleep in the iśing. As soon as he leaves the house and goes to other places, he must himself prepare his meal or he can let it be prepared by an unmarried man. But it is prohibited for him to eat anything which has been prepared by a married man or any woman – outside the family.

If the members of the family are living in various places, he can be summoned to visit them in order to perform the 'nōnĭ 'dō'ri ceremonies. He can remain a 'nōnĭ 'dō'ri until he dies. But if he falls into adultery or suffer from leprosy he will be dismissed.

Second, the 'rādjŏnĭ 'dō'ri.24 He performs the 'dō'ri ceremonies at the common festivals. It is prohibited to him to carry a dead body. If he is caught in adultery or suffers from leprosy, he is dismissed.

Third, the 'bāmăn 'dō'ri.25 He is selected among the villagers, but he must be of the 'nādzărĭ 'hārĭ (narjari, nar'jari). His only duty is to perform purification. If for instance a man has committed incest, he has to be purified by a 'bāmăn, and if a man has

23. The sacrifices to the gods are the same that are mentioned in various other places.
24. raijŏni 'dō'ri, raijŏni 'dō'ri. 'rāj'dzø = kingdom. Here it means a village 'dō'ri. For the appointment of this 'dō'ri and his duties, see the autobiography of Păsă'rū.
25. 'bāmăn is the Boro language word for Brahmin
eaten meals prepared by member of other nation (Muslims, etc.), he has become bădŏ'ă (badua, unclean) and has to be purified by a 'bămăn.

The 'âdză (oja): Bodo Medicine Man

Informant: Măkōrăm, Patkijuli, 14 December 1949

Any man who wants can study to become an 'âdză, but he must be a pupil with an 'âdză who will teach him. In a village there may be several 'âdzâs. In every ceremony, general as well as private, the 'âdză has certain duties. He has the duty to invoke the gods and instruct the 'dō”ri concerning his performances. It is closely observed that both the 'âdză and the 'dō”ri are present at all ceremonies. One of them cannot act without the other.26 There are no special prohibitions for an 'âdză.

1. It is the duty of the 'âdză to consult the nine cowries concerning the will of the gods in certain cases, for instance in case of illness.

2. The 'âdză knows the medicine, the herbs and the treatment of the sick person.27

3. The 'âdză knows the mantra by means of which he can kill men.28

The Village Dō’dînî

Informant: Măkōrăm, Patkijuli, 14 December 1949

Only a woman can become a dō’dînî.29 There is only one dō’dînî in a village. The dō’dînî are not common and there are villages without a dōudînî. In that case they fetch one from another village, sometimes many miles away, for the necessary performances.

26. We observe that Siiger appears to contradict himself. In his description of the rituals associated with the New Year (Sâklârî Hê’näi), he reports that the 'dō”ri performs the rituals without supervision. (Eds)

27. The medicine bag used by the âdză is called 'dzôlenggă (jôlengga).

28. As such he is also called ‘dăjnă (daina)

29. As with the previous section, Siiger had intended to provide a rigorous definition of ‘dō’dînî’. However, he wrote only, ‘The meaning of the word dō’dînî’, left a space (presumably to be filled in later) and continued with the chapter. (Eds)
Religion

A dō’dìnī is selected by the ‘âdzā. He makes his choice among the young girls according to his own free will and opinion. Afterwards he asks the gods to give her their initiation. But he can also select her at the time when he puts new clay on the skin of the big drum, called kām.30 The girl must be selected before the clay is put on the drum. When the clay is put on he asks the gods to give her their initiation.

If a dō’dìnī gets married to a man who does not want her to remain a dō’dìnī, he can go to an âdzā and ask him to give her some medicine in order to protect her against the gods. Then the gods won’t take possession of her any longer and she will lose her ability for ecstasy.

There is no initiation ceremony for a newly chosen dō’dìnī. If some young girl or woman feels much attracted by the drumming ceremonies and cannot stay at home as soon as she hears a drum going. She will be appointed as a dō’dìnī by the villagers and will then be chosen by the âdzā.

There are no special prohibitions for a dō’dìnī.

The dō’dìnī acts at the selection of the ‘dō’ri, at the ‘Măină’ Diśo’năi-ceremony, and at the Kĕ’răj festival. In case of diseases she may be summoned and will tell what must be done in order to regain recovery. (The name of the disease may be found by the ‘âdzā by means of nine cowries. But in case he cannot make it out, or in case the gods give him order through the cowries, he will summon the dō’dìnī.)

Wherever the dō’dìnī acts she must put on a quite new dress which has never been used previously. There is nothing peculiar in her clothes.

Ritual Purification Ceremonies

Incest
A man becomes āgăr’băd (ā’gar means to become like an animal, to be in the stage of an animal; bad comes from bădŭ’a = unclean; ogor = bad) if he commits incest with his mother, his sister or his

30. kham; Boro language: dhol, an Assamese word; kham can be made by anybody, but the âdzā must be present when the clay is put on it.
daughter or if he kills a cow or eats cow meat. As for his purification there are various rules:

a) As for incest, the man must take two pigs, a chicken and an egg, and must prepare rice and wine. On the day of purification, the man and the woman must go towards the south to a river. The man carries with him one of the pigs, the chicken and the egg. The 'bāmān and the 'ādzā and the villagers accompany them. One of the villagers makes a pig shed, with a manger inside and an altar towards the north. The altar consists of an oblong space from which the turf has been removed and the naked soil cleaned (Figure 5.13).
Religion

In the north end of the altar a cup is placed \( (G_1) \). In the middle of the altar a banana leaf \( (L) \), and to the south a cup \( (G_2) \) containing cow dung and dung of pigs, dogs, vultures, kites and fowl. To the west of the altar is a row of six arrows and two bows. Towards the south of the altar is the pig shed, while the \'bāmān stands in front of the altar with the \'ādzā behind him. The villagers gather towards the north.

First one of the villagers goes to the pig shed and, beating the manger, he calls:\(^{31}\) ‘Come here you boar! Come here, you sow!’ Three times he repeats the exclamation. The man crawls on all fours into the pig shed, crying, ‘Ush ush!’ (the Boro language imitation of a grunting pig). After him the woman crawls on all fours into the pig shed, crying in the same way. When they have come into the pig shed, the villagers set the roof of the pig shed on fire. The man and the woman inside will have to rescue themselves as best they can by running out.

After the man and woman are safe, the villagers will kill the pig and cut six small pieces of the meat, which they will put on arrowheads. Now the \'ādzā and \'dōri shoot the arrows, first the \'ādzā and then the \'dōri and so on until all six arrows have been shot. They will shoot in the following directions: east, north, west, south, upwards, downwards.

The man and the woman will go to the river and take a bath. After bathing they go close up to the altar. The \'ādzā calls the gods and mentions the names of rivers known to them (Brahmaputra, Ganges, Tista, etc.) and then says (Chapter 8, Text 12)

\[
\text{You, giver,} \\
\text{who is in possession of honour!} \\
\text{You, god,} \\
\text{who is capable of forgiveness!} \\
\text{If four-footed animals also fall down (sin),} \\
\text{why should not human beings fall down?} \\
\text{You, giver,} \\
\text{who is in possession of honour!}
\]

\(^{31}\) \( pō^u \) būn’dā, \( pō^u \) būn’di, \( pō^u \) (\( pō^u \) = exclamation used in calling for pigs; \( būn’dā \) = boar, \( bundi \) = soar).
You, god,  
who is capable of forgiveness!  
Kindly forgive this man for his offence.

Thereupon the 'dō'ri or the villagers mix dung with water and give the mixture to the man and the woman to drink. Again, the 'ādzā invokes the gods and mentions the names of the rivers, using the same text as above.

Now, the 'dō'ri kills the chicken and throws it away, and throws away the egg, too. The 'dō'ri takes the banana cup, in which water and milk are mixed. With bent grass, he will sprinkle this liquid upon the man and the woman. Once more, the 'ādzā calls the gods, enumerates the names of the rivers and repeats the text. Thereupon the 'ādzā, the 'dō'ri, the man and the woman all kneel down facing towards the east and salute the gods. Now they will all go back home to the village, taking the remaining pig meat with them. They will kill the other ceremony-pig in the village and they will make meals of the pigs, everybody getting his share.

Thereafter, family members of the two guilty persons will have to clean their house and their clothes and the bā'tō. The noni 'dō'ri and the 'ādzā will perform the necessary home-ceremony. They will go to the bā'tō, place banana leaves on the altar, the 'ādzā will call the gods and the 'dō'ri will take a chicken and sacrifice it to the bā'tō (bura bā'tō). With a cup of water, a ring and bent grass, he sprinkles the bato and the leaves on the alter and sprinkles all the houses belonging to the family in question. Then the 'ādzā and the 'dō'ri kneel down and salute the gods.

Cow Killing
In case a man kills a cow, the cow’s rope is tied around the man’s neck and, for three or four weeks, he must go begging from house to house through six or seven villages. He must not talk and, if anybody asks him a question, he is only allowed to answer: må må (Boro language’s imitation of a cow). If somebody gives him some rice, he will use it for making wine and if he gets money, he will

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32. This liquid is called santidāi (shanthi doi) (santi = peace, dō = water: water that brings peace). To kill the chicken is called absa hōnaj (absha honai) absa = to sacrifice, h'onaj = giving, hō = to give.
Religion

use it for buying two pigs. When the begging period is over, there will be a purification ceremony for him near the river. Here, the same altar is built as above, but without a pig shed, and the same ceremonies are performed by the same celebrants; the ritual is the same.

At the opening of the ceremony, the 'âdză calls the gods and enumerates the names of the rivers. The man walks down to the river, takes off the rope, and takes a bath. Then, they will kill the pig and the same ceremony takes place as for purification because of incest.

Adultery or ‘Unchastity’
In these cases, the Bodo perform a purification ceremony called pāñ'slåt (phoŋshlot). They go down to the river and make an altar. They take a chicken and an egg along with them. On the altar, they put two cups of banana bark. In one of the cups, they pour water and put a ring and some bent grass into it. In the other cup, they put cow dung mixed with water. The altar is of the same as for the other purification ceremonies.

The 'âdză opens the ceremony by invoking the gods and enumerating the names of the rivers. The 'dō'ri kills the chicken and puts the chicken head on the banana leaf as a sacrifice. He also puts the egg on the banana leaf. The guilty man walks down to the river and takes a bath. Returning from the river, he stands as on Figure 5.14. The 'dō'ri takes the cup with the cow dung and gives it to the guilty man to drink. Then the 'dō'ri takes the other cup and sprinkles water on him.

Then the guilty man enters and kneels. The 'âdză and the 'dō'ri also kneel down facing toward the east and salute the gods, the

33. The altar must be built in the direction: north – east.
34. Siiger makes a reference to The Eastern Anthropologist (1956) 9:2, p. 132. This is a review by T.N. Madan of McKim Marrioti ed., (1955) Village India: Studies in the little community. Chicago, University of Chicago Press. From the context, Siiger clearly supports Madan’s criticism of Kathleen Gough’s essay in the volume. Gough claims both that drinking dung is a ‘punishment’ and that human dung is used. Madan argues that ‘ritual purification’ is very different from ‘punishment’ and that, in his experience, human excrement is never used. (Eds)
'âdză calling the gods’ names again. The 'dō'ri takes the cup G1 and sprinkles some water on the altar. The same ritual takes place as described for the other purification ceremonies. Cases of adultery and unchastity used to be very rare among the Bodos.\textsuperscript{35} The same ceremony will be used as purification if someone has eaten meals prepared by non-Bodo people, and also when someone wants to enter into marriage with a non-Bodo.\textsuperscript{36} The purification ceremony takes place in the evening of the day before the wedding ceremony. Afterwards, they must feed the people lavishly.

\textsuperscript{35} It is said that the goddess Măjnău committed adultery three times with her brother-in-law, Sang Radza. Therefore, both of them had to go through the purification ceremony three times. The first time it happened while she was feeding the pigs; the second time when she was gathering a \textit{dingkia møgum} (a sort of vegetable: \textit{dinkhia} = a fern; \textit{moigun} = vegetables); and the third time was while she was gathering leaves of the castor oil plant. (The silkworm eats the juice of this plant. Of this plant, castor oil is obtained).

\textsuperscript{36} The Bhutanese are considered the Bodos’ guru-masters. No purification is needed after eating or before marrying with a Bhutanese person.
Religion

This ceremony is performed both when a foreign girl is taken to the Bodo settlement for marriage and when a Bodo man has gone to a foreign population, married a woman there, and returns with her. In the second case, both man and women have to undergo the purification ceremony. Intermarriage with foreigners is very rare, as is intermarriage with Bhutanese.

Collective misfortune

In cases of disaster or misfortunes, for example cholera, smallpox, tigers killing cattle and men, and so on, it is believed that there must be some case of secret adultery. The whole village goes down to the river. The ōdza makes altar, invokes Aham Apar, Burabato, Maharadza, Mahadev, Barmani, Mautantri, and Kali, and recites (Chapter 8, Text 13):

We cannot read the minds of others
You do know their minds. You can see.
Please reveal anyone among us
who has committed sin.
We beg your help!
Please hear our prayer.

Then, they take a hoe and make it red-hot in a fire. One by one, each walks down to the river and dives into the water. Then he takes the red-hot hoe in his hands and throws it backwards over his head. The guiltless will not get burnt, whereas the guilty one will. The guilty person is fined Rs 5.11.0 and has to go through the ordinary purification ceremony for adultery.37

37. In 1922, Mākōrām was living in the village Mosati. The village was heavily struck by cholera, five to six persons dying daily. In those days Mākōrām suffered from insomnia because some villagers committed adultery during the night. All the villagers now walked down to the river and went through the fire test. Forty guilty persons were found, fined and purified. Thereafter the cholera disappeared.
Halfdan Siiger earned a Master’s degree in theology and later the equivalent of a Ph.D in the history of religion. He described himself as a religo-ethnographer and may have been influenced by the Scandinavian ritual and myth school of religious history. This school sought to demonstrate the close relationship between ritual, text, and daily life. Whereas this school evaluated the relevance of written texts, Siiger broke new ground by collecting oral texts in a way that enabled him to establish a direct link between myth and ritual. For example, the legend concerning the origin of the gods changes between narration of the story and very factual descriptions of how present-day (1950) rituals actually incorporate those narratives in their performance. The memory of the 'Băubuţă Rădză is in fact recited during one of the important festivals of the year.

It is evident that Siiger has organised this chapter with the aim of communicating how the myths and legends explained traditional Bodo society and religion, rather than an interest in the transcendent aspects of the stories. This priority reveals itself in the order he presents the legends: Siiger starts with the sacred origins of

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1. See for example W. Harrelson 2005 [1987]. Scholars of the myth and ritual school label the stories attached to rituals as ‘myths.’ Siiger, by contrast, has chosen to label these texts ‘legends and myths.’ He makes no effort to explain the difference between a legend and a myth, nor does he identify which texts fall into each category. Further, Siiger distinguishes both legends and myths from the ‘folk stories and traditions’ presented in the next chapter. Clearly, Siiger was developing a ritual-text typology that went beyond that developed in the myth and ritual school. (Eds)
familial groups, as he calls the haris, and the real world constraints on and expectations regarding each of these groups.

Whereas Sidney Endle (1911:24–29) reported about twenty different septs or sub-tribes, as he termed the haris, Siger only reports twelve groups. The reason seems to be that, at least in the villages he visited, Bodos believed that there were exactly 12 haris, no more and no less. Siger, who was well aware of Endle’s work, made no attempt to explain the difference. It is perhaps significant that Siger’s report omits the Swarga-aroi (or heaven-flock,) which Endle reported to be ‘the highest of all’ (S. Endle 1911:24). Siger’s informants also described one hari that Endle did not mention (Ovāri), despite Endle’s clear attempt to compile a fully comprehensive list.

To Endle, depictions of the haris were history in the same way that he believed the books the Christian Old Testament were history. This is one reason Endle argued that the haris must have been endogamous at some time in the past (S. Endle 1911:25.). This argument, while consistent with his world view, had to make certain compromises with other understandings of human reproduction in the context of lightly populated early generations. We keep in mind that these myths focus on families within the Bodo community and not on the broader issue of human development per se.

As usual, Siiger shows great respect for not only the ideas, but also the voice and presentation of his informants. The legends in this chapter are based on interviews with two men who share the same name: one is Mākōrām (Maguram), son of Dā’kår (Dakhor); the second is Pastor Mākōrām (Mosahari), whose contributions appear throughout this manuscript.

2. This critique was already forwarded in a footnote inserted by Endle’s editor, J.D. Anderson. The publication was hereby brought in accordance with the generally accepted view of the haris. J.D. Anderson, however, did not criticize Endle’s characterization of haris as part of a totemic system (S. Endle 1911:24 note 1). Totemism remained an accepted term in anthropology at least until Claude Lévy-Strauss challenged its accuracy and usefulness (1968 [1962]). Siiger’s approach to the haris more than a decade earlier may be seen as a forerunner of Lévy Strauss’ critique. (Eds)
Tradition of the origin of the Haris (Hari)

The original father and mother of the Bodos were Hāgrā'mā Bé'rāi and Hāgrā'mā Bŭ'rī. They had twelve children and lived with them in the jungle. Once upon a time, it came to a great fight among the children and they got scattered around here and there in the jungle. In this manner, the eldest son Boshumatari (Boshumathari) was hiding under the soil from which he had got his name Bushumata which means soil, earth.

The next boy 'Nadjări (Narjari) was hiding in a basket with dry leaves of jute. (nă'djæj 'kisrî (najeg khishri); nă'djæh = dry leaf of jute; 'kisrî = basket)

The third boy Mŏ'sāhări (Moshahari) was hiding among the tigers (mŏ'să, mosha = tiger).

Of the other children Ō'uāri (Ouari) was hiding among the bamboo trees (ŏ'uă, oua = bamboo).

Gă'jări (Gôiari) was hiding in a nut tree, or a garden of nut trees (găj, gōi = nut).

Sŭmpră'mări (Shumphramări) was hiding among the guava trees (sŭmprăm, shumphram = guava).

Dŏjmări (Doimari) was hiding in the waters of a big river (doimă = big river).

Kăklă'vări (Khakhluari) was hiding among the gourds (kăk'lău = gourd).

Hădjø'ări (Hajoiari) was hiding in the mountains (hă'djəo = mountain).

Ishor'ări (Ishori), concerning him they are not quite sure (Ishor = god).

Laj'fangari (Laiphangari; Dovrang dialect: Lajongari) was hiding among the banana trees (laifăng = banana tree).

Bărgavari (Borgoari; Dovrang dialect: borgauari; bør = blessing).

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3. Măkörmă (Maguram) recited the following to me on 23 November 1949. He was taught this tradition by his father, Dă'kăr (Dakhor), who is now about 70 years old and still lives in the village of Mŏdjărti (Môjarthi), Kochugaon P.O., Goalpara District. Dă'kăr’s father had told him the story, and Dă'kăr himself first shared it with his son Măkörmă about 35 years ago.

4. Hăgră'mă Bé'răi (Hagrama Bōraí) hăgră, (hagra) = jungle; mă = big, great; bĕ'răj = old man; i.e., old man from the big jungle. Hăgră'mă Bŭ'răi (Hagrama Buri) bŭ'răi = old woman, i.e., old woman from the big jungle.
Legends and Myths

A few days later the twelve brothers returned and made an agreement to the effect that each of them should from now on be in connection in one way or the other with the things mentioned in his name.

'Nadjăři. They are equal to the Brahmins and act as priests. For instance, if a man has committed adultery it is their duty to purify him. It is prohibited of this Hari to sow and eat jute.

Mŏ'sāhăři. The members of this Hari have to act as soldiers. It is a Hari for warriors. When it is related that a tiger has been killed, the members of this Hari clean their houses and sprinkle them with water. They sprinkle them by means of two certain kinds of grasses: sām'dūbi (shamduibi; dubi is the short kind of grass growing around the houses) and tūlū'si (thulushi). They wash their clothes and utensils, and sit down and wail. This ceremony is performed because the tigers protected them and did not kill them. They never eat meat that has been touched by a tiger.

Bushumatarı. The members of this Hari cannot cultivate the land. It is strictly prohibited to the members of this Hari to pollute the holy rivers e.g., the Ai river (ai = mother), the Manas river (monas), the Sāŋg'kōs river (shankhos) and the Sumpabote river (shumpabothi) and many other rivers. In general, nobody is allowed to pollute a holy river, but the prohibition is exceptionally severe for the members of this mentioned Hari, and if they do it, the river god will punish them by causing some illness or disaster to their family. They will try to avert this by sacrifices.

Oḇäři. The members of this Hari cannot plant bamboo (ō’ūă, oua = bamboo) (But they may well eat bamboo).6

Gā'jāři. The members of this Hari can neither plant nor eat nuts (goj (goi)).

Sūmpră’măři. The members of this Hari can neither plant nor eat sumpra’m (guava).

Dōj’măři (do’ = water). The members of this Hari ran away and hid themselves in the water.

5. The Bodos consider the mentioned rivers as large, and Siiger notes that small rivers are not holy. (Eds)

6. Endle (1911: 24–29) does not know the Oḇäři, but they are recorded as Owari in K. Brahma (2009 [1998]: 28).
Kăklă’vāri (khakla or lao = calabash). The calabash is rather mealy; this fruit, however, is juicy). The members of this Hari can neither plant nor eat calabash. (Kăk'láv or lāv = calabash, gourd).

Hadjø'ari (hajöari). (hadjø = hills, mountains). The members of this Hari hid in the hills.

Lăj'făng'ari (laifangari) The members of this Hari can neither plant nor eat bananas.

Børga'vari (Borgovari)?

Legend concerning the origin of the gods.

Informant: Măgorăm

Ē'hĕm Bĕ'raj (male) and ĕhĕm Bŭrī (female) lived in Heaven with God, but they did not see God. They had no children and therefore they got angry with Him. Once they made an image of God and took a broom, a pair of wooden sandals and some chili. They placed the image of God at a crossroad, burnt the chili in front of the image and struck it in the face with the sandals and the broom. For three days they cursed God because he did not give them any children, saying, ‘Let your heart be warm and, if you die, we shall wash our clothes on your chest.’

The following day, when ĕhĕm Bŭrī was sweeping the courtyard, she found a fruit named um’rid. She picked it up and kept it tied into a piece of cloth and forgot to eat it. Some days later this fruit had become a child and was crying under the cloth. As they did not know it was a child, they believed it was a rat and ĕhĕm Bĕ'rai took a stick and opened the bundle in order to kill the rat. When they discovered that it was a child, they were very happy – but also frightened. They realised that the child had been given by

7. Siiger includes only a question mark as his description. In his notebooks, he writes that the Børga'vari are similar to Gøjari, meaning the betelnut clan. (Eds) Bor means big one in Assamese. (Siiger)

8. Siiger explains each phrase: ‘Let your heart be warm (give us children) and, if you die (if we remain childless), we will wash our clothes on your chest (expression of contempt).’

9. Umrith, the fruit is unknown. This may be derived from Sanskrit. Amrit, meaning nectar of immortality. (Siiger and eds).
God, but they were afraid to show it in Heaven to the other people, because they were very old. Perhaps people might think that they had stolen the child from somewhere.

Ě'hēm Bě'rai made a measuring basket and gave it to his wife to carry on her belly, and every day she had to exchange the basket with a larger one so that her belly might look still bigger. One day she went to take a bath and was seen by some girls called 'Sîkrî 'Sîklâ. When they discovered her they exclaimed, ‘Oh grandmother, what have you got in your womb? You are very old, but have you got a child in your womb?’ She replied, ‘What shall I do? God has given me a child.’ When the day had come on which they had planned that the childbirth be made known, the woman told her husband to take a gourd and some betelnuts and give them to the 'Sîkrî 'Sîklâ. She asked him to tell the 'Sîkrî 'Sîklâ to spit into the gourd. When 'Sîkrî 'Sîklâ had done so, the old woman told her husband in the evening to bring the gourd into which the 'Sîkrî 'Sîklâ had spit and by means of that liquid she now made her clothes dirty.

The next day, she went to the river and washed her clothes. This was seen by the 'Sîkrî 'Sîklâ, who used to take a bath every day. Then they assumed that she had given birth to a child and she brought them home with her and showed the child to them. The child now gradually grew up and became bigger and he was taught how to use the bow and arrow. Every day he played with the bow and arrow. His father, however, forbade him to go to the northeast side. One day however a thought struck the boy: ‘Let me try to go to the northeast side and play there with my bow and arrow, and let us see what happens.’

On his way, he came upon a fig tree and thought: ‘Maybe there is something under that tree. And he went close to the tree and pushed it down. When he had done so he saw that there was a very dark gap full of water under the tree. That place is called Bŏ'hâk

10. ‘sîkrî = butterfly, but, here ‘sîkrî means many = a group of girls; ‘sîklâ = girl.
11. The 'Sîkrî 'Sîklâ (shikhri shikhla) called the woman a'bôg (abôu, grandmother).
The Bodo of Assam

Pū'ri 'Rajdé. When he was tired of looking at that gap, he replaced the tree and closed the hole again. Then he went back home but did not tell anything. For two to three days he now did not eat anything. When his parents asked him why, he did not answer their questions. But his parents made him tell and at last he said to them: ‘If you take an oath I can tell you.’ Then at last his parents were compelled to take an oath and they chanted, ‘Surely, surely three times surely, if this truth be broken, let our lives be ended.’ Then he told his parents: ‘I am going now to Bō'hâk Pū'ri 'Rajdé.’ And his parents replied, ‘Yes, you may go wherever you like. But wherever you will happen to stay, you should remember us always.’

And they fed him and gave him a bag with provisions enough to last for twelve years. When everything was ready he decided to start. But first he called, ‘Mænă Guru, 'Tænā Guru, 'Hænă Guru, Īs Guru, Bīs Guru, Sād Guru and Dânâ'râm Guru.’ They came and asked him: ‘Our Lord, why did you call us?’ He said to them, ‘Our time has come. Now we shall proceed to Bō'hâk Pū'ri 'Rajdé.’ Then they all agreed to accompany him.

They came to the spot where the fig tree was and Ănăn'dō 'Gosăi pushed down the tree and they all looked down into the

12. These words are Bengali and may mean bohogpuri: a place of sensuous pleasure and enjoyment, heaven, paradise.

13. Siiger offers a detailed analysis of this oath: sād sād tīn sād, ēi, sād kātī'læ, prān' kātī mà'râd (mâ'râk).

Sād = invocation of an oath (in Bengali: 'sāti), tīn = three (times), ēi = this, kātī'læ = broken, kāt = to cut, to break, prān = life, 'kātī = break (imp.), mà'râk = let it be dead (mārā = to die).

Direct translation: ‘Surely, surely three times surely, if this truth be cut down (broken), let the life be dead by cutting (breaking).

He explains that ‘this formula is still used among the Bodo when one takes an oath, but only at important occasions.’

14. These seven brothers are all Bodo gods. Only Meena Guru and Thena Guru are referred to later in the text. Siiger is not consistent in his spelling of their names. As he sometimes uses these more simple spellings, we choose to follow that lead and consistently call them Meena Guru and Thena Guru. (Eds)

15. Siiger clarifies that 'Ārt Guru Ănăn'dō 'Gosăi is the boy’s name. We do not know why the name is not mentioned earlier in the narration. Our guess is that Siiger was loyal to the narrator, Mâkôrâm, and the narrator simply forgot about it until now. As Siiger occasionally uses the shorter name,
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opening. They said, ‘We cannot climb down by means of a rope.’ They therefore called a spider and picked up a hollow gourd and placed a pole at the entrance to Bŏ'hâk Pŭ'ri 'Rajdé. After that they fastened one end of a spiderweb to the pole and with the spider at the other end they went down into the gourd taking the spider with them. They now went down by means of the gourd and at last they reached the water and the gourd floated on the water. When they realised that they were floating on the water and that there was nothing except darkness and water then Ānăn'dō 'Gosăi said, ‘Let there be light!’ and then it grew light.

They now discussed the creating of the earth and Ānăn'dō 'Gosăi said to Meena Guru, ‘You must consult the almanac\(^1\) as to where the soil may be found.’ He then consulted the almanac and there he saw that the soil might be had from Bŭ'hŭ Mŭ'tĭ Ră'dză. That king lived under the water.

They now discussed the matter and Ānăn'dō 'Gosăi asked them, ‘Who will be able to bring that soil?’ They said to each other, ‘It would be a good thing if we could send a kingfisher.’ Then, Ānăn'dō 'Gosăi called the kingfisher. The birds, a husband and wife, came and asked him, ‘Lord, why have you called us?’ Ānăn'dō 'Gosăi answered them, ‘You must bring the soil which is to be had from Bŭ'hŭ Mŭ'tĭ Ră'dză.’ The kingfishers agreed to go. First they flew very high up in the air and then they dived deep down into the water. However they could not reach their destination and halfway down the water they died. When they had died they came up to the surface close to the place where the gourd was. All the Gurus in the gourd smelt the putrid smell from the two dead birds. Looking around they observed the dead birds. Ānăn'dō 'Gosăi pulled them out of the water and beat them with mŭ'rā lătu'tī. Thereby they became mŭ'rā mŭrī.\(^2\) After that he beat them with zĭa lătu’tī (jia

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\(^1\) Siiger notes that the narrator used the word 'păndjă mŭtĭ, (Phanji móthi) the Boro word for calendar.

\(^2\) Mŭ'ră mŭră, Boro language: mŭ'ră = fat, big. Mŭră is one of the words that the Bodo often put after another word as a sort of emphasizing. It means nothing in itself.
The Bodo of Assam

The Bodo of Assam (laothi) and they became alive again. And he blessed them and let them go.

The Gurus now consulted among themselves and decided to call 'Dāⁿnātūr (daonathur). When he arrived he asked, ‘Why have you called for me?’ Guru Ānān'dō 'Gosāi replied, ‘I have called you for you to bring soil from Bū'hū Mū'thī Rā'dzā. Will you be able to bring it?’ 'Dāⁿnātūr replied, ‘Yes, I will be able to bring it.’ 'Dāⁿnātūr dived down into the water together with his wife. But when they arrived to the bottom they died. Then they floated up to the surface of the water close to the spot where the gourd was floating. When the Gurus smelt the putrid smell from the dead bodies, Ānān'dō 'Gosāi pulled the two birds out of the water, beat them with the mū'rā lă'ū'tī by means of which they became mū'rā mū'rī. Then he beat them with zīa lă'ū'tī and they became alive again. He blessed them and let them go.

The Gurus now again discussed the matter and decided to call two crabs, husband and wife. They arrived and asked, ‘Why have you called us?’ Ānān'dō 'Gosāi asked them to bring the soil from Bū'hū Mū'thī Rā'dzā, to which they replied, ‘If you bless us we shall be able to bring the soil.’ Having obtained the blessings they dived down into the water. They went on and arrived at their destination where they intended to steal the soil. Here they nibbled small pieces of soil, piece by piece, and this caused the earth to move just like by earthquakes.

The guards watching the soil realised that somebody was stealing it and when they looked around they spotted the crabs, and they began to chase them. The crabs tried to hide but failed. The guards crushed them under their feet and killed them. The guards now removed the soil from the crabs, scraping it from their backs and recovered the soil. The dead crabs floated up to the surface of the water where the gourd was sailing. When the Gurus smelt the

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18. This is perhaps a kind of kingfisher. [Siiger] We do not know what led Siiger to this conclusion. We observe that creation myths rarely use the same species twice for different purposes. (Eds)

19. Netherworld. (Eds)

20. The manuscript reads ‘… decided to call two birds,’ We have corrected this error. (Eds)
putrid smell from the dead bodies, 'Ārt Guru Ānān'dō 'Gosāi pulled the crabs out of the water and beat them with mū'rā lā'ū'tī whereby they became mū'rā mū'rī. He then beat them with zīa lā'ū'tī but before beating them he removed a few small pieces of soil which were still on the crabs, and when they became alive he blessed them saying, ‘May you have many grandsons.’21 And he let them go.

Guru Ānān'dō 'Gosāi took the soil into his hand, but he knew that without the rāj'lām leaf he would be unable to make the earth.22 He therefore called a pair of parrots, husband and wife. When they had arrived he ordered them to bring the leaf from 'Mājnāgrī mountain. In order to do so, they had to cross fourteen mountains, but they succeeded and brought the rāilām leaf back with them. Having gotten the leaf, Ānān'dō 'Gosāi blessed them and let them go. Ānān'dō 'Gosāi put the soil unto the leaf. The Gurus took the soil one by one and in this way the soil grew. As it was growing one of them exclaimed, ‘Oh, look the soil has become big.’ When he said this, the soil got small again. At that the Gurus became very astonished and Meena Guru looked up, amazed.23 And from the almanac he knew that, to counteract the influence of mé'kā u năj'kāj, they had to do the needful.24 But Ānān'dō 'Gosāi said to them, ‘We cannot get

21. Siiger notes:
Nong’sorhă pĭ’sāh pĕsō’pĕr băng’lăngtěng
Nŏnshŏrhă bisha bishouphŏr banglăngthŏŋ
for you sons grandsons let be increased! (băng = to let increase)

22. Siiger provides extensive notes regarding translations in this paragraph. Leaf = rāj'lām laj (railam lai), lái = leaf, rāj'lām = name of the tree from which the leaf was to be taken; mountain = ’hādzō, ’măinăgrī a name: ’Măjnăgrī hādzŏ (mainagri hajŏ) = a specific mountain.

23. Siiger appears to be uncomfortable with this translation and offers extensive notes: mé'kăw năj'kăj (Môkhao naikhai) is Boro language for ‘astonished because of’, mé'kăw = astonishing, năj'kăj = because of. This is a common Boro exclamation for amazement. Here it must mean that he investigated the almanac and finds that, because of amazement, the earth got small.

24. kō'gār (khōuga) = mouth, pornō = to do, nāng'gōw = is necessary, ought, should; kō'gār pornō is the Boro expression for the actions you undertake in order to counteract the bad influence of words, i.e. you ‘do the mouth’ = you counteract the bad influence coming from the mouth.
And he sent Meena Guru and Thena Guru to his parents. Meena Guru and Thena Guru went to his parents to fetch the necessary things. When they had nearly arrived at the place, a dog was barking at the gateway. The old parents, Ehem Bérai and Ehem Buri, were also sitting at the gateway. When they heard the dog barking they looked around and observed Meena Guru and Thena Guru, and the old couple asked them, ‘Why have you come to us?’ They replied, ‘We have come to fetch a besom, a pair of wooden sandals and some grains of mustard seed and some chili.’ Next day when they had got the things, they returned to Bŏ'hāk Pū'ri 'Rajdé and handed over the things to Guru Ănăn'dō 'Gosāi. He took the things and said, ‘Now we shall do the needful!’ And he gave orders to one of them to make a bow and four arrows, but instead of common arrow heads they were to put chili at the ends of the arrows. And they did so.

25. From the context, Siiger surely meant mé'kā' nāj'kāj rather than kō'gār pørno. (Eds)
At this point, the narrator and other participants stopped telling the story and made a small structure shown in Figure 6.2. This is the same structure they would make during Ka'tik (~ October), when the festival is celebrated, and use it as part of the stage when they recite the legend. During the demonstration, the succession of events was as follows: 1. They make the structure, 2. They recite the whole story, and 3. They perform the ceremony at the structure. The structure is made at a place east of the village on the grazing ground at the kô'gâr pørnø festival of Ka'tik month.

Early in the morning, they walk out to the place, attended by a lot of participants. Men only can attend. The previous night, the 'dô'ri must abstain from his wife and he must eat nothing until the ceremony is over. Both 'âdză (oja) and 'dô'ri are ordinarily dressed. On the place they make the structure. Thereupon 'âdză stands with his face towards the east and recites the whole story in a mass-tone while the rest remain silent. When he has finished the recital they take their places as shown on Figure 6.2 above. Both 'âdză and 'dô'ri take some grains of mustard seed into their hands and a besom (broom) in the right hand. They let their sără'măj fall down. (sără'măj is the back part of the găm'să – that part which from the front is hanging through the fork and fastened to the waistline). From now on it will be hanging down during the rest of the ceremony. Then 'âdză recites (Chapter 8, Text 10),
Figure 6.3: Arrows collected by Siiger item 57–60 (photo Danish National Museum 2015)
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If you ‘hum’
then we know you are cursing.
If you say ‘īs’
then we know you are displeased.
Male mouth protruding teeth,
female mouth with big teeth,
any mouth with poisonous words or evil thoughts:
go away!

Each time the 'ādzā reaches pō’ā, the last word in the recital, heard 'dō-uri take some besom and mustard oil and throw it into the fire. But they may not cross the barren spot. Then 'ādzā will take the bow and the arrows and send off an arrow in each direction: east, north, west and south. These ceremonies are performed in order to destroy everything evil. The besom sweeps away all dirty things. From mustard seed, oil is made which is used for cleaning. And by shooting off the arrows, they expel evil words and influence. This ceremony is performed in Ka'tik month before the paddy has made seeds in order to expel all evil influences.

That is the end of the ceremony. They will go home and eat and drink.

After the kō'gā phor'nāj they took up the soil again into their hands and again it began to grow. And they put the rāj’lām leaf on the water and put the soil on the leaf while smoothing it out. And the soil gradually grew bigger and wider. But while the soil was growing bigger and bigger, the giants at the southwest corner began losing their place to live in. Consequently they became very angry and began to eat the soil. As they began to eat the soil Ānān'dō 'Gosāi had dreams every night. Therefore he one day said to Meena Guru, ‘You will have to look into the almanac in order to find out what is happening to the earth.’ Meena Guru did so and found that the giants had begun to eat the earth, and he informed Ānān'dō 'Gosāi. Then Ānān'dō 'Gosāi made up his mind to go to the giants.
In the gourd they now all of them went to the giants. When they arrived there the giants asked Ānān'dō 'Gosāi, ‘You will have to keep a place for us to live on because you are our creator.’ Then Ānān'dō 'Gosāi made a boundary between the giants and the earth so that the earth should not grow over that border. Thereupon Ānān'dō 'Gosāi and all the Gurus set out upon a trip around the earth in the gourd and wherever they went in the gourd there grew oceans and rivers. Now Ānān'dō 'Gosāi was struck by the thought: Unless we sow seeds of trees and other plants, the earth cannot become hard and strong. He therefore ordered Meena Guru to look again into the almanac in order to find out where the seeds could be got. Meena Guru did as told and informed him that the seeds could be got at 'Gålā 'Radzā.26

Guru Ānān'dō 'Gosāi now sent Meena Guru and Thena Guru to 'Gålā 'Radzā. Having arrived there they asked for some seeds saying: ‘Our Lord sent us to bring seeds back from you.’ But 'Gålā 'Radzā said to them: ‘I cannot give you anything unless I get a bail.’ Then they called for the moon. He arrived and, when they had consulted the moon, he agreed to bail for them. Then 'Gålā 'Radzā gave them three full baskets each containing 12 seers of seeds. That they took with them but as they could not pay it back again 'Gålā 'Radzā from time to time swallowed the moon. When they had sown the seeds and it grew up, the earth became hard and strong. They now finished the creation of all creatures and when the earth had become hard and strong they left the gourd and went wherever they lived on the earth to all four quarters of the globe.

Ānān'dō 'Gosāi settled down at a place and he often used to walk around the world. One day a great desire took possession of him and his valour fell down to the ground. He picked it up again, opened his left calf by cutting it and hid his valour in the wound.27 Later on, it became a baby and it was a girl. When the day for its birth had arrived he cut open his calf and the girl came out by her-

26. 'Gålā mānō'nāj = eclipse of the moon; māno = to swallow, 'Gålā = name of the king. The Bodo assume that eclipses of the moon are caused by a king swallowing the moon. That king is called 'Gålā.

27. This probably refers to his manhood, which when inserted into his calf fertilized what later became a baby girl. (Eds)
self. He brought up the girl and when she grew up Ānān'dō 'Gosāi’s father said to her: ‘Now you are grown up and you cannot remain unmarried. Therefore you must have a husband. From tomorrow you must try to look for a husband.’

Next day she went out to look for a husband, taking with her a water pot, a ring and an ūn'drūmālā (a kind of garland). She went towards the west. On her way she met her father and returned home again. When she came home her father had arrived there before her. In the evening her father said to her: ‘Did you not meet anybody today?’ But she did not answer but kept silent. Then her father said to her: ‘Again tomorrow you must go out to look for a husband.’

Next day she went out towards the north side. That time too her father went ahead of her and waited for her at the road. When she met him she got ashamed and returned home. Coming back she saw her father at home and in the evening he asked her: ‘Did you not meet anybody today?’ But she did not answer and kept silent. Then her father said to her: ‘Tomorrow you must accept anybody you meet on your way as your husband. If not sword will fell upon your neck.’

The following day she went out towards the east with a sorrowful mind. She had with her a water pot, a ring and an ūn'drūmālā. That day she saw her father sitting under the fig tree. She grew very sad, but she had to do as her father had ordered her. She therefore went forward and put the ring on his finger and the ūn'drūmālā round his neck and poured water on his head. Having embraced him she kissed him and said to him, ‘From today you have become my husband.’ And he also embraced her, kissed her and said, ‘From today you have become my wife.’ And they went back home.

Later on, when the Gurus heard that he was going to marry his own daughter, all seven of them came to him and said, ‘You should not do so as you are our master!’ But before answering them, Ānān'dō 'Gosāi invited all the creatures to give their opinion. And they all came and gave their opinion of the question whether he ought to marry his own daughter or not. They all of them agreed that he could marry her because the number of men too had to be
increased. But the seven Gurus that were brothers became ashamed and went away and stayed by themselves wherever they liked.28

Ánän'dō 'Gosăi and his wife lived happily together and she gave birth first to Bråmmā and then to 'Bisnă and then to Māhæ'sår.29 Then 'Ārt Guru Ánän'dō 'Gosăi died.

Traditions of 'Bāubũlĭ 'Rādză (Baobuli Raja)

Informant: Măkōrăm. Patkijuli, 5 December 1949

Before the 'Kērăjnĭ Kān Kō'tānāj (Kherani Khan Khotanai) festival, this story will be recited in a slow mass-tone. It is recited by 'Gītăl (Githal),30 and the assembled people will join singing håi håi. A man playing the flute accompanies the recital and cymbals are used.

In Heaven there lived a king named 'Bāubũlĭ (Baobuli). He had a son named Ă'lāri Dăm'brā (Alari Dambra). This son descended from Heaven and became a shepherd for an old man who had no children, and he lived as his son. One day it happened that he wanted to play with some gallnuts, but he could not find any gallnuts and he grew very sad and would neither eat nor drink.31 And this went on for three days. The old man’s wife asked what the

28. The seven Gurus’ sense of shame reflects the usual Bodo position which condemns incest, as is confirmed by the cleansing ritual after incest as described in Chapter 5. That discussion, which focuses on social responses after acts of incest have occurred, is quite common across cultures (as for instance in the myths of the Santals [Kolean Haram] 1942: 5–8). The legend presented here, however, adds a rarely-addressed wrinkle: the logic behind this legend is that, in the beginning, few people were present and population growth was a priority. Incest was understood to be required during the early generations, but that need did not mean that the behaviour was appropriate. Hence, the legend raises the issue of an ethical tension between the gurus’ shame and their choice not to act to prevent the taboo behaviour they knew would happen in the near future.

29. Siiger notes: probably Brahma, Vishnu and Siva.

30. Siiger notes that the word 'Gītăl (Githal) is used in New Testament, transl. Matths. 23,10.

31. When some plants are attacked by insects, they respond by forming a bulb-shaped protective ‘bubble.’ These are called gallnuts.
Legends and Myths

matter was with him, and why he refused to eat and drink. He then answered her, ‘If you will take an oath then I shall tell you!’ Then both the old man and his wife agreed to take an oath, promising to do what he might want them to. They took the oath as follows: ‘Certain, certain, three times certain, if I break this oath, let my soul die by cutting.’

When they had taken the oath he told that he wanted the gallnuts and as he could not get them he felt so sad. He explained that, far away, you had to cross twice seven rows of mountains that were very high. On the other side of these mountains there was a gallnut tree leaning towards the east. On this tree there were two gallnuts. These gallnuts he wanted and the old man had to go and bring them to him. On hearing this, the old man immediately went off and after a lapse of seven days he was back again. He brought back with him the two gallnuts and gave them to the boy, saying, ‘You may play with these two gallnuts in any direction except in the direction towards the middle of south and east.’

The following day he began to play \textit{gĭlă kă’nāj} with the two gallnuts. He first played in the direction of the north, then of the west, then of the south and then of the east. But he was still wondering why he had been forbidden to play in the direction of southeast. At last he thought to himself, ‘Let me try to play towards southeast.’ But as soon as he did so the gallnuts rolled away and disappeared. He only saw a line on the ground where they had rolled away.

32. \textit{sāt} certainly, \textit{sāt} certainly, \textit{tīn} three, \textit{ē’} certainly, \textit{sāt} certainly, \textit{kātĭ’lee} (oath) this certain if break

\textit{prān} soul, \textit{’kātĭ} to cut, \textit{mā’rād} let die

It is not known whether cutting in former days was used as punishment for people breaking their oath. It is still the custom, however, when taking an oath to say i.e., ‘Let me die let my children, let us be eaten by tigers’…. etc. and so on, something like that.

33. Siiger explains, \textit{gila khanai} = the walnut play; \textit{gĭlă} = walnut, \textit{kă’nāj} = playing. We observe that neither gallnut nor walnut makes complete logical sense. (Eds)
Just at that time a girl was pulling thread in another courtyard. With her were some Sīkrī Sīklă to help her pull the thread. Suddenly it happened that the two gallnuts rolled into the courtyard, they rolled in among the thread and tore it. The gallnuts kept on rolling about in the courtyard. The Sīkrī Sīklă tried to stop them but they failed. But when the girl that was called Āsă'gō Būísā'gō (Ashago Buisago) went to stop them they at once lay still. She picked them up and put them into her ‘dōbă’.

When the gallnuts had disappeared from Ā'lāri Dăm'brā, he went to look after them. At last he found out that the two gallnuts

34. Girls ‘pull thread’ in preparation for weaving.
35. ‘Dōbă’ is the remaining piece of cloth over her breast; dobha = this is a triangular piece of cloth hanging down in front of the breast and when the women have to carry something they often use to fold the utmost point upwards and towards the breast. The fold resulting from this they use like a sort of pocket.
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had rolled into the courtyard of Āsā'gō Būīsā'gō, but he dared not to enter the courtyard but remained standing at the gateway, very sad. After a while, the bodyguards of Āsā'gō Būīsā'gō discovered him sitting at the gateway. They therefore went up to him and asked, ‘What do you want?’ And he replied, ‘I’m looking for my two gallnuts!’ When he mentioned the gallnuts, the Sīkri Sīklă began to box his ears as they assumed that he had caused the gallnuts to tear their thread. Then they told Āsā'gō Būīsā'gō. She came out and rebuked him severely and warned him that he must not to do so again. Then she gave him the two gallnuts and he went back home.

Another day when he was again playing with the gallnuts, they again rolled away into her courtyard and again tore the thread. Once more the same things happened, they boxed his ears and finally he got back the two gallnuts. But some days later, when it happened for the third time, Āsā'gō Būīsā'gō was struck by the thought that perhaps there was something behind it all and she went down to the river and dived down into the water seven times. Then she went back home. Now it happened that her hair was very long, it was seven yards long.36 In order dry it she had to stretch it out on seven poles in the courtyard. When doing so, she was facing towards the east. Meanwhile she was studying the almanac in order to find out when the man was to come who was going to be her husband. In the almanac, she found out that he was to come just at this time and that he had indeed already come.

When she had finished drying her hair and studying the almanac she entered the house and prepared eating and drinking and made everything ready to receive her husband. When everything was ready she went out to the gateway, looking for her husband, and she forbade her bodyguard and the Sīkri Sīklăs to box his ears when he would come. When she saw him approaching she went forward and welcomed him, took his hand and led him into the house. Then she gave him a fine new dress to put on and a pair of golden shoes, and led him to a place she had prepared where he could rest, and she gave him a silver ring with a stone to put on his finger. Now she had some wine which she had kept for a long time. It had become so old that a worm had developed in it. This worm

36. Original: 14 mu long. One mu is approximately 18 inches. (Eds)
had drunk all the wine and therefore the worm was very big and full of wine. Now she took that worm, broke it, and poured out the wine and gave her husband to drink. After that she gave him the worm to eat.

When he had become completely drunk she brought him into her room and put him onto her own bed. Lying here he forgot everything about his home. In the middle of the night he awoke and understood that he was lying in her bed. He wanted to go home, but she at once awoke, caught hold on him by the wrists and said, ‘Where are you going now?’ And he replied, ‘I want to go home.’ Then she asked him, ‘Where is your home? You must stay here with me.’

But he insisted again and again upon going home. Then she said to him, ‘If you don’t love me why have then your gallnuts come to me again and again? But tell me where are now your gallnuts?’ She knew very well that she had taken them and that they were in her own 'dōbā. And she showed him the two gallnuts. When he saw the two gallnuts he kept silent and went to sleep again.

Next day she said to her parents, ‘My husband has come.’ And she informed all the people in the village. Then her parents prepared a marriage festival for them and Ā'lāri Dăm'brā informed his parents. When the wedding day had come, all the people gathered.

Now Āsă'gō Bŭi'să'gō had a very big pig. She had kept it from her childhood and it had become so big and dangerous, with two big front teeth that curled around twelve times, that it had to be kept by itself far up in the mountains. By beating the manger she now summoned the pig down from the mountains. When it came down she ordered it to be fed and told her men to kill it while it was eating. But no one had the courage to do so. At last Ā'lāri Dăm'brā took a hair out of the head of his wife, caught the pig and tied it by means of the hair and killed it. And he ordered the people to prepare a meal on it and to serve it for all these assembled as a wedding festival.37 In the evening the wedding meal was served and the Mă'daj Rainø Go'røng recited the wedding ritual.38

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37. They here prepared the wedding meal called hătă 'sūnī ho'nāi.
38. Siiger refers here to Text 4 (Chapter 8). As he notes, this text is impossible to translate in a meaningful way. (Eds)
Later on, she gave birth to a boy who was called Bă'to Ră'dzā (Bathou Raja). Later on, she gave birth again but that time not to a child but to an egg. This happened near the sea-side on the sands. One by one she gave birth to 28,800 eggs. When she realized that she only gave birth to eggs, she felt very much ashamed and she asked her first-born son to look after the eggs and she flew away to Heaven with her husband. When the time had come for the eggs to open, they all cracked except one. It was rotten and was thrown away out into the sea. That egg was floating down the sea and became a king named Gŏlă Ră'dzā (Gôla Raja; gŏlă = rotten) and he was the Sea King.

When all the other eggs burst, they began to cry and when Bă'to Ră'dzā heard them crying he did not know what to do and called for his mother. And he went to Heaven crying and crying. When he arrived at Heaven he knocked the door crying, ‘Doorkeeper, please open the door.’ And the doorkeeper opened the door for him and

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39. Dū'ā'rī dū'ā'rī dōr'dzā mælīa'daú
duari duari dorja meliadao
doorkeeper door open (mæla = to open)

dao = Bengali: do, thus: do open
he entered the house. Still crying, he told his mother. Then she took some Arum leaves, made a basket of them and let the milk from her breasts drop down into it. Bă'to Ră'dză descended with the milk but on the way he became thirsty. He therefore put down the basket on the ground and went down to the sea to drink from its water. While the basket was standing there a kingfisher bird came down, saw it, opened it and drank all the milk.

When Bă'to Ră'dză saw that all the milk had gone, he cried. Then he took the basket and carried it to his brothers and sisters and gave them to suck from it. When they had got this they kept quiet. Thereupon he brought milk twice again from his mother and his brothers and sisters began to grow. When they had grown up, Bă'to Ră'dză one day told them, ‘Now you have grown up. I cannot feed you any longer. You can go wherever you like.’ And they all agreed to that, but they gave the following warning to themselves, ‘Now we shall separate and go at all directions. If now any of us looks back on the others when leaving then he will have to pay land revenue.’

Now Bă'to Ră'dză was going foremost, but he loved his youngest sister very much and therefore looked back towards her. Then she said to him, ‘Well, you are looking at me; then you will have to give me land revenue.’

From now on they scattered all over the world and became kings. The one who went towards the North became king of Bhutan and was called Dæb Dōhoro'miă Ră'dză. One went towards the West and he became king of Nepal and was called Nē'pāl Ră'dză (Nepal Raja). One of them went towards the East and became king of Burma. He was called 'Būrmă Ră'dză (Burma Raja). One went towards the South and he was called Gōlā'khātă Ră'dză (Golakhata Raja). One of the sisters went towards the European side and became a great queen. She was called Mōhā'rānī (Moharani = great queen). The rest of them went to other sides and became kings, but nothing is known of them.

40. Land revenue is called năn (non).
41. Deb Dhōhōromia Raja; dæb = god, dōhoro'miă = virtuous, ră'dză = king.
42. Golakhata = Calcutta. (Eds)
43. Siiger notes, ‘The Great Queen must refer to Victoria (1819–1901) Queen of Britain and Ireland from 1837 and Empress of India from 1876 until
But when they had all gone away in their own direction Bă'to Ră'dză became alone and he did not know in which direction he should go, and he felt like an orphan. Weeping and weeping he looked in all directions and at last he found a cactus tree. He climbed up in the tree and remained there, still weeping. At the same time Hăgră'mă Bé'raj⁴⁴ came from his field. He had been cutting *Asu* paddy. He was tired and wanted to rest under the cactus tree and he lay down to sleep beneath the tree. Then it happened that some

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her death.’ We are struck that this myth places the time of creation in the Victorian era. (Eds)

⁴⁴. *Asu* paddy is sown in the ashes of the spring season burn.
drops of tears from Bá'to Ră'dzā’s eyes fell and hit the old man beneath the tree. By that he awoke and looked around. At last he happened to look up and discovered the boy. Then he asked him, ‘Why are you crying up there in the tree?’ Bá'to Ră'dzā replied, ‘I have become an orphan and helpless and I don’t know what to do.’ Hägră'mă called up to the boy and said, ‘Don’t be afraid, you can come with me and stay in my home as a shepherd.’ From now on he stayed with the old man and became his shepherd.45

Some time later on, the wife of the old man fell ill with pains in the stomach. That pain had been caused by Bá'to Ră'dzā. As Hägră'mă Bé'rai46 and his wife Hägră'mă Būri did not know that pain they became very much afraid and sad. Then Bá'to Ră'dzā asked the old man, ‘What is the matter with your wife?’ Hägră'mă Bé'raj replied, ‘What are we to do? It is awful that my wife has got pain in the stomach, she may die because of that pain as she has never had such pain before.’ But Bá'to Ră'dzā said to him, ‘No, she will not die, but you must go by this way to Meena Guru and Thena Guru. They will tell you what to do.’

Then the old man went to Meena Guru and Thena Guru as the boy had instructed him. He met them on the road and told them of his wife’s pain in the stomach. But he did not know who they were and he therefore asked them, ‘Where is Meena Guru and Thena Guru?’ Then Meena Guru’s brother Thena Guru told the man, ‘He is Meena Guru.’ Then the old man asked Meena Guru to come and see what was the matter with his wife. Then Meena Guru took his nōu kō'ră 'kārī (no khōra khorī),47 and threw them onto the ground, and he told him, ‘Oh, there is a famous god. He wants to dwell in your home. If you promise to bring him a sacrifice, your wife will recover!’ And he added, ‘But to bring him an offering you must

45. Siiger observes that, during the telling of the story, another informant added, ‘As Bá'to Ră'dzā had climbed up in the cactus tree and as the old man had rested beneath it Bá'to Ră'dzā told the old man that he must take the tree with him and plant it in his courtyard.’ (also named Măkōrăm – from Mosati village in Goalpara.)

46. hagrama; hagra = jungle, -ma = probably great, large.

47. Nōu kō'ră 'kārī (no khōra khorī); nōu = nine, kō'ră / 'kārī = cowrie, by means of nine cowries he could foresee the future.
use a pair of big drums (kām, kham) and a pair of cymbals (djō’tā, jotha) and a pair of flutes (si’pūng, shipun), and you must also have an 'âdzā.48 He will instruct you how the god is to be worshipped.’

When the old man returned home Bă'to Ră’dzā asked him, ‘What happened? What did they tell you?’ Then the old man told what they had instructed him to do and he said, ‘I must have an 'âdzā, but where do I get him?’ Then Bă'to Ră’dzā told him, ‘Go in this direction and you will meet a man, who will instruct you what to do!’ The old man followed this advice and on his way he met a man who said, ‘What do you want? What are you looking for?’ The old man replied, ‘I am looking for an 'âdzā, because my wife has fallen ill with pains in her stomach. And I was instructed to worship a god!’ Then the stranger replied, ‘I am an 'âdzā. I know how to perform the work of an 'âdzā!’ On hearing this, the old man became very happy and said, ‘Well, come with me to my house!’ And he took the man along with him.

On coming home, the old man took a pair of drums made of 'tāngā grass and a pair of cymbals made of bivalve shells, and a pair of flutes made of reed. Outside in the courtyard, he built a bă’tō.49 An 'âdzā called the god’s name and promised to give him

48. A man who can foresee the future by using Nōu kō’rā ‘kārī is called 'âdzā (oja).
49. Siiger notes: At another session with partly other informants it was explained that the bă’tō was built of three sticks of reed, placed in the shape of a tripod. The 'âdzā stood in front of the bă’tō with his face towards the East. (At such occasions the ritual is used. That ritual was not recited in this story, but pastor Măkōrām said that it would be used at similar occasions.)
an offering, and he puts the drums, the cymbals and the flutes into the ī’sīng. After this, Hāgrămā Būri is recovered.

The 'ādzā now said to the old man, ‘A story must be told why we celebrate the kē’raj festival!’ Then the old man asked, ‘What things are required to tell the story?’ and the 'ādzā told him, ‘You must get some rice beer and a pair of flutes and two pairs of cymbals, and furthermore a 'gitāl (spiritual leader or singer) and an assistant are needed.

Hāgrămā Bérai had no wine and did not know how to get any. Therefore Bă’to Ră’dzā told him, ‘You must go into the jungle, there you will find an old man and an old woman named 'Kångkrămā Bē’rai and 'Kångkrămā 'Būri. The old man will tell you how to make the beer (jōu). Hāgrămā Bérai went into the jungle. There he found the old couple and asked them how to make beer. But at first they gave him wine to drink which they kept in a hole of a tree. Thereupon they taught him how to make wine.

A month later the old man wanted to make an arrangement for the recital of the story kē’raj. He took two pairs of cymbals and a pair of flutes. Bă’to Ră’dzā instructed him to get a 'gitāl and a 'păssĭ and told him how to find them. Then the old man went to find the 'gitāl and the 'păssĭ, as he had been instructed. And he found them as he had been told and brought them back with him. He also found a flute player according to the instructions Bă’to Ră’dzā had given him.

Standing beside the tripod, the 'ādzā will make a cup of banana leaves and in that cup he will pour some water and put a piece of basil in it. Then he will sprinkle the water on the head of the man who is to make the offering (or give the promise as above). No ritual is said while doing these things.

When the 'ādzā has finished this, the man who is to make the offering will carry the musical instruments into the cooking-house. But note that it is not the real instruments that he places in the cooking-house, but only fake ones. The entire performance is made in order to demonstrate that he gives a sincere promise that later on he will make an offering at which occasion the instruments will be used.

50. ī’sīng = cooking-room or kitchen. Place forbidden to all who are not family members.

51. 'păssĭ (pashi = helper).

52. 'Păssî is the man who gives the returning responses to the recitation of the 'gitāl. While reciting the 'gitāl will walk around the bă’tā. He will be followed by the 'păssî. Walking round they must have their left hands against the bă’tā.
Legends and Myths

Then one day they gathered to tell the story. Here were the 'gitāl, the 'păssī, the flute player and a man to distribute the wine. First they made the bă'tō. After they finished these arrangements they would begin to tell the story, but meanwhile one of the wine distributors was sitting near the bă'tō with wine pots and wooden wine jars and Hăgrămă Bē'raj was sitting near the bă'tō with the wine distributor. Hăgrămă Bē'raj was ready to listen to the story.

Then the 'gitāl began to tell the story from Baubuli Ră'dză, to the point where Bă'to Ră'dză became a shepherd for the old man. One day, Bă'to Ră'dză instructed the old man to bring the cactus tree from the field and to plant it in the northeast corner of the courtyard. The old man did as he was asked. One day, the old man called the 'ådzā as he had to celebrate the kē'raj festival. The old man now asked the 'ådzā, ‘Tell me how to make an offering in the kē'raj and which things are required.’

Then the 'ådzā instructed him, ‘Build a bă'tō in the northeast corner of your courtyard. Surround the cactus tree with bamboo stocks by putting down a row of bamboo stick in the earth. Horizontally on the stick you have to fasten with intervals five rows of bamboo sticks, two in each row, and at the west side of the bă'tō (at the gateway of the bă'tō) you are to raise tall bamboo sticks with flags on. The flags must hang down from the top by a cotton string.’

On the bă'tō the 'gitāl will raise both his hands open palms and recite a common saying (Chapter 8, Text 6):

The cactus bark has five grooves.
The bă'tō has five rows of bindings.
The bă'tō has a line of poles.
The road of mud is the road of the world.

53. Outside the story it was explained that this bă'tō was made in the following way: There was no cactus tree. In the east corner of the courtyard the ground was cleaned and a small tripod consisting of three bamboo sticks was built up. Then they placed a banana leaf in front of it. Then they put some grains of rice and the head of a sacrificed chicken onto the leaf. They now made a cup of banana bark and poured some water into it. With a twig of basil they sprinkled themselves with drops of water.

54. This festival is the noni kē'rai.
The Bodo of Assam

Then the 'âdzā told the old man, 'You should prepare something to celebrate the kē'raj festival, you should have a cock for Bâ'to Râ'dzâ and you should have a pig for Sûng Râ'dzâ, and a cock for Bâ'râj Râ'dzâ and a pigeon for Mâhâ'dæv and a pig for Ā'grang and 'Ăjløng, and a young red cock for Kû'bîr, and a pig for Dzøg'mûn Bê'raj and Dzøg'mûn Bû'rî and a pig and an egg for Mâj'nâu (Mâj'nâu), and a pig for Bû'lî Bû'rî and a goat for Mâug'tântrî. Having told this to the old man, 'âdzâ went back home. The old man now collected these things in the period of 3–4 months. When he had finished collecting these things he called a 'dō'ri, a 'dō'dînî, a 'gitâl, a 'pàssî, an 'âdzâ and two flute players and two drummers and two wine distributors and two wine makers — and he took a shield and a sword. First, the 'âdzâ called the gods and the gods began to come to the 'dō'dînî. When they began to come to her, she drank the chicken blood saying: Øî nô'søi bâ'kloï 'kloï. When she had finished drinking the chicken blood, the 'dō'ri took the water pot and with the basil twig sprinkled water on himself and on the 'âdzâ (oja) and on the 'dō'dînî. After that the 'dō'dînî went away into the house, and the 'âdzâ told the 'dō'ri to place banana leaves everywhere on the places of the gods and ordered him to put some grains of rice on every leaf.

55. Mâinău is also called Bâ'li Kûng'gri. She is the wife of Bâ'to Râ'dzâ. She is his only wife.

56. There are in fact some more gods that should be mentioned here, but Mâkôrâm Mosahari cannot remember them anymore...during khe'rai, Bodos celebrate all of their gods. Everyone has his own god in his house. Khe'rai is the only occasion at which they celebrate all the gods.

57. The 'Dô'ri will prepare the things that are going to be sacrificed. The 'dō'dînî will go and sit in front of the bâ'tô. The 'dô'ri will sit north of 'dō'dînî. He will have a water pot and a basil twig. The 'âdzâ will sit behind the 'dō'dînî. The 'dō'dînî will have beside her a small cup with chicken blood.

58. Neither the meaning of the various words nor the meaning of the whole sentence of these words is known. 'Tanesår suggests the following correction:

Ôi bâklâï nô'søi 'kloï
Ôi bakhlainoshoi
Oh just coming down (to be finished)

bâklâï = to come down; nô'søi indicates present continuous; 'kloï: meaning uncertain; supposed to be almost like, ‘let it be finished’ (i.e. the sacrifice).
When the 'dō'ri had done this, the 'ådză called all the gods. Then the 'ådză told the 'dō'ri first to sacrifice to Bă'to Ră'dză. After that the 'dō'ri went into the kitchen house (î'shīng) and made sacrifice to Măj'nău. Then the 'dō'ri came back into the courtyard and sacrificed to Sŭng Ră'dză and to Bĕ'răj Ră'dză, to Măug'tăntră, and to Măhă'dăev, to Bŭlă Bû'ră and to all the other gods that 'ådză ordered him to. When the 'dō'ri had finished his sacrifices, the 'ådză called all the gods. The 'dō'ri took a water pot and, with a basil twig, he sprinkled water on each banana leaf. A man from the house collected the chicken heads and goat heads and they prepared meals with these things.

Thereupon the 'ådză, the 'dō'ri and the 'dō'dină again went up to the sacrificial place where they stood before, and the 'ådză began to call the gods again. With them were the 'gităl and the 'păssă, the flute players, the drummers, the wine makers and the wine distributors. When the 'ådză began to call the gods they began to come one by one to the 'dō'dină. She told them one by one which god was coming. Each time the 'dō'dină informed them that a god had arrived the 'ådză asked her what that god wanted. If the 'dō'dină made any mistake in the dancing, the people had the right to criticise her, for example:

   Younger sister, hello! 'dō'dină you
   Your moving of your hand is not right
   Your moving of your foot is not right
   Younger sister, hello!! 'dō'dină you!!

59. Siiger notes that Măkōrăm is not quite sure of the succession of the sacrifices.
60. The 'dō'dină would reply either by singing, dancing or telling a story. This is Măkōrăm’s assumption but he is not quite sure what she would answer. It may be noted that, if a god wanted, all of them would play – except the 'dō'ri and the 'ådză.
61. Adopted (by eds) from Siiger’s notes:

| agøïløï   | 'dōudină      | nöng'o  |
| agøilõi   | dōudină       | nööö   |
| (younger) sister, hello! | dōudină you |
| âkăj'nî    | păwā         | zăjă'køï |
| akhaini     | phaoa        | jayakhoi |
| hand        | moving       | not right |
The singing and dancing and storytelling went on for four days and they drank a lot of wine and ate all the meat. On the last day, the 'gitāl called Hāgrāmā Bérai and Hāgrāmā Būri and blessed them, saying (Chapter 8, Text 7)

May your families grow.
May a pair of cows become seven pairs.
May one rice storehouse become seven.
May your house become prosperous.
And, may success come to you

After the festival, the head of the family (the børāi) and the mother of the family (the būri) gave the dō‘dīnî, half of a pig, a pot of wine, and one or two Rupees. They gave the 'gitāl five Rupees, the 'ādzā four Rupees, and the 'pāssî, flute-players and drummers two Rupees and eight Paise each. The khām-drummer got an extra Rupee and

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<th>pā'wā</th>
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<th>zājā'koî</th>
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<td>phaa</td>
<td>athînnî</td>
<td>jayakhoî</td>
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<td>moving</td>
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<td>agō'ilōî</td>
<td>dōdīnî nōnō</td>
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<td>(younger) sister, hello!</td>
<td>dōdīnî you</td>
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<tr>
<td>i, i, i, u</td>
<td>'kē'raj</td>
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<td>i, i, i, u</td>
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<td>i, i, i, u</td>
<td>keraj!</td>
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Mākōrām tells that, when he as a young man took part in the 'ke'raj, he recalls that the 'dō‘dīnî also would announce the arrival of the two brothers Zărā-Pāg’lā (jaraphagla; phagla = a crazy person) and Tən’təməlî (thentamali). These brothers had died long ago, but when they lived they had been so fond of the Khe’rai festival that they had been wandering round from place to place to take part in it. Therefore, still after their death they wanted to attend the festival. Mākōrām also tells that the following gods like dancing. The 'dō‘dīnî will announce that:

1) Băg Ră'dză (arrives on horseback). At that occasion the 'dō‘dīnî will not dance. Men only will dance.
2) Rās 'Pūtrā (comes with shield and sword). The 'dō‘dīnî will dance at that occasion.

And still a further number of gods will require dancing. He cannot remember their names.
some wine. The festival ended late in the night. As the people began to leave, they discovered that Bă’to Ră’dză had disappeared.

Măj’nă“ Dīsjōnāj

Informant: Măkōrăm Mosahari, Patkijuli, 6 December 1949

Once upon a time, there lived a king named 'Băsór 'Bănĭă (Bashor Bania). He often went out hunting elephants in the forest and the jungle. One day when he went out hunting, he saw a beautiful baby lying on a heap of grass in the forest. When he discovered the baby, he dismounted his elephant, saw that it was a baby girl, picked her up in his arms and mounted the elephant with her. She was the daughter of ‘Kărĭkătă Bē’răj and ‘Kărĭkătă Bŭ’rĭ (Khorikhata). They made a living by cutting and selling firewood and had put their daughter upon the heap of grass while they were out cutting trees in the forest. In this manner, the girl had been found by the king when he was out hunting and taken to his house.

The king adopted her and she got the name Bă’li Kŭng’grĭ (Bali Khungri). When she grew up wooers came to court her, and one day the king asked in what way things could be arranged at her marriage. Then she replied, ‘That man shall marry me who is able to prepare a meal on grains of rice boiled in an empty egg shell standing over the fire on a tripod made of gŭn’si (a single piece of that thatch grass which in bundles are used for brooms) and the fire to consist of two pieces of firewood.’ Then the king fixed the day and announced to all men that on that particular day they might come and woo his sister.

On the day fixed, the people gathered in his house. When the men arrived the king told them that anyone who could prepare a meal on grains of rice boiled in an empty egg shell, standing over the fire on a tripod made of gŭn’si, and the fire to consist of two pieces of firewood should marry his sister. The men tried to do so.

62. Siiger does not translate the title, but Măj’nă“ means wealth and, although she is not in the list of the gods (Chapter 5; several other Măj’nă“ do appear in the list), Dīsjōnāj is clearly endowed with special qualities. Among the Bodo, in India, and throughout the world, cultural heroes are sometimes described as historical figures and sometimes as godheads. (Eds)
but they did not succeed. However all of them, the wooers as well as the king, looked eagerly around to see whether there was a single man who could do as requested. At last they saw a young man sitting in a corner. His body was all covered with ringworms. The king asked him, ‘Oh, young man, would you perhaps be able to do as requested?’ The boy replied, ‘Let me try’, and he added, ‘If God has planned a marriage between that girl and me, I will succeed.’ Saying so, the boy saluted in the direction of all four corners of the world and, facing the east, he arranged everything as required and

Figure 6.8: Bodo woman in full dress, 1909. While Bodo women today often combine cloth of different colours, this picture suggests that women typically used one main colour when dressed up (painting by A.C.T., in S. Endle 1911)
Figure 6.9: Bodo woman in full dress, 1949 (photo H. Siiger 1949)

Figure 6.10: Dākna of red silk (item 1, Photo Danish National Museum 2015)
lighted a fire on two pieces of firewood. And actually he succeeded in preparing the meal, which he ate himself. All the other men were struck with astonishment and exclaimed, ‘This girl has become your wife from today’, and the king joined them saying, ‘This girl has become your wife from today, but the wedding can take place neither today nor tomorrow but will have to be postponed till later on.’

And the girl Bā’li Kūng'grĭ came out of the house after having put on a new dāknă (dokhna).63 In her hand, she carried a water pot64 in her hands she further carried two necklaces65 and a silver ring. She came up to the youngster. First she put the necklaces round his neck, then she put the ring on his finger and poured water over his head. Having done so, she embraced and kissed him and said, ‘From today you have become my husband.’ The young man also embraced and kissed her and said, ‘From today you have become my wife.’ For three or four days the boy stayed in her home and then he returned to his own home. But the king and his sister Bā’li Kūng'grĭ had learned that the young man was Bā’to Rā’dză.

Now it happened that the king had many kinds of precious stones and metals in his country, such as diamonds, gold, silver, and so on. Then one day he decided to go trading with these things. However, the king had two wives and it struck him that may be these wives would get jealous of his sister while he was away and thus might cause her troubles. He therefore built a house for her. This house was called Maj'bang No'sa.66 He built it in that way that a big pole was erected. On the top of the pole they placed a gallnut, and on the top of the gallnut they put some planks on which the house was built. When the wind was blowing the house and the planks could turn around on the gallnut, in the direction of the wind. In the house he stored foodstuff for twelve years and told her to remain there until he returned, and he forbade her to

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63. This is the usual cloth which the Bodo women wind around their body from above the breasts to the knees.
64. dūk’dāknī låtă (lotha), small barrel used as a drinking jug.
65. Siiger clarifies, ‘the necklaces were Ŧn’drŭmălă, mălă = wreath, probably a wreath of gondorosh, probably similar to gunduru, a lovely variety bush with scented flowers, perhaps the camellia.’
66. nosha = small house, no = house, she = diminutive.
leave the house. Then he left for his journey taking with him some helmsmen and boatmen.

No sooner had he left then his two wives began to deliberate upon how to kill the girl. And one day they decided on a plan. They invited her to come down and take a bath. But as her brother had forbidden her, she did not go down. Every day they continued inviting her but, when they realized that she would not come down, they decided on another plan. They took long sticks of bamboo and thrust these into her house. They went on doing it for so long that at last she was unable to stand it any longer and came down. They now went with her down to the river in order to take a bath with her. They rubbed her body to clean it. After a while they got the opportunity and struck her with the dŭk’dŭkni’ lătă 67 on her head, broke her left leg and killed her. The dead body they threw down into the river. As the dead body was floating down the river, it got caught in a fish trap belonging to Dă”kă Ră’dză. 68

Next morning, Dă”kă Ră’dză and his wife went down to the river to examine the fish traps. When they discovered the dead body they first supposed it to be a fish, but when Dă”kă Ră’dză drew nearer he realized that it was the corpse of a girl that had caught in the fish trap. He pulled up the dead body and laid it down on the river bank. He had two sticks called må’ră lă’tĭ and ’zīă lă’tĭ. 69 Then he struck the dead body with må’ră lă’tĭ whereby the body became må’ră mŏrĭ (stone dead), then he struck dead body with the ’zīă lă’tĭ and at once it became alive again. They now brought her to their house and she stayed with them for many days.

After a few years, 70’Băsör ‘Bănă started his journey home. On his way he stopped his boat at the place of Dă”kă Ră’dză in order to sell some of the valuables he had collected. When the women came

67. dŭk’dŭkni’ lătă is faithfully transcribed, but from the context Siiger clearly means må’ră lă’tĭ. The first word, used two paragraphs above, means ‘water container;’ the second, used one paragraph below, is a stick that bears lethal force. (Eds)

68. Dă”kă Ră’dză is also called Dă”kă Ră’dză Dzăn; daokha = the crow, dzăn = name of construction of poles put up in the river to prevent the fishes passing.

69. må’ră = dead, lă’tĭ = stick, ’zīă (jia) = living.

70. ‘many days’ is equivalent to ‘a few years.’ (Eds)
down to the landing-stage in order to take a bath they observed that some traders had arrived and that they wanted to sell their things. The women looked at the things and thus entered into conversation with the men. When Bá’li Kúng’grí came down to the landing-stage she saw her brother and recognised him, but he did not recognise her. Some doubts arouse, however, because the girl seemed to him very much like his sister.
When he had stayed there for a couple of days, he proceeded further on his journey and returned home. He immediately looked for his sister’s house where he had told her to stay, but he saw that the house had been destroyed. So he asked his wives, ‘What has happened to this house and to my sister?’ They replied, ‘We don’t know anything as to the whereabouts of your sister.’ He therefore assumed that something might be wrong with her and recalled the girl he had seen at the place of Dăw‘kā Rā’dzā and determined to go there and look for her. But he thought to himself that he could not go there as a king and consequently he took off his dress and put on the poor garment of an ascetic.

He then went from village to village and at last he arrived at Dăw‘kā Rā’dzā’s place. He asked the shepherd, ‘Whose daughter is that girl?’ The shepherds replied, ‘That girl is not a daughter of Dăw‘kā Rā’dzā’, and they told him in what way the girl had been found. When he learned that he returned home again. One day he

Figure 6.12: Note the similarity between this multifunctional piece of cloth, collected by Siiger in 1949, with the shawl depicted in Figure 6.11 (item 10 – image detail on p. 258, photo Danish National Museum 2015)
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put on his royal robe, mounted an elephant and went to Dă"kā Ră'dzā with his men. On arriving he dismounted the elephant and entered Dă"kā Ră'dzā’s house. He went up to Dă"kā Ră'dzā and asked him how he had got that girl.

Dă"kā Ră'dzā told him, ‘I use to put my fish traps in the river and one day this girl was found in the fish trap. She was dead but by means of my 'ziă lá' ti I gave her life again. From that very day I have kept her in my house. I don’t know whose daughter or whose sister she is.’ Then 'Băsót 'Bănă told him, ‘She is my sister!’ Dă"kā Ră'dzā said, ‘If she is your sister you may talk with her and find out, and if she agrees, you can take her with you!’ Dă"kā Ră'dzā now called the girl that she might talk with her brother. When the girl came out Dă"kā Ră'dzā said to her, ‘If he is your own brother then you may talk with him and go away with him.’

Then the girl talked with her brother and told him everything that had happened to her. When she had finished 'Băsót 'Bănă asked her, ‘Do you agree to go with me or not?’ She replied, ‘I’ll not go again to your home!’ To that Dă"kā Ră'dzā remarked: ‘But to whom will you go? You know that you have been engaged to Bă'to Ră'dzā!’ He now asked her, ‘In which way do you want to get married?’

She answered him, ‘For my wedding ceremony you should bring a pair of cymbals, a pair of flutes and two women, but these women may not be widows. You must make a golden road and you must make a barrel of wine, and you must buy rice, wine and meat for the wedding festival!’ When 'Băsót 'Bănă had heard this he returned to his home and informed Bă'to Ră'dzā and told him everything about the girl who was engaged to him. Then 'Băsót 'Bănă, Bă'to Ră'dzā and Dă"kā Ră'dzā fixed the date of the wedding. When the day had come 'Băsót 'Bănă and Bă'to Ră'dzā went to Dă"kā Ră'dzā and early in the morning next day they brought the girl to Bă'to Ră'dzā’s house and for seven days they celebrated the wedding.

Afterwards they lived happily for many years.

71. Siiger notes ‘that, with these words, a singing recitation begins’ and directs the reader to Text 8 and Text 9 (Chapter 8). What follows here is a paraphrase of these texts. (Eds)
CHAPTER 7

Bodo Folklore
and Tales

This chapter includes six folk tales. The first three, told by Ādi'rām, are followed by two stories Mākōrām remembered his grandfather telling him when he was a child. Finally, Halfdan Siiger presents a short tale narrated by 'Tanesār. It is not clear whose voice Siiger intends to use. On one hand, some words seem to be too sophisticated or precise to be direct translations from Boro language. On the other, grammar and syntax seem to vary considerably from one narrator to the next. Choices regarding language and voice can also be distinguished from those in other works by Siiger as well as other sections of this manuscript. We surmise that Siiger has taken care to retain a sense of his informants’ narrative integrity. (Eds)

The tale of the 'Māuriā Kumar

'Māuriā Dzēhé'lāu's father had taken a loan from 'Brāmān Bē'rāj. As now the father could not pay back the loan, 'Māuriā Dzēhé'lāu had to serve 'Brāmān Bē'rāj as a slave and they used him as a

1. Ādi'rām narrated these stories on 25–26 November 1949.
   'Māuriā = an orphan; Dzēhé'lāu (Jehelao) = crown prince in Boro language; Kumar = the crown prince in Bengali. So, the story gives 'Māuriā, the young man, the (common) nickname ‘crown prince.’ (Siiger and Eds)
2. 'Brāmān = Brahmin, priest; bē'rāj = old. Here one must imagine that the Brahmin is a non-boro Brahmin who acts as a moneylender. (Eds)
shepherd. Every day 'Māuriā Dzēhé'lāu had to watch the cattle in the field.

Now it happened that there were two brothers called Æk and Bér'dāg. They went to fetch some firewood from the jungle. While on their way, they came upon a snake on the road. It was coming out from the jungle. When they tried to kill the snake it stole away from them, but the two brothers ran after it. While the snake twisted away, it came across the place where 'Māuriā Dzēhé'lāu was watching the cattle. The snake begged 'Māuriā Dzēhé'lāu to hide him under the clothes lying on the grass, and he asked the boy to sit on him. The snake told the boy that two men were following him in order to kill him and, when the two men turned up and asked him whether he had seen the snake, he should deny it.

Shortly afterwards, the two brothers turned up and they asked the boy if he had seen the snake. They told the boy that the snake was so big that it could easily swallow a man. But the boy told them that he had not seen the snake, and added that in case he had met it he would no doubt have been swallowed by it. When the two brothers heard this, they went back home. When they had left, the boy said to the snake, ‘The two men have left, you can come out safely.’ But the snake would not believe him. He then again told the snake to come out and assured him that he was speaking the truth. Then at last, the snake believed him and came out from its hiding place. While it emerged slowly it looked carefully in all directions and as it could not see the men anywhere it understood that the boy had spoken the truth.

As the snake now felt safe again it said to the boy, ‘I'm hungry and I want to eat you!’ On hearing this, the boy replied, ‘I have saved your life and now you want to eat me! But if you really want to eat me, then allow me first to go back and take leave of my mother.’ The snake then replied, ‘I cannot believe that you will come back. You must take an oath that you will come back.’ The boy agreed to an oath. And he took the oath. After that the snake allowed the boy to go.

The boy now went home to his mother in order to take leave of her. On hearing this, his mother asked why he had come to take leave of her. He then told her about the snake that had been pursued
by the two brothers and how he, on the snake’s request, had hidden it, how the brothers had questioned him and how he had answered according to the order the snake had given. And he said that as the snake wanted to eat him, he had got permission to go home and take leave of her on the condition only that he was to take an oath that he would return again to the snake.

When the mother heard this she went to a bāmān (brahmin). From him she returned with a bundle of bananas, and she told the boy that he should take the bananas to the snake and feed it with them, one by one, but into the last banana he should hide a big fishing-hook before throwing it into the snake’s mouth. And she told him to fasten a string to the fishing-hook. When then the snake had swallowed the banana with the fishing-hook, the boy should draw the string and in this way catch the snake. Thereupon he should tie the string to a tree and beat the snake with a stick in order to kill it.

The boy went back to the snake and did as his mother had told him. Thus he succeeded in catching the snake and tied it to the tree by means of the hook and the string. Thereupon he began to strike it with a stick in order to kill it. The snake stopped him, however, and told him that if he would stop striking and let him free again he would teach him the languages of all the animals. But the boy did not trust the snake straight away and therefore requested that before releasing the snake it was to take an oath and promise him that it would not eat him when it had been released.

The snake then took an oath and promised not to eat him whereafter the boy released it. The snake now taught the boy the languages of the animals, but instructed him not to teach them to anybody else. And the snake continued, ‘If you teach the languages to somebody else I shall come back and fight with you.’ Having been taught the languages of the animals the boy returned to his mother and stayed with her until he was a grown-up man. During these years he paid back his father’s loan by serving the Brahmin. When he had paid back the whole loan he went to his mother’s house. It was near the time that had been fixed for his marriage.

In those days there lived in another place a king called Kūbīl. He had got seven sons. These sons wanted to go to a certain place
to buy horses. When the boy heard about that he wanted to go along with the brothers. He asked his mother permission to accompany them and asked her to give him 10 Rupees to buy a horse. And she gave him the money and some food and drink that he could eat on the road when he felt hungry. When the seven brothers learned about his intention to go to the market and buy a horse for 10 Rupees they told him not to accompany them and said, ‘You cannot buy a horse for 10 Rupees.’ But he told them that he had to go and that he would accompany them.

Then they set off and, when they had travelled for seven days and seven nights, they arrived at the market. The seven brothers were very clever and each of them selected a good horse which they tested by riding it. But the poor boy could not get a fine horse as he had only got 10 Rupees. When the boy was walking about the market he came to a dirty place where a lean and meagre little horse was lying. The horse began to talk to the boy and as he had been taught the languages of the animals he was able to understand what it was saying. It said to him, ‘I look like a very poor horse, but really I’m a very precious one. Inside the hoof of my right-front leg there is a golden needle. As long as it remains there I shall remain ill, but if you buy me and remove the needle I shall be able to fly and carry you through the air to wherever you want.’

The boy then went to the owner of the horse and told him that he wanted to buy the horse. But the owner said, ‘Why do you want to buy that horse? It is a poor and valueless creature. I don’t want any money from you for it. But if you really want it you may take it for nothing.’ When the boy heard this he at once went out and took the horse for nothing. And the owner of the horse gave him a bridle and a saddle. In the meantime the seven brothers had bought the horses for themselves.

Thereupon all of them, the seven brothers and the poor boy, started homewards. On their way home the poor boy was far behind the seven brothers because the brothers were going on horse-back whereas the boy was walking pulling his horse behind him. Then once, when the boy was walking, behind the brothers and was hidden by the jungle, he stopped his horse and removed the golden needle from the hoof of the right-front leg. No sooner had he taken
out the needle then a pair of wings – until now invisible – unfolded themselves on the back of the horse. The boy immediately mounted the horse and it began flying through the air carrying him on its back. In a few moments it passed the seven brothers and was soon far ahead. The boy then stopped it and urged it to fly down to the ground again, whereupon he dismounted, put the needle into the hoof of the horse and proceeded on foot pulling the horse behind him.

When the seven brothers overtook him they were very astonished to find him so far ahead of them as until now he had been falling behind. And they became still more surprised when they took into consideration the poor horse he had got. Several times it happened that the boy fell behind and then all in a sudden he was far ahead. This of course surprised the brothers very much.

As it now happened that the brothers had eaten all the food they had brought with them from home, the thought struck them that perhaps the quick boy could fetch them some food. They therefore asked the boy to go to their home and bring back some food. At first the boy refused, saying, ‘You can see yourselves that I have got a poor horse. How should I be able to fetch food for you?’ Still they tried to persuade him to fetch the food for them but he went on refusing. At last, they promised him that they would give him their sister as a wife if he would fetch the food for them.

On hearing this promise the boy agreed to bring them the food. They therefore wrote a letter to their father saying, ‘We are on our way home, but our food and drink are out. We are on the edge of starvation. Give food and drink to this boy and he will bring it to us, and if we return home we have promised the boy that he should marry our sister.’ When the boy had left the brothers and was out of sight, he pulled out the needle from the hoof of the horse. The horse immediately folded out the wings and flying through the air it carried him in no time to the home of the seven brothers. When the king got the letter he realized that his sons were in great danger. He therefore gave the boy food and drink and promised that he would give him his daughter as a wife. Thereupon the boy returned to the seven brothers with the food and drink.

When the brothers had satisfied their hunger and thirst, they asked the boy whether their father had said anything to him. He
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answered that the king had said, 'Let first my sons return home safely, then I shall give you my daughter!' After having eaten and drunk the brothers recovered, mounted their horses and arrived home safely. There, they together with their father made plans for the wedding ceremony, which shortly afterwards was celebrated with great joy.

The boy now took his young wife with him to his own home. When eight days had gone it was the 'Atti 'Mongål' and the boy therefore brought his wife to her father’s house and, in order to express their gratitude, they took gifts of food along with them. At dinner time the mother-in-law brought food to her son-in-law. Now it happened that an ant was crawling on her clothes and at the same time some ants were crawling on the ground where the boy was seated. These ants began quarrelling. As the boy could understand their language he could not help laughing at their quarrelling. When his mother-in-law saw him laughing, she supposed that she had done something wrong and she therefore asked him, 'Why are you laughing?' The boy answered, 'It's nothing. I just suddenly recalled something.'

But she did not believe him and remarked, 'You must have seen something wrong with me, and therefore you are laughing?' But the boy insisted that nothing whatever was the matter. He did not want to tell her that he could understand the languages of the animals, as he remembered what the snake had told him, ‘In case you reveal your knowledge to anybody, I’ll come and fight with you.’ His mother-in-law, however, insisted on his telling why he was laughing, he at last made up his mind to give way to her desire, but first he made ready his horse so as to escape what might happen. Then he took his wife with him and they both mounted the horse after he had removed the needle from the hoof of its right-front leg.

Thereupon he told his mother-in-law the secret that he was able to understand the languages of the animals. However, no sooner had he told her then the snake appeared. He and his wife flew in the sky, but the snake flew up in the sky too, continuously fighting with him. Then he drew his sword and, with a fierce blow, he

3. The 'Atti 'Mongål celebrates completion of the first week of marriage. See Chapter 3, Periods of Life. (Eds)
succeeded in killing the snake. But as soon as the snake had been killed, the boy, his wife and the horse died too, and they all fell down on the ground.

When now God saw all of them lying dead on the ground he realised that there must have been fighting going on between them. He recalled that he had created them with one life, so that in case one of them died, they would immediately die all four of them. As God now realised that it was not good for them to have one life together, he recreated them, but this time each of them with a separate life.4

When they had become alive again, the snake immediately started fighting with the boy again. The boy mounted his horse together with his wife and they flew up in the air. The snake pursued them and fierce fighting took place high up in the air. Again the boy succeeded in killing the snake, but this time only the snake died and fell down to the ground, whereas the horse descended to the ground with the boy and his wife.

They now went back to his parents-in-law. When the mother-in-law saw the boy she exclaimed, ‘If I had known the difficulties that would arise, I would never have forced you to answer my questions. But now, fortunately, it has all come to a happy ending and you have killed the snake. I’ll now ask the king to give you one third of his kingdom as your own property.’ When she asked the king, he agreed to her request and the boy got one third of the kingdom, and he and his wife lived there in great happiness for the rest of their lives.

The Tale of 'Ādă Bŭdî
Once upon a time, there was a man called 'Ādă Bŭdî.5 One day, he went along with his neighbours into the jungle in order to get some firewood. While he was busy, his neighbours several times shouted, ‘'Ādă Bŭdî, 'Ādă Bŭdî! Have you finished your work?’

4. Siiger takes care to transliterate this paragraph:
Islôra jebla bishôr gashôikhônbo thoinai naihorashoi biô mîthinô mônaslöi, biô bishôr shatham khônbo jiu mônshe daphnandôn hônnanöi. Bibadi jiu mônshê daneia hammai nona hônna nöi biô bishôrni jiuhôu gabungabom dagashöi, arô bishôr knôn pôthanphinashöi.

5. 'ādă = brother, bŭdî = intelligence, intelligent.
Now it happened that in the same jungle, there was a lone male tiger. When the tiger heard the people shouting it was struck by the thought that, perhaps, there was here a chance of meeting an intelligent man who could help him to get a female tiger, and it therefore followed the man. In the evening when Ādā Būdi and his neighbours had finished their work, they returned home to the village and the tiger was still following them at a distance. When they arrived at their houses, the tiger looked at the house of Ādā Būdi very keenly as it wanted to remember where the man was living. The tiger then went back into the jungle. There it caught a pig, killed it and brought it into the courtyard belonging to Ādā Būdi. Standing here it shouted, ‘Ādā Būdi, Ādā Būdi!’ just as it had heard the friends of Ādā Būdi shouting.

When Ādā Būdi heard the shouting from the courtyard he opened the door and looked out to see what the matter was. When he discovered a tiger standing there, he became very frightened and immediately closed the door again. But the tiger kept waiting for him in the courtyard until, at dawn, it was forced by the daylight to go back into the jungle. The following night, the tiger turned up again in the courtyard, this time with a deer. Again it shouted for Ādā Būdi, saying, ‘Ādā Būdi, Ādā Būdi! Are you at home? Yesterday night I came to you with a pig and tonight I have brought you a deer. You are an intelligent man and I need your advice. How shall I get me a female tiger as a wife?’

This time Ādā Būdi answered the tiger and said, ‘Yes, I am at home and I shall give you some advice. Tonight you must go back into the jungle, but come back here tomorrow night and I shall give you my advice.’ Next day, Ādā Būdi went to an old man to ask his advice how he should kill the tiger when it came back again. The man told him, ‘You must get hold of a big net. When the tiger comes to ask your advice you must tell it to enter into the net and say, “If you enter into the net you will get a good piece of advice.” When the tiger has entered the net you must pull it together. In this way you will catch the tiger and will be able to kill it, and when you have killed it you must throw the dead body into the river.’

Ādā Būdi returned home and, when the tiger appeared, he did as the old man had told him to do. When the tiger got caught in the
net, he killed it by striking it with a club. The dead body he threw into the river. When now the body was floating down the river it happened that a female tiger was wandering about looking for a male. When she discovered the body of the male tiger floating down the river, she got hold of it and pulled it up on the bank. The male tiger, however, was not quite dead but had only fainted in consequence of the blows. As it now recovered and opened its eyes, it saw a female tiger beside it. As a matter of course it was very surprised but at last it thought to itself, ‘Oh that was the advice of 'Ădă Bŭdĭ. It certainly was a curious way to give me a wife, but, well, here she is. Just a pity that I have got so much pain in my body because of the blows.’

Then the male tiger and the female tiger decided to go back to 'Ădă Bŭdĭ to thank him for the good advice. And they took a pig with them. It was their intention too to try to bring him a woman as he had not got any wife himself. When they arrived at 'Ădă Bŭdĭ’s house, they entered the courtyard and the male tiger shouted, ‘Ădă Bŭdĭ, 'Ădă Bŭdĭ! I have come back with a pig to thank you because of your good advice. By your help I got a wife!’ When ‘Ădă Bŭdĭ heard the tiger shouting he became awfully frightened and he thought to himself, ‘Oh, I have tried to kill that tiger and I struck it terribly, but I didn’t succeed in killing it and now it has come back to take revenge.’ He therefore shouted from inside the house, ‘Thank you. If you have got back your life and if you have got a wife then you can go back into the jungle and don’t mind that I struck you.’

But the tiger replied, ‘I have come to thank you and give you a present. As you have not got a wife yourself my wife will get you one.’ The two tigers went away in order to look for a wife for 'Ădă Bŭdĭ. When they had walked for a week they arrived at a royal palace situated close to a river. In that palace, there lived a princess who every day used to walk down to the river to take a bath. Close to the river, there were three kinds of jungle. One was a nølé jungle, the second was a 'kāgră jungle, and the third was a 'năngdăr jungle.6

6. Siiger clarifies: nølé = reed; 'kāgră = another variety of reed; 'năngdăr = Cyperus tegetus, a kind of grass used for weaving mats. He does not, however, explain why these distinctions might be important to the legend. (Eds)
The two tigers were hiding in the jungle. When the princess went down to the river to take her bath she was accompanied by two female attendants. Suddenly the two tigers rushed forward, caught the princess, bit her, and ran away with her and brought her to 'Ādā Būdī’s house. Meanwhile the two attendants ran back to the palace and told the king, ‘Two tigers have killed your daughter!’ The king then ordered his men to take elephants, bows, arrows and guns and go into the jungle to look for and kill the tigers. The men did so, but they could not find the tigers as these had gone away to the house of 'Ādā Būdī.

Here the tigers gave the princess to 'Ādā Būdī, saying to him, ‘Here is a wife for you. You must take care of her. It is not necessary that we should meet again, as the people of the village might think that we are friends and they might kill us and do you harm!’ Having said this, the tigers took leave and went away from 'Ādā Būdī. 'Ādā Būdī then said to the princess, ‘Do you agree to marry me?’ She replied, ‘Yes, I’m ready. If I won’t marry you then the tigers will come back and kill me.’ But she decided to send a letter to her father, and in that letter she wrote, ‘Two tigers caught me and brought me to 'Ādā Būdī. I must now marry him. If I don’t do so, the tigers will come back and kill me!’ And she sent that letter to her father. When the king had got her letter he also agreed to her marrying 'Ādā Būdī.
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The king, however, decided before the wedding ceremonies were to take place to build a road going straight from his palace to 'Ādā Būḍī’s house, in order that people could go and come easily by the road. And the king ordered his men to build the road. The men did as the king ordered. When they had finished that work the king fixed the day for the wedding. On the day fixed the king sent motor-cars, elephants and his men to bring 'Ādā Būḍī and his daughter to the palace. When they had arrived the wedding was celebrated with great festivals. And the king gave half his kingdom to his daughter so that she could live happily in spite of the fact that she had married a poor man. Thereafter he sent them back home.

When they had returned back to 'Ādā Būḍī’s house, they settled there and lived in great happiness for many years. The villagers were grateful to 'Ādā Būḍī because he had married the king’s daughter.

The Story of the King’s Minister

Once upon a time there was a king. The king had a minister, who took care of his official duties very well. One day the minister said to the king, ‘Thieves and kings are identical.’ The king was very surprised and asked, ‘What do you say?’ Then the minister repeated, ‘Thieves and kings are identical.’

Now the king became very angry with the minister and said to him, ‘I take steps that the thieves are caught and punished and this notwithstanding, you assert that thieves and kings are identical. I shall put you to a test. I’ll fix a day and on that day you must try to steal in my palace. If you don’t succeed in doing so, you must die the following day.’ The king then ordered him that he had to steal the palace on the night after the following day. If he failed, he was to die the next day. When the minister heard the king’s decision he went home in low spirits. When he came home his wife discovered how sad and dejected he looked and she wondered what the reason was for this. She therefore asked her husband, ‘What is the matter with you?’ To this the minister replied, ‘Accidentally, I said to the king that thieves and kings were identical and this made the king very angry, and he gave me the order that tomorrow night I should try to steal something in the palace, and in case I failed to do so I’m
to die next day.’ The minister and his wife now passed the night in great unhappiness as neither of them knew what to do.

The minister and his wife had a son who was a great and learned man. He had been travelling all over the world for the past twelve years, and now it happened that he returned from his travelling just the very next morning. When he noticed how low-spirited his parents were, he asked them what the matter was. They did not want to tell him, but he insisted and said, ‘I realize that something is worrying you and causing you great trouble. You must tell me what the reason is. If you won’t tell me I’ll leave you again and proceed with my travelling.’ At last the minister felt obliged to tell the reason for their distress and he said, ‘Accidentally,’ I said to the king, ‘Thieves and kings are identical,’ and on hearing so the king became very angry with me and said that I must try and steal something in the palace and if I don’t succeed I will be killed.”

The son told his parents not to feel low-spirited and he said, ‘Now I have come back home and you must not be distressed by the king’s words. I’m here now. You shall only eat and drink and enjoy yourselves and afterwards I shall see to it what might be done.’ The father then ordered his servant to kill a goat, and they sat down all of them and ate in great happiness. When night fell, the son went to the king’s palace. He surveyed every room, noting the location of all furniture and objects. He then took everything and carried it down to the seashore. On the shore, he made a big tent, in which he placed each item exactly in its proper position. He then returned to the palace, sneaked into royal bedrooms and kidnapped the royal couple, taking them also to the tent by the seashore. Finally, he set up a telegraph line between the tent and the palace.

Next morning, the guard and the servants of the palace were waiting for the king and queen to appear, but they did not appear. At last the servants fetched the key of the palace, unlocked the door and entered. They were highly astonished when they discovered that the whole palace was quite empty and furthermore that they could not find the king or the queen anywhere. When the king awoke, he looked around him in great perplexity. He could not

7. The following paragraph has been revised for clarity. (Eds)
understand how he and the queen, the furniture and all the things from the palace happened to stand here in this tent. But at last the thought struck him that this no doubt must be the work of the minister.

He then noticed the telegraph wire and he telegraphed to the palace, ‘I and the queen and all the furniture and the things from the palace have been taken by thieves during the night and brought down to the seashore, where we are now standing in a big tent. You must come immediately and take us back to the palace.’ When the servants had received this wire from the king, they did as he ordered them. After having returned to the palace, the king called a meeting and ordered his minister to attend it. Here the king thanked the minister and said, ‘You told me that the power of kings and the power of thieves are identical. Now I have seen that you are right.’

**How the Bodo Arrived in Darrang and Kamrup**

A long time ago, the Bodos and the Bhutanese were at war with each other because the Bhutanese always disturbed the Bodos living near the mountains. The Bhutanese sometimes stole cattle and women, and they cut the hair of the women. As the Bodos could not stand all this, in the long run they made war upon the Bhutanese. They fought in Rangia. Ron means war, and from that the town has got its name. There the Bodos were defeated by the Bhutanese. As they were defeated by the Bhutanese, the Bodos had to pay land revenue to them.

The king of Bhutan first informed them that he would send a tax collector (‘gælång) to collect the land revenue. The Bodos got that information through a messenger from the Bhutanese king, and they were ordered to keep ready rice, wine, pigs, and so on for the tax collector. Being afraid, the men fled away and hid in the jungle so that only the women were left in the villages when the tax collector arrived. The tax collector did as he pleased with the women and the things belonging to the Bodos. The women had to serve him very carefully in order to satisfy him. When the

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8. This legend and the next are untitled in the manuscript. Siiger notes that they were told to Mākōrām in his boyhood by his grandfather. It is not clear precisely when Mākōrām narrated them to Siiger. (Eds)
tax collector and his men had eaten and drunk, they ordered the women, ‘Call the men!’

Then the men had to come out from the jungle. They humbly saluted the tax collector. He asked for the land revenue and they had to give him what he demanded. And if the tax collector and his men wanted to stay in a village for a night, the Bodo men had to select nine girls for them. The tax collector and his men took the beautiful girls and cut their hair, and they took the strong boys to carry their luggage, and they brought all of them to Bhutan. On the way the Bhutanese made much trouble for the Bodo carriers. If they could not carry the heavy loads, the Bhutanese beat them with their swords.

As the Bhutanese were continuously worrying the Bodos, the latter began moving towards the West. The Bodos moved westwards as far as Nepal (Nā’rāṅg) beyond the Meche river. But although the Bodos moved westward the Bhutanese continued to come down from the mountains following them and troubling them. This happened while the Bodos were staying in the Jolpaiguri district. Thereafter the jomidor, 9 named Jaolia, from Goalpara district (close to Kokrajhar) went with his men to fight the Bhutanese. He stayed in Madari and started fighting with them. Then the Bhutanese began to put poison into all the rivers.

One day, Jaolia was looking for water and tried to drink from a well. And it now happened that the Bhutanese took him there by surprise, catching him in a net. And they killed him there. From now on the Bodos were unable to fight any longer. They kept silent and humbly suffered anything. But from the day when the British arrived and fought the Bhutanese, the Bodos got peace. When the British occupied Assam and drove off the Bhutanese peace once more returned to Assam and consequently the Bodos again began to return and move backwards towards the East. But as the Muslims had by this time occupied the southern area of the Goalpara district, the Bodos had to settle down in the Darrang and the Kamrup districts.

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9. Jomidor is Boro for ‘zamindar’, the word for landlord in many North Indian languages. (Eds)
The origin of the Limbu

Once upon a time, there was a man who had got seven sons. One day, these seven brothers went out to hunt in the jungle. Now it happened that one of the seven brothers lost his way. In the evening, the six other brothers returned home without him. The following day, the six brothers went out to look for him. In looking for him they spent three days in the jungle. On the fourth day, they found him. But as he had been starving he had eaten raw cow meat.

10. The Limbu are a tribe living mainly in Sikkim and Nepal. Their language is related to Boro. (Eds)
They therefore said to him, ‘Now you have eaten cow meat and you have become unclean. You cannot stay with us.’ He therefore went back with them, fetched his wife and children and returned to the jungle, and stayed there. The name of this man is Limbu.

The Story of How the Moon Got a Spotted Face\textsuperscript{11}

The Sun and the Moon were brothers. One day they were both invited to a festival in the village. The Sun, however, was busy and thus was unable to go, but he asked the Moon to attend to the festival, and asked him to bring back some of the food they were to get 'kadzi.'\textsuperscript{12} The Moon went to the party and he ate his own portion of the 'kadzi' himself. He got a portion for the Sun too, but on his way home he ate that portion as well. As he now did not know what to do, he laid a plan to cheat the Sun. He squatted down and made a poop and wrapped it in a leaf.

When he returned home, the Sun asked him, ‘Didn’t you get any 'kadzi' for me?’ The Moon answered, ‘Here, that is for you,’ and he handed him the turd in the leaf. When the Sun unwrapped the turd it smelt very bad, and the Sun thought it an ugly cheat. In great anger the Sun threw the turd in the face of the Moon, cursed him and said, ‘From now on you shan’t be able to give a proper shine in the world.’ Since that time, the Moon has had a spotted face on account of the poop that was thrown at him.

\textsuperscript{11} 'Tanesår narrated this story to Siiger on 18 January 1950.

\textsuperscript{12} The Boro term 'kadzi' designates such food brought from another home at festival occasions. (Siiger and eds)
Looking up and out

Siiger’s lighthearted story provides us the opportunity to present a variety of details, curated from various locations in his notebook.

Points of the Compass

Sā (sha) = north; also used as adverb, i.e. above.
Kr’lä (khola) = south.
’Sāndzā (shanja) = east; original meaning: sunrise.
Sā’náb (shonab) = west; original meaning: sunset.
Nā’kráng (nokrañ) = a. zenith, b. sky, c. above.
Pā’tál (phathal) = point just below, i.e. nadir.

Northwest, southwest etc. are combinations of the above-mentioned points, e.g., sā-sā’náb = northwest).

Celestial Phenomena

Hātār’ki (‘hathorkhi) = star.
Ålång’bār (oloṅbar) is the bright planet which during winter is seen at dawn towards east. The same name is used for a bright planet which can be seen to the north, and also for one to the west. It could be any planet.

The Milky Way is called Radzani lä’mā (rajani lama), i.e. the king’s way or path.

A falling star (meteor) is called Dāinā hātār’ki (daina hathorkhi; daina = witch, hātār’ki = star). It is considered to be a bad, evil star which is driven away by the other, good stars.

A comet is called Ålång’bār ŭkŭn’dōi (oloṅbar ukhundöi; ŭkŭn’dōi = smoke).

Phases of the Moon: Nākāpor = moon

ūngkār’nāi (onkharnai); ūngkār’nāi = appearing.
’gōrlōi (gōrlōi); ’gōrlōi = tender, small.
’rā’nāi (ranai); ’rā’nāi = to become hard, to become mature ǝ: half-moon.
’Pūrno (phurnima); ’pūrno = full ǝ: full-moon.
br´rāi (bōrai); br´rāi = old ǝ: decreasing moon.
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The word "dzó’hābnǎi (johabnai); dzó’hāb = to sit very late, to sit for a long time.

"tøi’nǎi (thônai); tøi = to die."

Selected constellations

Dzōu bǐ´bǎn (jōu biban); dzōu = wine, bǐ´bǎn = burden. It may be one man carrying two pots of wine or two men carrying one pot of wine (It appears from Siiger’s drawing that this constellation is a collection of three stars in a straight line. We guess that it is Orion’s belt. (Eds)

Dāw’sri gø´bǎ (daoshri gōba, gø´bā); dāw’sri = a kind of bird; gø´bǎ = to embrace. It is a constellation of several stars. The meaning is: a group of stars embracing or holding each other. Siiger’s drawing shows 11 stars. We do not recognize the constellation. (Eds)

Sǎt bǎ´hāi (Sat bahai); Sǎt bǎ´hāi = seven brothers. They can be seen just before dawn during winter and sometimes from evening. Siiger’s drawing clearly depicts the ‘Big Dipper’, also known as the bear’s tail in Ursa Major. (Eds)
CHAPTER 8

Texts

Most of Halfdan Siiger’s collections were noted down in English, but he also collected a number of prayers, incantations and songs in Boro language when he deemed their nuances to be sufficiently important, and sufficiently challenging to translate, that future scholars would benefit from their preservation in the original. These texts carry important messages either in the ritual situation or as propaganda elements of the ongoing modernisation of Bodo society, which modernization he mostly excluded from his presentation. The Song of Temperance Movement (Text 16) is a significant example of how the Brahma Dharma (the Bromos) tried to guide Bodos into new and more ‘modern’ ways of behaviour. Siiger emphasizes that his informants, as well as other Bodos, knew these texts from memory. Hence, it was possible to develop the translations over time and across informants. This is why most texts are not identified with a single date or single informant.

For the modern reader used to printed literature, or the reader who knows about the Vedic tradition’s emphasis on exact recitation of an oral text, it may seem odd that there are small differences in texts that appear to be parts of the same prayer. This shall not surprise; the Bodos did not stress precision in their recitation or performance of prayers and songs. Their goal was to interact with the deities in ways the deities would understand.

The analysis and transcription of Boro language has gone through a number of changes over the years. As Siiger visited, the Boro-language Bible was about to be changed from one Roman-script-based system to another. Aksel Kristiansen had introduced the first system and fought for it to be retained, but was instructed by the church to adapt the new one, which already had been accepted by several churches (O. Hodne 1992:368–369). Later on,
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Boro language was taught in the schools through the medium of Assamese (or Bengali) script, and instruction today is through Nagari script. In the midst of this linguistic fluidity, Siiger adapted his own system of transcription and phonetics that is both language-sensitive and typewriter-friendly.

We have not collaborated with linguistics specialists or engaged in our own phonological analysis and revision of the collected texts. Rather, we have chosen to provide the translation boxes precisely as Siiger presented them, in order that linguists at a later point will have the chance to make such an analysis. For the general reader, it may be of some help to have our interpretation of Siiger’s transcription system. We offer a tentative pronunciation guide immediately below. As Siiger’s pronunciation guidelines have not been found, we base our guide on our own understanding as well as referral to the few Boro linguistics texts that we have access to. Halvorsrud’s Boro Grammar (1959) seems to reflect Siiger’s approach most closely, even though it is evident that Siiger aimed to include more sounds than Halvorsrud’s system does. Some letters in the guide below do not have any explanation; this is because we do not know precisely what Siiger’s intention was.

Vowels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>open a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>å</td>
<td>open a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ā</td>
<td>long a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>’ā</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. J. Richel made such an analysis for the Lepchas volume (H. Siiger and J. Richel 1967).
2. We have not focussed on Skrefsrud’s earlier work or the great developments made by A. Brahma (2013) or P. Basumatary (2005), although these scholars develop Boro phonetic and phonematic analysis in important ways. An important difference between Siiger and Halvorsrud involves treatment of vowels. Siiger’s system places vowels in more specific mouth positions; it is not so much the length of the vowels but how far back they are on the tongue and the position of the tongue with regard to the palatal. Boro is a tonal language with at least two tones; we have not identified how or if Siiger indicated changes in tone.
Texts

u  u  short u
ū  u  long u
ū  u
e  e
'ē  e
'ā  o
ō  ō  a semi nasal o
'o  o
ø  ō  nasalised o

Consonants

Labials

'p  ph  bi-labial fricative
p  ph  a checked explosive bi-labial sound found in the end of the syllable
b  b  is usually explosive, but between tends to become fricative when between vowels
'b  b
m  m
'm  m
'v  v

Cacuminals

t  t  vigorously articulated cacuminal t³
't  th
d  d  the voiced but less aspirated variant of t
'd  d
s  s/sh  pronounced in the front of the mouth (‘‘s’’ is a vigorously ‘perspirated’ cacuminal sibilant, [which] sometimes sounds almost dental.’ (A. Halvorsrud 1950))
's  sh  aspirated s
'z  j

3. Halvorsrud (1959) accepts the existence of an aspirated t (th), but Siiger only finds it in loan words from Assamese or Bengali.
The Bodo of Assam

j j the voiced variant of the above, but sometimes almost dental
n n frequently tends to become palatal
'ⁿ n frequently tends to become palatal
r r trilling r
'r r

Palatals

r r sometimes like the palatal t, sometimes more like the checked r (in Bengali and Assamese pronounced t)
y j is a fricative sound used to avoid hiatus between vowels
l l
'l l

Gutterals

k k unvoiced explosive, sometimes almost velar.
'k kh aspirated k
g g/k/kh usually g, but it is sometimes changing to k or kh in certain contexts
'g g
ṅ n像是 a fricative sound used to avoid hiatus between vowels
h
'h h

Siiger presents each text five times. The text is first written in Siiger’s own formal system, designed specifically to capture details of the Boro language. Second, in italics, the text is presented in a phonetic transcription. Next, the text is shown as a word-by-word translation of into English. The final section offers more detailed linguistic analysis. A somewhat more polished version of the text appears between these two literal analyses. And, diverging from our practice in the rest of this volume, we have chosen to polish the translations very slightly more than Siiger himself presented in his manuscript, in order to highlight textual nuances for the benefit

4. In his discussion of a palatal variety of ‘s’, Halvorsrud (1959) states that ‘c’ (‘ch’) mostly is heard in the Jalpaiguri dialect. Siiger, whose work was centred 350 km east of Jalpaiguri, has not included the sound in his system and likely did not hear it.
of an English-speaking audience. Siiger surely would have wished to do the same, especially as he provides (and we reproduce) the foundation that each and every reader can use to work toward a translation that ’makes sense’ to them. (Eds)

Texts

Text 1: 'Navån-ceremony prayer

1. kāriā – börāi – máharajā
2. ailōṅ – agraṅ
3. 'kaji – 'ku ņūr – 'ku ņūṛ
4. ali – bura – ali
5. ras – 'putra
6. ras – 'kandra
7. sanjyani – monās
8. børaj – bag raja
10. jøṅ – dausa – daudøï – bainanøï
11. jøṅ – bulī – høyø
13. dausa – daudøï – jagonanøi
14. jøṅkou – baunø – naṅlïa

1. khurai – bôrai – maharaja
2. ailōŋ – agrayj
3. khaji – khuŋgur
4. ali – bura – ali
5. raj – phuthro
6. raj – khandra
7. shanjani – monas

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8. bôrai – bag raja
10. jôŋ – daosha – daudôï – bainanôï
11. jôŋ – buli – høyô
13. daosha – daodôï – jagonanôi
14. jôŋkhôu – baonô – naŋlia

1. hot-tempered/leprotic – old – great king
2. name of deity – name of deity
3. name of deity – name of deity
4. mud wall – old – mud wall
5. king – son
6. King
7. to the east – name of river
8. – Tiger king
9. to, for you – we – widow – bracelet – earring plur – having sold
10. We – chicken – eggs – having bought
11. we – sacrifice – give
12. in peace – son – grandson – us – well – to keep
13. chicken – eggs – having eaten
14. Us – to forget – should not / ought not to

Translation: see Text 2
Texts

Commentary on Text 1

1. kāriā = hot-tempered. This translation is not certain, but no other translation is known. 'Tanesār says that it ought to be 'kūria, which means leprosy. Börāi måharajā should be identical with Siva, who had become leprotic but recovered his health by dancing beneath the cactus-tree. Inside this cactus there was a white liquid. börāi måharajā took that juice, drank it and got intoxicated. He danced and danced and kept on dancing and so he recovered.

börāi = old, ancient
måharajā = lit. great king, here used of bathōu raja, c/r.
Worshipped in kērai-festival (Kērai: name of a festival, original meaning unknown). However, Bodo experts say it has derived from hanthu kherai, meaning to kneel down to pray to god. He occupies the first place as in all other Boro-festivals. He is the most important Boro-god. The entire line is an invocation of börāi måharajā, followed in the next line by other gods.

Line 1: hot-tempered old maharaja (great king)

2. ailoṅ = name of a god, unknown deity
agraṅ = name of a subordinate deity

3. 'kaji = name of a god, unknown deity
'kuṅūr = name of a god, unknown deity
'kaji may be used of a meal, a dish, eaten without rice; 'kuṅgūr standing alone is used for the cock’s comb.

4. ali = a mud wall around a paddy field
bura = old, here the Bengali word for old is used. (Boro language = börāi)

5. ras = raj = king; but the Bodo cannot pronounce raj.
'putrå = son
Line 5: king’s son

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6.  6? (The question mark is Siiger’s. – Eds)

7.  sanjanī = sanja = east, ni = of; (seen from Goalpara)
    Monas = name of a river on the border between Kamrup and
    Goalpara districts. (But now newly created Chirang and Bagsa
    districts). The official name is Manas that flows from the Bhutan
    hills.

8.  'bāg raja; bāg = tiger, Bengali word; Boro language = ‘mosha
    (mosha); raja = king. here, tiger-king
    Lines 1–8: invocation of various divine powers

9.  nøṅsørnø = to you
    nøṅsør = you (plur)
    nø = to
    jøṅ = we
    rāndi (bāri) = widow; rāndi = ordinary word for widow; bāri =
    meaning unknown. It is not unusual in Boro language to put a
    word after another without the second word having any special
    meaning. There is a word 'bāri that means garden, but that
    does not give any sense here. Dinesh [Siiger’s translator] gives
    examples of other constructions of a similar kind: borai'bēnto =
    old man. Borai standing alone means ‘old man’ and the meaning
    of 'bēnto is unknown. This combination, however, is commonly
    used. Gōtō gotāi = child, gōtō = child, precise meaning of gotāi is
    unknown, but the combination is much used.
    asan = bracelet, common word only used by women
    'kira = earring, used by women
    pōrkōg = ending for plur. acc.
    pannanøi = having sold
    pan = to sell, nanoï = perfect participle
    Line 9: For you, we and widow have sold bracelets and earrings.
    N.B. The plural ending relates to both words.

10. jøṅ = we
    dausa = chicken
Texts

daudøï = egg (singular, comprehending plural)
bainanoï = have (having) bought
bai = to buy
-nanoï = perfect participle

Line 10: We have bought chickens and eggs.

11 døṅ = we
bulī = sacrifice. Another common word for sacrifice is baū (bao)
høyø = give
hø = to give; -yø = indication of the present indefinite tense
Line 11: We give sacrifice (we give this sacrifice)

12 'sukhsantiyoï = in peace (Bengali) sukhsanti = peace; sukh = joy,
santi = peace; the ending -yøï = in or with, used as an adverbial ending.
phisāh = son, common word
phisōu = grandson, common word
jøŋkhou = us
møtjaṅøï = well, nicely
møtjyaṅ = good; -oï (adverbial ending)
dønnø = to keep. A short form, dön, = to keep may also be used.
naṅgo = should, ought to
Line 12 is difficult to translate as the subject is silent. The best
translation seems to be: You ought to keep us in peace and well,
son, grandson and us.

13 jagōnnøï = having, have eaten
jā = to eat
Line 13: (As you have) eaten chicken and egg.

14 baonø = forget,
naṅlïa = should not, ought not to
naṅ = ought to; -lïa = not, negative suffix
Line 14: You ought not to forget us.
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Text 2: Prayers at sāklari henāj by the 'do“ri

1. kāriā – berāi – māharajā
2. nōṅsorjōñ – jōṅō – randi 'bāri – asan – 'kiraporkōg – pannanōi

1. khuria – bōrai – maharaja
2. nōṅshōrjōñ – jōṅō – randi bari – asan – khiraphorkōu – phannanōi

This prayer [Text 2] begins with the name of the following god and continues with the same prayer as above, from line 2. So it goes on mentioning all the gods in the said list.

Translation of Texts 1 and 2

Oh, angry and sick old god(s), and subordinate gods,
For you, we and our widows have sold many bracelets and earrings.
We have brought chickens and eggs,
And we give this sacrifice.
Now you ought to keep all of our generations well and in peace.
As you have eaten chicken and egg,
You may not forget us.

Text 3: 'Nevān ceremony recitation

A. When the head of the family places the meal in front of the tools, he says:
1. ko’dal – ’sika – rua – kasi
2. nōṅsorjōñ – jōṅō – kulpē kulpē – maubā i
Texts

5. jādō – jādō

1. khodal – shikha – rua – khashi
2. nōṅshōrjōŋ – jōṅō – khuphle khuphle – maobai
5. jadō – jadō

1. hoe – knife – axe – sickle
2. you by, with – we – too much – worked
4. spring-paddy – little, small of soft – rice (boiled) – new – we – for you, to you – gave
5. eat! – eat!

B. When the head of the family places the meal in front of the oxen and cows, he says:

1. jōṅō – màdaipōr – ag’zupōrnōbō – hōgbai
2. nōṅsōrbō – jādō

1. jōṅō – modaiphōr – agjuphōrnōbō – hōbai
2. nōṅshōrbō – jadō

1. we – gods – tools for too – gave
2. you too – eat!

Translation of Text 3

Oh, hoe, knife, axe, and sickle!
We have worked too much with you
The Bodo of Assam

And you have done your jobs without harming us.
So, we give you newly-harvested Spring rice.
We offer to all that have helped us.
Eat. Eat!

Commentary on Text 3A

1. kodal = hoe

'sika = big knife. Two kinds of 'sika are used: 'sika götoñ (gôthôŋ) = knife with straight blade, and 'sika känkai (khoŋkhai) = knife with curved blade. The straight type for instance is used for cutting wood and bamboo, the curved type is used for cutting grass, jungle and jute. There is no rule as to which type, the straight or the curved, should be used for this ceremony.

rua = axe (or axe with [handle]). It is used for instance for cutting trees and bamboo.

kasi = khashi = sickle. The Bodo sickle has got a row of teeth inside. It is used for instance for cutting paddy, crops and thatch-grass.

Line 1: (addressed to): hoe, knife, axe and sickle.

2. nøṅ'sørjøṅ = by or with you

nøṅsør = you

-jøṅ = by, with. Common construction that the preposition is placed after the pronoun and combined with it.

jøṅø = we. The form døṅ may be used in a similar meaning

kupilë kupilë = too much; kupilë (standing by itself) = to throw down violently, to strike against the ground, to thrash, to dash. It is only in connection with mau (to work) that kupilë kupilë obtains the meaning ‘too much’

maubāi = worked (past tense)

māu = to work. Used of all kinds of work.

Line 2: We have worked too much with you.

3. 'āre = and, common word for ‘and’

nøṅsørnø = you. Another form: nøṅsør
jønñi = our (of us), jøn = us, -ñi = of (genitive)
atiñ = foot, common word. (The plural ending from the next word is implied and this is also the case with the accusative ending).
a'käiparkøu = hands (plural)
akäi = hand
-pør = plural ending
-køu = accusative ending
bou'älä'bâne = without cutting
bou = to cut; -a, negation; (l'a'bâne): not having cut. In this construction there is a double negation, ‘without cutting’. The construction in question is used only in connection with this verbal form. ‘Bou’ is used in the meaning to cut oneself by accident. For ‘to cut with intention’ is used the words ‘hå’ or ‘dan’. (‘bou’ may also be used in the connection: to sharpen a knife). (ha = dan)
møjañøi = nicely
møjañ = nice, good
-øi = adverbial ending
døñ = to keep, (don)
døñbâi = kept (past tense)

Line 3: And without cutting, you have kept our feet and hands nicely. (The tools have not cut the feet and hands of those using them when working with them in the past season).

4. ’āsu = early paddy, spring-paddy, the paddy that is sown in the spring season, around February–March.
gøløinî = little, small, soft, easy. -nî = of
øṅkâm = rice (boiled and ready for eating)
høgbâi = gave
høg = give (imp); hobai, ho (imp)

Line 4: We gave you new (boiled) rice of the spring-paddy.
5. jādø = eat! (imp); jā = eat! (imp.) The long form is more polite.
Line 5: Eat! Eat! (When the head of the family has said so he will beat each of the tools thrice.)

Commentary on Text 3B
1. må'daipør = gods
mådaï = god (Common word for god, may be used of all gods without distinction.)
ag'zupør – nø – bo = tools – for – too
ag'zu = piece of tool
-be = too, also (when used at the end of a word)
Line 1: We gave to gods and to tools too (implied: and now we give to you, oxen and cows).

2. nøṅ'sørbø = you too
Line: You too, eat!

Text 4: Wedding Ritual
Recited by mådai rainø gorøn before the eating of the 'hata 'suni hønai. The text is set in its ritual context in Chapter 3 (Haba, p. 49) and as used in the 'Kêrâjni Kân Kôtānâj (Kherani Khan Khotanai) festival in Chapter 6 (p. 148).
1. ehem – apha(r)
2. bura bă’tō – måharajā
4. di'nøiniprāi – 'bishoro – bihi – pišai – jabaị
1. ehem – apha
2. bura bathōu – maharaja
Texts


1. first being – father
2. name – great divine Majesty
3. [no attempt at translation, beyond both 'ishadī and 'saki = witness’]
4. today from – day – wife – husband – have become

Translation of Text 4
Siiger makes no attempt to translate this text. Nor do we. (Eds)

Commentary on Text 4

1. ehēm = name of first human being, original ancestor, cfr. Tradition concerning the Creation of the World. (Mākōrām says that ehēm is always mentioned at the beginning of the Bodo rituals.)
   Apār = father, ancestor
2. Bura bā’tō (borai bathou) = god, first king, king of the Bodos, Cfr. many legends. (Mākōrām says that he also is always mentioned at the beginning of the Bodo rituals.)
   māharajā = a title in connection with burabathō, great divine Majesty. It may also be used of great temporal kings, e.g. George V, VII, etc.
3. sāŋgrajā = name of bura bā’tō’s chief-minister.
   bari guňtaŋ = one of the warriors of king bura bā’tō and the god of the warriors.
   móitā hazī = one of the warriors of king bura bā’tō.
   agraŋ koila = ?
   sanja burali = one of the warriors of king bura bā’tō.
   'basmuti 'soudri = goddess, helper of mankind. Equal to the ‘seven sisters’ in the Hinduism.
   asā piša = ?
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alai kuṅgré = goddess
bilai kuṅgré = goddess
mau'tāntri = goddess
san'surju = sun. (If the Bodos get a wound in the finger they will sacrifice a white chicken to the sun.)
bilalaitā = star, moon, body in the sky
nakār nukūr = insect(s), but also used in general of all being living and moving in the soil and on the ground.
'gaiguru = Bengali word. Here used for ‘cow’. (They consider the cow a mother and the ox a father for them, as they give them milk and plough their fields.)
isahādī 'saki = witness, synonym meanings. 'saki is still used in ordinary language. isahādī is not used nowadays.

All those mentioned above from line 1–3 are called as witnesses at the wedding.

4. All the words are quite common word used nowadays. After dinø'niprāi the names of the husband and the wife are inserted.

Text 5: Ritual for a man who is ill

Recited by mådai rainø gørøṅ in front of the altar.

1. ehēm – apār
2. bura bā'tō – māharajā
3. devō – guru – devota – 'mānni – 'giri – 'dāta

1. ehem – apha
Texts

2. bura bathou – maharaja


1. first being – father

2. name – great divine king


5. you – worship – ready – is, are – kindly – this – sick man – let be recovered

6. invocation – my – head of – blood – will get to drink – this – sick man – free from illness – if you do not

7. invocation – Bato! – great divine majesty – this – sick man – free from illness – make surely, certainly – we – to you – pray

Translation of Text 5

*Original Father, Great God,*

*Oh, gods, goddesses, masters lords of honour, those who give, [I], a mere mortal, eater of earthworms and frogs*

*Am ready to worship you. Please let this sick man become healthy.*

*Help! You will get to drink my head-blood if you do not make this sick man healthy.*

*Help, oh Great God, we beseech you!*

*Please ensure that this sick man recovers.*

Commentary on Text 5

1. ehêm apâr = ehêm bôrâi, an invocation
2. bura bā'tō måharajā = an invocation
3. devō = god, in general; mask
guru = teacher, master; honorific term
devota = god or goddess
'mānni = honour of, common word
mān = honour
-ni = of
'giri = lord, common word used by servants to their masters
'dāta = giver, common word, (Bengali word)
Line 3: God, master, goddess, lord of honour, giver!
4. khansrī = name of worm, earthworm
jagrā = eater
imbu = frog, common word
nār = man (Bengali word), not common in Boro language
monu'sūmøya = human being (Bengali word)
N.B. The subject is silent, presumably 'ādzā himself.
5. nøṅkhōu = you
pujinø = worship, to worship
tamtim = ready, adj.
doṅgā = is, are
onnanøi = kindly
jobrakōu = sick, ill man
ko'røṅhødø = to let be recovered
'hødø = let, give, an indicative ending
Line 4-5: I, man, human being, eater of earthworm, eater of frog
is ready to worship you, let this sick man kindly be recovered.
(In order to humble themselves, they mention all the miserable
things they eat.)
6. dāhāi = invocation; here best as an exclamation: Help!
'añni = my
korāni = head of
thøy = blood
mān'loṅgøn = will get to drink
loṅ = to drink

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mån = to get; gôn, indication of future
gôkhrôn = healthy, free from illness, adj.
khal'ambla = if do not make
khalam = to make; kalam, negative form; -bla, hypothetic indication

Line 6: Help! My head-blood you will get to drink, if you do not make this sick man free from illness.

7. khalam = make! imp.
thârde = sure, certainly, adv.
khalam thârde = do make well. târde is never used alone but always combined with a verb. It adds an emphatic assurance to the verb
'aras'gabø = to pray, to request, to beseech
'aras = prayer, request
gab = to cry

Line 7: Help, oh bura bă'tô māharajā! Do make this man well do let him recover from (his) illness, we beseech you.

Text 6: Common saying concerning the Bă'tô
Recited in the Traditions of 'Băubŭlĭ Ră'dzā (Baobuli Raja) which are recited at the festival called 'Kērăjnĭ Kān Kō'tânăj (Kherani Khan Khotanai – chapter 6, p. 148). It will be recited by the 'gĭtăl, the others falling in. The Bodos think that the cactus tree is steady and fixed here for the festival in the courtyard of the home. The subject implied is the people and not the bă'tô. The people said (say):

1. zizōu – hônō – go'rāṅba / gørønbā
2. bă'tô – hônō – 'băndoba
3. batōa – dumdøṅ – 'sari 'sari
4. 'bosumatani – alī

1. shijōu – hônō – gōroŋba
2. bathōu – hônō – bandōba
The Bodo of Assam

3. bathōua – dumdōŋ – shari shari
4. boshumathani – ali

1. cactus tree – said – five grooves
2. altar – said – five (rows), bindings
3. altar – surrounded – line (by) line, row (by) row
4. earth of, world of – road

Translation of Text 6

The cactus bark has five grooves.
The ātō has five rows of bindings.
The ātō has a line of poles.
The road of mud is the road of the world.

Commentary on Text 6

1. zizōy = cactus tree, common word
   honō = said (hōn = to say). The subject is silent, but context recommends the abstract: it is said. It is a common saying.
   gorāṅ = expression for the grooves in the bark of the cactus tree.
   It has got five such grooves.
   -ba = five, numeral
   Line 1: It is said that the cactus tree has got five grooves in its bark.

2. ’bāndo = binding. Here: the five horizontal bamboo-bindings around the batō, -ba = five
   Line 2: It is said that the batho has got five bindings.

3. batōa = the ending -a: ? (The context should be: the Batho surrounded itself line by line?)
   dumdōn = surrounded; dum = to surround (a common word)
   ’sari = row, line (a common word); ’sari ’sari = by a line
   Line 3: The batō surrounded (by a line). (Presumably ‘itself’ is implied?)

4. ’bosumata = earth, world (Bengali word, a common word);
   ’bosu = earth, ’mata = mother, -ni = of
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ali = road (wall of soil built for the gods, stretching from the bă’tō towards the kitchen.) Also used to indicate the small mud-walls surrounding the paddy-fields

Line 4: The road of the world (earth)

Mākōrăm says that, just as the world has got five elements, so the human beings consist of five elements and the bathōu is built with five divisions. The five elements are the common Indian elements constituting the world:

The earth (the human body)
The water
The fire (the head of the human body),
The air (the breath)
The sky or ether (disappearance by death).

Text 7: Blessing of the father and mother
Recited by the 'gīṭāl at the end of the Kē’rāj Kān Kôtānăj festival. This festival is described in Chapter 6 (p. 148) during the narration of the traditions of 'Bāubūlī 'Rādzā.

1. nøṅ'soṟha – pisāh – pisōh – erlaṅtøṅ
2. møsōǥ – haliseā – halisni – jatøṅ
3. māi – bakrī – guṅsēa – guṅsnī – jatøṅ
4. nøṅni – noa – røhø røhø – jatøṅ
5. 'āro – nøṅha – zøi zøi – jatøṅ

1. nøŋ'shōrha – bisha – bishōu – erlaŋthōŋ
2. mōshōu – halishea – halishni – jathōŋ
3. mai – bakhrī – goŋshea – goŋshni – jathōŋ
4. nøŋni – noa – rōhō rōhō – jathōŋ
5. arō – nøŋha – jōi jōi – jathōŋ

1. To you, for you – son – grandson – let be increased
2. cows – a pair – seven pairs – let become
3. rice – storehouse – one house – seven houses – let become
5. and – to you – success – let become

Translation of Text 7

May your families grow.
May a pair of cows become seven pairs.
May one rice storehouse become seven.
May your house become prosperous,
And may success come to you.

Commentary on Text 7

1. pisāh = son, common word
   pisōu = grandson, common word
   ēr = to increase,
   Line 1: May your son and grandson be increased (let their families grow)
2. mösōu = cow
   hali = pair
   -sni = seven
   jā = to become
   Line 2: May a pair of cows become seven pairs.
3. māi = rice harvested, common word
   bakrī = storehouse
   guṅ- = is placed in front of inanimate nouns, and thus indicates approximately: a single piece
   -sni = seven
   Line 3: May one rice store-house become seven.
4. no = house, common word
   ā = one
   rōhō rōhō = prosperous, richly (much blessed); rōhō cannot be used alone.
Texts

Line 4: May your house become prosperous.

5. zøi zøi = success; zøi cannot be used alone.

Line 5: And, may success come to you.

Text 8: First song from the Mainau 'Disonnai Ceremony

(See Chapter 6. Legends and Myths, p. 163.)


1. I – go not – I – go not – elder brother – your – house
2. your – wives – squeezing – drying, giving trouble, causing trouble – sorts, kinds – depression, down-hearted – having made, have made – me

Translation of Text 8

I won't go, I won't go to your house, elder brother.
Your wives have harassed trouble me, and left me feeling depressed
As the small piece of cloth hides in the rickstand,
so the wound of my heart hides within me.

Commentary on Text 8

1. aṅ = I, common word
taṅ = to go; -a (negative)
ada = elder brother
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no = house; 'au = to (locative); noaū = to (your) house
Line 1: I won’t go, I won’t go to your house, elder brother.

2. bihi = wife; -pra (plur.)
šeb = to squeeze, to press
røgaṅ = to dry; (fig.) to cause trouble
'nanan bilāi = being of various sorts (adj)
alāi silāi = depression; oppression (composed noun)
kalam = to make
aṅkōu = me (acc.)
Line 2: Your wives have pressed me and caused me trouble and caused me to feel depressed in various ways.

3. 'sisri = rag, small piece of cloth, (material)
siba = rickstand to put clothes on; -au = in
gøsø = heart, soul, mind; -ni = of
køtā = wound
gorbø = inside, interior; -au = in
Line 3: As the small piece of cloth hides in the rickstand so the word of my heart hides in my interior.

Text 9: Second song from the Mainau 'Disonnai Ceremony
(See Chapter 6. Legends and Myths, p. 163.)
1. tū – binanāu – tuū – tū – binanāu – tuū
2. bā'tō – rajaniāu – 'tañdøni
3. bā'tō – rajayā – sonanī – alī – kalambāi
5. nønha – pisāh – pisōh – zalaṅgon
Texts

2. bathōu – rajaniao – thāndōni
3. bathōu – rajaya – shonani – ali – khalambai
5. nōŋha – bisha – bishōu – jalaŋgōn

1. let us go, come along – sister – let us go, come along
2. Bă'tō – to Ră’dzā – let us go
4. wine of – pond – rice of – road – meat of – fried rice – has made
5. you for – son – grandson – will be
6. front – servants – behind – servants – cattle (domestic animals) – will be
8. let us go, come along – sister – let us go, come along

Translation of Text 9

Come! Come along, younger sister,
Let us go to Ră’dzā Bă’tō!
Ră’dzā Bă’tō has made a road of gold.
He has a pond of rice-beer, a road of rice and plenty of meat.
You will have children and grandchildren.
You will be surrounded by servants and cattle.
He has brought a pair of bridesmaids, a pair of flutes, and a pair of cymbals.

Commentary on Text 9

1. tū = come along, let us go together (int.)
The Bodo of Assam

binanāu = younger sister
thū = extended form (singing)
Line 1: Come along younger sister, come along, come along, younger sister, come along.

2. rajaniāu = to the Radja (locative ending)
tañ = to go
tañdøni = let us go
Line 2: Let us go to the Raja.

3. rajaya = the Radja
sona = gold; sonani = of gold
alfi = road, used of planned roads, highways
kalam = to make; -bai (past tense ending)
Line 3: Rā’dzā Bā’tō has made a road of gold.

4. zøu = wine, i.e. rice-beer: -ni = of
'phukri = tank, pond
ṅkham = rice (prepared, boiled rice; (cleaned rice is called
mairān; paddy is mai)
bedāt = meat, flesh
akhāi = fried rice
bedātni akhāi = plenty of meat; Dinesh tells me that the Bodos
can use the following sentence: ańha bedātni akhāi = for me,
plenty of meat; dåṅ / is = I have got plenty of meat.
Line 4: He has made a pond of rice-beer, a road of rice and
plenty of meat.

5. zā = to be, to become: zalangøn (fut. tense)
Line 5: For you son (and grandson will be (become))

6. ag = in front
'bandi = maid, servant (bandi = barren cow)
pas = behind, in the rear
møsōg = cow
mosa = taken alone means ‘tiger’; used in connection with
møsōg the construction is used for cows, cattle, big domestic
animals; møsōg mosa = cows and etc.
Texts

Line 6: (For you servants in front (and servants behind, domestic animals will be.)

7. 'bôrati = name used for two women who, during the wedding ceremony, distribute betelnut to the guests. These women must not be widows. With flowers in a vase they will walk in front of the bride.

zora = pair, common word

sipuŋ = flute made of bamboo. (One would assume that the peîpa (flute) had been used here, because this is a wedding ceremony. Nowadays the peîpa only is used at wedding ceremonies – Dinesh.

jothā = cymbal. Not used at ordinary wedding ceremonies

labøg = to bring; here, past tense (The implied subject must be bă'tō)

Line 7: He has brought a pair of bridesmaids, a pair of flutes, and a pair of cymbals.

Text 10: Chant during Khouga Pørnai festival

(See Chapter 6, Legends and Myths, p. 145.) This text is recited three times in succession.

Recited by the 'âdzā

1. hum – hōnbla – huṅkaṛ – nāṅnāi
2. īs – hōnbla – bīs – nāṅnāi

1. humming sound – if you say – curse – being with
2. is – if you say – poison – being with

**Translation of Text 10**

*To hum is to curse.*

*To say īs is to voice displeasure.*

*Evil thoughts come from big, ugly mouths and teeth. Go away!*

**Commentary on Text 10**

1. **hum** = here used as a curse. Expression used in connection with a curse
   
   høn = to say; -bla = if; hønbla = if you say when you say
   
   huŋkar = denouncement
   
   naṅnāi = from naṅ (to contact, to be with); -nai = English ‘-ing’ ending
   
   Line 1: If you say ‘hum’ then it will be a sign of cursing (denouncing).

2. **īs** = expression used to indicate displeasure
   
   bīs = poison, common word
   
   Line 2: If you say ‘īs’ then it will be a sign of displeasure (poison).

3. **kōu** = here used instead of kougā (mouth). It may also be pronounced ‘kōga’ or ‘kūga’
   
   kouzråṅ = protruding (teeth), (adj.)
   
   dant = tooth, teeth (female)
   
   dantral = tooth, teeth (male); -ini = one who has
   
   måndai = evil (poisonous word, n.; (the root of the word ‘måndāi’ is unknown)
   
   poā = disappear, go away (int.) In Bodoincantations in the past, Assamese or Bangla words were mixed.
   
   Line 3: Mouth (with protruding teeth, (female mouth with big teeth, mouth (mouth) (with evil) (poisonous) word, mouth (with evil thoughts, go away!
   
   Explanation: People with mouths as mentioned above are assumed to have bad influence.
Recited by the 'âdzâ

1. jôŋô – be – mansikōu – nôŋsorkou – manasina kalamnô – takôi
   – pärsuŋnâi – jabâi
2. 'dâne – 'bējî – nôŋsörni – sigaŋao – 'dâŋâ
3. nôŋsörō – bekou – gâusörno – måjañoi – sai'kōnanoi – 'lâdo

1. jôŋô – be – mansikhôu – nôŋshôrkhou – manashina khalamnô
   – thakhôi – phorshuṅnai – jabai
2. danô – beô – nôŋshôrni – shigaŋao – dono

1. we – this – man – you – for – selection – becoming
2. now – he – you of – before – is
3. you – him – yourselves – nicely – selecting – take

Translation of Text 11

We have selected this man to minister to you.
Now he is standing before you.
Please accept him, selected nicely by yourselves.

Commentary on Text 11

1. mansikōu = acc. of mansi (man)
   manasina = honour, (from man); -sina = to be acquainted with, to give honour. Common word. Also used for to minister
   kalamnô = to do (from kalam), here: inf.
   pärsun = to select, here noun: selection
   ja = to be, to become, here: pres. part.
   Line 1: We have selected this man to ministering on you (to give honour).
2. 'dane = now (adv.)
The Bodo of Assam

sigaṅ = before
dāṅ = is, are; the word dāṅā may also be used for is, are

Line 2: Now he is (standing before you).

3. gau'sørne = you yourselves, they themselves (plur.)
mojaṅ = good, nice; here with the ending -øi = adv.

saiko = to select, here: selecting
lā = to take, here: honorific imp.

Line 3: Please take him, selected nicely by yourselves

Text 12: Purification Ritual for Incest

Recited by the 'ādzā. (Enumeration of the names of the gods and rivers)

1. 'manni – 'giri – 'data – 'kēmani – 'giri – de'vōta
2. atiṅ toṅbrōi – junarpørbøg – gōgløibla – nāṟmonu'sumuyaya – 'mǎno – gōgløiā
3. 'manni – 'giri – 'data – 'kēmani – 'giri – de'vōta


1. honour – owning – giver – forgiveness – owning – god
2. foot four / four-footed – animals also – fall down if – human being – why – fall down not

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Translation of Text 12

You, god, who is in possession of honour!
You, god, who is capable of forgiveness!
If four-footed animals also fall down (sin),
why should not human beings fall down?
You, giver, who is in possession of honour!
You, god, who is capable of forgiveness!
Kindly forgive this man for his offense.

Commentary on Text 12

1. man = honour
   'manni = of honour
   'giri = owner (n.)
   'data = giver, Bengali word
   'kemani = forgiveness (n.)
   de'vōta = god (masc.)
   Line 1: You giver who is in possession of honour, you god who is in possession of forgiveness! (address.)

2. athiṅ = foot, common word
toṅbroi = four (num.)
junār = animal; junarpør = animals
bø = also; (in daily parlance it is pronounced like: ‘junarpra bøg’)
gøgløi = to fall down; -bla = if
når = man (foreign word, Sanskrit)
monus = man
muya = being
nărmonu'sumayaya = human being
'māne = why
gøgløi = fall down; -ā = negative
Line 2: If four-footed animals also fall down (sin), why should not human beings fall down (sin).

3. (Repetition of line 1.)
The Bodo of Assam

4. ōnnai = kind, here adv.
pap = sin, common word
dai = offence
khema = forgiveness
høg = to give
Line 4: Kindly give forgiveness for the offence of this man (who is) committing sin (who has committed sin).

Text 13: Purification Ritual

Recited by the 'ådzä in case of secret adultery.

1. (Enumeration of the invoked gods)
2. jøŋø – nārmunu'sumøia – jøŋø – manisipørnī – gø'søpørkøu – mitia
5. dāhāi – nōŋsøro – jønnī – arās – gabnaikou – kø'nasu недо

1. (Enumeration of the invoked gods)

1. (Enumeration of the invoked gods)
2. We – human being – we – men of – minds – know do not
3. you – their – minds – know – and – see
4. This – men of – in the middle, among – anybody, somebody –
sin – having committed if – him, it – to bring into light

5. Help – you – our – prayer – crying, asking – do, please hear

Translation of Text 13

*We cannot read the minds of others*
*You do know their minds. You can see.*
*Please reveal anyone among us who has committed sin.*
*We beg your help! Please hear our prayer.*

Commentary on Text 13

2. mansi = man; -pør = plur.; -ni = of
gosø = mind, (here: plur.); -kou = acc. indication
miti = to know
Line 2: We human beings, we do not know the minds of men.

3. bi'sørni = their
miti = to know, the ending -gōu is used for emphasizing, thus
approximately: you do know
nū = to see
Line 3: You do know their minds and you see.

4. ge'jēr = middle, centre
sorbaya = anyone, somebody
pap = sin
nuzahø = to reveal
Line 4: If anyone among these men has committed sin, please,
bring it into light.

5. dāhāi = a sign of invocation for help
arās = prayer, common word
gab = to cry, here: to ask
kōnā = to hear, here: honorific (imp.)
Line 5: Help be with us. Do, please hear our asking prayer (hear
our prayer.)
Text 14: Consolation Song

Informant: 'Tanesår.

Consolation song with its own tune. The villagers will often sing this song, for instance, while they are toiling hard the field, when they observe that the crop is not satisfactory, etc. The idea of the entire song is: Don’t be proud of worldly things; one day we shall be deprived of all wealth.

1. aṅnī – dabuṅ – apa
2. bē – såńsarau – raunibō – rāu – nuńńa
3. dinōi – aṅnī – 'gābon – nøńńi
4. bē – såńsarā – såligōn – jōbā – 'mani
5. aṅnī – dabuṅ – apa
7. sansē – jagōn – 'lēter 'pēter
8. dōṅnāi – såmau – jagōn – møidēr – gārai
9. sansē – jagōn – alāi silāi
10. aṅnī – dabuṅ – apa

1. aŋni – dabuŋ – apha
2. be – shoŋsharao – raonibō – rao – noŋa
3. dinōi – aŋni – gabōn – nōŋni
4. be – shoŋshara – sholigon – jōba – mani
5. aŋni – dabuŋ – apha
6. thanai – shomao – gakhōgon – gorai – møidert
7. shanshe – jagōn – lethet pether
8. dōŋnai – shomao – jagōn – møidert – gorai
9. shanshe – jagōn – alai shilai
10. aŋni – dabuŋ – apha
Texts

1. I of, my – not say – father, son
2. this – world to, in – anyone – voice anything – not
3. today – I of, my – tomorrow – you of, your
4. this – world – will go on – finish not – till
5. I of, my – not say – father, son
6. having – time in – ride will – horse – elephant
7. one day – become will – scattered
8. having – time in – become will – elephant – horse
9. one day – become will – forlorn, lost
10. I of, my – not say – father, son

Translation of Text 14

Son, do not say ‘mine’.
In this world, nothing belongs to anyone.
Today mine, tomorrow yours.
This world will go on and on, forever.
Son, do not say ‘mine’.

When you become rich, you can ride your horse and elephant.
But one day, your wealth will be scattered.
There will come a time when elephant and horse will be yours.
But on another day, you will lose even yourself.
Son, do not say ‘mine’.

Commentary on Text 14

1. (address)
   aṅnī = my, mine
dabuṅ = do not say; -buṅ = to speak, to say; da- (neg. pref.)
apa = is used in address from the father to the son and from the son to the father.
The Bodo of Assam

Line 1: Father (son!) Do not say ‘mine’.
The meaning is that he cannot say that any worldly things belong to him, because he may die today or tomorrow and then the worldly things will belong to somebody else.

2. sânšēr = world, -au = in
    raunibø = anyone
    rāu = (a) voice, (b) anything
    nuṇā = not (common negation)
Line 2: In this world not anything (belongs to anyone)

3. dinøi = today
    'gabon = tomorrow
    nañ = you. This may also be pronounced ‘nøṅ’; -ni = of, here: your, yours
Line 3: Today mine, tomorrow yours.

4. 'sāli = to go on; såligøn = will go on (fut. ending)
    jøbā = derived from jøb (to finish); -a = neg. suf.
    'māni = till, common word
Line 4: This world will go on (like this infinitely).

6. ta = to stay, to have; -nai = having
    sâm = time; -au = in
    gakø = to ride; -gøn (fut. ending)
    gårai = horse
    møidēr = elephant
Line 6: When you have horse and elephant, in that time you will ride.
Meaning: When you become rich, then you can ride, etc.

7. san = day; -se = one
    'lēter 'pēter = scattered here and there, destroyed (combined and stiffened expression)
Line 7: One day it will get scattered (here and there).

8. dalam = to have
    ja = to become, to be
Line 8: There will come a time when elephant and horse will come (for you) (will become yours).

9. alāī silāī = abandoned, left, forlorn, lost (stiffened expression; common use.

Line 9: One day (the man himself) will become lost (he will lose his wealth, elephant, horse, etc. and become poor.)

Text 15 Recitation by the cowherds at the Bælă’gûr Său’năi

The occasion of Bælă’gûr său’năi is the only text known to 'Tanesår that includes both a blessing and a curse. As a rule, the people will only practice either blessing or curse. The Bælă’gûr său’năi is commonly seen in Assam’s plains as, for example, in the Assamese meji-mesdaha. But in Bodo society, the cowherds had a role to play in the past in this post-harvest festival now called magw domasi. Belagur means a bamboo structure wrapped with dry hair or firewood for ceremonial burning on the early morning of magw domasi. The cowherds perform the incantations in a playful rather than serious way. There was a tradition of cowherd worship by some couples who had tried, without success, to have children. (Anil Boro)

15A: Bør – hönăi (bôr – hônai) (blessing)


The Bodo of Assam


1. whosoever – us – having been kind – and – help – gave – forest in/at – son – grandson with – let (him) get to eat – and – long – last

2. hut in – to stay – giver – men – long – last

3. us to / for – asking at – chicken – egg – givers to – son – grandson – let it be

4. we of (our) – good – lords / masters – to buffalo – cow – many – let it be

15B: Sau – hónai (shao honai) (curse)


1. us to / for – chicken – egg – give not – women – son – stopping – die let
Texts

2. us – chaser – and – beaters for – everything – finish let be / happen ––

3. us – unjust – doer – lords to – many – buffalo – cows – not be let

4. rain – falling at – us to – to stay – house / hut – not giver – men / we like – trouble / punishment – let be

Translation of Text 15

To all who have been kind and helped us, even in the big jungle, may they eat with their children and grandchildren, and live a long life.

Let the men last long who let us stay in their huts when it rained.

Let there be sons and grandsons for those who fed us.

Let there many buffaloes and cows for our good masters.

Let those who did not feed us die childless.

Let all be finished for those who have chased and beaten us.

Let the lords who were unjust live without many buffaloes or cows.

Let the man who did not share his hut get the same experience we had when the rain was falling.

Commentary on Text 15

A. bör = blessing, börhø = to bless, hø = to give, hønai = giving

1. jai = who, jai-jai = whosoever

   ån = to be kind; Đoñ = indication of past tense

   hepajab = help, assistance

   ’hagra = jungle. ’bāña is used in connection with ’hagra. The meaning of ’bāña itself is unknown. It indicates a big jungle but not impenetrable. The impenetrable jungle is called aulia.

   møn = to get; ja = to eat; -tøñ = let (something) take place, let (him) get to eat

   göbaui = long (of time), (long indicating space = gölau)

   jør = to last, to live long
The Bodo of Assam

Line 1: Whosoever has been kind and has given help to us (even) in the big jungle, let him get to eat with son and grandson and last (for a) long (time).

2. 'dera = hut; yau = in
   ta = to stay; -nø = infinitive ending
   høgra = given, from hø = to give
   Line 2: Let the men last long who gave us (permission) to stay in (their) hut. (The cowherds are grateful to those men that have not been cruel and forbidden them to stay in their huts during rain.)

3. jøṅ = we; jøṅnø = to us, for us
   magi = to ask, to beg; au = at
   'dausa = chicken
   daudøi = egg
   pør = indicates plur.; -ha = to
   ja = to be; -tøṅ = to let (something happen.)
   Line 3: Let there be son and grandson for those who gave us chicken (and) egg when we asked.

4. møjañ = good (common word)
   'giri = lord, master; -pør = plur. Indication; -ha = to
   møisø = buffalo
   gøbañ = many (common word)
   Line 4: Let there be many buffaloes and cows for our good masters.

B. sau = curse, sau hø = to curse, to give curse, -nai = ing, ending

1. hâ = to give; -yøi = negation
   hinjaupra = plur. of hinjāu
   'tabta = to stop (here: present participle)
   tøi = to die; -tøṅ = to let (something happen)
   Line 1: Let (those) women die, stopping (the birth of their) son, who did not give us chicken (and) egg.

2. hø'søgra = chaser, from høsø = to chase
   bu = to beat; bugra = one who beats
joboŋ = everything
jøb = to finish; -laŋ = indicates that it happens; -tøŋ = to let (it) happen

Line 2: Let everything be finished for those that have chased and beaten us.

3. inai = unjust, injustice, wrong, (gaham = just, right)
kalam = to do; -gra = one who performs, executes something; doer
da- = negation; ja = tobe; -tøŋ = to let (something happen)

Line 3: Let (there) not be many buffaloes (nor) cows for the lords who did us injustices.

4. noka = rain (common word)
ha = to cut; the construction 'noka hanai = rain is falling; noka ha = to rain

ta = to stay; -nø = infinitive ending
-yøi = indicates a negation and is used after a verb

badi = like
'sasti = trouble; punishment

Line 4: Let there be trouble, same as we got (when the rain was falling on) us for the man who did not give us hut (shelter) to stay in (when the rain was falling).

Text 16: Song of Temperance Movement

Informant: 'Tanesår

1. a'kaini – asìa – sàman – 'nuña – apa
2. Bo'røni – bisaia – akål – gøiā
3. loinlaibái – sikasē – nañzlai – kumzlai – balap-gasē
4. å – Bo'røni – bisapør*
5. loinlaibái – jantasē – buzläi – søzlai – dabørsē
6. å – Bo'røni – bisapør
7. loinnanøi – tadøg – sirī srāi
8. gaujøn gau – 'danañzlai*
The Bodo of Assam

1. akhaini – ashia – shoman – noŋa – apha
2. boroni – bishaya – akhol – gôia
4. ó – boroni – bishaphor*
5. lôŋlaibai – janthashe – bujlai – shôujlai – dabôrshe
6. ó – boroni – bishaphor
7. lôŋnanôi – thadô – shiri shrai
8. gaojoŋ gao – dananjlai*

1. hand of – finger – same – not – father, son
2. Boro of – son – sense, wisdom – not having
3. drink having finished – full bowl – to quarrel – to fight each other – once
4. Oh – Boro of – sons, children’
5. drink (having finished) – sieve – beat, strike each other – to strike back – for some time
6. Oh – Boro of – sons, children
7. drinking – to stay, to remain – silence
8. you yourselves – not quarrel, do not quarrel*

* Note: At the end of each of these lines, Siiger requests that lines 1 and 2 be repeated. We are uncertain about his intention as, unique to this text, he does not ask that additional lines be added. His normal system also appears in this text: Line 6 instructs, ‘Repeat Line 4’. (Eds)

Translation of Text 16

The fingers and hands of father and son are different sizes. Similarly, that ‘son’ (referring or pointing to an intoxicated man) has no wisdom (less wisdom than a sober man). Once, after they finished drinking a bowlful, they quarreled and fought with each other. Oh, you sons of Boros!
The fingers and hands of father and son are different sizes. Similarly, that ‘son’ has no wisdom.

When they have finished drinking a sieve-full they beat (one another) for a while.

Oh, you sons of Boros!

Please remain silent when you drink.

You must not quarrel among yourselves!

The fingers and hands of father and son are different sizes. Similarly, that ‘son’ has no wisdom.

Commentary on Text 16

1. akai = hand
   ası = finger; -a = definite article
   såman = same, equal
   'nuña = negation: not
   apa = father, son
   Line 1: The fingers of a hand are not same (equal), alike in size (so the Boros are not equal).

2. bisā = son; -ja = sign of indication: That son of the Boros
   akål = sense, wisdom
   goîā = not (having), common negation
   Line 2: That son of the Boros has no wisdom The singer is here addressing a man who is intoxicated.
   Explanation: Just as there is no equality in the sizes of the fingers, so there is no equality in wisdom (as regards the drinking of beer among the Boros).

3. løn = to drink; -laibāi = indicates that something has come to an end
   sikasē = a bowlful (measure for rice-beer)
   nanzlāi = to quarrel
   kumzlāi = to fight, to wrestle
   balap = jointly, in group; gase = once, one time. The construction ‘balap gase’ means ‘once’.
   Line 3: (When they once jointly have finished drinking a bowlful (of rice-beer) they quarrel and fight each other.
The Bodo of Assam

4. bisa = son, child
   Line 4: Oh, you sons of Boros!
5. janta = sieve (common word); -se = one, a. Sieve or strainer that
   the rice beer is pressed through in order to separate beer from
   the rice, which is left in the sieve. (Eds)
   buzslai = to beat, to strike
   sozslai = to strike back
   daborse = for some time, for a while
   Line 5: When they have finished drinking a sieve-full they beat
   (one another) for a while.
7. løn = to drink; -nanøi = -ing ending
   ta = to stay, to remain; -døg = honorific imperative!
   'siri = quiet, silent; 'siri srai = silent
   Line 7: Drinking, you must remain silent. (When you drink, you
   must not quarrel, etc.)
8. gaujøng = yourselves; gau = you yourselves
   da- = negation
   nanzlai = to quarrel
   Line 8: You must not quarrel yourself!

In 1938–1939 there was a temperance movement among the Bodos. People went round in the villages and destroyed everything connected with the preparation of rice-beer. At that occasion they would sing the song above. Notwithstanding that movement, it is said that the people are still drinking a lot (Siiger).

The movement, led by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma since 1913, must have made its way to Patkijuli in 1938–1939. This socio-religious movement declared a crusade against ‘malpractices’ in Bodo society, including the habit of brewing and drinking rice beer, raising pigs and eating pork and other meats, worshipping the spirits (Anil Boro).

Text 17: Proverbs

Informant: 'Tanesår, Bongaigaon, January 1950

Proverb 1
   døi – guduňjøñ – møi – hånäi – bådi – kalamnø
**Texts**

\[døi – gudunjøŋ – moi – honai – badi – khalamnø\]

water – hot with – deer – removing hair – like – to do

*Translation:* To work like removing hair (from) deer with hot water

*Explanation:* It is not necessary to make haste (like must when you use hot water to remove the hair from a deerskin). Meaning: Do not be in a hurry! More haste less speed!

*Commentary:*

- døi = water (common word)
- gudunjøŋ = hot
- jøŋ = with
- moi = deer
- hå = remove; -nāi = -ing ending

**Proverb 2**

\[sikauni – salaiā – kandā\]

\[shikaoni – shalaia – khandā\]

thief of – tongue – short, half

*Translation:* The tongue of a thief is half.

*Explanation:* You cannot trust a thief. Used of thieves or other guilty persons to indicate that they cannot be used as reliable witnesses.

*Commentary:*

- sikhau = thief
- salai = tongue; -a = one, a
- khandā = short, half, (’ada = half)

**Proverb 3**

\[jainī – suŋkrī – jayø – ’bini – nam – ’gāiø\]

\[jaini – shuukhrī – jadō – bini – nam – gaiø\]

who of – salt – eats – him of – name – sings

*Translation:* He who eats a man’s salt, sings that man’s name (praise).
Proverb 4

hisrī-hī – sibayau – gō'søni – kotā – gørbāu

*hishri-hi – shibaiao – gōshōni – khotha – gorbao*

small piece of cloth – frame, rickstand – mind of – word –

heart in

Translation: Small pieces of cloth in the frame (rickstand) (are like

the words of the mind in the heart.)

Explanation: Used of a man who cannot express his innermost

grief. Just like small pieces of cloth may be hidden in the rickstand

among the bigger ones, so the words of that man cannot find their

way out of his heart.

Often used of a man who owing to grieve cannot express his

sorrow and respond to consolation.

Commentary:

hisrī = small piece of cloth

hī = cloth

siba = rickstand, frame

gōsø = mind

kota = word

gørbø = interior; heart

Proverb 5

kanaiā – kana'joñ – 'taña

*khanaia – khanajōŋ – thaŋa*

blind man – blind with – does not go

Translation: A blind man does not go with a blind man.
**Texts**

*Explanation:* Used for instance of a guilty man. He will not be trusted to correct or judge other people.

*Commentary:*

'kana = blind; -a = a, one  
-jōṅ = with  
taṅ = to go; -a = negation

**Proverb 6**

```
ada – naṅgraṅ – bajøi – naṅgraṅ  
ada – naṅgrañ – bajōi – naṅgrañ  
brother – being in contact with, to touch, to concern, regard  
– sister-in-law – to contact
```

*Translation:* To accuse the sister-in-law (along) with the brother.

*Explanation:* As a wife shares everything with her husband, an accusation against him will hit her too, even if she is innocent.  
*Meaning:* Be careful when accusing! Indirectly, you may hit an innocent person.

*Commentary:*

naṅ = to contact  
-graṅ = indicating that two things influence one another, un-  
necessarily  
bajøi = sister-in-law

**Proverb 7**

```
kināi – mansīa – lajȳa – nunāi – mansia – lajē  
khinai – manshia – lajia – nunai – manshia – lajiô  
stool passing – man – does not feel ashamed – seeing
```

*Translation:* A man who passes stool does not feel ashamed, but the man who sees it feels ashamed.

*Explanation:* A guilty person does not feel ashamed, but other people do.
Commentary:

kī = to pass stool, (here: pres. part.)
mansi = man; -a = a, one
lajī = to feel ashamed; -a = negation
nū = to see

Proverb 8

shōima – shōŋnaia – orrōňa – nokha – khörômnaia – harōňa
dog – barking – bites not – rain – thundering – does not rain

Translation: A barking dog does not bite; the thunder (alone) does not give rain, nor do roaring clouds give rain.

Commentary:

søimā = dog (common word)
søŋ = to bark; -naia = -ing ending
ār = to bite; -rōň = to know; -a = negation (i.e., does not know to bite)
nākā = rain (here: clap of thunder)
kɒrôm = to thunder
hā = to cut; nākā ha =to rain
-rōň = to know; -a = negation (i.e., does not know to rain); -rōň is constructed with some verbs. The original meaning of -rōň is lost here.

Proverb 9

jāmøi – gɔya'labano – nɔkā – 'hānai
jomøi – gôialabanô – nokha – hanai
cloud – without – rain – raining

Translation: Raining without clouds.

Explanation: Used when someone spreads rumours without foundation.

Commentary:

jāmøi = cloud (common word)
gɔya = not
gɔya'labano = without
Proverb 10
year one – paddy – not properly growing – do not cry – woman
– work (weaving) – not knowing to work – cry

Translation: Do not cry if one year the paddy does not grow properly, but do cry if a woman does not know how to weave and does not know how to work.

Commentary:
bøsør = year (common word); -se = a, one
māi = paddy, growing in the field
jā = to grow; -jōi = negation; -kou = acc. ending
dā- = negation; gab = to cry
haba = to work; to weave (especially in case of women)
røñ = to know

Text 18: Love song

Told by 'Tanesår.

He had heard it at the village of 'Baṉtål in the Goalpara (Now Chirang District) about 1940. It was sung by a man to a girl, making fun with her. It is a well-known love song.

1. rɵgɵ – rɵgʌṅ – agøi
2. jøṅlai – sanøibøg – gupuṟ – jøgaṅ
3. agøi – rɵgʌṅ – nainøbøg – mojaṅ
7. røgo – rɵgãŋ – agøi
The Bodo of Assam

8. jōṅlai – sanōibō – gupur – jōgaṅ

1. rɵgɵ – rɵgoŋ – agói
2. jōṅlai – shanōibô – guphur – jōgaŋ
3. agói – rɵgoŋ – nainōbō – mōjāŋ
4. aınin – göshōkhōunô – aıkhañ baikañ – khalamōi – mani
7. rɵgo – rɵgoŋ – agói
8. jōṅlai – shanōibô – guphur – jōgaŋ

1. man’s name – girl’s name – dear
2. we (together) – both (together) – white, beautiful – very
3. dear – girl’s name – to see – beautiful
4. my, mine – mind – excited – does it – why
5. look at – see if – tarai-tree – leaf – waist – see if – insect, ant – waist
6. calf of leg – see if – new bamboo – bottom part – nose – see if – thorn of a lemon tree
7. man’s name – girl’s name – dear
8. we (together) – both (together) – white, beautiful – very

Translation of Text 18

(We) are Rɵgo (and) Rɵgoñ, (oh beloved)
Together, we are very beautiful.
Beloved Rɵgoñ, alone, is beautiful to see.
Why does (her beauty) make my mind so excited?
Your face is smooth like a tarai leaf, your waist is thin like an ant.
Your calf is like the lower part of a bamboo bud; Your nose is like a lemon tree thorn.
Commentary on Text 18

1. rɵgɵ = boy’s name, nickname  
   rɵgʌṅ = nickname of a girl  
   agøi = common address between lovers and family-members, almost the same as dear, beloved, sweetheart, darling.  
   Line 1: (we) are rɵgɵ (and) rɵgʌṅ , (oh beloved)

2. jøṅ = we; -lāi = together, we both of us  
   sanøi = both; -bø = two, we both  
   gupur = white; beautiful  
   jøgʌṅ = very (not frequently used)  
   Line 2: We together, both of us (are) very beautiful.

3. nai = to see; -nø = inf. Ending; -bøt = also, all together  
   mɵjaṅ = nice, good; beautiful  
   Line 3: Beloved R, to see, too, is beautiful

4. gøsø = mind; -khou = acc. ending; -nɵ = def. acc  
   aikaṅ baikaṅ = stiffened expression, excited  
   kalam = to do; -øg = pres. indef  
   'bani = why (common word)  
   Line 4: Why does it make my mind so excited (her beauty and appearance make him excited).

5. mɵkaṅ = face  
   tarai = tarai-tree. The leaves of this tree are used as food for elephants. It has got plain and smooth leaves.  
   janji = waist, loin  
   måzlai = insect, and that has a very narrow waist  
   Line 5: If I look at (your) face (it) is like the leaf of a tarai tree; if I look at your waist (it) is like the ant.

6. adøi = calf of leg (common word)  
   mørwāi = new bamboo-bud just coming up  
   kita = the bottom part, the base, the lower part  
   gåntuṅ = nose (common word)  
   'narɵṅ = lemon tree, lemon plant; -su = thorn  
   Line 6: If I look at (your) calf it is (like the lower part of a new bamboo bud. If I look at your nose (it) is like the thorn of the lemon plant.
Text 19: Children’s Song

Informant: 'Tanesår, January 1950, Bongaigaon

1. øg – okapør – ma – nāgīrdôn
2. bizī – kandā – nāgīrdôn
3. bizī – kandākou – 'mānø
4. hisrī – hikōu – sufīnø
5. hisrī – hikōu – 'mānø
6. moïsø – raṅganø – gānhônø
7. moïsø – raṅkakōu – 'mānø
8. goalparaïāu – laïnø
9. goalparaïāu – 'mānø
10. 'pūja – hōinø

1. ōu – okhaphôr – ma – naigirdôn
2. biji – khanda – naigirdôn
3. biji – khandakhou – manô
4. hishri – hikhôu – shuthinô
5. hishri – hikhôu – manô
6. môishôu – raṅganø – gānhônø
d. môishôu – raṅgakhou – manô
8. goalparayao – laïnø
9. goalparayao – manô
10. phuja – hōinô

1. oh – moon – what – searching for, looking for
2. needle – half-broken – searching for, looking for
3. needle – half-broken – why
4. rags – clothes – sewing repairing
5. rags – clothes – why
6. buffalo – red – put on
7. buffalo – red – why
8. Goalpara – take and go
9. Goalpara – why
10. to worship – to perform

Translation of Text 19

Oh, moon! What are you looking for?
I am looking for a half-broken needle.
Why a half-broken needle?
To repair the ragged clothes.
Why will you mend the clothes?
To dress the buffalo with red clothes.
Why dress the buffalo in red?
To bring it to Goalpara.
Why bring it to Goalpara?
To perform a puja.

Commentary on Text 19

1. øg = oh
   okhapøř = moon (common word)
   ma = what
   nagīr = to search, to look for; -døṅ = ending of present continuous
   Line 1: Oh, moon! What are you looking for?
2. bizī = needle
   kandā = half-broken
   Line 2: (The) moon is supposed to reply. I am looking for a half-broken needle.
3. 'māne = why
   Line 3: Why are you looking for a half-broken needle?
4. hisrī = rags (common word)
   hi = cloth; -kou = acc. ending
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su = to sew
suti = to repair by sewing; -ne = inf. ending
Line 4: (The) moon is supposed to reply. To repair the rags of the cloth.

6. møisø = buffalo
'rāṅga = red (probably a light-coloured buffalo); -nøg = to, for
'gānhø = to dress; gan- = to wear, to put on
Line 6: To dress the red buffalo (to decorate the red buffalo with clothes.

7. [no commentary]
8. lā = to take
lañ = to take and go
9. [no commentary]
10. puja = to worship, to honour by sacrifice
hø = to give
høi = to go and give

Text 20: Children’s play-chant

1. 'ēṅbør – 'tɵṅbør – 'kailabøk
2. dausā – katī – mohabør
3. kukūr – katī – dom / dâm

1. eybør – thøybør – khailabør
2. daosha – khathi – mohabør
3. khukhur – khathi – dom

1. Siiger offers no translation
2. chicken – cutting – great blessing
3. dog – cutting – name of the lowest caste

Translation of Text 20
No meaningful translation.
Commentary on Text 20

1. The meaning of the two first words is unknown. They seem to be children’s nonsense words. In the game songs of children nonsense words are used, but the words have role in keeping the rhythm or rhyme of the song while playing the game.
   -bør = used alone as a verb means to become made; used as a noun it means blessing.
   'kaila = a sort of fruit like balsam-apple. It has got a bitter taste. It is prepared like curry and eaten.

2. katī = to cut, Bengali word
   mohabør = blessing? Not a Bodo word
   moha = great, Bengali word
   -bør = blessing, (Boro language)

3. kukūr = dog, Bengali word
   Dom = name of the lowest Hindu-caste. It does not exist among the Bodos.
   (As mentioned earlier Assamese or Bangla words are used in some songs or incantations)
   There is no sure translation of the song.

Text 21: Kerkā-moti chant. Children’s Play

1. kerkā – moti – kerkā – jāi
2. dumni – moti – dumni – jāi
3. kāi – boli – jāi

1. kherkha – mothi – kherkha – jai
2. domni – mothi – domni – jai
3. khai – boli – jai

Translation of Text 21
No meaningful translation.

Commentary on Text 21

1. kerkā = ordinary sieve
The Bodo of Assam

moti = fist
jāi = goes; jā, jawā = to go
2. dumni = junction, i.e. used where two rivers meet.
3. kai = who (Bengali word))
boli = to distribute (common Bodo word)
Translation: It is difficult to give a sure translation. The fist is compared with a sieve. The meaning is rather evident when the text is explained by the description of the play. (As with the earlier song, nonsense words are used to keep the rhyme or rhythm of the song.)
CHAPTER 9

Articles of Material Culture

Peter B. Andersen and Santosh Soren

This catalogue is based on our and Anil Boro’s inspection of the items owned by the National Museum of Denmark in Brede. From the Museum’s perspective, the items were collected either by Halfdan Siiger or by Aksel Kristiensen. However, Siiger’s notes make clear that each man had assistance, ‘Dinesh’ and Mån'såb Boshumathari respectively, during this process. We have cross-referenced the museum’s records (hand-written as well as electronic) with Siiger’s list of ethnographica purchases among the Bodos), and have compared all of these records with the physical objects themselves. Hence, we are confident that our presentation is accurate and complete, although limited to items ascribed to the Bodo community. We share our cross-referencing with the reader (see Figure 9.1) by including each object’s museum inventory number along with Siiger’s and Kristiansen’s identification numbers, dates and locations purchased, and other ethnographic details as available. By noting the date of each source, one can discern whether the knowledge dates back to the specific village where an item was obtained (List of Acquisitions), from memories contemporary with the date of purchase (Siiger’s manuscript and the Inventory), or from more modern memories (AB, MB, and the Electronic Inventory).

1. Fortegnelse over Ethnografiske indkøb blandt Bodo’erne i Assam 1949–1950. Litra: B.) (List of Acquisitions)
Together with Anil Boro (AB), we visited the museum’s facilities in Brede in January 2013. Boro’s training as a folklorist and lifetime of Bodo experience was a huge help while museum assistants Anja Blok Jespersen and Suzan Mephair rendered invaluable help and advice. Curator Inge Damm (ID) discussed the textiles with us and has also commented on some of the entries in this chapter. At a 2013 visit in Guwahati, a designer, Ms Mwanabili Brahma (MB), advised Peter B. Andersen on the weaving patterns of some textiles.

We include the items Siiger collected from the Bodos, but omit those collected from other groups living in Assam at that time. In three cases (Nos 92–94) this raises a problem, but in most cases this curating assignment was easy: when Siiger noted that a bow was collected from the Bodos it was included, but when he noted that it was collected from the Santals it was not included. As the National Museum of Denmark had neither earlier collections from the Bodos nor later follow-up collections, this catalogue can be considered as a full catalogue of the collections of material culture from the Bodos in the collections of the National Museum of Denmark.

Figure 9.1: List of Sources

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<td>List of Acquisitions</td>
<td>List of Acquisitions, written by Siiger at the time the objects were purchased.</td>
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<td>Siiger</td>
<td>At some point before 1953, Siiger began drafting a catalogue. This work is unfinished.</td>
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<td>Inventory</td>
<td>As objects arrived in Denmark, the National Museum of Denmark constructed an inventory based on Siiger’s notes and the curators’ personal inspection of the objects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electronic Inventory</td>
<td>During 1988–1989, the National Museum of Denmark compiled an electronic inventory, which supplements (and occasionally contradicts) the older inventory.</td>
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<td>AB</td>
<td>Anil Boro, folklorist, personally inspected the collection in January 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>Mwanabili Brahma, a designer, gave advice on weaving patterns in April 2013</td>
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### Articles of Material Culture

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The Bodo of Assam

Cloth and Clothing

To the extent possible, Siiger followed the Museum’s instructions and collected textiles directly from their original users, thus enabling the Museum to document the common culture of the Bodos. (Ulrik Høj in press). Exceptions that were bought directly in the bazaar are clearly noted. The most common exceptions are fabrics bought by Bodos in the bazaar. These pieces typically are machine-made shirts ‘gåsla (goshla) and underwear genjī (genji). One can also see that ready-to-wear clothes were already expanding among the Bodos during Siiger’s visit.2 As he stated in his manuscript, a vest might ‘be worn under a shirt, but is very often worn without any shirt’. The gamsa (gamsha), a very short, tied loincloth much like the longer dhotis of the Bengalians which reaches the ankles. Sometimes the gamsas were also bought ready-made in the bazaar, but sometimes it was only the thread for them and the cloth woven locally (Siiger).

2. None of these readymade items have been included in the collections of The National Museum of Denmark.
Siiger also collected other items which we have not identified in the inventory at the National Museum of Denmark; it is a long type of a Bamboo-topie, kōpri (khophri)\(^3\) used in the planting season only, that is the rainy season. There has also been what Siiger calls a fork-cloth 'leñti (leñthi) which was held up by a string, but not used in Goalpara. And a string of cotton 'janji 'gunsa (janji gunsha)\(^4\) worn round the waist-line to keep up the gamsas. Surprising information as gamsas and the Bengali dhotis later on are usually worn without any supporting sting or belt, but just tied together.

Siiger bought three pieces of fabric representing typical weaving patterns items 1, 2 and 3 in the bazaar, and in his manuscript he informs us that each is used by women, ‘covering the body from the breasts and downwards. The women weave this cloth of silk bought at the bazaars… There are special types of patterns for the various neighborhoods and villages. Of late years the women have been buying dyed cotton thread at the bazaars. Previously they dyed the cotton themselves or bought dye from the Bhutanese’.

1. A fabric (dākna (HS), dokhna (HS & AB)), used by women
It is a garment of red silk mixed with yellow, pink and mauve. Along the sides there are ribbons of brocade pattern woven in brown on yellow or red. The Inventory designates the silk as shantung, length 247 cm, height 124 cm. Siiger notes that he purchased this dākna from ‘school teacher Djå’gændrå.’See Figure 6.10 p.165.

2. A fabric (jiyra (AB), dākna or dokhna (HS)), used by women
An upper garment for women in yellow silk (cotton, according to List of Acquisitions) interwoven with ribbons in red, green, orange and blue. Length 264 cm, height 107 cm. Siiger notes that he purchased this dākna from ‘Jacob’s mother.’

3. A fabric (dākna (HS), dokhna (HS & AB)), used by women
The cloth for women wound over the breasts. The cloth is woven in coarse yellow silk in stripes (silk or cotton) of red, orange, yellow and

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3. The khophri called shatha (umbrella) in Bengali (Siiger and eds).
4. The 'janji 'gunsa is derived from 'janji – waistline, and 'gunsa – cotton string. Bodos use a thin string and the Santals use a thick one.
nuances of red woven in two warps with red, green patterns along some of the ribbons. The garb ends in fringes. The weaving technique is very complicated, perhaps brocade. Length 241 cm, width 121 cm.

4. A shawl (jumgra (AK) or dokhna (AK & AB)), used by Bodo women
The shawl is woven of red, yellow and white with minor patterns of orange and black. The main pattern is goose eye but some of the vertical stripes are just the red and white thread left open for about 8 threads or 1.2 cm. The red thread is silk, while the yellow and other colours seem to be cotton. Siiger writes that the weaving is called ar’går, it is a ‘woman-dress [that] equates with the Indian sari’ (List of Acquisitions). Kristiansen notes that it is ‘A Bodo women’s dress, used as a shari’ (i.e. shawl). Both Siiger and Kristiansen may be right, but it is too short to be wrapped around the body as a dokhna. Height 105 cm, length 170 cm.

5. A piece of silk cloth (indi hi (AK), indi si (AB)), rectangular, used by Bodo women
A rectangular piece of silk of the variety indi si, that is derived from indi, or mulberry tree, and hi which means cloth (List of

5. There are different terms for silk in the materials of the collections: silk (H. Siiger), Assam country silk (A. Kristiansen) and Shantung silk (Inventory). In many cases these different terms refer to the same product; museum curators’ use of ‘Shantung’ is merely descriptive and does not imply cultural
Acquisitions). The silk is in natural colour (‘brown’, List of Acquisitions) and the weaving has three closures at each end. The Inventory indicates that this piece is used as a sari, but on inspection we conclude that it is too short for that use. It must be wrapped in the typical Bodo fashion. Height 116 cm, length 332.5 cm.

6. Upper garment (‘sādōr bi’šā/shador bisha (List of Acquisitions))
The Bengali word sador designates a piece cloth worn as an upper garment’ and bisha means ‘small’ or ‘little’. It is used by men, communication between northeast India and northeast China. However, it is also possible that variations among more precise terms do in fact reflect variations among different kinds of silk.
women and children. It is ‘woven in the village by women. The dyed threads are bought readymade in the bazaar’ (List of Acquisitions). The Inventory adds that it is Assam Silk. See Figure 5.6, p.108.

7. A garb (bisina bogra si (AB), jöm Bainäi (jombainai) (HS)), used by men
A red and white chequered silk (shantung) for males. It is woven in double threads, tabby. In his manuscript Siiger states that it is a ‘Long piece of woven cloth for covering the body. Woven of thread bought in bazaars. Many different colours. May be worn by all men.’ Siiger’s identification of the Bodo name may hint that it is bought in the bazaars as he states that jöm means ‘to cover the body’ and bainai may be derived from bai ‘to buy’. Length 236, height 120 cm.

Siiger describes items 8, 9, 10 and 11 as ‘Turban (palî (phali)), local weaving of bazaar-bought thread. May be worn by all men … Small turban may be used by all men the larger turban may be used by headmen only. The small turbans may have various colours, whereas the larger turbans for headmen are always white.’ See Figure 5.6, p.108.
8. A towel/turban (*palī* (*phali*)) or just a piece of cloth (*thebul ji*), fringed
Garb of white cotton with patterns of brocade woven in silk of red, black and yellow. The pattern is in borders of respectively black and red, and a white centre with a couple of red threads in open work, followed by the same sequence of borders to the other side of the garb. The motive at the middle which may be described as trees is not any set weaving pattern (MB). The square piece has fringes at all four sides. The garb is worn and has been loosely repaired by a stitching.

The rectangular garb is interwoven with red and black and ends in fringes on all four sides. The Inventory and the Electronic
Inventory disagree on whether the material is shantung silk or cotton. It looks most like cotton. Length 47.5 cm, width 43.5 cm.

9. A towel/turban (palī (phali)) or just a piece of cloth (thebul ji), fringed
The yellow garb is interwoven with borders along the length in orange and green silk. The Inventory and the Electronic Inventory disagree on whether the material is shantung silk or cotton; we believe it is cotton. Length 62 cm, width 58.5 cm.

10. A piece of cloth (agor phalli (AB)), fringed
A tablecloth (AB) with borders of brocade silk (or shantung as stated in the Inventory) red, blue and green. The cloth is perhaps made
of a mixture of *eri* silk (weft) and cotton (warp). The square piece has a line of triangular patterns at the top and the bottom. From the bottom red border (*kaseo bibar*, ‘eye of the tortoise’ (MB)) there are two blue patterns (*pahar ekwnai*, ‘hill’ (MB)) along the sides changing into green and across the middle of the garb, but ending before they reach the other red pattern at the opposite side of the garb. In the middle column there are patterns of flowerlike figures in green and red, but of no specific weaving pattern (MB). The red side is of the pattern *kaseo bikha* ‘eye of the tortoise’ and the dark of *pahar erknai*, ‘hill’. There are fringes at all sides. The cloth is worn and has been repaired and has some brown spots in the centre and speckles as of mould. Height 43 cm, width 42 cm. See Figure 6.12, p. 169, as well as detail in Figure 9.7 opposite.

11. A napkin or shawl (*pá'li* (*phalli*)) (List of Acquisitions) or just piece of cloth (*asan* (*akhaini*)) (AB), fringed
The ‘locally woven’ (List of Acquisitions) shawl (Inventory and AB) is of white cotton with interwoven thin lines of black and yellow, in herringbone pattern along the length. The shawl has fringes at the ends. It is ‘used by both men and women for covering the shoulders, for keeping warm,’ and ‘sometimes used as a turban by men’ (List of Acquisitions). Width 54.5 cm, length 80.5 cm.

12. A garment (*phalli* (AK))
The garment of white cotton is woven in double threads, tabby, mixed with brocade weaving and embroideries (it is beautifully done, no ends are visible). The borders along the sides and the ends are highly demanding where the weaver has to have extra heddles to form the interwoven pattern. A piece of white cotton with two stripes of yellow near the ends. It has been woven in well-known patterns. The brown and yellow is in the *Kaseo bikha* pattern, ‘eye of the tortoise’; the red, orange and black patterns are in the *Pahar erknai*, ‘hill’ pattern, and the red, black, yellow (some of it perhaps of Assam silk). The Inventory describes it as a, ‘(Garb) interwoven with black, orange, yellow and red thread on nature coloured cotton. The interwoven colored parts may be made of Assam silk.’ Fringes at the end. Height 62 cm. + 1 cm fringes, width 48.5 cm.
13. A garment (*phalli* (AK & AB))
A piece of white cotton broached with stretches of red along the sides and the top. At the bottom it ends in three lines of closing weaving, 6 cm. over the bottom is a 6 cm embroidery in silk of lilies (*lily bibar*, ‘lily flower’ (MB)) framed of roundish forms of no specific name (MB).

The use of the garment is uncertain: Kristiansen writes that it is a towel that can also be used as a turban, while A. Bodo suggests that it is a cloth for decoration or perhaps a table cover. The Inventory states that it is ‘cotton interwoven with read threads, perhaps of Assam silk.’ Height 107 cm, width 55.5 cm.

14. A pillow cover (*gān'dū* (AK), *gandu* (AB))
A cotton pillow cover with yellow, orange and black stretches in the weaving, ending infringes. The pillow cover has been made of reused waste cloth (MB). Height 28 + 1 cm fringes, and width 44.5 cm.
15. A medicine bag (ʼdjol-unngā (jōlunga) (List of Acquisitions) or a multi-purpose bag (muli jolonga) (AB)
Siiger stresses that this bag is ‘used for keeping medicine’ (List of Acquisitions) The ‘locally made’ (List of Acquisitions) medical bag is made of a red outer cloth of about 1 x 1 metre embroidered in ‘pheasant eye’ pattern (Parou mecom, ‘pheasants eye’ (MB)), of black cotton ending in fringes about 7 cm. from the border along the sides. The pattern is similar to the Danish ‘goose eye.’ There are added ‘tufts of white hare-skin’ (List of Acquisitions). To the inside is stitched a layer of withe cotton. The Inventory explains that it is used by the ojha (oja in Bodo language). 49 x 47 x 50 x 51 cm. See Figure 4.2, p. 91, as well as detail in Figure 9.8 above.

It is possible that this bag is the one used by the oja (Siiger and AB). Seen in retrospect from 2013 M. Brahma considered it an atypical kind of bag among the Bodos. S.K. Soren has seen such bags among Bhotias when they came down to Assam from Bhutan
to sell medical products such as leaves and animal bones during the 1950s. However the bag is considered a Bodo bag in Siiger’s collections and must have been utilised by the oja.

16. Loom (ishan (AB))
The complete loom consists of weaving area (ishan (AB)) and poles for the frames and weaving (sal khunta (AB); sal khuntani gonsi (AB) and gandwi are also present (AB)). The loom was in working condition when collected. It is constructed as a European loom as is evident from the svingles. The Electronic Inventory notes that the central parts of the loom and the weaving on it has been left bundled in museum storage (C6512h). Width of weaving: 131 cm, length: 71.5 cm, the width of the pole carrying the piece of cloth being weaved is 185 cm.

17. A yarn reel (dangon natha or daina natha (AK) swrkhi (AB)), made of bamboo and cane
A yarn reel to collect the yarn when it has been spun at the spinning wheel. The yarn reel is made out of wood and bamboo. The handle is of wood. The spindle is used by hand, where handle allows you to hold it to spin. The Inventory explains it as ‘a yarn reel made of bamboo. The central axel has a handle to turn it round by.’ Central rod height 96 cm, the spindle’s height 62.5 cm, bottom width 15 cm top width 31 cm.

18. A pair of sandals (khwrwm (AB))
The pair of sandals made of wood. The feet catch a string between the big toe and the other toes. The string then goes to both sides over the feet to be tied into holes at the sides of the sandal. The Inventory states that it is ‘a pair of wooden sandals with holes for strings of plant fibres.’

Materials: Wood and string of grass or other straw.

The two sandals do not exactly fit the same format. The one measures: length 25 cm, width ranges from 10 to 13 cm; the other measures, length 27 cm, width 11–14.5 cm. The thickness of both sandals ranges from 1–2 cm. The reason may be that they are of two different styles: Siiger distinguished between ‘wooden sandals, flat type’ (pēta (phōitha), abtuñ (aptuŋ)) and ‘a ‘Bengalian type’ described as ‘wooden sandals with heels.’ In spite of this they
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Figure 9.9: A yarn reel made out of bamboo (item 17) (photo Danish National Museum)

Figure 9.10: A yarn reel in operation (photo H. Siiger)
The Bodo of Assam

seem to have been bought as ‘a pair of wooden sandals’ (List of Acquisitions). The Inventory describes them as, ‘A pair of wooden sandals (or perhaps two sandals of different pairs) build of a board with drilled holes for stings of plant fibres’. Siiger notes that he purchased these sandals from Pasa'rū. See Figure 6.1, p. 172.

Jewelry

Bangles
Halfdan Siiger collected a number of different bangles for the museum. All may be worn on the wrist but the heavier among them (items 19–21 and 25) may be for the ankles (AB). Besides the general word for bracelet, asan (ashan) which designates ‘all kinds of bracelets’, he divides between asan 'sunsra (shunshra) which are ‘hollow’ and asan muta (mutha)’bundle’ (from muta, ‘thick’ or ‘fat’) (Siiger, manuscript).

19. A pair of metal bangles (asan (AB))
The open bangles for the wrists end in ‘heads’ a bit like a thunderbolt, but only from the top side where two parallel groves along the ring can be seen. The Electronic Inventory adds that they are ‘cast and bend’. The unidentified metal is grey. Diameter 7 cm.

20. A pair of metal bangles (asan (AB))
Women carry the open bangles on the wrists. They end in ‘heads’ a bit like a thunderbolt, but only from the top side where two groves can be seen. The Electronic Inventory adds that they are ‘cast and bend’ and ‘engraved with lines and grooves’. The unidentified metal is yellowish grey. Diameter 6.5 cm.

21. A pair of metal bangles (asan (AB))
The open bangles for girls (Inventory) end in conic heads. They are ‘cast and bend’ and ‘hammered with dots in rows’ (Inventory). The unidentified metal is grey. Diameter 4.5 cm.

22. A pair of silver bangles (ā'sán (ashan) (List of Acquisitions), asan (AB))
The silver bangles for women (Inventory) have been hammered of short pieces of cast silver later bend to the bangles (0.8 cm. broad on the backside). Each of them has 7 rhombic patterns on the
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Figure 9.11: A pair of metal bangles (item 20) (photo Danish National Museum)

Figure 9.12: A silver bangle of hammered sheet metal (item 25) (photo Danish National Museum)
The Bodo of Assam

outside leaving triangles towards the arm side which is flat. The bangles end in short hammered balls with edges. Slight oxidations are visible. Diameter 5 cm.

23. A metal bangle (asan (AB))
A bangle for a girl (Inventory) is cast of a very light metal. The colour is white-grey. It has 9 rhombic patterns which meet in four dots at the end of the rhombi. The cast seems to have a fought as it should have carried two more rhombi at the one end which have come out in an irregular way. The bangle seems to have been cut from a longer piece of patterned metal, which have been cut and bend to form the present form. The Inventory states that it is ‘a bangle made of metal, with engraved patterns of dots, used by girls.’ Diameter 5 cm–5.8 cm.

24. A metal bangle (asan (AB))
This bangle for girls (Inventory) is cast of a very light metal. The colour is white–grey. The production have been carried out in an open mould as it is evident that there are irregular flow over giving a flat background to the pattern of two flat found tops set in a way that they are two in diagonal over the outside of the bangle. The mould has been handmade as the tops wary between about 1 mm and up to 3 mm. The ends have been cut from a longer piece of metal before the bangle was bent to its present form. The Inventory states that it is, ‘a bangle made of metal, engraved with figures and dots, used by girls.’ Diameter 4.5 cm–5 cm.

25. A bangle (asan (athini) (AB)) of hammered silver sheet metal
The slightly irregular formed ring have been made of a length of sheet silver where the pattern of the outside of the ring have been hammered in diagonal lines of two grooves pressed by a slight chisel, changing with a line of 6 to 7 square holes. The open bangle ends in two rings of silver put in four rounds each end to keep the openings in site. The Inventory states that its decoration is of ‘oblique grooves and dots on the outer side, ends with spiral like metal threads.’ And describes it as, ‘a bangle made of metal, oblique grooves and dots, spiral-like metal threads at each end.’ Diameter 7 cm – 6.5 (outside), 5 cm – 4.5 cm (inside), thickness 1 cm (height and brought, but irregular in the bending).
26. A copper bangle (asan (AB))
The closed copper bangle has been cast with patterns of rhombi connected by meandering lines. After casting it has been polished on the outside. The Inventory states that it is, ‘a bangle made of metal, hammered patterns of tapered ovals and zigzag lines, used by women.’ Diameter 5.5 cm – 5 cm, width 3 mm.

27. A metal bangle (asan (AB))
The closed cast heavy bangle of white metal has flat round dots placed in diagonal over the full round of the bangle. It has presumably been cast in an open form (like item 24) but there are no traces of it except minor traces that the ends of the bangle have been forged together. The Inventory describes it as, ‘a bangle made of metal, hammered dots in 2 lines, used by women.’ Diameter 5.5 cm. width 3 mm.

28–31. Necklaces
Four necklaces (lu (gudnani) (AB)) made of (glass?) pearls. The List of Acquisitions reports these as red (item 28), orange (item 29), white (item 30) and blue (item 31).

32. A pair of covers for amulets (maduli (AB))
Siiger considers them as finalised amulets ‘tabis (thabis), ‘amulet and box’, and informs ‘Small copper-box with an amulet inside to protect against all kind of evil’, but they are only the amulet cover as it is also stated by the Inventory.

    Adults have it hanging tied to the janji gunsa (a cotton string around the waist). Children have it hanging from a string worn around the neck, around the wrist, or in a string around the waist-line’ 'Tanesår got such an amulet when he was about one year old, and told Siiger that there were animal bones in it and Siiger explained that ‘Such bones may be pieces of bones of man, tortoise, and of the jahamalāi animal. The translation of this animal is unknown. It is a small four-footed jungle animal of the size of a small cat. The animals has a very strong odour and it is assumed, therefore, that when pieces of the bones of that animal are put into the amulet box, the gods will be able to smell it and will not cause the child any harm.’ Presently such amulets may be worn in the ears (AB) or in a string around the arm, the neck or the body when proper prepared with the necessary charms. They are made of copper. Length 2 cm.
33–35. Three pairs of ear plugs (köröm 'pūla (khörôm phula) (HS), khumani khera (AB)) made of metal
The ear plugs are worn by women. The metal has colour that resembles gold.

The plugs have a cover to the outside with flamed cuttings or hammered openings. The cover is ‘made of hammered metal with small spheres and small holes. A cylindrical tube is screwed in from the backside. They are worn by women.’ (Siiger)

36. A single earring (khumani khera (AB))
A flat piece of gold-like metal. At the top of the earring is a lotus stanch out in shadow within a circular frame, and below hang three small independent plates of bell- or flower-formed copper. The ring will be fastened to the ear with a hook. In the Inventory they are described as a ‘flat ring of metal with a stylized flower, three pieces of metal as decoration, and a hook for the lobe of the ear. Worn by women.’ Height of main ring about 1.5 cm, width about 1.5 cm.

37. A single earring (khumani khera (AB))
A flat piece of gold-like metal. At the top of the earring is a round frame and within it are five lines of metal left on the top of another circle. Below that hang three small independent plates of bell- or flower-formed metal. The ring will be fastened to the ear with a hook. The Inventory describes it as ‘a flat ring of metal with five pieces of metal, one is red and one is green. Worn by women.’

38–39. Ornament for ears (khumani khera (AB)), made of metal
Two small earrings to be fastened with a ring through the earlobe. They are made of gold-like metal. The Inventory describes them as ‘Hollow with a hole with a metal thread, used by women in the nasal cartilage or the earlobe. The plug to keep it on the nose is in the piece’. Length about 1.5 cm.

Ornaments for the nose
Siiger collected a number of ‘nose-stones of various types’ (natār, guntun, ‘nose’), and he designates between natār or guṇtuñni (nathar guntun) ornaments which may then be a) & c) called 'nakpul (nakphul), b) called tarapul (tharaphul), d) called sakipul (shakhi-
Figure 9.13: An earring (item 36) (photo Danish National Museum)
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*phul* (manuscript). It has, however, not been possible to distinguish between the different items in the collection according to these designations.

40–41. Ornaments for the nose (*khumani (AB)*), made of metal
Two small nose plugs (0.4 and 0.7 cm diameter) with a fastener from the inside. One is formed like a heart on a stalk, the other as three double leaves. The metal may be gold, but also any other metal of a like colour. The Inventory describes no. 40 as ‘Metal piece with a hammered flower, used by women. The pin to keep it in the nose is present’ and no. 41 as ‘Metal piece formed as a flat heart, used by women. The pin to keep it in the nose is missing’.

42. Ornament for nose (*gonthoyni sona (AB)*), made of metals
A small plug (0.5 cm in diameter) to put in the nose and to be fastened from the inside. The metal has a golden colour and it consists of a central ball surrounded by 8 smaller balls, all with red colour. In the Inventory it is described as, ‘A metal piece with a knob surrounded by 8 other knobs, used by women. The pin to keep it in the nose is missing’.

43. Necklace (*bias hår (bias ‘scorpion’, hår ‘chain’) (bishahar) (List of Acquisitions), rupani lu (AB)*), made of metal
The necklace is a chain made of silver-like metal with interlinked pieces. It is closed with a larger ring and is used by women. Length: 55 cm.

44. Earrings (*'bōula (boula) (HS), bōula (AK), khwmani (AB)*), made of metal rods and chains
‘Ear-ornament hanging in a string round the ear’ (Siiger). They are ‘often given to a woman as a marriage present’ (List of Acquisitions). Earrings of a long rod with a chain connected to each end. On one end they have a cone-shaped embellishment. The ‘whitish’ (Inventory) metal may be of a mix of nickel and silver. Inventory: ‘Made of metal, they have long cylindrical pin with five chains. They are used by women.’ The Electronic Inventory corrects this information as there are is only four chains. Length: 6.8 cm.
45. Earrings (khorom phula or phuthi (AK), khwmani sona (AB)), two half spheres on a plate, made of metal
The ear plugs are made of two half spheres fastened on a plate. Siiger suggested that the name is derivated from khorom which means a wooden sandal and pula which means flower, ‘The earring looks like the front part of the sandal,’ which is ‘called by the same name’. They are ‘only worn by women’ and ‘usually given to the women at marriage’ (Siiger). They are also called ‘puti (List of Acquisitions). The Inventory adds that they are chiselled. They are connected by a conic pipe which is to be put through the earlobe. They are made of mixed metal, nickel and silver. Length: 3 cm, width 1.9 cm, length of staff: 0.8 cm, width of staff: 0.4 cm.

46. A necklace (suki mala (HS), shukhi mala (AK & HS) or thakhanishri (AK), 'takansri (shukhi mala thakhaushri, taka risiri) (HS and AB))
The necklace is made of one big coin and 62 small 4 annas coins.
Necklace used by women made 62 smaller coins (suki, ‘4 Annas’, taka, thaka, ‘Rupee’) and one bigger coin at the closing mechanism connected by a string. At the side of the coins are fixed small rings to put the string through. The coins are smaller coins: ¼ Rupee. Bigger coin: ½ Rupee. It is possible to read the years of many of the coins, e.g. 1912, 1915, 1918, and the ½ Rupee at the closing mechanism 1922. Possibly a mix of nickel and silver. Length: 51 cm.

47. Earrings (kirū or tukū (khiru, thukhi) (HS), khira (AK), khwmani sona (AB)), made of coins
‘Ear-ornament, boat-shaped, hanging from the ear-lobe by means of a small stick’ (Siiger manuscript) for women. The earrings are made out of coins (25 Pesas, Piece, i.e. ¼ Rupee) with a hole slightly to the side in the middle. Mix of nickel and silver. Cut through from the hole in the middle with three small metal balls on each side of the opening. On one of them it is possible to recognise the head of George V (Emperor of India from 1910 to his death in 1936). The Inventory explains how they are fastened: ‘(Earrings made of) perforated Rupee pieces to be pressed to each side of the earlobe. Used by women.’ Diameter 1.9 cm, diameter of hole: 0.7 cm.
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Figure 9.14: A pair of metal ear plugs (item 45) (photo Danish National Museum)

Figure 9.15: A necklace and earrings made out of silver coins (items 46 and 47) (photo Danish National Museum)
48. A bracelet (*ashan mutha* (AK), *asan* (AB)), cylindrical, made of metal
The bracelet cylindrical and narrow in the middle. Along the backside is a closing mechanism. It is made of hammered sheet metal with patterns of bulbs along the middle and across the bracelet towards the sides. It ends in singular bulbs along the openings. The metal may be a mix of nickel and silver. The Inventory explains that, ‘(the bracelet) is made of metal and has a closing mechanism at the inside. It is used by women.’ Length 6.5 cm, diameter one end 5.5 cm, other end 6.5 cm.

49. Anklet (‘*mipur* (*mipur*) (List of Acquisitions), *mipur* (AK & AB)), hollow, round, iron pellet inside
The hollow ‘tinkling anklet’ made of brass (List of Acquisitions) with ‘10 [metal] pellets in the hollow part with a slit along the...
outside.’ It is decorated with sets of ‘three belts on four different places’. They are utilized to ‘seal the openings where the tinkling pellets have been inferred, and that one of the belts has an eye with a string.’ It is worn by the women when dancing to make a sound. Siiger described it as ‘a jingling ornament worn round the ankles, a tinkling anklet’ (List of Acquisitions). Length: 14.8 cm, width 10.3 cm.

50. A bangle (bala or gôdôni ashan (AK)) or a bracelet (asan khera (AB)), made of metal
The bangle is maybe brass. The inventory states that the ‘bangle’ has ‘engraved bands interchanging with squared fields’ on the outside. Bala is the Bengali word for a ‘young girl’ and ashan means ‘bracelet’. In the alternative name gôdôni means ‘old’ or ‘ancient’. Kristiansen stated that it is ‘a bangle, to be worn on foot’, but Dinesh said that it is worn on the hand or wrist (List of Acquisitions). Diameter: inner 6.5 cm, outer 8.3 cm.

Pipes

51. Hooka bowl
An earthenware pipe or rather bowl (silim or kausā (shilim, khaoshā) (HS) or thangkhu silim ‘pipe for smoking tobacco’, silim ‘pipe’ (AB)) is ornamented with circular grooves and dots. Around the neck and the top of the pot it is surrounded by a bulb ornamented with crossing grooves. At Siiger’s time it was only used by the women (Siiger, manuscript). The Inventory describes its function as: ‘There is not any mouth piece as one smokes directly from the neck’ Width 6.5 cm, height 12 cm.

52. A pipe (Silim pusīgi (shilim phushigi) (HS), hongkha subgra (AB)), bowl made of burnt clay, mouth piece of bamboo
The Electronic Inventory describes it as, ‘A pipe bowl of thrown burned clay with a drilled hole for the mouth piece made of bamboo tied together with a string’ (four black and four beige strings) and adds that ‘the pipe bowl should be ornamented with lines and dots’. Length: 16.5 cm, height 3.5 cm.
53. A trap (onani phaŋ (AB))
A piece of bamboo with rectangular holes for fitting wood or other utensils and strings of home-made ‘horse tail’ (List of Acquisitions) to a small short piece of wood. At present it is not possible to describe how the trap functions. Siiger informs that this and the big bow (mōs’hā sā’grā ’bōrlā (mosha = tiger; sā'grā = to keep something for killing animals or birds; ’bōrlā (bōrla) = bow) is ‘used for hunting tigers’. It ‘is put up in the jungle somewhere where the tigers are hunting together with a bait’ and it ‘will be released automatically, when the tiger jumps on the bait’ (List of Acquisitions). The suggestion in the Inventory that it has been ‘part of a bow for tiger hunt’ seems, however, to be problematic as the so-called bow is extremely strong and rigid.

Siiger may be right, but as it is impossible to bend the bow, it may rather be a carrying pole (baokha (AB)) mixed up with the piece of bamboo for the trap. This may be confirmed by the fact that Siiger informs that the trap should work ‘with a poisoned arrow’ (taught to the Bodos by the Bhutanese, according to Siiger’s notes) – a description that does not point to a bow of an extraordinarily strong quality See Figure 7.1, p. 180.

54. and 55. Two bows (bwrla (AB)), made of bamboo
The two bamboo bows are stringed with home-made string (one fully preserved the other partly). The bows are respectively 144 cm with a span of 132 cm and 127 cm with a span of 113 cm. One of the bows is darkened by smoke and carries an inscription (6 cm x 2 cm) in Bangla/Assamese script, added with rough scratches with the end of a knife or another sharp instrument. Siiger adds that the word for bow differs in between the districts. Bōrla (bōrla) in Goalpara District and jilid (jilid) in Jolpaiguri District (manuscript) and that he purchased these specimens from Pasa'rū.

56. Bow (jilirt or bōrla (AK), bwrla (AB)) made out of bamboo with string
Length: 130 cm, length where string is fastened: 115 cm, string length: 107 cm.
Bamboo arrows (*kār* (*khar*) (HS), *thir* (AB))
Siiger collected four arrows, each designed to kill different kinds of animal, On New Years Eve from Pasa'rū. See Figure 6.3, p. 144.

57. An arrow (with iron head)
The Inventory describes it as made of bamboo with five steering feathers and an arrowhead made of iron, spiral insertion. Length 74.5 cm, head 8 cm.

58. An arrow (with iron head)
The Inventory describes it as made of bamboo with four steering feathers and an arrowhead made of iron, spiral insertion. Length 73 cm, head 8 cm.

59. An arrow (with iron head)
The Inventory describes it as made of bamboo with two steering feathers and arrowhead made of iron with a spiral insertion. Length 75 cm, head 11.5 cm.

60. A blunt arrow (with a blunt point of bamboo)
The Inventory describes it as made of bamboo with three steering feathers and that the arrow (shaft) ends in a cylindrical end of antler for hunting birds. Length 70.5 cm, head 10 cm.

61. A sling ((*pn’djür*) (List of Acquisitions)) or snare ((*phay* (AB)), with a noose at one end, used for catching birds
Mākōrām added this item to Siiger’s collection: a sling made of jute fibers ‘used when hunting smaller birds’ (List of Acquisitions), but the Inventory indicates that it is rather a snare to catch the birds and describes it as ending in a noose with an extra noose at the middle between which there are three parallel pieces of string. Length 171 cm.

Musical instruments

62. A string instrument (*serja* (*sherja*) (HS), *serja* (Boro language), *sarinda* (Assamese) (AB)) with four strings
The ‘locally made’ (List of Acquisitions) instrument is cut of one piece of wood with an opening where the sound box is partly covered with leather partly left open under the four strings made of cotton. A
string for carrying is made of natural materials. The plectrum included is made of wood. It is ‘used for common songs with Bodo melodies’ (List of Acquisitions). Sůğer informs that the owner of the instrument was named Lausuṅ, but Sůğer himself seems to have corrected this to Lóki’ram (List of Acquisitions). We observe that Sůğer purchased a great number and range of items from Lóki'ram, who also contributed information about religion and folk tales. Length 70 cm, width 19, length of the four strings 48–52 cm.

63. A string instrument (duntrā (dhundra, dontr) (HS), Důntră (Dhuntra) (List of Acquisitions) donthra or bongb-long (Boro language) dontra (Assamese) (AB)) made of wood and skin

Sůğer stresses that the ‘violin [is] for common use’ (manuscript). The instrument has four strings over a sound-box covered with leather with 11 cut round holes. The sound box, fingerboard and peg box are cut of the same piece of wood with a bird on the top of the peg box. The owner had been ‘the Braman from the Sessapani village’ (Sůğer manuscript). On the front of the peg box is an inscription in Bangla script: Srijut Khagendra Pracharak, ‘Khagendra, the respected preacher’ or ‘the famous preacher’ as Sůğer suggested (List of Acquisitions).

The Inventory describes the instrument as, ‘timber, sound-box covered with skin, a bird-figure on the sound-board, a cord for carrying, finger-board ornamented, inscribed’. The Inventory adds ‘stool and screw for this instrument are made by Jørn Jørkov 1974’.

Two bamboo flutes

Sůğer notes that both of the flutes are ‘used in the 'kèrāi festival’ (List of Acquisitions). Both of these flutes are associated with Kā'gændrā Prǒtjā’rāk, the violinist mentioned in object 63. See Figure 6.7, p. 157.

64. A bamboo flute (with 6 holes) (sipuṅ (HS), bāsi (AB))

The Inventory describes it as made of ‘bamboo, with a hole for inflow of wind from mouth and 6 sound-holes.’ Length 67 cm, diameter 2.5 cm.
Figure 9.17: A stringed instrument (serja) (item 62) (photo Danish National Museum)
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Figure 9.18: A stringed instrument (duntrā) (item 63) (photo Danish National Museum)
65. A bamboo flute (with 5 holes) (*sipuṅ* (HS), *siphuŋ* (AB))
The Inventory describes as made of, ‘bamboo, with a hole for inflow of wind from mouth and 5 sound-holes.’ Length 69 cm, diameter 2.5 cm.

66. Cymbals (*jotha* (AK), *zotha* (AB)), made of brass
Cymbals in brass and connected by a short cord. Played with two hands. Holding the strings one cymbal is hit on the top with the other one. The Inventory describes them as ‘Two brass bowls [saucer shaped] connected by a cord’. Diameter 6.5 cm.

67. A pair of cymbals (*jotā* (*jotha*) (HS), *zotha* (AB)) made of brass
A pair of small, cast brass cymbals ‘for religious use only’ (Siiger), ‘used at the Kērăi festival’ (List of Acquisitions). These 6 cm diameter cymbals, played with both hands, are connected by a cord 53 cm made of natural materials. They are ornamented by three double circular rows of grooves.

68. A pair of cymbals (*kauān* (*khaoān*) (HS), *khawāy* (AB)) made of brass
This pair of middle-sized brass cymbals (diameter 10 cm) is for common use (Siiger Manuscript). The cymbals are made of a hammered plate of brass less than one mm thick. They are joined by a cord of plant fibres. The Inventory adds that one of the cymbals has a crack at the edge. Diameter 10 cm.

69. A pair of rattles (*djāb'krīng* or *djāb'φrīng* (*japhkhriŋ*) (List of Acquisitions), *zabkhreŋ* (AB)), made of wood
The ‘locally made’ (List of Acquisitions) pair of rattles is cut of wood with 6 small pieces of sheet metal fastened by a machine-made nail. One has a hole drilled for the thumb, and the other a somewhat larger square hole which allows for two fingers. The wood is from a machine-cut plank. The rattle is played with the right hand with the thumb through the round hole and two fingers through the rectangular hole. It is mostly played by girls, and during Siiger’s days it was played ‘for religious use only’ (manuscript) or more specific at ‘kērăi festival, and in wedding–festivals’
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Figure 9.19: Rattle (item 69) (photo Danish National Museum)

Figure 9.20: A modern rattle as played at a public Baisagu celebration organized in Guwahati, April 2013, one day before the proper religious Bihu was to be celebrated back in the villages (photo P. Andersen)
(List of Acquisitions). Nowadays there are also longer varieties of rattles made of various materials. Width 14 cm, height 9 cm each.

**Domestic utensils**

70. A water jar ('Gīlā gi'grēb (gila gigrep) (List of Acquisitions)) or a pot ((jouda (AB)), used for keeping rice beer; oval, narrow neck
The ‘locally made’ earthenware pot was ‘old-fashioned’ (List of Acquisitions) at the time of the collection, and may rather have been used for rice beer than water (suggested by AB who had never seen such a bottle before). At the opening of the neck there are jagged ornaments. The bottle is round and there is a short string around the narrow neck to stabilize it when carrying or standing. The Inventory describes the jar as ‘circular with softly rounded sides and a short narrow neck with jagged ornaments (2 teeth are harmed). Around the neck is tied a short string for carrying.’ Height 24.5 cm, width 19 cm.

71. Mortar (ūal (oal) (HS), kal (big) (AB)) made of kanthal wood with a pestle (gāhen (gahen) (HS), gahen (AK and AB)) in sal wood strengthened with an iron ring on the end
Kristiansen, who collected this pair, describes them as a ‘ular or ual (mortar for) rice husking.’ Siiger adds that they are ‘used for preparing paddy to rice’ (Siiger manuscript). The Inventory states further: ‘(a mortar) cut of one piece of wood. It has a narrowing at the girdle ... [the pestle has] a narrowing on the middle of the handle’. Mortar height 38 cm, diameter 36 cm; Pestle height 135 cm, diameter 7 cm, end used 5.5 cm. See Figure 3.1, p. 420.

72. A sieve (shandri (AK and AB)) made of bamboo
The sieve is used for various purposes among them sieving rice powder. Bigger sieves were once used to hang over the fireplace to dry or smoke meat and fish. The Inventory describes it as of ‘Wickerwork made of bamboo’. Diameter 45 cm, height of rim 2 cm.

73. A winnowing-fan (suṅgrāi (shungrai) (HS) soṅgrai soṅgrai (AK), soṇray (AB)), round, made of bamboo
A winnowing fan is used when separating the husk from the rice (Siiger and Kristiansen). The bottom is made of split bamboo
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Figure 9.21: Women working with a basket, 1949–1950 (photo H. Siiger)

Figure 9.22: Winnowing fan (item 73) (photo Danish National Museum)
weaved with one split crossing three. When used for fanning, one holds at the side and waves it in order to blow the husk from the paddy. There is a handle for hanging it up when not in use. Inventory: ‘wickerwork with a low rim of split bamboo, and a string for hanging or holding’. Diameter 45 cm.

74. A basket, bowl-shaped (‘khada (HS), khada (AB & HS), made of bamboo, can be used as a measure (don (AK)) of paddy or rice
Traditionally paddy and rice was not measured by weight but by volume, and the basket has been used as such a measure. But it can also be used just to move the grain. It is made of bamboo plastered with a mix of cow dung and soil. The Inventory describes the basket as: ‘Circular with a rim of split bamboo used for measuring rice’. Diameter 44 cm, height 14 cm.

75. A basket, bowl-shaped (khada (AK), dukhli (AB), made of bamboo and rattan
Round basket made of rattan and with a rim of split bamboo. It is plastered with a mix of cow dung and soil. It can be used to carry grain. The Inventory describes it as: ‘a circular (basket) with a rim of split bamboo’. Diameter 52 cm, Height 15 cm.

76. Strainer (jantha (AK), jou sorgra / jaŋtha (AB)) of bamboo
The strainer is used to filter rice beer after fermenting. The fermenting is started by mixing cooked rice and water. After some days or even weeks, the rice beer changes from being sour, white and opaque to sweet, yellowish, clear, and quite intoxicating. When it is time to drink, the strainer is lowered into the pot so that the liquid can sieve through and be enjoyed without the solid byproducts. Height 15 cm, diameter/width 10.5 cm.

77. Scraper (roena or roina (AK), roina (AB)) in a half circle, made of wood
Half circle of (sal) wood used to scrape grains together on the ground. A hole for fitting the handle is found in the top of the half
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Figure 9.23: Basket for measuring and carrying rice (item 74) (photo Danish National Museum)

Figure 9.24: Basket for carrying rice tightened with cow dung and mud (item 75) (photo Danish National Museum)
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circle. It is utilised to collect the rice after threshing, the shaft can be up to 3 or 4 meters. The Inventory states that it is, ‘Used for working with rice, a hole at one of the sides for adapting a shaft.’ Length: 57.5 cm, height 27.5 cm, width 5.5 cm.

78. A mortar (small) (thophohi (HS), thousi / thobsi (AB)) and pestle (thophohiakhai (HS)) made of wood
A wooden mortar with a handle. The wood of the mortar is fractured. The inside of the mortar is still rough and may not have been finished. If this is the case the fracture may go back to the time of production and be the reason for not finishing it. The ‘mortar and pestle’ are ‘for grinding chili, spices, turmeric, etc.’ (List of Acquisitions). The Inventory states that it is ‘(a mortar) with a handle. (It is made of) wood and fractured’ Height 22.5 cm with top 12.5 cm, middle 8 cm, bottom 12 to 13 cm.

79. A stool (khamphlai (AK & AB)), made of wood
A stool cut out of one piece of tree (gumbari kamplay = Boro language) specifically for marriage ceremonies (AB). The Inventory describes it as ‘a stool with four short legs.’ Length: 55.5 cm, Height 7.8 cm, width 20.3 cm.

80. An oval chair or stool (Kamplāi (HS) (khamphlai) (HS & AB))
The Inventory indicates that the oval piece of wood has been a chair or rather ‘a piece of wood to sit on’. This is correct, but it had legs when Siiger bought it as a ‘stool with legs’ (List of Acquisitions). The legs are now only indicated by the heads of two (machine produced) nails left in it and broken on the underside of the chair, there are traces of holes from two other nails which could then have connected to two supporting pieces of wood. It carries also traces of have been used for cutting materials as there are traces of knife cuts in the surface.

The Inventory describes it as ‘an oval piece of timber with 2 nails counterpoised to each other; traces of other 2 holes counterpoised to each other, but without nails.’ Length 32.5 cm, width 23.5 cm, thickness 2 cm.
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Tools

81. A fish-trap (*jekhai* (AK), *zekhai* (AB)), made of bamboo
The triangular moveable fist-trap is open to the front where the bottom of it (56 cm) allows it to be drawn along the bottom of the water. It is made of split bamboo. At the back of the trap a number of vertical splits of bamboo keep the fish which has been caught. It is used to scoop up the fish in rivers and ponds. The Inventory states that it is a, ‘Triangular (fish-trap) mounted on a shaft used for catching fish. It is made of open wickerwork that allows the water to seep through. It is utilised by the women at lakes and rivers.’ Height 81 cm, Handle 81 cm: 42cm, width 56 cm, depth: 55 cm. See Figure 3.5, p. 57 and 3.7, p. 59.

82. A fishing net (*dzæ* (*je*) (List of Acquisitions) 'āsra je (*ashra je*) (HS), *asraje* (AB)), made of cotton thread
The conical fishing net is ‘locally made’ (List of Acquisitions). ‘The fisherman goes round in the water, throws it out, and draws it up. The metal-balls will cause the net to fold up, whereby the fishes may be caught’ (List of Acquisitions). The ‘Fishing-net [is made] to be drawn through the water’ (Siiger Manuscript). The meshes are 3 cm when stretched, but normally they are about 1 x 2 cm over the meshes opening when thrown. Length: 185 cm. See Figure 3.4, p. 56.

83. A fish-basket (*khobai* (HS & AB)), pitcher-shaped
The ‘locally made’ basket is ‘used for keeping fish’ (List of Acquisitions) wickerwork bamboo basket has been woven from bottom towards the top where the wickers have been broken and tied with another more smooth and thin wicker. It has a carrying handle made of 8 mm home-made string presumably out of cotton. When placed on the floor it balances with a slight bend to one side. The Inventory describes it as, ‘a fishing basket made of inter-woven split bamboos, rope for carrying at the neck.’ And states that the ‘jar-like’ basket is, ‘made of inter-woven split fibres and a thick rope at the neck.’ Height 36.5 cm. Width at the opening 15 cm, at the neck 11 cm, at the broadest point 21 cm, and a bottom of about 14 cm. Siiger notes that he purchased the basket from ‘Jacob’s mother.’ See Figures 3.6, p. 58.
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84. A bell, big, *(gatha (HS), gaṅgriṅ geder (AB))*, made of brass and iron
‘A bull bell’ (Siiger, manuscript) of cast brass. At the top of the 3 cm bell is a handle of other 3 cm with enlargements horizontal and at the top. The clapper is of brass or Iron. Height 7 cm, diameter 5.5 cm.

85–86 Two small pear-shaped brass bells *(gaṅgriṅ (HS), gaṅgriṅ (AB))*
The round ‘cow bells’ (Siiger, manuscript) are made of brass, which is closed around a loose clapper of iron (with small traces of rust). The surface of the bell shows traces of polishing, but whether it has been hammered or cast is not known. It may be used for cattle, or for dancers ‘tied around the lower leg’ (AB). The Inventory states that is, ‘A pear shaped’ bell ‘of brass, with a loose metal ball’ used ‘for the cows.’ Item 85 is 3.5 cm wide and 6 cm high. Item 86 is 2.8 cm wide and 4 cm high.

Jute

87. A lump of jute fibre *(phather (AB))* before spinning it into rope
The Inventory states that it is, ‘a bundle of (jute fibres)’ measuring 19 x 10 cm.

88. Wooden harrow *(bēda (beda) (HS), beda (a large item) (AB))*
The locally made (Siiger) heavy harrow has 20 pegs of bamboo (Siiger manuscript) hammered down in a heavy machine cut log with a round hole to fix the shaft for drawing it.

Width 127.5 cm, the length of the tooth vary between 34 and 32 cm. Their cut is between 15 and 16 cm. See Figure 4.4, p. 71.

89. Small Harrow *(ha'sini (hashini) (HS), hashini (a small rake) (AB))*
The locally made (Siiger) rake is made in the same fashion as the harrow: 10 bamboo pegs are inserted in a machine-cut piece of wood. Width 67 cm, height 24–25 cm; the tools cut about 15–16 cm deep. See Figure 4.4, p. 71.
90. A plough (*naṅgal* (HS), *nangol* (AK), *naŋgol* (AB)) made of wood

The plough is made of hand-cut logs. But the ploughshare (*pāl* (phal) (HS)) seems to have been made of machine fabricated iron. In his manuscript Siiger distinguishes between the locally made plough and the ploughshare - item 90 which is bought in the bazaar. During his visit Siiger brought another ploughshare ‘made by the local blacksmith’ in Patkijuli (Siiger no. 13, bought 18 December 1959 (List of Acquisitions)). The Inventory describes the plough as, ‘wooden (plough) with iron ploughshare, a drawing pole and a wedge.’ Drawing pole 214 cm, plough 107 cm, when measured along the bends 129 cm, iron ploughshare. 22.5 cm. See Figure 4.5, p. 92.

91. A wooden yoke (*juṅgal* (AK & HS), *jongal* (AB)) with pegs (*leygra* (AK), *leyra* (AB) and homemade ropes (*dukhthī duduy*, *[shel juri]* (AK), *duruy / duduy* (AB)) for fitting the oxen

The main frame of the yoke may have had another function before it was made into a yoke, as there are two old iron nails that have been cut or hammered down into the wood. The yoke itself, pegs, and ropes that harness the yoke to the bullocks are all included.
Width 154 cm, height at middle 8 cm, thickness at middle 5 cm. Head opening 22 cm, 64 cm between the wedges; Wedges 36 cm and 38 cm.

92. 28 models of men (mansini musukha (AB)) and 6 models of women (hinjao mansini musukha (AB))
The models represent a number of different social positions and kinds of employment found in Assam, but none of the figures seems to represent a Bodo. The models are made in painted plaster (The Inventory states that they are made out of burned clay). No information regarding their collection is available. Box 12 cm width (high). Inv.no. C.4642 a–v & C.4641x–z.

93. A model of animal (mwider (AB))
Elephant figure in wood with tuckers in bone, perhaps of ivory. The Inventory describes it as, ‘An Elephant. The figure was collected sometime between 1927–1939 among Santals (Bodo)’ by Esther Nielsen, who lived in the mission and donated the object to Aksel Kristiansen, who could do no more than repeat what Nielsen had told him. Length 6.8 cm, height 5.5 cm.

94. A model of cart (mwsou gari (AB))
Wooden model of ox cart.
It is a cart with high wheels and a cover made of woven natural materials stretching to the double of the carts length. It is drawn by one ox. The ox has black horns and an evident hump on the back. Like the previous object, the ox cart was collected by Esther Nielsen between 1927–1939 and subsequently donated to Kristiansen. Total length figure 17.5 cm, height 8 cm.

Inconsistencies
The Inventory informs that correspondence regarding Siiger’s collections from the Bodos C.6406 – C.6443 have the Journal Number 20/1948–50 and that Aksel Kristiansen’s collections from the Bodos C.6480–C.6512 have the Journal Number 38/49. Also, the inventory number c.6434 is not missing but the inventory number has not been utilised (noted at C.6434 in the Inventory).
Two items described in the inventory were not found in the physical collection. The Inventory describes them as:
95. A basket used for fishing
It has the shape of a cupola and is open in both ends with a small woven handle at the side. Height 51.5 cm, the diameter at the bottom 54 cm.

96. A long net of dark ropes
It is used for the catch of wild animals in the jungle.
  The net is wide-meshed and has loops in both ends to tie it.
  Length about 28.10 m, width 1.40 m.
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