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# *Christian Missionaries' Ethnographic Accounts of Diets and Foodways in the Area of Kokonor during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Early Republican Time*

UTE WALLENBÖCK – VERONIKA ZIKMUNDOVÁ

The Kokonor region, often referred to as northeastern Amdo, comprising nowadays China's Qinghai province, is a culturally transitional area considerably influenced by the diverse cultures of the Tibetans, Mongolic groups, Chinese, and the ethnically complex Muslim communities. In this article we provide a broad contextual framework regarding the Christian missions in the Kokonor area during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early Republican time, an area described as follows: "For the true Chinese this region is a land of scarcity, but the European finds compensations for the lack of the produce from the gardens and orchards of the "blessed land," for beef and mutton are plentiful, milk is to be found, and butter – much of it of doubtful freshness – is to be had."<sup>1</sup> Due to the lack of other sources on food consumption and offerings in that area, we present excerpts from published works of missionaries on food and religious food offerings.<sup>2</sup> This area has a long history in terms of Christian missions, tracing, according to some authors, back to the Nestorians during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) as well as to the Italian Franciscan Giovanni da Pian del Carpine (John of Plano Carpini) and the Flemish Franciscan missionary Willem van Ruysbroeck (William of Rubruck), who traveled to the courts of the Mongol khans already prior to the foundation of the Yuan

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1 Robert B. Ekvall, *Gateway to Tibet. The Kansu-Tibetan Border*, Harrisburg: Christian Publication 1938, 21.

2 In fact, there were also some Russian travelers who passed through the area, such as Nikolay Mikhaylovich Przhevsky (1839-1888), Grigory Nikolayevich Potanin (1835-1920), Bazar Baradievich Baradin (1878-1937), Gombojab Tsybikov (1873-1930), and Agvan Dorjiev (also known as Ngawang Lobzang, 1853-1938), but they did not live with locals as the missionaries did.



Dynasty (1271-1368).<sup>3</sup> In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Christian missions were destroyed;<sup>4</sup> however, Edmund Fürholzer<sup>5</sup> mentions that the Nestorian community near Kumbum monastery existed until 1620. From the late Yuan dynasty until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, knowledge of the life and activities of missionaries in northwestern China is very limited. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the Austrian Jesuit Johannes Grueber (1623-1680) and the Belgian Jesuit Albert d'Orville (1621-1662) were the first Europeans<sup>6</sup> to make the journey from Beijing to Kokonor, which Grueber compares with the Caspian Sea,<sup>7</sup> and further to Lhasa, Nepal, and India, with the mission of finding overland routes connecting China and India. A summary of their travel reports with descriptions of local dress and hairstyles as well as of rituals performed to gods is contained in Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*, published in 1667. Then, "[a]t the beginning of the eighteenth century, the missionaries were spread in great numbers, not only in all the provinces of China and in the tributary kingdoms of this powerful empire, but they had also found the means to preach and establish themselves in the heart of Tibet."<sup>8</sup> Still, until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, no significant Christian mission took place in Northwest China.

Then, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the expulsion of missionaries in 1953,<sup>9</sup> missions provided health care and formal education. In most of the available missionary accounts and reports of the above-mentioned congregations, besides their descriptions of local economic conditions, customs, and habits, little information can be found on food, despite the fact that

3 Bianca Horlemann, "Christian Missionaries in Qinghai and Gansu: Sources for Tibetan and Mongol Studies", *Xiyu lishi yuyan yanjiu jikan* 西域历史语言研究集刊 (*Historical and Philological Studies of China's Western Region*) 6, 2013, 163-191: 163.

4 Freundeskreis (ed.), *Kan-su. Zwischen Gletscher und Wüste*, Wien-Mödling: Missionsdruckerei St. Gabriel ca. 1933, 56.

5 Edmund Fürholzer, *Arro! Arro! So sah ich Tibet*, Berlin: Wilhelm Limpert Verlag 1942, 119. There were early Christian missionaries in that area such as the Nestorians and papal legations, however, these missions had no impact on the later Christian missions.

6 Bruno Zimmel, *Johann Grueber in Lhasa. Ein Österreicher als erster Europäer in der Stadt des Dalai Lama*, Wien: Biblios 1953.

7 Cornelius Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia. 1603-1721*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1924, 183.

8 Evariste Régis Huc, *Le christianisme en Chine, en Tartarie et au Thibet*, Vol. 4., Paris: Gaume Frères 1858, 3.

9 Bianca Horlemann in her works gives a very detailed outline on the Christian missionaries in contemporary Gansu and Qinghai provinces from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century up to 1953, when the missionaries were expelled from China's Communist government. Bianca Horlemann, "Xixiang, a Historic Catholic Mission Station in Northwest China", *Religions and Christianity in Today's China* 4/2, 2014, 40-49; B. Horlemann, "Christian Missionaries in Qinghai...".

food, as a marker of cultural identity and also as a communication tool about ideologies, and the economic and social status of people, is an excellent tool for examining the meeting of cultures. However, when reading carefully the various missionaries' accounts, some descriptions of their own experience with food during their stay in the area can be found.

Thus, we are not only interested in the food habits of missionaries in the Kokonor area, but, on the basis of accessible sources,<sup>10</sup> we also want to shed light on the descriptions of the daily foods of the local population in the Kokonor area in regard to their religious beliefs, as we want to see "how the conflict between the dietary tenets of Buddhism and the exigencies of a pastoral, meat-eating existence is resolved."<sup>11</sup> Ekvall goes on, describing how "Buddhism forbids the killing of animals for meat, and the Tibetan accepts this theoretically; but he continues to kill sheep and cattle for meat and rejoices in the delights of the chase. [...] Neither does the Tibetan see anything incongruous in whirling a prayer wheel and saying his prayers as he rides to rob and kill."<sup>12</sup> Further, we want to investigate how special ingredients became an essential part of ritual offerings and how food exchange and shared eating created a bridge between humans and super-mundane beings. As religion and food culture are two closely-related topics, food can be divided into daily and ritual food. Hence, a sacred diet is connected to religious rituals, which we will look at by using the travel accounts of Christian missionaries that describe "sacred foods". Most of the works in question distinguish between "Buddhist", "Bön", and "shamanist" practices. The first two refer to the sphere of Buddhist/Bön monasteries and interactions between monks and lay people, while the last, found mainly in works concerning the Monguor,<sup>13</sup> refer

10 We are neglecting local Tibetan and Chinese sources as our focus is on the ethnographic accounts by Western Christian missionaries.

11 Robert Ekvall, *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border*, Chicago (IL): University of Chicago Press 1977 [online], <<https://case.edu/artsci/tibet/sites/case.edu.tibet/files/2022-05/Cultural%20Relations%20on%20the%20Kansu-Tibetan%20Border.pdf>>, [3. 8. 2023]. On the Vinaya and Buddhist diet, reference shall be given to Geoffrey Barstow, *Food of sinful demons: meat, vegetarianism, and the limits of Buddhism in Tibet*, New York (NY): Columbia University Press 2018.

12 R. Ekvall, *Cultural Relations*...

13 The name Monguors, as used in this article, refers to several sedentary Mongolic-speaking groups of the Gansu-Qinghai borderland. Their religious tradition combines elements of different, mainly Chinese and Mongolian, origins, with Tibetan Buddhism. The canonical descriptions of Monguor religion are found in Louis M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier, 1954, 1957, and 1961*, reprint 2006 [online], <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/159606732.pdf>>, [3. 8. 2023]; and in Dominik Schröder, "Zur Religion Der Tujen Des Sininggebietes (Kukunor)", *Anthropos* 47/1-2, 1952, 1-79. More recent works on the Monguor religion include Gerald Roche, *Nadun: Ritual and the Dynamics of Diversity in Northwest China's Hehuang Region*, [PhD dissertation], Griffith University, Australia 2011; Limusishiden –

to the complex practices directed at local deities of predominantly popular-Daoist origin,<sup>14</sup> which were the domains of medium-like practitioners. We, consequently, keep this distinction as “Buddhist” versus “non-Buddhist” spheres.

### Christian Missions in the Kokonor area

As the main target group of the Christian missionaries in the Kokonor area was Han-Chinese, most of the missionary stations were situated in areas mainly populated by Han-Chinese, as the success of the conversion of Han into Christianity was higher than among any other ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the Han-Chinese were also reluctant to accept missionaries, as the *China Inland Mission* missionary H. French Ridley (1862-1944) reported: “The Chinese at that time would not drink our tea. They were afraid lest we should put poison into the tea and that through their drinking it their hearts would be won over by Christianity.”<sup>15</sup> In contrast, the American Robert Ekvall (1898-1978), a missionary for the *Christian and Missionary Alliance* (CMA), who was born in Gansu province, went to the US with his mother, and, after graduating, returned to Gansu in 1922, stated that the Tibetans “had none of the easy religious tolerance of the Chinese.”<sup>16</sup> Despite the fact that Tibetans were “friendly to the messengers of the Gospel, the Tibetans yet seemed by all the forces of demon influence, by all the powers of that ancient subtle faith, and by their own sinfulness, thrice sealed against the Gospel.”<sup>17</sup> As for the Monguors (“Dchiahour”),<sup>18</sup> the Lazarists Evariste Régis Huc (1813-1860) and Joseph

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Gerald Roche, “Socializing with Gods in the Mongghul Bog Ritual”, *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 40, 2016, 35-74; and Mingzong Ha – Kevin Stuart, “The return of the Goddess: Religious revival among Hawan Village Mongghuls”, *Mongolo-Tibetica Pragensia* 2, 2008, 117-148.

14 Limusishiden and G. Roche speak about “Daoism and Shenjiao, ‘the way of the deities’”. Limusishiden – G. Roche, “Socializing with Gods...”, 38.

15 H. French Ridley, “Then and Now in Siningfu, Kansu”, *China’s Millions*, July 1911, 101-103: 102.

16 R. Ekvall, *Gateway to Tibet...*, 37.

17 *Ibid.*, 153.

18 The term “Dchiahour” is an exonym and derives from the Tibetan term “Chinese Hor” (tib. *rgya hor*) with Hor as an ethnonym referring to populations of mainly Turkic origin. It was then the scholars of the Scheut Mission who established the term “Monguor”, deriving from the autonyms of these groups, in the Western literature, which became used as an equivalent of the Chinese name Turen (土人) for this ethnic group. *Tu* with the meaning of “local” and *ren* “human/person”. Hermanns explains that the “Tu jen” call themselves “Mongor” or “Dolden”. See Matthias Hermanns, *Die Nomaden von Tibet*, Wien: Verlag Herold 1949, 30. Schröder even elaborates the

Gabet (1808-1853) highlighted the pragmatic nature of their two Monguor friends' relationship to Christianity, such as: "This young man, apparently of devotion so pure and disinterested, was in reality a dissipated knave, whose only aim was to ease us of our sapeks."<sup>19</sup> Consequently, most existing material written by the missionaries focuses on the Han-Chinese. Only a few missionaries wanted to work among non-Han Chinese; hence, reports by missionaries regarding their work with non-Han groups is quite sparse.

Among the missionary accounts focusing primarily on the non-Han Chinese population are ones by missionary-travelers of the French congregation of the *Congregatio Missionis* (CM), better known as the Lazarists; two independent Protestant missionaries representing the *Foreign Christian Missionary Society* (FCMS) who stayed four years in the Kokonor area, namely the Dutch Petrus Rijnhart (1894-1901) and the Canadian medical doctor Susie Carson Rijnhart (1868-1908); the Belgian fathers of the *Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae* (CICM),<sup>20</sup> better known as the Scheut mission; and the fathers of the German-Dutch Catholic Congregation *Societas Verbi Divini* (SVD).<sup>21</sup> The fathers of the latter two congregations were trained as ethnologists before being sent to the Kokonor region; hence, scholarly material with quite an Orientalist perspective, which also indicated an attitude of cultural and economic superiority over the local population in that area, is available.<sup>22</sup> As Joachim G. Piepke elaborates,

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various theories on the various names of the Turen in the various sources. See D. Schröder, "Zur Religion...", 4-5.

- 19 Evariste Régis Huc, *Travels in Tartary, Thibet, and China during the years 1844-6*, Vol. 2, London – New York (NY): Routledge, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1928), 20, <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/33269/pg33269-images.html>>, [3. 8. 2023].
- 20 In 1879, the CICM opened their independent missions in the Kokonor area (incl. Gansu province), which had to give up in 1922 due to a lack of funds and priests. See Bianca Horlemann, "The Divine Word Missionaries in Gansu, Qinghai and Xinjiang, 1922-1953: A Bibliographic Note", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19/1, 2009, 59-82, 60.
- 21 Regarding the SVD, who were stationed in the Kokonor area between 1922 and 1953, their missionaries had undergone academic ethnological training in Germany or Austria before they went to China. Most of the substantial written material has been left in German. The SVD missionaries had to face a strong dichotomy between formal prescription from church and human empathy which led the missionaries to form a reflection circle in which they discussed their experiences and reflections among themselves.
- 22 On the relation between missionaries and anthropologists, reference shall be given to Patrick Harries, "Anthropology", in: Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005, 238-260; Hermann Mückler, "Zum Verhältnis von Missionaren und Ethnologen. Ein historisches Beispiel und rezente Entwicklungen", *ET-Studies (Journal of the European Society for Catholic Theology)* 6/2, 2015, 233-250; Anton Quack, "Anthropology and Missionaries: A Review Essay", *Anthropos* 103/2, 2008, 560-567.

the SVD missionaries of the Kokonor area “lived in primitive conditions in order to adapt to the standard of living of the population, but on the other hand they had financial resources from home that enabled them to construct buildings and social facilities that were far above the standard of living of the surrounding area.”<sup>23</sup> It can be stated that because these missionaries were anthropologically trained, their documenting and publishing of these “indigenous” societies brought such societies closer to the Europeans, and moreover contributed to some of the earliest works in anthropology. We therefore consider them as “missionary anthropologists”. The main differences between anthropologist and missionary anthropologists are that the latter, despite being trained as anthropologist, mostly do not analyze and interpret, but rather simply observe and describe.

Regarding the Lazarists, Evariste Régis Huc arrived in China in 1839 and, together with Joseph Gabet, traveled between 1844 and 1846 through “Tartary”, namely Inner Mongolia and the Kokonor region, to Lhasa, with the aim of establishing a mission. Huc and Gabet had a guide and servant called Samdadchiemba, a “lukewarm Christian”,<sup>24</sup> from the group known today as the Monguors, who traveled with them. Unlike many other missionaries, Huc and Gabet report that they were much better disposed towards the “Tartars”,<sup>25</sup> than towards the Chinese, whom they considered cunning and hypocritical, and who, in the capacity of authorities, were a constant hindrance to the work of Christian missionaries: “We were no sooner acquainted with this nomadic people than we loved them, and our hearts were filled with a passionate desire to announce the gospel to them.”<sup>26</sup> During their stay in the Kokonor area, Huc and Gabet attempted to spread the Christian faith among the local population, and also among the Buddhist monks, describing the different food customs they encountered in various communities. In their travelogue, the connection between food and religion is manifested at several points: As it was easier for Buddhist monks to travel than for lay foreigners, the two Lazarists chose to travel semi-disguised, in the lay robes of the Buddhist monks,<sup>27</sup> and with shaved heads, and also to denounce alcohol and tobacco, which were allowed for Christians. The aim was to achieve an outward resemblance to

23 Joachim G. Piepke (ed.), *P. Johann Frick SVD: Mao schief in meinem Bett. Erinnerungen eines Chinamissionars 1931-1952*, (Collectanea Instituti Anthropos 52), Baden-Baden: Academia 2020, 7.

24 William Woodville Rockhill, *The Land of the Lamas: Notes of a Journey through China, Mongolia, and Tibet*, London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1891, 45.

25 “Tartars” (< Tatar) – meaning, above all, the Mongols. At that period, Westerners also distinguish between the “western Tartars” – the Mongols – and the “eastern ones” – the Manchus.

26 E. R. Huc, *Travels in Tartary...*, Vol. 1, 10.

27 *Ibid.*

Buddhist clergymen that should have facilitated their mission. In fact, Christian missionaries in China were obliged to wear Chinese secular dress and to grow a pigtail – a symbol of a lay subject of the Qing government – and were allowed to drink alcohol and smoke tobacco. The Lazarists' reason for their choice of dress and their rejection of tobacco and alcohol was partly ideological – it was an opportunity for them to publicly appear as religious personages, something Christian missionaries in China wished but were not allowed to do –, and partly pragmatic, as it facilitated their missionary work and travels. In fact, it was much easier for Huc and Gabet to disguise themselves as lamas to travel (more or less) unnoticed.

Regarding the Scheut missionaries, the Flemish Lodewijk Schram (1883-1971), better known as Louis Schram, studied anthropology, and after his ordination to the priesthood in 1908, was sent to the University of Leiden, a non-Christian university, to continue his studies. Then, in September 1909 he was sent to the Kokonor area, where he arrived in 1911 – an area ideal for fieldwork in anthropology, ethnology, and linguistics, as there were the Muslim Salar, and the Buddhist Tibetans, Monguors, Mongols, and Chinese.<sup>28</sup> However, his actual mission was to make his “Christian faith known to the Tibetans, who, inside Tibet, proved to be unreachable for any foreign influence.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, for Schram, the Monguors were more interesting than the Tibetans as there was “very little known about them.”<sup>30</sup> Hence, Schram describes the historical development and traditional society of the Monguor population.

In fact, the most objective, significant, and similar documents to which this article alludes are the food-related records of the Scheut and SVD missionaries. Regarding the SVD missionaries in the ethnically-diverse

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28 That the Kokonor area can be perceived as a crossroad of different civilizations, is highlighted by Huc and Gabet in terms of the ethnic background of their guide: “This young man was neither Chinese, nor Tartar, nor Thibetian. Yet, at the first glance, it was easy to recognize in him the features characterizing that which naturalists call the Mongol race. [...] The face was without any decisive character: it exhibited neither the mischievous knavery of the Chinese, nor the frank good nature of the Tartar, nor the courageous energy of the Thibetian; but was made up of a mixture of all three. Samdadchiemba was a *Dchiahour*.” Evariste Régis Huc, *Travels in Tartary, Thibet, and China during the years 1844-6*, Vol. 1, London – New York (NY): Routledge, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1928), 20, <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/32747/pg32747-images.html>>, [3. 8. 2023].

29 Jeroom Heyndrickx, “Louis J. M. Schram, CICM: Missionary and Ethnologist”, *Jidu zongjiao yu jindai Zhongguo* 基督教与近代中国 (*Multi-aspect Studies on Christianity in Modern China*), Social Science Academic Press 2011, 455-471: 459, <<https://www.globethics.net/pdfs/CNKI/CPFD/ZSKS200908001021.pdf>>, [3. 8. 2023].

30 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors...*, 23.



Kokonor area, Johann Frick<sup>31</sup> (1903-2003) focused on the Han Chinese, Paul Cwik<sup>32</sup> (1901-1997) looked at the “national unity of the Muslims” (“völkische Einheit der Mohammedaner”) by describing their family as well as their political and religious life, whereas Josef Trippner<sup>33</sup> (1899-1970) shed light on the Muslim community of the Salar as well as mentioning the debate about the ending of Ramadan among the Muslim communities in the area. Dominik Schröder<sup>34</sup> (1910-1974) concentrated on the Monguors, on which he did his PhD upon his return to Europe, while Matthias Hermanns (1899-1972), in the course of his ethnographic work, not only studied the Tibetans in the Kokonor area from 1922 until 1953 but also investigated the “newly discovered descendants”<sup>35</sup> of the Uyghurs in Gansu province, namely the Yugur,<sup>36</sup> who were influenced by them as they believed in Tibetan Buddhism, and their customs and habits were similar to the Tibetans’. As an example of the similarity, he mentioned childbirth:

At birth, the umbilical cord must not be cut with a knife or scissors. As with the Tibetans, it is bitten off by the mother. The newborn is washed by the mother right on the day of birth and rubbed all over the body with butter. There are no specific rules for the subsequent washings. However, the butter must be rubbed in after each one until the child is one month old. [...] The woman in childbirth is only allowed to drink a soup made of barley flour, milk, and butter. 7, 10 or 20 days after childbirth a sheep is slaughtered. The mother drinks the meat broth and eats the mutton.<sup>37</sup>

31 J. Piepke (ed.), *P. Johann Frick SVD...*

32 Paul Cwik, “Die völkische Eigenheit der Mohammedaner von Ch’ing-hai“, in: Johann Frick et al. (eds.) *Ethnographische Beitrag aus der Ch’inghai Provinz (China)*, (Museum of Oriental Ethnology, Folklore Studies Supplement 1), Tokyo: The Catholic University of Peking 1952, 234-263.

33 Josef Trippner, “Die Salaren, ihre ersten Glaubensstreitigkeiten und ihr Aufstand 1781“, *Central Asiatic Journal* 9/4, 1964, 241-276: 262.

34 D. Schröder. “Zur Religion Der Tujen...“

35 Matthias Hermanns, “Uiguren und ihre neuentdeckten Nachkommen“, *Anthropos* 35/36, 1940/1941, 78-99: 80.

36 The Shira Yugur/Saryq Yugur, also referred to as Eastern and Western Yugur respectively, are two related groups in modern Gansu. Their ethnonym points, without doubt, to their relationship with the mediaeval Uighurs (Huihu in Chinese) who, after the fall of their nomadic empire in 840, established now kingdoms around modern Turfan and in Gansu. Their exact relationship with these mediaeval groups is less clear. Currently, the Saryq/West Yughur speak a Turkic language while the Shira/Eastern Yughur speak a Mongolic language. See Shimin Geng – Larry Clark, “Sarig Yugur materials”, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 46/2-3, 1992, 189-224; Hans Nugteren, “Shira Yugur”, in: Juha Janhunen (ed.), *The Mongolic Languages*, London: Routledge 2003, 265-286: 265; and David Somfai Kara, “The Last Yugur Shaman from Sunan, Gansu (China)”, *Shaman* 24/1-2, 2016, 113-132.

37 M. Hermanns, “Uiguren...”, 83.

## Christian missionaries and food

In terms of missionaries and food and their founding of new missions in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, the Jesuits, in particular, initiated the globalization of Catholic cuisine, as “[t]he Jesuit missionaries played a vital role in the dissemination of crops, animals, agricultural practices, and eating manners throughout the early modern world.”<sup>38</sup> In fact, starting in early childhood, individuals within a civilization learn which foods are appropriate to consume and how to prepare them properly, as well as adopt cultural food beliefs. With respect to missionaries in America<sup>39</sup> and Hawaii,<sup>40</sup> for instance, they believed in their own inherent superiority, believing their foodways to be superior to “indigenous” ones. At the same time, they understood that they had to eat local foods as one of the sacrifices required by their missionary endeavors. Notions about the local ethnic food can be found in many missionary reports, with mostly the concluding remark that it was just a matter of getting used to it. Especially among nomadic people, local ethnic foods were a primary part of the missionaries’ diet, whether they liked them or not.

In her research, Verónica Peña Filiu<sup>41</sup> explores how local foods on the Mariana Islands (western Pacific) were adopted by Jesuit missionaries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. A similar report is given by the Austrian Jesuit Johannes Grueber: “Travelling in the highlands of Tibet, even a European could only survive if he had become accustomed to the Tibetan diet of cooked millet with rendered, long since rancid butter made from cream during months of wandering.”<sup>42</sup> And regarding European travelers in general, Robert Launay<sup>43</sup> states that by highlighting the similarities to European cuisine rather than their differences, European visitors made unusual foods part of their familiar culture. Matthias Hermanns, for instance, compares the lifestyle, diet, and food production of Tibetan nomads with alpi-

38 Verónica Peña Filiu, “Foodways, Missionaries, and Culinary Accommodation in the Mariana Islands (1668-1674)”, *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 9/2, 263-280: 264.

39 Heather Martel, “Dirty Things: Bread, Maize, Women, and Christian Identity in Sixteenth-Century America”, in: Ken Albala – Trudy Eden (eds.), *Food and Faith in Christian Culture*, New York (NY): Columbia University Press 2011, 83-104.

40 Jennifer Fish Kashay, “Missionaries and Foodways in Early 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Hawai‘i”, *Food and Foodways* 17/3, 2009, 159-180.

41 V. P. Filiu, “Foodways, Missionaries...”.

42 Johannes Grueber, *Als Kundschafter des Papstes nach China, 1656-1664*, Stuttgart: Thienemann, Edition Erdmann 1985, 138.

43 Robert Launay, “Tasting the World: Food in Early European Travel Narratives”, *Food and Foodways* 11/1, 2003, 27-47: 30.

ne pastoral cultures in Switzerland with the aim of showing the parallels between the two.<sup>44</sup>

How missionaries in the Kokonor adapted their own foods and trained their cooks is reflected in several reports: During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the two French Lazarists Evariste Régis Huc and Joseph Gabet, for instance, emphasized that “[w]e were resolved, for once and away, to have a little festival in the desert; and to take the opportunity to indulge our patriotism by initiating our *Dchiahour* in the luxury of a dish prepared according to the rules of the *cuisinier Francais*.”<sup>45</sup> In fact, they had a hard time with the local food, and their servant helped them out by adding ingredients according to their taste:

First, we burned our fingers when we tried to touch the hot and smoking re-past. Although our guests urged that it ought not to be allowed to grow cold, we waited a little, afraid of burning our lips also. At last, we tasted these puddings of sheep’s blood and oatmeal, but after getting down a few mouthfuls, we were quite satisfied. Never, perhaps, had we eaten anything so utterly tasteless and insipid. Samdadchiemba, having foreseen this, had withdrawn from the common dish, the liver, and the kidneys, which he placed before us, with some salt, which he had previously crushed between two stones. We were thus enabled to keep pace with the company, who, with a devouring appetite, were swallowing the vast system of entrails.<sup>46</sup>

Another report is given by Susie Carson Rijnhart: “Han-kia, our Chinese ‘boy’, aged about twenty-two years, soon learned under my tuition to prepare many kinds of food in English or American style, and twice a week he regaled us with *m’ien* [noodles]. Having no oven in our stove, we extemporized one out of a paraffin tin, in which we could roast meat and bake cookies.”<sup>47</sup>

Also, the German Journalist Edmund Fürholzer, who stayed at the Styler Mission in Lanzhou in 1936, describes the fabulous breakfast served there, existing of “bean coffee with yak milk, yak butter, yak hard sausage and the best house bread. Yak butter has a slightly rancid aftertaste, but it’s easy to get used to. The yak sausage is also made in the Mission. It has the same taste as the best Göttingen sausage.”<sup>48</sup>

In the early days of her almost 27-year-long stay in Tibetan areas before having become used to the local diet, the American Blanche Griebenow

44 M. Hermanns, *Die Nomaden von Tibet...*, 240-243.

45 E. R. Huc, *Travels in Tartary...*, Vol. 1, 38.

46 *Ibid.*, 215.

47 Susie Carson Rijnhart, *With the Tibetans in tent and temple*, Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier 1901, 31.

48 E. Fürholzer, *Arro! Arro!...*, 25.

reported that: “[w]e have a native cook who fixes everything in our foreign way.”<sup>49</sup>

In their accounts, the various missionaries pay considerable attention to issues of food and give, at times, ample descriptions of local food and eating habits as well as of the relation between food and religion.

### Food and its relations among people and the “other world”

Food is not only a vital part of life, representing history, tradition, and culture, but specific food also relates to specific events, such as after child-birth as mentioned before. In fact, food is the basis of every society and, at the same time, a tool with which to communicate ideas, values, identities, and attitudes. Moreover, food can be seen as an indication of a diversity of relationships that the individual forms, not only with others as individuals, but also with spirits, gods, and demons. Hence, light will be shed on accounts by Christian missionaries of the preparation, sharing, and consumption of food regarding the relations between people and the other world inhabited by gods, spirits, demons, and ancestors. In fact, food can be a metaphor for spiritual nourishment. In Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, food offerings assume yet another form and meaning: Through donations of food and tea to the monks, the lay pilgrims increase their merit and, indirectly, participate in the monks' activities aimed at pleasing the Buddhist deities. However, according to the Norwegian Lutheran missionary Edvard Amundsen<sup>50</sup> (1873-1928), “lay people bring in offerings of butter to be burned up before the idols, and great masses of butter are wasted this way...”<sup>51</sup> – indicating, for him, the inferiority of the local religious practice and the superiority of Western culture.

In regard to Christian missionaries in the Kokonor region, descriptions of food as part of domestic offerings among Tibetans and Monguors as well as in rituals in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries can be found, such as

49 Blanche Griebenow, *Called to Tibet. The Story of M. G. and Blanche Griebenow*, West Conshohocken (PA): Infinity Publishing 2013, 45.

50 Edvard Amundsen was a member of the “Tibet Mission Band” of the China Inland Mission on the Indo-Tibetan and on the Chinese frontier in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His book is written from the missionary standpoint. See Edward Amundsen, *In the Land of the Lamas. The Story of the Trashilhama*, London: Marshall 1910, vii-viii.

51 Edward Amundsen, “The Diary of Journeys through East Tibet”, *Chinese Recorder*, December 1907, 649-659: 659.

those by Hermanns<sup>52</sup> for the Tibetans, and by Schroeder<sup>53</sup> and Schram.<sup>54</sup> Both of the latter authors report that, for the Monguors, food offerings constituted a central part of their ritual practice and the main medium of communication between the people and deities, or as Schram says, “heaven and all the spirits”.<sup>55</sup> Even though their task was to evangelize the local people, as all these three missionaries had been trained in anthropology, no traces of any attempt to impose their cultural and religious values on the Tibetans and/or Monguors can be found in their publications, nor did they state that the local religious beliefs and practices were inferior. It can hence be argued that the work of the SVD and Scheut missionaries in the Kokonor region (apart from subsuming the idea of colonialism which is inherent in the concept of missionary work itself) did not explicitly follow colonial ideas and exhibited only a minimal degree of European cultural bias. Consequently, their reports represent very valuable ethnographic accounts. Nonetheless, their work still counts as “missionary work” by virtue of the fact that only these missionaries could write them. In the turbulent times of the early Republican period, few foreigners ventured to the Kokonor region and no one except missionaries stayed there for long periods. Moreover, missionaries were close to the local communities and, as a rule, developed close contacts not only with ordinary people, but, above all, with the local élites. The mission was their goal and, in pursuing it, they sought to penetrate local communities and develop friendships based on mutual trust, often assuming active roles in the society. Schram, for example, acted several times on behalf of various Monguor commoners before the local chief, who was his friend. Overall, their personal engagement in the societies they studied was certainly one of the features which made their writings different from secular anthropologists.

All major (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) rites among Tibetans and Monguors involve offerings of food and drinks – such as tea, yoghurt, and milk.<sup>56</sup> Getting deeper into the Buddhist and non-Buddhist rituals would go beyond the scope of this article; hence, we only display the various accounts and travelogues in which some reference is given, such as, for instance, to the smoke offerings (Tib. *bsang mchod*),<sup>57</sup> when “white and

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52 Matthias Hermanns, *Mythen und Mysterien der Tibeter*, Stuttgart: Magnus Verlag 1955; Matthias Hermanns, *Die Familie der Amdo-Tibeter*, München: Verlag Karl Alber 1959.

53 D. Schröder, “Zur Religion Der Tujen...”.

54 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*

55 *Ibid.*, 510, 526.

56 M. Hermanns, *Mythen und Mysterien...*, 76.

57 Samten Karmay refers to the fumigation offering and its social dimension. He moreover distinguishes between the interpretation by Western scholars and Tibetan Buddhists. “The former have attempted to connect it with the term *bsang bu*, meaning

black sugar, food of every kind, various grains, diverse fragrances (incense) are burnt in the fire and thus sacrificed.”<sup>58</sup> In fact, besides types of grain and aromatic woods, three white substances (Tib. *dkar gsum*: yoghurt, milk, and butter) and three sweet substances (Tib. *mngar gsum*: sugar, molasses, and honey) are the commonly-used ingredients for this smoke offering. Schröder, in contrast, describes the smoke offerings among the Monguor as follows: “Dry cream is also permitted instead of butter, regardless of whether the milk was raw or boiled. If there is no tsampa at hand, distilled wheat or barley flour is permitted, but never bean flour, because it is impure. There are no rules about the color of sugar, so red sugar is usually used because it is cheaper than white sugar.”<sup>59</sup> He then also mentions that besides six different kinds of spices, milk or barley wine can be added instead of water. Later, he notes that, at that time, the Monguor often used nothing other than tsampa and water for the ritual.<sup>60</sup> However, no mention of the missionaries’ personal active participation in any rituals can be found in any of the missionaries’ reports, implying that active participation in rituals did not comply with the rules of the missionary societies.

Regarding the smoke offerings,<sup>61</sup> the fragrant smoke is imagined to travel into the sky to please the five senses (Tib. *'dod yon lnga*) of the deities, and, thus, serve as a kind of pathway between humans and the blessings of the heavenly beings. As Fitzherbert<sup>62</sup> states, these rites are a prominent lay ritual for the propitiation of worldly (Tib. *'jig rten pa'i*) deities and spirits.

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‘food’, while the latter have assimilated it with incense offerings referred to in the Buddhist scriptures. [...] Under the influence of this Buddhist interpretation, the bsang ritual [...] came to be conceived of as a fragrant offering to the gods.” Samten Karmay, “The Local Deities and the Juniper Tree: a Ritual for Purification (bsang)”, in: Samten Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle. Studies in History, Myths, Rituals and beliefs in Tibet*, Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point 2009, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1997), 380-422: 381.

58 M. Hermanns, *Mythen und Mysterien...*, 77.

59 D. Schröder, “Zur Religion Der Tujen...”, 44.

60 *Ibid.*, 45.

61 On “smoke” and “smoke offering” in Tibet, see Gillian G. Tan, “Differentiating Smoke: Smoke as duwa and Smoke from bsang on the Tibetan Plateau”, *Anthropological Forum* 28/2, 2018, 126-136: 131; and on the “smoke offerings” by the Mongols, see Krisztina Teleki, “The Khalkha Zaya Paṅḍita’s Smoke Offering Rituals to the Khangai Mountain Range”, in: Vesna A. Wallace (ed.), *Sources of Mongolian Buddhism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020, 207-214.

62 Solomon George Fitzherbert – Charles Ramble, “An early Tibetan Gesar bsang Text”, *Archiv Orientalni, suppl. Special issue: Tibetan Margins* 84/3, 2016, 467-526.

Another offering described by the missionaries is the so-called red purifying smoke offering (Tib. *dmar gsang mchod*),<sup>63</sup> in which meat is offered to the gods despite the prohibition of killing in Buddhism as killing is widely seen as a cause of intense suffering. For this offering, as Schröder<sup>64</sup> explains, an animal – usually a slaughtered goat, a hog, or a sheep – is put on the fire to be consumed completely.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, Schröder explains that a special means of honouring the deities is to offer a whole cooked animal. He then gives further information concerning the use of animal sacrifices in the context of Tibetan Buddhism: According to him, animal sacrifices were prohibited in the monasteries, and were not supposed to take place in front of the monks. However, certain local deities within the Buddhist pantheon were understood to be pleased by such offerings; thus, the issue was resolved by the animal being slaughtered outside the monastery and brought already cooked to the temple of the local deity, which was aside of the main temple buildings. Hermanns, on the other hand, writes that “if meat is cooked as food, then some of the cooked meat is cut off and thrown into the fire to burn as a sacrifice.”<sup>66</sup> Robert Ekvall, in his very detailed anthropological work, even explains that some Tibetan Buddhist rituals specify that meat must be offered.<sup>67</sup> Participants often consume the meat from both folk and Buddhist rituals after it has been offered first to the divinities.<sup>68</sup> In regard to the Monguor and their customs concerning the consumption of meat in the monastery, Schram observes the following: “The lama never returns from his parents without having received some clothing from his mother, having his clothes mended, and having received some sweet rolls, meat, and pickled vegetables.

63 See Katia Buffetrille, “Beasts, Men and Gods. A red purifying smoke offering (mar-sang) in Trika (Amdo)”, *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* [online], 50, 2019, <<http://journals.openedition.org/emscat/3893>>, [4. 3. 2019]. See also Daniel Berounský, “Burning the Incestuous Fox: A Tibetan fumigation ritual (wa bsang)”, *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* [online], 50, 2019, <<http://journals.openedition.org/emscat/3893>>, [4. 3. 2019].

64 D. Schröder, “Zur Religion Der Tujen...”, 42.

65 The killing of the sheep for the offering is not happening on the eyes of a Lama nor in the same courtyard.

66 M. Hermanns, *Mythen und Mysterien...*, 77.

67 Robert Ekvall, *Religious observances in Tibet: patterns and function*, Chicago (IL): Chicago University Press 1964.

68 Reference shall be given to Barstow, who explores the tension between Buddhist ethics and Tibetan cultural norms to offer a novel perspective on the spiritual and social dimensions of meat eating. Geoffrey Barstow, *Food of sinful demons: meat, vegetarianism, and the limits of Buddhism in Tibet*, New York (NY): Columbia University Press 2018.

His parents slaughter a sheep or kill a pig, and a piece of meat is sent to the lama and his master."<sup>69</sup>

Hermanns, in his work on Amdo Tibetans, mentions not only blood sacrifices (red offerings, Tib. *dmar mchod*), but also bloodless animal sacrifice<sup>70</sup> – for instance, the release of an animal (Tib. *tshe thar*), which is performed under the following condition: if “a Tibetan falls seriously ill, he offers an animal, yak, sheep or horse as a proxy for his life”<sup>71</sup> and releases the animal, which is seen as a virtuous activity.<sup>72</sup>

Offerings of food – such as milk, milk products and tsampa – are key features of religious practice among Tibetans<sup>73</sup> and Monguors<sup>74</sup>: Tsampa and butter are not only foods for humans but also for deities, as these two ingredients are used in the making of *torma* (Tib. *gtor ma*), ‘ritual cakes’, as briefly described by both Schram<sup>75</sup> and Ekvall.<sup>76</sup> Hermanns instead argues that *torma* were made of rice flour, barely flour, or wheat flour and butter as a binder.<sup>77</sup> Hermanns then gives a quite detailed account of the meaning of the various forms of *torma*; some *torma* are very simple and others are very colorful. “The simpler ones are offerings that are thrown away to accuse spirits and demons.” He further states that “[t]hese objects are always thrown away, not consumed by the people and not burnt.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, *torma* are used in many contexts, which makes it difficult to provide a simple explanation: *Torma* can function as a temporary residence of dei-

69 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 367.

70 M. Hermanns, *Mythen und Mysterien...*, 134.

71 *Ibid.*, 77.

72 David Holler and Jens-Uwe Hartmann give a good overview of the ritual of freeing animals, by distinguishing the kinds of liberations based on the different motivations and intentions as well as its divergent functions. David Holler, “The Ritual of Freeing Lives”, in: Henk Blezer (ed.), *Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the IATS, 2000, Volume 2: Religion and Secular Culture in Tibet*, Leiden: Brill 2002, 207-226; Jens-Uwe Hartmann, *Aktive Gewaltlosigkeit: Die rituelle Befreiung von Tieren* [online], Vortragsmanuskript: Universität Hamburg, Asien-Afrika-Institut, Abteilung für Kultur und Geschichte Indiens und Tibets 2006, <<https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/4-publikationen/buddhismus-in-geschichte-und-gegenwart/bd10-k04hartmann.pdf>>, [3. 8. 2023].

73 In the chapter on nutrition among the Amdo Tibetans, Hermanns gives a very detailed description of the Tibetans’ nutrition, dividing it into various categories, namely meat, tsampa, tea, milk, butter, soft white cheese (“Quark”), cream, yoghurt, and alcoholic drinks. See M. Hermanns, *Die Nomaden von Tibet...*, 58-79.

74 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 257-258, gives a brief overview of the Monguors’ nutrition with emphasis on slaughtering. In all three volumes, he further mentions the various foods prepared and eaten during festivals and offerings.

75 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 433.

76 R. Ekvall, *Religious observances in Tibet...*, 29-31.

77 M. Hermanns, *Mythen und Mysterien...*, 169.

78 *Ibid.*, 170.



ties or as a prison for a malicious spirit; moreover, tormas can be served as food to mundane and supermundane beings.<sup>79</sup>

Food also served as a means of communication between the mundane and supermundane in the offerings made by lay people in Buddhist monasteries. Huc and Gabet describe for instance how pilgrims could enhance the merit of their visit to Kumbum monastery by offering certain food items – mainly tea, but sometimes butter and cakes. One practice was the donation of specified food items to the monastery. The food items were equally distributed, in the presence of the donor, to all monks living in the monastery.<sup>80</sup>

On the day fixed for a tea-general [offering], after the repetition of morning prayer, the presiding Lama gives a signal for the company to retain their seats. Then forty young *Chabis*,<sup>81</sup> appointed by lot, proceed to the great kitchen, and soon return laden with jars of tea with milk; they pass along the ranks, and as they come to each Lama, the latter draws from his bosom his wooden tea-cup, and it is filled to the brim. Each drinks in silence, carefully placing a corner of his scarf before his cup, in order to modify the apparent anomaly of introducing so material a proceeding as tea-drinking into so spiritual a spot. [...] There are some pilgrims who add a slice of fresh butter for each Lama, and magnificent Amphytrions go the length, further, of oatmeal cakes. When the banquet is over, the presiding Lama solemnly proclaims the name of the pious pilgrim who has done himself the immense credit of regaling the holy family of Lamas; the pilgrim donor prostrates himself on the earth; the Lamas sing a hymn in his favour, and then march out in procession past their prostrate benefactor, who does not rise until the last of the Lamas has disappeared.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, food donated in this way did not serve as a direct offering to the Buddhist deities but produced a similar effect for the donor.

According to Schram,<sup>83</sup> on different occasions monks were regularly treated with fixed amounts of specified food items. “Fa-t’ai,<sup>84</sup> several times a year, has to entertain the lamas of the community in a more or less sumptuous manner, with tea, butter, tsamba, mutton, beef, rice, raisins, and rolls. Each lama has to take home a fixed number of rolls.”<sup>85</sup>

Consequently, in Schram’s ethnography, food is seen to have several functions with regard to religion: Firstly, and most importantly, offerings

79 For a more detailed explanation on tormas in a wide variety of Tibetan ceremonies, “to feed and appease (...) ghosts and spirits,” see Richard J. Kohn, “11. An Offering of Torma”, in: Donald S. Lopez (ed.), *Religions of Tibet in Practice*, Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press 2007, 183-193.

80 E. R. Huc, *Travels in Tartary...*, Vol. 2, 59.

81 Mongolian: *shabi*, “disciple”.

82 E. R. Huc, *Travels in Tartary...*, Vol. 2, 57.

83 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 374.

84 A Fa-t’ai (Tib. *mkhen po*) is the “Master of the Doctrine”, the abbot of a monastery. L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 372.

85 *Ibid.*, 374.

of food were part of almost all rituals, both those with a clear relation to Buddhism and others without. Specifically, everyday activities involved libations<sup>86</sup> and offerings of small pieces of food to the spirits before the actual consumption of drinks and food.<sup>87</sup> Still today, rituals of different sizes involve offerings of butter, tsampa, and meat. Butter, oil, and different corns are typical for offerings in Buddhist monasteries.<sup>88</sup> Second, offering food items, mainly tea and butter, to Buddhist monks is a specific indirect way of not only acquiring merits in the Buddhist sense, but also of placating the non-Buddhist deities, as in the following passage describing a procession through a village, which followed a ritual against hailstorms, a public ritual involving the recitation of Buddhist texts: "The bearing of Buddhist books is said to be very effective [against hail], as are the praying of Om Mani, the offering of tea to the lamas and of butter for the lamps, and the shamanist spirit-laden staff, the table and stake gods, and all the other Taoist statues of the temple which tour the village at the same time."<sup>89</sup> The notion, widespread in the Tibetan and Mongol areas, that making donations to monks increased one's merit had made the status of a monk advantageous. As seen in the tale of the Monguor monk Sandara, Samdachiemba's cousin, about his journey from Lhasa, which he told to Huc and Gabet: "We were all in good health and in good humour, more particularly when the shepherds had made us a present of a kid, or a good lump of butter."<sup>90</sup> This account shows that donated food did not function as an offering to deities but to the residents of monastic institutions. Schram even reports that before 1910 farmers in the area were paying their obligations to Buddhist monasteries in kind, supplying fixed amounts of oil and pork. When subjects married, they paid a portion of pork to the monastery.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, Hermanns mentions that Tibetan nomads did not eat horse meat, wild donkey, or pork, "[t]hey are disgusted by pork when it is eaten in farming areas."<sup>92</sup> Third, certain items consumed by Tibetan monks, practitioners, and believers were viewed as improper for

86 In his work *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, Schram describes libations of alcohol and tea made at many different occasions: During a major collective feast to the honor of ancestral spirits (p. 137, 187, 210), to the various spirits of Nature (on pp. 452-456) and during funeral rituals (p. 501). In the Buddhist context, offering and libation of special type of tea is described on p. 370.

87 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 426.

88 *Ibid.*, 314.

89 As hailstorms were one of the most feared dangers, the Monguors turned for protection to the Taoist deities and spirits of Nature as well as to the Buddhist deities, and different types of practitioners, including Buddhist monks, performed the rituals. L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 433.

90 E. R. Huc, *Travels in Tartary...*, Vol. 2, 60-61.

91 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 325.

92 M. Hermanns, *Die Nomaden von Tibet...*, 58.

religion in general (drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco, these being mostly the case in the Buddhist context), while others were seen as improper because their consumption caused “bad breath” that insulted the deities. These foods were mainly garlic, leeks, and onion.<sup>93</sup> During specific rituals, monks also faced more restrictions: “He is not allowed to drink alcoholic beverages, eat garlic, leeks, or radishes. He eats only mutton.”<sup>94</sup>

According to Huc, also in Kumbum, alcohol, tobacco and garlic were prohibited, but secretly used by many monks in their homes.<sup>95</sup> In fact, the Vinaya explicitly forbids alcohol, garlic, and onions.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Huc and Gabet also note the strict prohibition on eating “black meat” – venison – for Buddhist monks,<sup>97</sup> while the meat of domestic animals was allowed in monasteries.

## Conclusion

In this paper, which is based upon the historical background of Christian missions in the Kokonor area, we have not only presented a brief outline of the modified eating habits of the respective missionaries, but also focused on references to food(s) in connection with (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) religious practices in the various accounts of Christian missionaries who lived in, or travelled through, the Kokonor region in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the course of our in-depth reading of the various accounts in German, English, and French of the lives and practices of the Monguors and Tibetans, we noticed that there is one important difference between the works of the Lazarist missionaries Evariste R. Huc and Joseph Gabet on the one hand and the Scheut (first and foremost Louis Schram) and SVD missionaries (such as Matthias Hermanns and Dominik Schröder) on the other: While the Lazarists’ only declared reason for their mission was to spread Christianity, the others were trained anthropologists before their departure to Asia and were interested in “cracking a culture”.<sup>98</sup> Through their prolonged stays in a community, they then also learned the local languages,<sup>99</sup> which helped them to spread the faith, but which also

93 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 345.

94 *Ibid.*, 394.

95 E. R. Huc, *Travels in Tartary...*, Vol. 1, 69.

96 G. Barstow, *Food of sinful demons...*, 10-11.

97 E. R. Huc, *Travels in Tartary...*, Vol. 2, 97.

98 See Judith Shapiro, “Ideologies of Catholic missionary practice in a postcolonial era”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, 1981, 130-149: 147.

99 However, the learning of the local language was one tool most Christian missionaries had, including Huc and Gabet.

opened the door to the respective society and formed the basis for acquiring profound knowledge of the particular culture and for understanding the local religious practices. The Scheut and SVD missionaries therefore played a double role in the field – namely, as missionaries and anthropologists; consequently, we classify them as “missionary anthropologists”. For instance, the beliefs of “the others” are not comprehended and described from the inside out, but rather on the basis of the anthropologist’s theoretical presuppositions.

In this article, we examined the missionaries’ accounts of food on a “personal” level as well as in a religious context. Christian missionaries adopted Tibetan and Monguor local foods for various, sometimes complex reasons. The primary reason they appropriated these local foods was necessity, but at the same time they had the choice of how the food was prepared. However, by their attitude towards local food and traditions, they showed their true cultural integrity, which was an important aspect for the success of their missions. For example, the two Lazarists Huc and Gabet even decided to renounce alcohol in order to exploit the advantage of behaving in a similar manner to Buddhist monks. Nevertheless, while attempting to convert the Buddhist monks in local monasteries, they ate venison, in order to emphasize their distinction from the Buddhists.<sup>100</sup>

Next, we focused on how food exchange between humans and deities is described in the missionaries’ accounts. The most salient topic in this respect is food offerings to deities, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist ones. Mostly – and particularly in the non-Buddhist context – food offerings were presented to deities in a special manner, by a religious practitioner, and were distributed and consumed by the community as a way of blessing. In addition, lay populations made small daily offerings of food and libations, while, in the context of Buddhist rituals, smoke offerings were made, during which food items were burned, or tormas were presented, not only as a food offering, but also as a means of exorcism. Besides these various means of directly offering food to deities, other mentions of food in a religious context were found in the various accounts: As a typical practice in the Tibetan Buddhist context, the missionaries describe food offerings to Buddhist monks as a means for lay people to indirectly please the deities, and, in Schram’s description of a public ritual against hailstorms, we see this notion of supplying the Buddhist monks with food also as a means of pleasing the deities.

Finally, we considered specific food items prohibited in the religious context. The relationship between meat consumption and Buddhism, dealt

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100 E. R. Huc, *Travels in Tartary...*, Vol. 2, 97.

with by Barstow,<sup>101</sup> as well as the consumption of other “prohibited” items, such as leeks, garlic and onion, is an often-discussed topic in missionary accounts, which point out the apparent contradictions between the Vinaya rules and the behavior of monks. On the other hand, interesting mentions of these prohibitions being transferred into the non-Buddhist context are also found in missionary reports, such as Schram’s description of Monguor rites of fasting by lay people.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the methodological anthropological approach of some missionaries, what differentiates them from anthropologists is their practice. Anthropologists translate and interpret information on the basis of theoretical frameworks, whereas missionaries simply describe. The anthropology of religion offers a good illustration of this difference. However, the accounts of the “missionary anthropologists” laid the foundation for future anthropological research on the cultures, religion, and languages of the population of the Kokonor area, especially on the Amdo Tibetans and the Mongours.

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101 G. Barstow, *Food of sinful demons...*

102 L. M. J. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier...*, 491.

## SUMMARY

**Christian Missionaries' Ethnographic Accounts of Diets and Foodways in the Area of Kokonor during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and Early Republican Time**

The paper deals with the description of food(s) used in religious rituals and in daily life in the Kokonor area from the point of view of Christian missionaries. By looking at Christian missionaries' reports of the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican time, light is shed on selected societies in the Kokonor region – namely the Tibetans and Mongolic groups, such as the Monguors – with an emphasis on these societies' diets and foodways. Food is at the core of everyday life, not speaking about festive occasions. Moreover, food and beverages with their symbolism constitute an important part of religious practice. On the basis of missionary reports, such as those by French Lazarist missionaries, missionaries of the Belgian Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae, and missionaries of the Societas Verbi Divini, besides the mundane description of daily food(s), we also highlight how special ingredients became an essential part of ritual offerings and how food exchange and shared eating was understood to create a bridge between humans and super-mundane beings.

**Keywords:** Kokonor; Lazarists; SVD; Scheut mission; daily and sacred food

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