



## The Ladakhi House

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## THE LADAKHI HOUSE

### I - Definition

The word *khangpa* (spelling: *khang-pa*) as distinct from *khangu* or *khangbu* (spelling: *khang-chung*), refers both to a place of residence and to a social unit, in particular an electoral unit (for example for the election of a *goba* (sp. 'go-ba or mgo-ba; the village head) and his assistants. The word *trongpa* (sp. *grong-pa*) denotes the residence complex as a whole including a winter floor, a summer floor, ground floor stables, a *chotkhang* (sp. *mchod-khang*) on the upper storey, etc. However, it also denotes a social unit (reference to the undivided family as opposed to the *khangpa/khangchung* fission) with a well defined position in the social hierarchy (opposition *tronchen/troncung*, sp. *grong-chen/grong-chung*). Thus there is no term, at least not one commonly used, to designate the house as a building. The terms used always refer to social or familial groupings, to the segmentations in village society, each with a defined function and place in the social hierarchy.

The word *yarsa* or *yartsa* (sp. *dbyar-sa*) denotes a summer residence. In fact it has two meanings:

- 1) either it refers to the summer floor, the second storey and in particular the kitchen (the words *can-sa* (*byan-sa*) and *thap-sa* (sp. *thab-sa*) are normally used for the winter kitchen). In such case *yarkhang* (*dbyar-khang*) is also used.
- 2) or a small dwelling near the fields where it is possible to stay for some time during the summer when the pressure of work requires of one to be on the spot continuously for the harvest or ploughing. We have seen that urban expansion is manifested by the construction of the main house near the fields, displacing the *yarsa* or *yarkhang* (sp. *dbyar-sa*, *dbyar-khang*) altogether. So the main house becomes a *yarsa* or *yarkhang* in its entirety. So, theoretically at least, there is a summer house and a winter house but the latter is commonly abandoned or sublet to migrant workers and the summer house is therefore reorganized into summer and winter floors.

The words *pulu* (pu-lu) and *brok* ('*brog*)<sup>1</sup> denote stone shelters up in the high pastures, where those who look after the herds during transhumance reside (mostly women).

### II - Construction

The first problem is a choice of site; this should not be a *lhu-sa* (*klu-sa*), that is a place sacred to a *lhu* (*klu*) or *sadag* (*sa-bdag*), from which stems the necessity to consult the *onpo* (*dbon-po*) in the first place. If the chosen spot is a *lhusa* it should either be given up, or a lama called in to do pujas. Whoever fails to take these precautions exposes himself to worse troubles. He will witness the loss of his wealth and illness befall his family. If a *lhu* is hurt by the builders' pick axes the result will be particularly serious.

Most often a plan is not made. The owner discussed the number of rooms he needs, their approximate size and orientation, with the (*r*)*tsikspon* (architect). The (*r*)*tsikspon* (*rtsig-dpon*) is left to trace the plan on the ground according to these demands. The *onpo* (*dbon-po*) fixes the date for the work to begin.

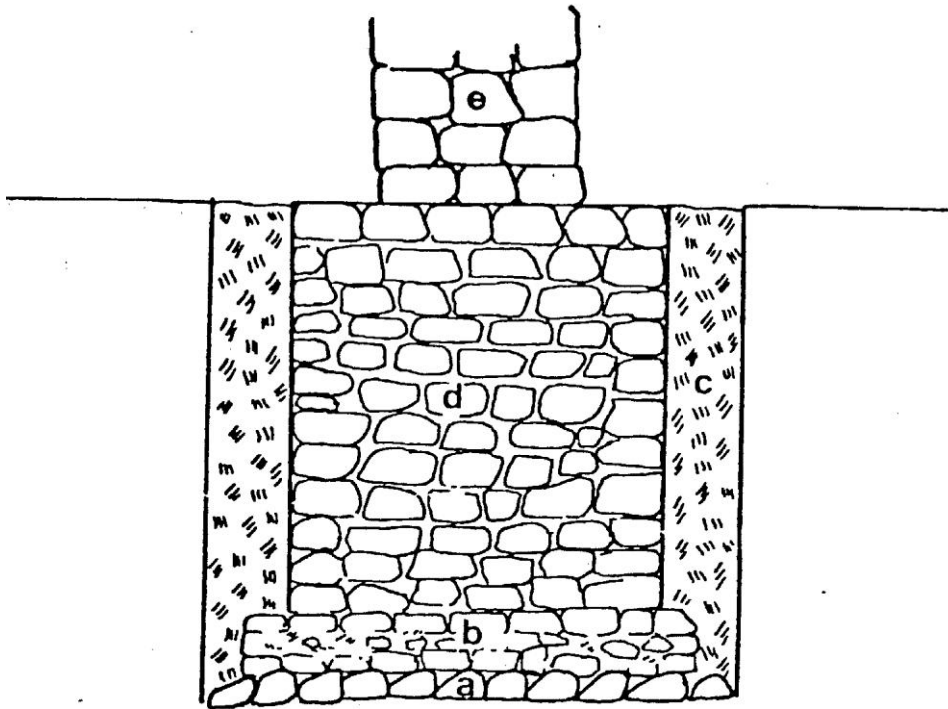
Once the plan is made on the ground, the foundations are sunk. The entire space to be occupied by the house is not dug up, only ditches corresponding to the course of walls. Thus the floor of the ground floor, is the ground itself. There is no cellar.

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<sup>1</sup> *phu*: upper part of the valley, pasture. Rebecca Norman writes to me : "The small structures are *pu-lu*, unaspirated, and not the same word as *phu*, high valley. I spell it *pu-lu*.. '*brok* is pronounced *brok* in western Sham, *dok* in eastern Sham, and in Sham it doesn't mean the structure, but only an area. In Sham it is not always or even usually at higher altitude than the main house, in fact I think it might be the Sham word for *Leh* yarsa, just whatever fields or workplace are far away from the main house. I think in Zangskar the *dok* is as you describe. Some people in Leh say *dok* for the grazing area with *pulu* structures, but most people in Leh don't have the word *dok* at all.

The depth of the foundation ditches depends on the nature of the terrain: two feet when the ground is hard, up to five feet if it is boggy. The width is usually three feet.

The bottom of the ditches is covered with large stones packed together and leveled. Then 1/2 foot is left on either side and a small wall is built to ground level. The space between the sides of the ditch



(1) Foundations of the wall of a house. a - layer of stones, b - bank of earth in three layers, c - the rest of the ditch filled with earth, d - stone foundations flanked by two earth-filled ditches. The foundations are narrower than the bank of earth. e - wall of the building. This system of reduction also existed for walls far wider at the base, and can still be seen today. The insloping walls give the houses their elegant and gracious appearance.

and the wall is then filled. Then the main outside wall is raised on this small wall. This operation is sometimes performed twice. For example, in a 3 foot wide, 2 foot deep ditch, a small wall 1 foot high is erected -leaving 1/2 foot on either side. Then a second wall, also 1 foot high is built, reaching ground level, again leaving foot on either side. The main wall is built on the second wall, again allowing 1/2 foot on either side, which makes it 1 foot thick. These measurements are by no means a rule, only a possible example.

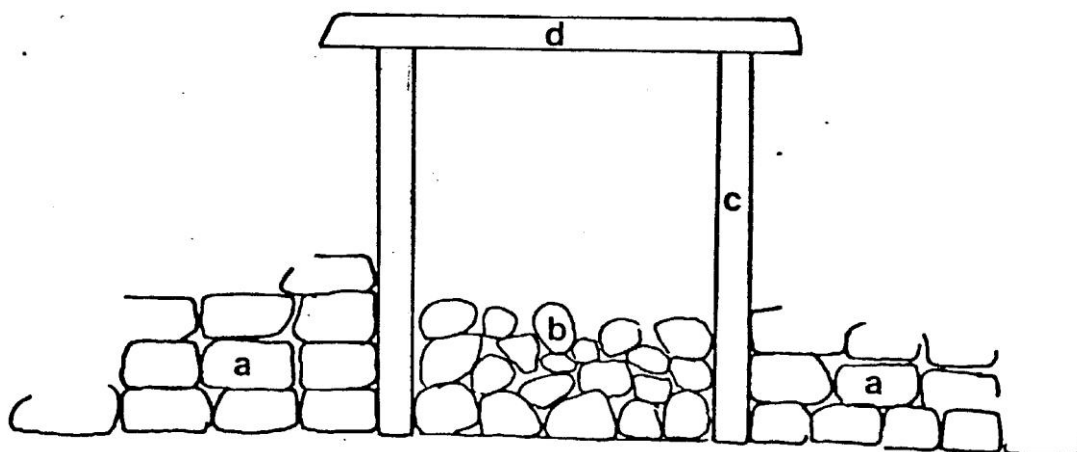
The door is raised before the wall (but after the threshold) as the rough and irregular stones must be arranged exactly for the two steps and the lintel. Once the wall is begun, they have to start anew for the windows, also inserted prior to the walls around them for the same reason. Whilst the wall is being built, the door and window frames are blocked up with loose stones so as not to warp under the pressure of the walls under construction. (Fig. 2) A beam, or to be more precise, several beams, connect the lintels of the doors and windows, and are eventually covered with cement. (Fig. 3) The window has only recently been introduced. Before the introduction of glass there were only some small skylights, stopped up with rags or paper. These openings are always present on the ground floor. (Numerous houses in the Zanskar valley still retain this feature.) At any rate windows were always confined to the houses of the king and the nobility. They were closed with decorated wooden latticework.

A particular feature called *rapsal* (*rab-gsal*) should be mentioned here. This is a kind of balcony made of wooden latticework reminiscent of the mouharabiehs of Ottoman architecture. Amongst

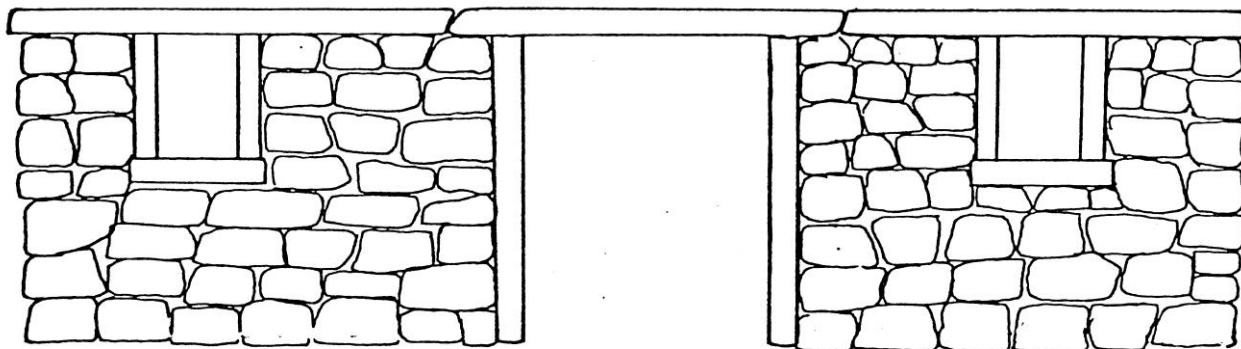
other things the *rapsal* is an observation post for the household members; in numerous tales the hero sees the enemy or his loved one from the *rapsal*. The introduction of glass will make the *rapsal* increasingly obsolete.

The main door, which theoretically faces east, is called *gyazgo* (*rgya-sgo*). Though thought of as the main door because of its orientation, it is not necessarily the largest or most used one. Many houses are built on a slope, as a result a second door on the mountain side leads directly to the first floor.

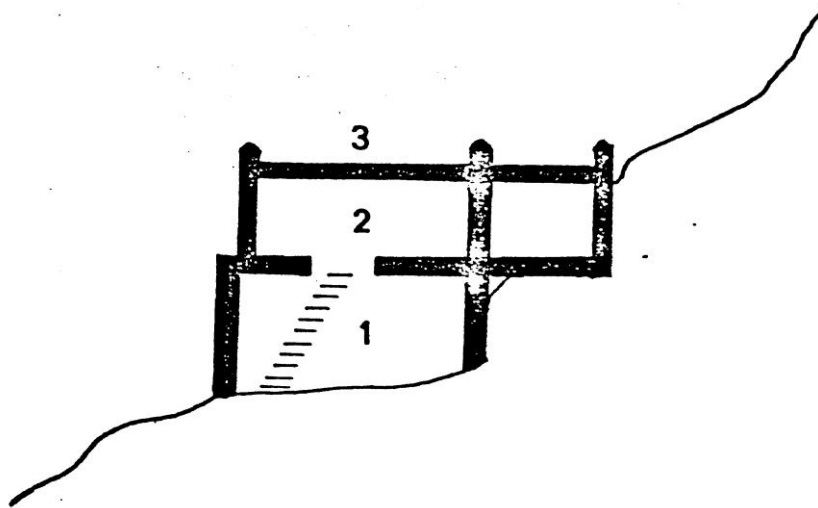
(Fig 4)



(2) Building the base of a wall. The two vertical jambs (c), and the horizontal traverse lintel (d), are constructed first, so that the stones of the wall (a), can be as level with the jambs as possible. As the wall is being built, the space between the jambs is filled with stones (b), so that the former do not lean inwards under the pressure of the wall. These stones are removed later.



(3) The wall is built up to the level of the lintel. The stones have been removed. A chain moulding runs along the length of the wall joining the beams of the doors and windows. The joists rest on this chain moulding. The whole ensemble is then rough cast, and the chain moulding will no longer be visible except above the doors and windows. At the same time the spaces between the stones and the wood are filled in with mortar which is made of fine sieved earth to which some sand has been added. This same mixture is used as plaster, pisé (for enclosure walls), for the floor and the parapet, for balconies and roofs. The door frame is not masked. In the sketch given here, the surround is very simple indeed. There could be a second horizontal beam at the bottom of the door. This may be complicated further by another larger beam as a threshold under the door frame (Tib. *ma-them*) and a lintel above the frame (*ya-them*).



(4) A house built against a slope. One can either go downstairs directly or by some stairs from the first floor (called the second floor by Ladakhis). Likewise one can go onto the roof directly (the Ladakhis call the roof third floor, when a house has one of our floors).

Clay, the hardness of which leaves much to be desired, is used as cement. However, houses are frequently rebuilt; 30 - 40 years is an average lifespan for a house.

The top floor (the second floor if the house is two-storey) is constructed with mud bricks (*paku*; sp. *pag-gu* or *pa'u*<sup>2</sup>), much less expensive than stone, but also much less solid. However, the walls have no more floors to support.

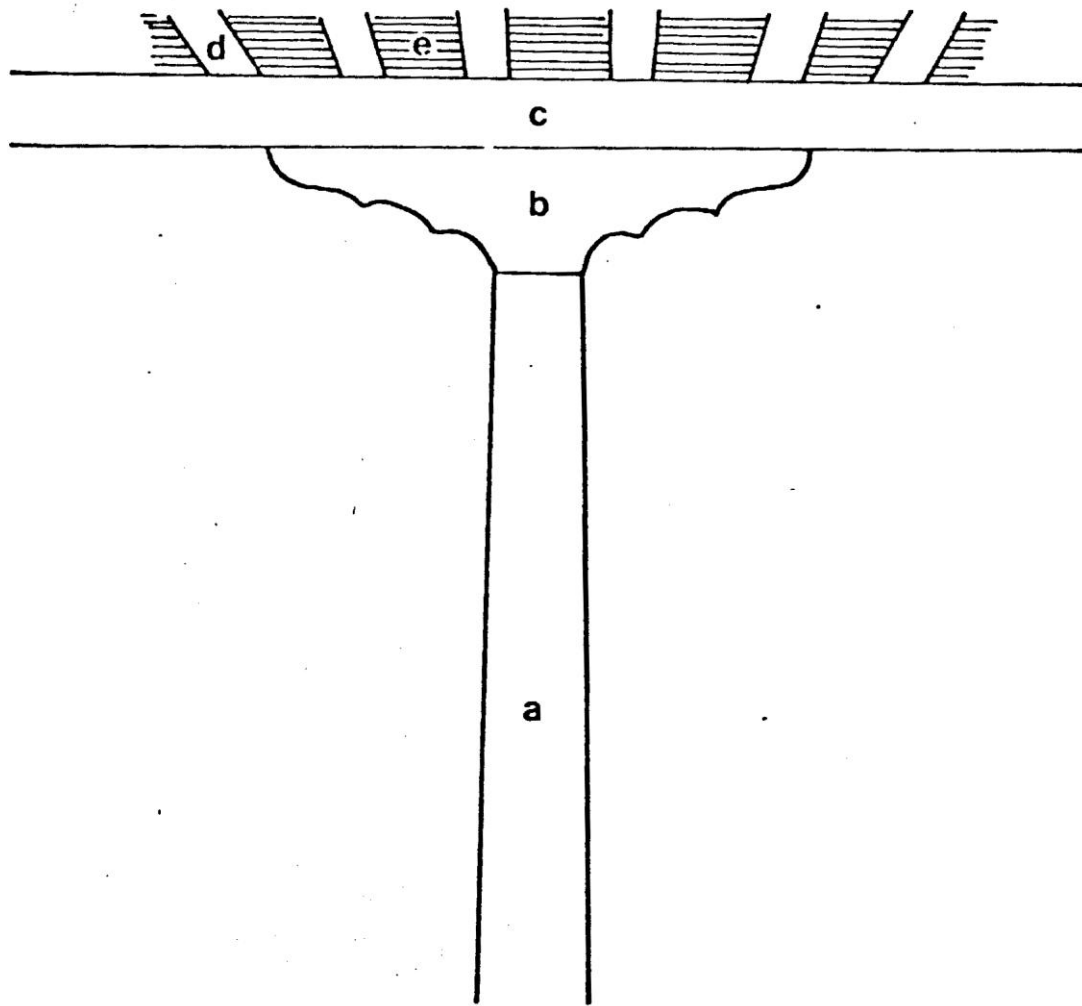
When the stone walls of the ground and first floor are finished, the *ka* (*ka*), central pillar of the kitchen, is erected. In general there is only one *ka* in the kitchen and none in the other rooms. However, some kitchens have two, and some larger houses may have a *ka* in other rooms. Often there may be one or two *ka* in the *chotkhang*, but here their sole function is decorative. If the kitchen *ka* is a tradition which rarely suffers exception, its presence can also be explained in functional terms. The kitchen is the largest room and the central beam (*mardung-ma*, sp. *ma-gdung*) is supported by the *ka*. Sometimes the *ka* enables two beams to be joined in a capital. When the external walls and *ka* are finished, a feast with *chang* (*chang*) may be held.

Less important transverse beams called *burdung* (*bu-gdung*<sup>3</sup>) join the walls, or the walls and the *mardung*. The spaces between the *mardung* are filled with small sticks (*tralu*, sp. *gral-bu*) and the ceiling is covered with a species of dried grass called *yagdzes* (sp. *yag-rdzas* or *g.yag-rdzas*)<sup>4</sup>, which is then covered with earth. This also constitutes the floor of the next storey (fig 5).

<sup>2</sup> *pag-gu* or *pa'u* according to S. C. Das, *A Tibetan English dictionary*, New Delhi 1985 [Calcutta 1902], p. 777. S. C. Das mentions that it is a Ladakhi word. Rebecca Norman suggests *pag-bu* and adds "Tibetan is only *pha-gu*". She writes "Leh, Sham, Nubra pronounce it *pagbu* or *pakbu*".

<sup>3</sup> *mardung* (sp. *ma-gdung*) for the main beam that holds up smaller beams, which are then called *burdung* (*bu-gdung*). All beams are generically *dungma* (*gdung-ma*).

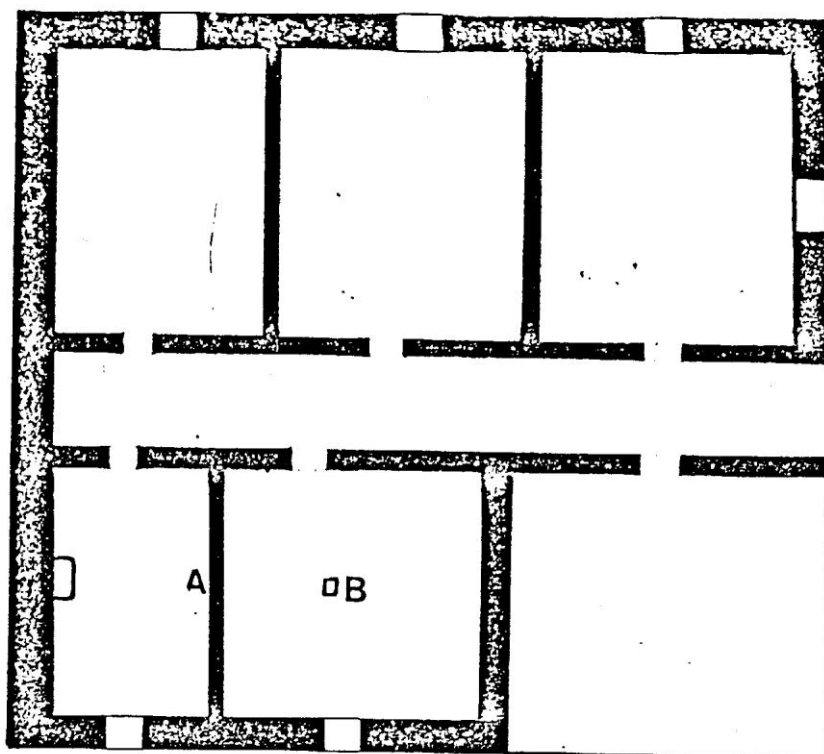
<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Norman : "I spell it *yag-rdzas* though *g.yag-rdzas* would be just as good; in Upper Ladakh where the pronunciation of *yag* and *g.yag* would have different tones, they don't use this word, they say *bi-lap* instead, so I can't use their pronunciation as the clue to its spelling. Its Latin name is *Stachys tibetica* and it's not a grass at all, but Ladakhis speaking English tend to say "grass" for any plant smaller than a tree. In Leh, the word *bilap* means this role in roofing, which nowadays can be done with discarded cardboard boxes, whereas *yagdze(s)* means the specific plant, *Stachys tibetica*. In Changthang and Nubra, *bilap* is the name of the plant itself".



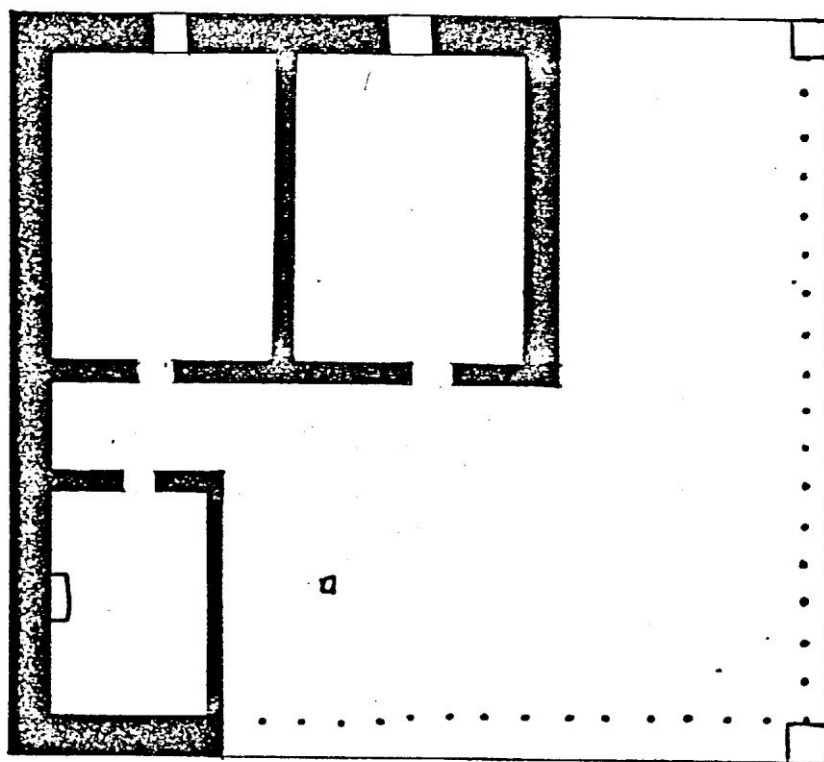
(5) The arrangement of beams in a kitchen:

- (a) the central pillar (*ka*).
  - (b) capital (*kazhu*, sp. *ka-gzhu*).
  - (c) main beam (*mardung*, sp. *ma-gdung*).
  - (d) cross beams (*rdungma*, sp. *gdung-ma*)
  - (e) wooden beading (*tralu*, lath work, sp. *gral-bu*) in the spaces between the cross beams. The sticks are covered with a plant called *yagdzes* (sp. *yag-rdzas* or *g.yag-rdzas*) and earth, which forms the floor of the next storey.
- The cross beams rest on the chain moulding (fig 3) and more rarely on the stones or the bricks of the wall. The main beam rests on the stones of the wall.
- The terminology used for beams seems to be a fairly imprecise.

The plan of the second storey is the same as that of the first. The ceilings/floors are not strong enough to support walls above them; thus walls are built on walls. In the case of a three-storey house, one rarely finds that the second floor is built up entirely. Only certain rooms of the first floor can be found again on the third, leaving an empty space in the middle, either facing the open or



1<sup>er</sup> étage



2<sup>e</sup> étage

(6) A simplified plan of a modern house at Chanspa. Above the rooms to the right of the corridor, an extension of the walls of the two rooms is built, thus forming another two rooms on the second storey.

The summer kitchen is right above the winter kitchen, but being smaller, one of its walls is erected above the main beam (A), of the winter kitchen. The one hearth is above the other, which means that the ventholes are also aligned in this way. On the other hand the opening (*thokskar*) above the secondary hearth (*mera; me-ra*) (B), gives out onto the unbuilt terrace.

sometimes closed off into a patio. Nevertheless there is one exception; it is possible to build a wall above the central *rdung-ma* in the kitchen. Anyway it is almost a rule that the main vent hole (*thokskar*; sp. *thog-skar* or *thog-dkar*, cf *thog*, roof and *dkar-khung* or *skar-khung*, pronounced (*s*)*karkhung*, window) of the kitchen, above the *mera* (*me-ra*, see below) leads to an open space on the second floor. For example it is possible to do this by reducing the summer kitchen by half in relation to the winter kitchen, and it is thanks to this device that the *thokskar* of the *mera* opens up into the sky. Often it is also protected by a wind break closed off on three sides and on top. On the other hand the two hearths are one above the other and the outlets for the smoke (where there are no chimneys), also called *thokskar*, are also aligned in this way (Fig 6). This is only one possibility. The summer kitchen may not be above the winter kitchen at all, but above another room. We can see how important wood is in the Ladakhi house. It is the most taxing element of the budget. The wood (willow or poplar) is rare and precious in Ladakh, or else<sup>5</sup> it must be brought by truck from Srinagar. Until the first truck reached Tungri in September 1977 wood had to be transported on horseback in the Zanskar valley.

Perhaps this explains the rarity of wooden staircases. More frequently they are made of stone, filled in underneath and reinforced with beams. The stairs leading to the first floor are sometimes outside. A ladder is frequently placed against the wall and leads directly to the roof.

This may also explain the rarity of *skorlam* (*skor-lam*) which is a wooden balcony encircling the *chotkhang* used for ritual circumambulations (*skor*).

This leaves the parapet (*charlen*; *char-len*) which surrounds the roof, or, if the second floor is not built up completely, then a parapet is built around all the open sections. It is supported by small beams (*tralu*; *gral-bu*) and protrudes about 10 cm from the outside wall. It is surmounted by a stone which is slightly projecting. This stone is painted red or black (Fig 7). Burnt ochre earth is used for the red, the bottoms of kitchen pots are scoured, or the interior of batteries used to obtain the substance used for black (similarly for blackening the hearth or window surrounds). The black band is called *nakchu* (*nakpo*: black, *chu*; water; sp. *nag-chu*, *nag-po*, *chu*), in other words black ink, and the red is called *spenma* (*spen-bad* or *span-bad*<sup>6</sup>). In principle the rules are the following:

- a) *nakchu* for houses of the laity
- b) *nakchu* or *spenma* for monks' houses (*trashak*, *gra-shag*)
- c) *spenma* for monasteries, *labrang* (*bla-brang*, a kind of hostel belonging to the monastery), and the *chotkhang* of kings, the *kalthon* (*bka'-blon*) and *lhonpo* (*blon-po*).
- d) Black is associated with the laity. The laity may be called *mi-nak-pa* (*mi-nag-pa*; black people) but these rules have almost completely fallen into disuse. Certain informants told me that at one period black was reserved for the royal families and the nobility.
- e) The *spenma/nakchu* is frequently situated just below the parapet. Sometimes rather than a painted line, it may be composed of fine twigs packed together and embedded in the wall, then painted over.
- f) This black/red opposition seems to possess a certain importance in Ladakhi civilization. In the archery festivals the target is called *bennak* (*ben*, target, here we come across *nakpo*, *nag-po*, black, again) and the central part *tsaga* (sp. *tsha-kha*) of ochre, the yellow earth which turns red when burnt and is used to colour the *tsandos* (*btsan-mdos*)).

<sup>5</sup> Willow and poplar are local, but other wood is available from lumberyards that bring wood from Kashmir.

<sup>6</sup> According to Hubert Feiglstorfer, "Revealing Traditions in Earthen Architecture : Analysis of Earthen Building Material and traditional constructions in the western Himalaya", in Art and Architecture of Ladakh, edited by J. Bray and E. Lo Bue, Brill, Leiden, 2014, page 383. Rebecca Norman : "What I was told is that *spedma/spezma* is if you make it out of sticks with the chopped ends; *nakchu* is black paint anywhere it belongs on a building, along the parapet or around windows; and *charlen* is the parapet. *spen-ma* is in Tib dictionaries as tamarisk, including compounds that refer to the red parapet on monasteries, so may be the same word. But Ladakhis make the *spedma* out of any available sticks, such as leftover *tralu*, and not just tamarisk."





### III - Organisation

An example will enable us to appreciate more fully the arrangement of rooms inside the house. Fig. 8 is the plan of the ground floor of a bourgeois house in Leh. By this I mean a non-peasant house where the ground floor is inhabited and not used as a stable.

Leading from the main entrance (*gyazgo*) is a long corridor (Fig 8), from which a staircase takes us to the floor above. The room (*nang*) no. 7 is extended into a verandah (no. 9). Nos. 9 and 9a could very well form a separate verandah.

In many Ladakhi houses there is a *shelkhang* (*shel-khang*), most frequently on the upper storey. The *shelkhang* (*shel*, sp. *shel*: glass) is a room in a corner of the house with panes of glass on both sides looking out onto the open. It is a gathering place used mostly during the winter months. If the door faces east, conforming to the theoretical rule, then it will be placed in the corner to the left of the main entrance, that is S.E. which ensures maximum sunlight.

The actual form of the *shelkhang* only dates back to the introduction of glass. Previously it was constructed with wooden latticework like the windows and *rapsal* and was called *congsa*<sup>8</sup>. Our contemporary Western architects have rediscovered the *shelkhang* which they call 'window in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright' after its inventor, (information Paul Miremont). In our plan we can also have:

- in 9 a verandah
- in 9 a *shelkhang*
- in 9 a verandah and the room above it a *shelkhang*
- in 9 a verandah, there is nothing above 9 and the room above 7 is a *shelkhang*
- a final hypothesis which is not excluded is that a room is built above 9 and that above 7 there is a 'semi- *shelkhang*', that is with one side of glass instead of two.

1 and 4 are simple rooms (*nang*, sp. *nang*) and 7 is readily used as a living room (*dronkhang*, the room *khang* where one receives the guests *dron-po* (sp. *mgron*; this room is also called *zabkhang*, maybe from *gzab*<sup>9</sup>). Note that the *shelkhang* is itself a living room and therefore a particular form of *dronkhang* or *zabkhang*. It is one of the rare rooms where there are a few pieces of furniture; low tables (*coktse*, *lcog-rtse*), with large square cushions behind them called *boldan* ('*bol-gdan*; '*bol-mo* means soft), measuring about 1 x 1 m. Frequently they are covered with rugs. But in the poorer houses there will be no *boldan*, merely some mats. *Boldan* and *choktse* are practically the only furniture, for there are no beds (one sleeps on mats or *boldan*) or cupboards, only niches with crude shelves called *staksha*<sup>10</sup> (the cupboard is replaced by the *dzot* (*mdzod*) which we shall return to later).

Whether the *zabkhang/dronkhang* is a *shelkhang* or an ordinary room, it should always be kept impeccably clean as guests could come in at any time. It is a more formal meeting place than the kitchen, where close friends, relatives and neighbors are received without much ceremony. Sitting in the *zabkhang* implies a certain effort in dressing up.

Access to the washroom (*thruskhang*, *khrus-khang*) no 3 is by way of a small alcove, no 2. This is not a general rule. The *thruskhang* is a small, plain, square room into which pitchers and buckets are brought. Many houses do not have one in which case one washes in the kitchen, or, in the summer, outside.

In our example the latrines (*chakra*, honorific, *decot* - n° 10)<sup>11</sup> are not really a part of the house.

There is a small room added to the exterior of the building which therefore lacks foundations.

The list of rooms given in this example is far from exhaustive, in the more important residences one may find the following: Outside the food *dzot* (*mdzod*), another *dzot*, where balls of wool, tools,

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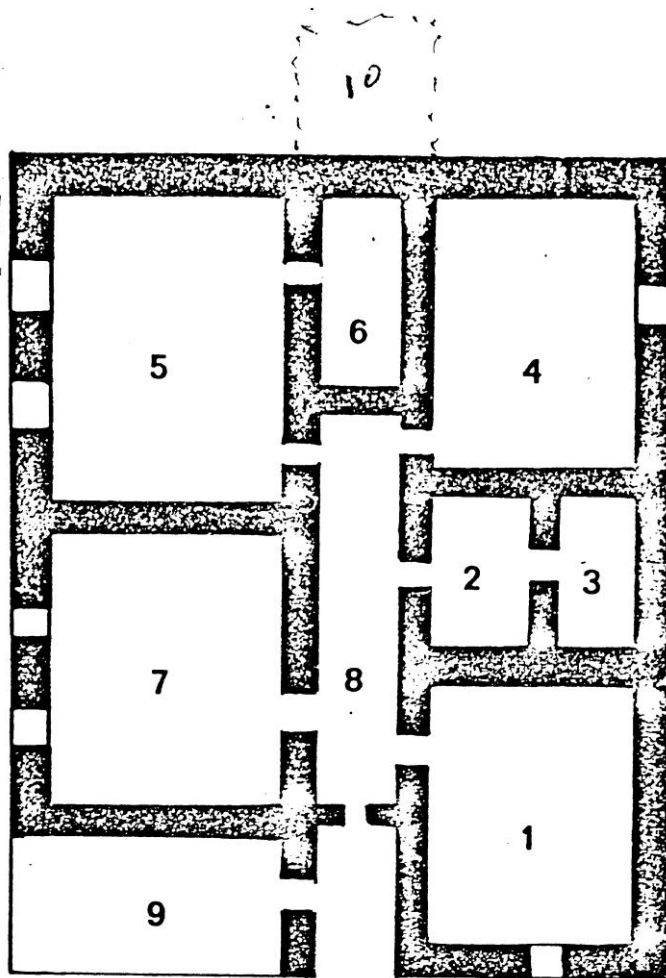
<sup>8</sup> Spelling unknown. The word is not used any longer today. People prefer to say *rapsal* or *shelkhang*.

<sup>9</sup> in Tibetan, according to Das: 'well behaved, attentive and polite to guests, careful, cautious and also well dressed'.

<sup>10</sup> Spelling unknown, maybe *stag-sha*. The word is not used any longer today. This article was written in 1979.

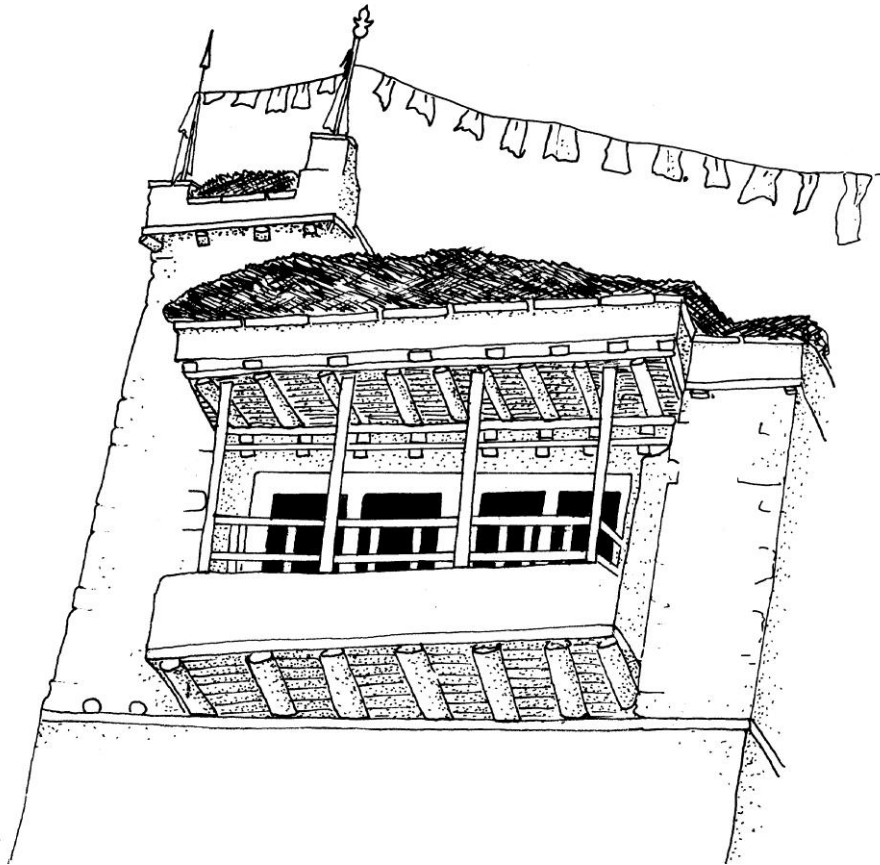
<sup>11</sup> According to Das, *phyag-ra* toilet, but the more recent *Podgya Tshigdzot Chenmo* doesn't list *phyag-ra* or *chag-ra*. Honorific, *decot*, maybe *bde-spyot*, but it's not Tibetan.

pieces of cloth garments and coats are stored. The main agricultural tools such as the plough, are kept on the ground floor. The second *dzot* is frequently on the second floor.



(8) Plan of a modern house in Leh. This is the kind of house built by young couples nowadays:

1 - room (*nang*). 2 - antichamber. 3 - washing room (*thrus-khang*). 4 - room (*nang*). 5 - kitchen (*thap-sa/ cansa*). 6 - *dzot*, storeroom with access to the kitchen. 7 - room (*nang*) which would readily be used as a living room, or for receiving guests (*zabkhang*). 8 - main entrance (*gyaz-go*) and corridor. The *shel-khang* is above 9, if a larger one is required then it is above



10 The rapsal

- a) *Changkhang* (*chang-khang*); a room for storing *chang* in earthenware jars, often adjacent to the food *dzot*. On the occasion of important festivals (marriage, etc) a person called the *changma* (*chang-ma*) stands near the *changkhang* and distributes *chang*, similarly the *dzotma* (*mdzod-ma*) next to the *dzot*, and the *thapma* (*thab-ma*) next to the hearth. They are mainly chosen from within the *phaspun*.
- c) *Shakhang* (*sha-khang*) a room in which dried meat is stored (*sha*, sp. *sha*: meat), or where yak or goat meat is dried.
- d) *Pangnga* (*bang-nga*): a silo where barley is stored. From here a trap door opens out into the room above called *pang-khang* (*bang-khang*). The latter is likely to be the *dzot* or kitchen.
- e) *tangra*<sup>12</sup>: stable or sheep pen, etc. This is on the ground floor. Sometimes this is outside the house and may or may not be adjoined to the ground floor. The word *stara* (*rta-ra*) may also be used for horses (*sta*, sp. *rta*: horse). The dog's kennel is called *kipul* (*khyi*: dog, *pul*: *pul* < *pu-lu* small simple structure). Dogs are more or less obligatory guardians of Ladakhi houses.
- f) *Markhang* (*mar-khang*): room for storing butter (*mar*, sp. *mar*). In view of the large quantities consumed in salt tea (*gurgur ca* sp. *gur-gur ja*), butter is extremely important. Besides Ladakh is not self-sufficient in this respect. Butter is valuable. The wealth of a house may be expressed in quantities of butter.
- g) *phograks*: room where straw<sup>13</sup> (*phoma* or *phugma*; *phug-ma*) is stored. This room is also called *pukrak/pugrak* (*phug-rags*). The fodder *chunpo* (*chun-po*) is simply left on the roof and parapet (*khathok*) referred to as the third level even if this is not built (*sumthok*, *gsum-thog*).

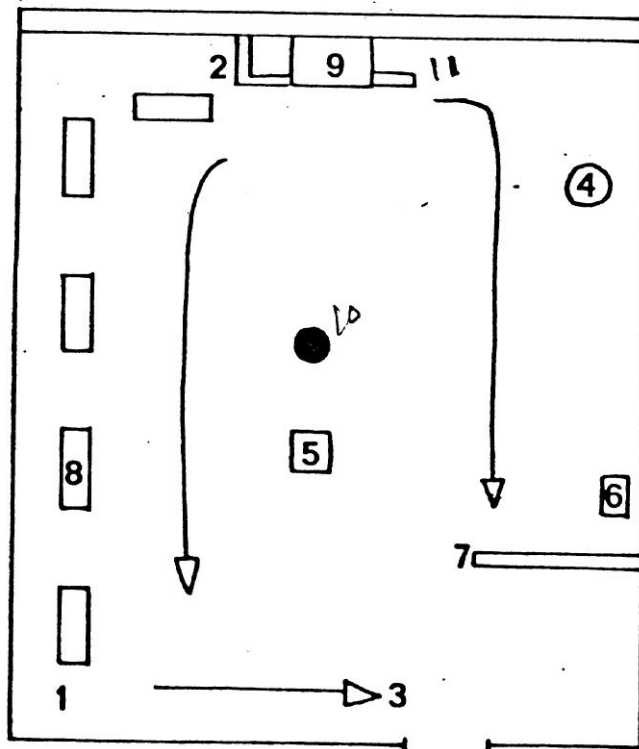
<sup>12</sup> Rebecca Norman : 'I spell it *dang-rwa* because some people in lower Sham pronounce it *dangra* or *dagra*, though Leh and Zangskar pronounce it *tangra*. There is wide variation between regions in the meaning and words for various animal-related structures, but certainly *tangra* is a common word.'

<sup>13</sup> According to Das *phug-ma* means chaff in Tibetan. According to Rebecca Norman *phoma/phugma* means straw in Ladakhi, not chaff, and *phokrak /phug-rags* is where you keep the straw, not proper fodder, which is *chunpo* and is kept on the roof. *chun-po* is a Tib word: bundle.

Therefore apart from the latrines (*cakra.*), the washroom (*thruskhang*), and the *shelkhang* which is used as a living room (*zabkhang*), most of the rooms with a specific usage are these small rooms for the storing of wood (*shingkhang*; *shing-khang*), meat (*shakhang*; *sha-khang*), food (*dzot*), textiles and clothes (*dzot*), grain (*pangnga*), etc. However the kitchen deserves special mention.

#### IV - The kitchen

First let us recall briefly what has already been said about the kitchen (*cansa* or *thapsa*<sup>14</sup>, sp. *thab-sa*, for the main kitchen which we are mainly concerned with here, *yarsa* for the summer kitchen). The latter term denotes more generally the summer floor, or summer house, there is no specific word for summer kitchen.

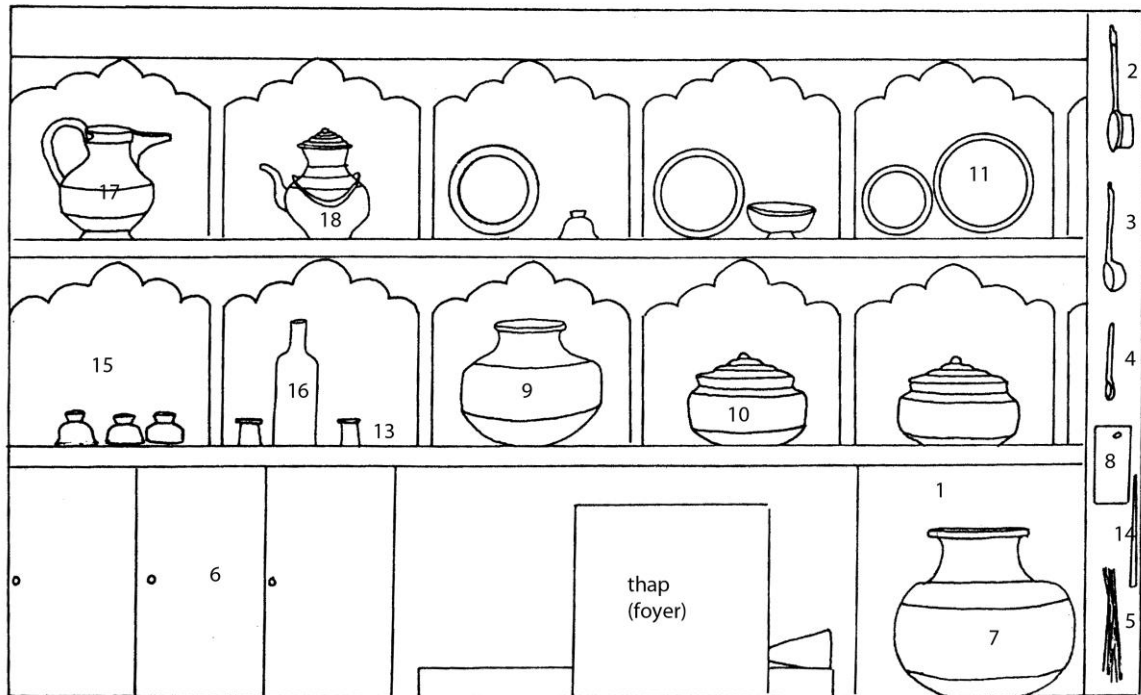


(9) .Plan of a kitchen. The black circle stands for the central pillar (*ka*). (1) is the end of the row of seated guests (*traljuk*), (8) is the end of the row of tables (*coktse*), and (2) is the beginning of this row (*tralgo*). The guest of honour or the father sits here. (3) is the furthest point of the row; it is the 'end of the house' (*khyim-juk*). The daughter-in-law of the father also seated at the *tralgo* (2), sits in front of him on the other side of the hearth. Her place is called *thap-ma*. (A) is the position of the big pot of drinking water (*dik*, sp. *dig*). (5) is the secondary hearth (*mera*). (6) is another container, frequently a metal can, for the fluid and semi-fluid leftovers (*trhuchu*; *khru-chu*). (7) is the *daber* (*da-ber*), a wooden partition next to the hearth. This word is also used for the wooden screens masking the lower parts of the windows. The arrows A - B - C, indicate the direction of sweeping. Sweeping itself also follows a hierarchical order.

The *thapltak* (*thab-ltag*) is found between (2) and (9). It is a container for ashes and glowing embers, and is surrounded by a small wall. The person sitting at (2) *tralgo*, has the privilege of removing the embers through an opening in the hearth on his side, with a metal spade called *lcaks-yok*. On the other side, the left hand side of the seated woman (*thap-ma*), a small stone wall (*bustak*, *sbud-ltag*) is used for keeping the bellows (*butpa*, *spud-pa*). One end of the bellows is fixed into the hearth.

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Norman : 'I've never heard *thapsa* for kitchen. Monks sometimes use the Tib word *thap-tshang*, which in Zangskari might be pronounced *thaptsha*, but in Leh area it's not a common or known word'

The kitchen is the usual gathering place for the household members, neighbors and visiting relatives. The focal point of the room is the hearth (*thap*, sp. *thab*) which I shall describe in detail below. The *thap* is built against one of the four walls which is lined with shelves (*langs*; *slangs*-*(ka)*), more or less carved. It is surrounded by a line of *choktse* (low tables), beginning with the *tralgo* (*go*, sp. *mgo*; beginning, of the line; *tral*, sp. *gral*) where the *nangdak* (*nang-bdag*) is seated (the household head i.e. the oldest man in the male line) and ending at the door (*traljuk*, sp. *gral-mjug*; end of the line).



(10) *Langs*, shelves covering the back wall of the kitchen. The hearth is represented here by a simple rectangle, with the *thap-ltak* in profile on the right, and the bellows (*butpa*) and *bustak* on the other side.

In the lower part is an empty wooden section (1), where the seated woman helps herself to wood and dung. Enough fuel for everyday needs is kept here (1). This part is called *pangong* (in some of the large traditional kitchens, there is a small structure specially for keeping fuel, c.f. Mme Pommaret-Imaeda's thesis where it is described in detail). Behind the *thap-ltak* is a section with three little doors (6), called *cakar*, where objects of common use are kept, especially those used in spinning. Above, the two shelves are divided into two sections. The one on the left is used for beverages (or tea in particular), and the one on the right for food. So on the shelves above the *shakar*<sup>15</sup> we find a thermos flask (16), cups (*kore*) (15), and saucers. The drawings above are the two kinds of teapot; earthenware (*tibril*) (17), and brass (*thagu*) (18). A *capskyan* (*chab-rkyan*, *chang* pot 17) could also have been added.

On the shelves to the right are two kinds of container for food; (*dik*, *dig*) (9), and (*zambu*, *zangs-bu*) (10). Above are plates (*thali*, Hindi/Urdu word) (12), large metal dishes (*tabak* or *thabak*; *tha-pag*, also *lagin*, probably a Urdu word itself borrowed from Persian) (11), and soup bowls for *kholak* (*gormo*, *sgor-mo*) (15).

<sup>15</sup> Not a Tib word, so spelling is unknown.

Different utensils are hanging from a board on the right; a copper ladle for tea and water (*thumbu* or *thazu*), an aluminum ladle for the soup (*camca*, 3, Hindi/Urdu words like *thali*), a wooden spoon for the yoghurt (*zho*) or whey, called *zaru* (*za-ru*) (4). Sometimes this is kept in the yoghurt churn (*zobker*) often found near the *ka\_*. There is also a board for the *bapa*, a dough made out of boiled tsampa (*taro*) (8), a stick for mixing the *bapa* (*skya*) (14) and a kind of small, stiff brush for mixing the soup (*silkya*) (5). Below this is a large *dik* (*dig*) for drinking water (7).

The woman seated in front of the *nangdak* is very often his daughter-in-law or wife, or failing these, his eldest daughter or sister. The place where the woman sits, in relation to the *tralgo* and next to the *thap* is called *thapma* (*thab-ma*). In most cases she has her back turned towards the door, form which she is separated by a partition called *daber* (*da-ber*). The *daber*, which is a simple wooden screen, is sometimes replaced by a unit of shelves. (Fig 9)

The fact that the woman has her back turned to the door, and that the *daber* separates the two, can be explained in two ways:

a) We know that the section near the door is the end of the *tral* called *traljuk*. As it is rude to have one's back turned, the woman's back is turned as far as possible to the lower strata, next to the door (note that in Fig. 9 she does not do this openly; the door is not directly behind her).

b) This impoliteness is mediated by the presence of the *daber*, which on the other hand protects her from impurity.

I will not describe the arrangement of *coktse* of decreasing height in the *tralgo* or *traljuk*, here<sup>16</sup>.

Another item of furniture next to the *coktse* should be noted — *kacok* (*ka-lcog*) is the name for a group of shelves around the central pillar (*ka*: pillar, *coktse*: table). The *kacok* is rare and only found in the kitchens of large and wealthy households. More common perhaps is the shelf above the door (*goltak*, *sgo-ltag*, this is a general term: the *riks-sum-gonpo* (*rigs-gsum-mgon-po*) above the *gyazgo*, rests on the outside of the *goltak* as well).

But the *langs* is the item of kitchen furniture invested with the greatest importance. Rows of shelves cover the entire wall against which the *thap* is built, (Fig 10) the *langs* house all the kitchen utensils. Three levels can be distinguished:

a) the lower level is that of the *thap*. As the *thap* itself touches, or almost touches the wall, a section of the *langs* space on the lower level is unusable. At the level of the *thapma* (to the right on our example) there is a store of wood and dung which is in easy reach of the seated woman, called *pangong* or *pangongs* (spelling unknown). The *shakar* is found at the level of the *tralgo*, this shuts with small doors. Objects used in weaving the female spindle (*phang*, sp. *phang*), the male spindle (*skuru*; *sku-ru*- a short stick or *yokshing*, *yog-shing*), the base of the *phang* called the *phangkor* which looks like an incense burner, and various other objects are stored here<sup>17</sup>.

b) On the second level above the *shakar* is the place of the teacups (*kore*; *ko-re*), saucers and glasses as well as bottles and thermos flasks. Above the *thap* are the various casseroles (*zambu*; *zangs-bu*), such as the *dik* and *kabukma* (*kha-bug-ma*), large plates (*tabak*, *tha-pag*), and *lagin* which are very large dishes in which the dough is kneaded.

c) Above the *tralgo* on the third level, are the *chang* pots (*chabskyan*; *chab-rkyan*) and teapots *thragu* (*khra-gu*) if made of metal, often copper (no real spelling found but should be *khra-gu*), *tibril* if made of clay (maybe *tib-ril*), and above the *thap* are bowls for eating *kolak* (tsampa, Ladakhi *phe* (*phye*), mixed with tea or whey: *tara* (*dar-ba*), until a dough is formed) called *gormo* (*sgor-mo*) and plates (*thali*, Urdu word).

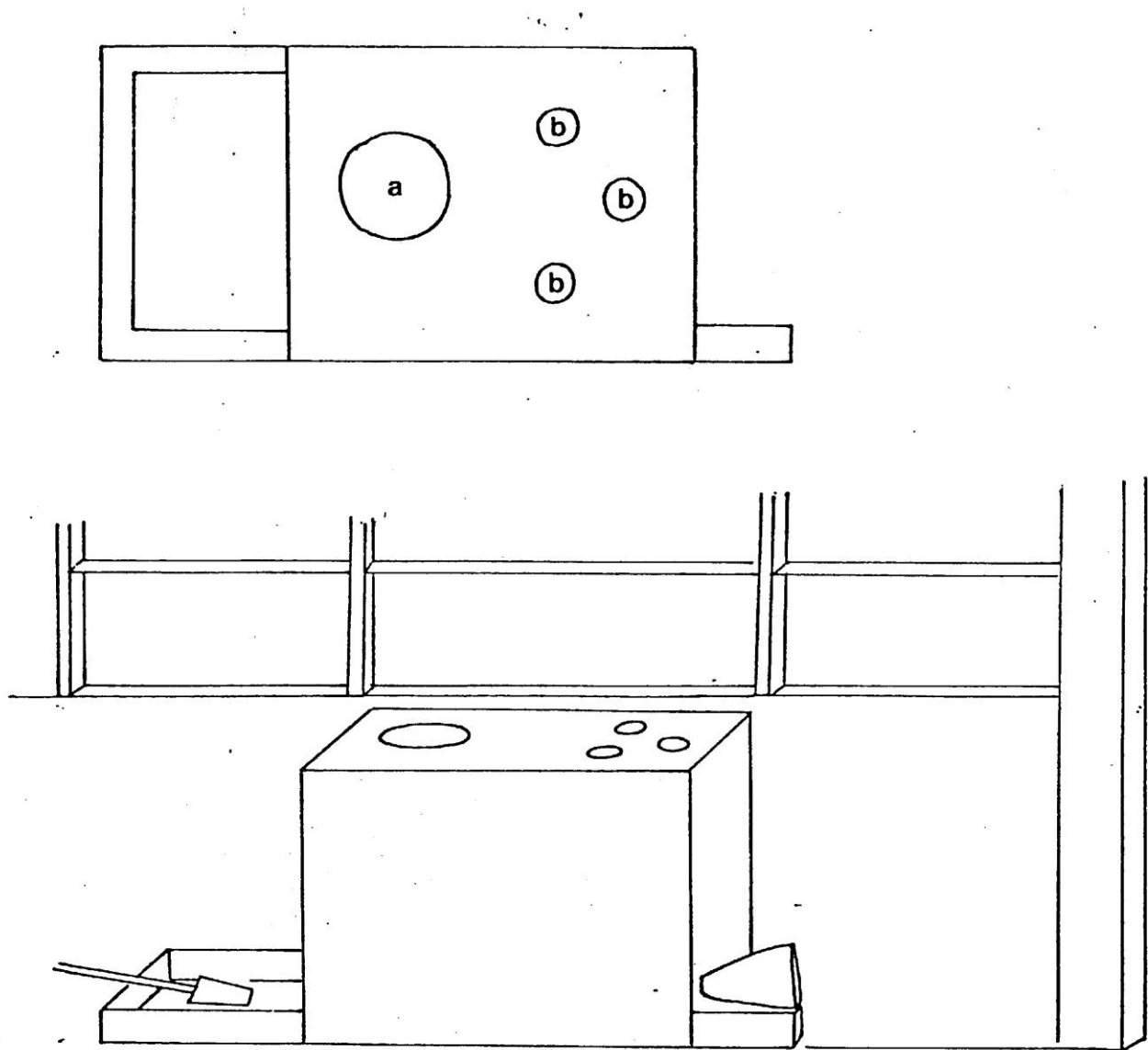
To the extreme right ladles (*thazu*, sp. *kra-tsu*, Tib. *thum-bu*) are hung. The copper ladles with cylindrical scoops are used for tea and water (*camca*, Urdu word), the aluminum ones with semi-spherical scoops are used for food, especially soup (*thukpa*, *thug-pa*). The *skya* (*skya*) is also hung here. This is a stick used for making *paba* (*pa-ba*), a mixture made by boiling tsampa in water. A

<sup>16</sup> My article 'The constituent elements of architecture and urbanism in Ladakh'.

<sup>17</sup> see Kaplanian, *Les Ladakhi du Cachemire*, Paris 1981, pp. 75-77.

small brush for stirring the *thukpa* called *silkya* (*sil-skya*) and a wooden board (*tharo* could just spell *tha-ro*) on which *paba* is placed, are also found here.

The brazier on which the teapot is placed, *mezlang* (*me-slang*), is often next to the *tralgo*. A very large *dik* in one corner of the kitchen is used for storing drinking water, and the churn is placed next to the *ka*.



(12) The hearth seen from above and from the side. There are two kinds of brazier; *zhong* is the main one, (b), and *tamik* (*thab-mig*) the secondary ones (a), which serve to keep containers warm.

Apart from the *thap*, a secondary hearth, *mera* (*me-ra*), is in the centre of the room. It is not a built oven but simply a square hollowed out in the ground. A fire is lit here in winter (during the winter all the family sleeps in the kitchen). Above the *mera* a large opening, *thokskar* opens onto the roof. I noticed that in many kitchens rays of sunlight passing through the *thokskar* fall first on the *thap* in the morning, and then shift in a straight line, until, in the evening, they fall on the bottom of the wall opposite the *thap*. I was unable to ascertain whether this was a rule, I was simply told that this ray of light was used as a sundial. Above the *thap* there is a small *thokskar* for smoke to escape. However, since their introduction by missionaries in the 19th century, more ventilation has been installed.



The *thap* is still mostly made of earth. It takes on the appearance of cast iron when it is blackened and polished. The missionaries introduced the metal stove which has the advantage of taking up less space. They are most likely to be found in the summer kitchen. A small mud wall on the outside edge in relation to the seated woman, is called *bustak* (*sbud-ltag*). The bellows (*butpa*; *sbud-pa*) are kept here. Thus the woman has the bellows on the one hand, and the store of wood and dung on the other side. She stokes the fire by putting the wood in a large hole in front of her. On top of the *thap* the main opening above the flame is called *zhon*. Apart from this main source of heat there are two secondary ones called *tamik* (*thab-mig*, eye of the *thab*), used for keeping cooking pots warm. By the *tralgo* another small wall, less high than the first, delimits a space in which the ashes and cinders are disposed of. This is the work of the *nangdak* who removes them with a shovel (*mekem*, *me-khyem*) and tongs (*melen*; *me-len*). This section is called *thapltak* (*thab-ltag*). (Fig. 11)

The *thap* is decorated on the side facing the room. There is a line of swastikas (*yundrung*; *g.yung-drung*) above, and a jewel in the middle (*norbu*; sp. *nor-bu*) which is a symbol of wealth. Both sides of the *norbu* are frequently adorned with a *palpi* (*dpal-be'u*), one of the eight auspicious Buddhist symbols. A frieze of inversed lotus petals creates a border on the lower level of the *thap*. Should one recall that the hearth is the seat of a *lha*, the *thap-lha*?

The metal stoves are made by the *gara* (*mgar-ba*). The earthen ones are not constructed by any particular specialists. Amongst others the (*r*)*tsiks-spon* know how to make them. First the (*r*)*tsiks-spon* draws the outline on the ground. The workers help and hand him clods of earth mixed with 3 parts sand and 2 parts 'stove earth', *thap-sa*, clay that is. So he builds a parallelepipedal mass. This takes three days. The (*r*)*tsiks-spon* then outlines the holes for the fire, the opening for the wood (on the side of the *thapma* (sp. *thab-ma*) and the outlet for the cinders (on the side of the *thapltak*). Then he hollows these out using a metal pipe. The hollowing out can be avoided with another method. This involves inserting pieces of wood whilst the *thap* is being built. They are then removed leaving empty spaces.

The bellows must be carefully plugged in. A special stone is used for polishing. Polishing is considered an important operation as the earth may crack without this. Then the *thap* is tried out. The air should not be sucked back. It should be directed into the flames. One can always put this right.

The surroundings of the *thap* should always be kept clean. We have already seen how important the *than* is with respect to the prohibitions relating to the back and the feet. At the New Year offerings of butter, and salutations are made to the *thap* or rather the *thap-lha*.

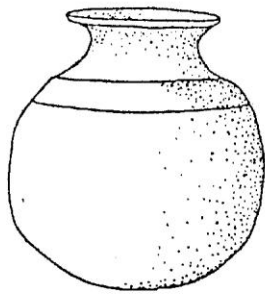
The description of the house is now complete. A few words should be said about the garden wall. It is either made of loose stones on top of each other (*nyagra*, not a Tibetan word so could be spelled *nyag-ra*), like those surrounding orchards (*bag*, Urdu word borrowed from Persian), or of cemented stones or bricks (*kyang* spelled *gyang*)<sup>18</sup>. Like the main entrance of the house, the entrance into the garden is called *gyazgo*<sup>19</sup>.

Translated from French by Maria Phylactou (London School of Economics)  
Drawing by Lucy Vallauri (CNRS, Aix en Provence)

Patrick Kaplanian

<sup>18</sup> Rebecca Norman: "kyang is freestanding wall outside, eg surrounding the courtyard. *Nyagra* is very simple drystone walling, eg between fields. *rtsikpa* if it's the wall of a building"

<sup>19</sup> I am grateful to Rebecca Norman who helped me a lot in finding the proper spelling of the Ladakhi words. I am using the Wylie system.



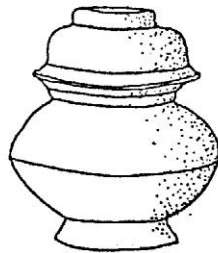
Dik



Thagu



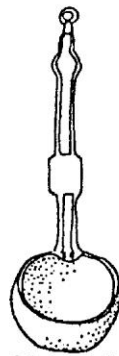
Kore



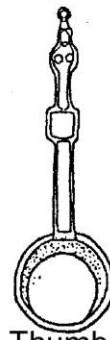
Phepor



Capskyan



Chamcha



Thumbu  
Thazu