Chapter One

Dispersed Geographies, Mobile Landscapes
Erections and Effacements of Boundaries

Within two weeks of Goethe declaring in the battlefield of Valmy that world history had entered a new era, an indistinct British soldier left the port of Calcutta with six companies of Native Infantry to assist a neighboring king's war effort against his rebel subjects. The pathetic insignificance of this event in Goethe's world history becomes more poignant when we remember that 1792 was the year of abolition of monarchy in France, of the beginning of the New York Stock Exchange in the United States and of the short-lived ban on Immanuel Kant to teach or write on religious subjects in Prussia. Let us also throw in the Peace of Iaşi between the Romanovs, the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, the lynching of Tiradentes in Rio de Janeiro by the Portuguese, the publication of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the earliest European abolition of slave trade in Denmark, and we know why Captain Thomas Welsh is hardly a character in the global drama of 1792, leave alone the rebels he was fighting with. Even within British India, the crushing defeat of Tipu in the Third Mysore War and the finalization of the Permanent Settlement rules in Bengal occupied much more space in the government parchments than an uncertain expedition to an unknown country. Some events, however, somehow survive.
Chapter One

Captain Welsh's expedition to the Ahom kingdom survived in the margins of Indian nationalist history for what it did not achieve. Understood as the originary moment of colonial contamination of Assam, the mission is usually seen as anticipating the territorial annexation that was to come some thirty-four years later. Coded in greed, conspiracy and vice - elements that we safely and routinely ascribe to colonialism today - it is thought of as an event of half-hearted European intervention exposing the inner weakness of a crisis-ridden oriental state.1 A possible way to begin is to complicate the twin ideas of precolonial crisis and colonial intervention. In turn, this allows us to trouble both the genealogical comfort of colonialism and the unreflective nostalgia of nationalism.

Concurrent Sovereignties

No doubt, Welsh and his Calcutta bosses fully believed in the fiction of crisis in Ahom sovereignty. They had no reason not to: the king had run off from the capital city; the Moarnarias - "that cursed order"2 - had taken possession of the extensive area between Bengmara and Guwahati; tributary chieftains had declared independence, and disruption of trade and cultivation became endemic. Large numbers of skilled cultivators were shifting out, while the plundering tribes were moving in. Mercenaries dominated the frontiers. The prized Ahom heartland was taken over by herds of primeval people. The royal court sank into terrible debts. None of the competing governments could guarantee the security of life and property. Conspiracies, revolts and disobedience became the order of the day. Such is the picture we get from the English records.3

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1 For a typical account of precolonial crisis, see the letter from F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontier, to A. J. Moffatt Mills, Judge of Sudder Court, on deputation, No. 275, dated Gowhatty, 23 May 1853, Appendix-B in A. J. Moffatt Mills, Report on the Province of Assam (1864; Gauhati: Publication Board, Assam, 1984), 57-8. See also Ramesh Chandra Kalita, Assam in the Eighteenth Century (New Delhi: Omsons, 1992).
3 For a characteristic description of "the fatal effects of the anarchy and confusion, which, previous to the arrival of Captain Welsh, had prevailed in every part of his dominions", see Political Letter to the Court of Directors, Political Department, 18 May 1793, in Y. J. Taraporewala (ed), Indian Records Series: Fort William India House Correspondence and Other Contemporary Papers relating thereto (Foreign, Political, and Secret), Vol. XVII: 1792-95 (Delhi: Manager of Publications, Government of India for National Archives of India, 1955), 271.
The English language sources, characteristically, have one word to indicate the complex scene of desertion, recirculation, resistance and reconfigurations of loyalties in the area: chaos. Ever since the Welsh Mission, chaos remained the key official term to explain the plurality of political forms and alignments in the expanding northeastern frontier of British India. It is no coincidence that the dominant British image of the late eighteenth century Ahom kingdom has been readily countersigned by the twentieth-century nationalist histories. The “isomorphism of people, territory, and legitimate sovereignty that constitutes the normative character of the modern nation-state” has other, more embarrassing, genealogies than what the nation’s autobiography is ready to admit.4

In fact, like most other parts of the non-national world, political entities in the area under discussion “were not delimited by boundaries in the classical sense of the term” in the eighteenth century, “but rather by an imbrication of multiple spaces constantly joined, disjoined, and recombined through wars, conquests, and the mobility of goods and persons.”5 Here we propose to take a cue from the so-called Southeast Asian histories from which the “history of Assam” has been so carefully kept separated for two centuries. James Scott suggests that it might be helpful to think in terms of “state spaces and nonstate spaces”:

In the first, to put it crudely, the subject population was settled rather densely in quasipermanent communities, producing a surplus of grain (usually of wet rice) and labor which was relatively easily appropriated by the state. In the second, the population was sparsely settled, typically practiced slash-and-burn or shifting cultivation, maintained a more mixed economy (including, for example, polyculture or reliance on forest products), and was highly mobile, thereby severely limiting the possibilities for reliable state appropriation.6

While this formulation needs to be further qualified in the light of the recent anthropological findings which have challenged the easy correspondence usually assumed between wet rice

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6 James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 186. Scott further maintains that “[s]tate spaces and nonstate spaces were not merely preexisting ecological and geographical settings that encouraged or discouraged the formation of states. A major objective of would-be rulers was to create and then expand state spaces by building irrigation works, capturing subjects in wars, forcing settlement, codifying religions, and so on.” This substantially modifies Leach’s earlier formulation of “hill people” and “valley people”, which, though perceptive in many ways, suffers from a covert ecological determinism. Cf. E. R. Leach, “The Frontiers of ‘Burma’”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 3: 1 (October 1960), 49-68
cultivation and state formation, on the whole, we find the framework useful for explaining the complex eighteenth-century patterns of political occupation and evacuation in the landmass between the eastern limits of the Ganga and the western banks of the Mekong. What appeared to the European cartographers as “a confused sea of forest-clad hills and narrow valleys”, now and then intercepted with river streams, was dotted with numerous state and nonstate spaces with fluctuating boundaries and reversible destinies.

The court of Ava represented one of the most entrenched traditions of state spaces in the region. Located in the fertile rice-growing basin of Kyaukse, Ava emerged as the strongest political alternative to Pegu after the seventeenth-century commercial crisis in the coastal

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trade circuit. From the middle of the eighteenth century, its command of the dwindling agricultural core of the dry zone\(^9\) was reinforced by the valuable control of the Mu River irrigation system, focused at Shwebo. The Konbaungs who brought about the valley-wide integration of the Irrawaddy after overthrowing the Toungoo at Ava in 1752 were insistent on pushing the frontiers of state space beyond the immediate valley complex. As Mon resistance and shrunken commerce restricted the Burman expansion in the delta area in the latter half of the eighteenth century,\(^{10}\) Ava eyed the neighboring wet-rice-producing formations stretching across from the Mekong through the Brahmaputra (collectively known as the Shan states to the British), the long and narrow littoral beyond the Yoma range (shown as Arakan on the European maps) and of course, the territories of Ayutthaya, the old rival in the Chao Phraya valley (in modern-day Thailand), most of which it managed to take control of between the 1750s and the 1790s, with varying degrees of success.

Want of space does not allow us to detail these conquests. But we must hold on to a salient nature of these victories. The eighteenth-century conquests of Ava were not usually backed up by any radical structural reorganization in the conquered domains. While honorific titles (such as Tsaukna or Myza) were bestowed on the local chiefs, they were hardly expected to deviate from the recognized practices of their respective territories. In spite of the merciless promotion of Theravāda Buddhism during the conquests, its militaristic overtone was set to serve more as a broad legitimizing idiom of the empire than as a coordinated attempt to bring different peoples in line with the sanctioned culture of Ava. Even when an Ava noble was imposed on the new domains, the quotidian logic of rule was not seriously altered. What the conquests did involve, however, was a pattern of forcible displacements, compulsory mobilizations, and massive labor impressments. To stay with the present-day vocabulary, since the withdrawal from the oceanic commerce forced the Ava rulers to concentrate on labor-intensive agriculture, seizure of manpower remained crucial to the functioning of the

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\(^9\) This "dry zone", roughly corresponding to "Upper Burma" in the British records, usually signifies the present-day regions of Myingyan, Meiktila, Yamethin, Magwe, Thayetmyo, Minbu, Pakokku, Lower Chindwin, Sagaing, Kyaukse, Mandalay, and Shwebo. The "delta area" or British "Pegu", on the other hand, consists of Prome, Toungoo, Tharrawaddy, Pegu, Thaton, Henzada, Insein, Maubin, Bassein, Myaungmya, Hanthawaddy, and Pyapon. See Michael Adas, The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852 – 1941 (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1974 ), 3

\(^{10}\) We follow the usage of Victor B. Lieberman here, who cautiously deracializes the categories like "Mon" and "Burman", pointing out that "[t]o some extent, 'Mon' was a role filled by people loyal to Pegu, while 'Burman' was the role accepted by people loyal to Ava." Victor B. Lieberman, "Ethnic Politics in Eighteenth Century Burma", Modern Asian Studies, 12: 3 (1978), 458
giant war-machine. Forcing the conquered people to work on huge irrigation and construction projects, usually far afield from their previous settlements, Ava consolidated the nucleus of its state space in the Irrawaddy valley.\(^\text{11}\)

In other words, the rhetorical unity of the Konbaung realm was not designed to exist on profane maps, and the territories lying outside the hub of imperial power were not policed with even rigor. In the "vast arc of dependent polities"\(^\text{12}\), the autonomy of each polity was conditioned by its relative distance and accessibility from Ava.\(^\text{13}\) This indeed applied to almost all the major state spaces in the region. On the whole northern frontier of the Konbaung realm, for example, there was a series of small polities like Kiang-hung or Kaying-yung-gyee, “one of the most important of Tsaubwaships" stretching along both sides of the Mekong and containing twelve smaller polities within, which even by the end of the eighteen fifties continued to send triennial tributes to the Konbaungs, while allowing the Qings to maintain an establishment of clerks and fiscal officers, and collect revenues. For Tsaubwaships of Kaingma and Muang Lem, again, there used to be “some joint arrangement between Ava and China, the successor being named by one government and confirmed by the other” – somewhat similar to the arrangement Ava had with Ayutthaya on its other borders.\(^\text{14}\) It would be wide of the mark to imagine, let us repeat, that this loose scheme of shared allegiance was all chocolates and roses. Gory battles and gorier seizures of human

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\(^{13}\) Distance, as the British explorers were to find out over the coming years, was a crucial element in articulation of sovereignty. Depending on distance, the tributes of the conquered domains could be alternatively fixed as annual, biennial or even triennial. To quote Leach, the Konbaung realm “consisted of a small fully administered territorial nucleus having the capital at the centre. Round about, stretching infinitely in all directions, was a region over which the King claimed suzerainty and from the inhabitants of which he extracted tribute by threat of military force. These marginal zones all had the status of conquered provinces, and their populations were normally hostile to the central government. Insurrections were endemic and the political alignments of local leaders possessed the maximum uncertainty.” E. R. Leach, “The Frontiers of ‘Burma’”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 3: 1 (October 1960), 58

\(^{14}\) Henry Yule, “On the Geography of Burma and Its Tributary States, in illustration of a New Map of Those Regions”, *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 27 (1857), 99-104. Yule lists a number of other frontier territories with dual allegiance.
groups distinguished the incessant assaults for surplus grabbing, at times developing into large-scale military expeditions. Nonetheless, the successful survival of a number of small state spaces consisted in occupying the interstices between the multiple networks of allegiance. In the prevailing culture of power in these areas, sovereignties were neither necessarily focused on one center, nor unavoidably reliant on demarcated borders.

Nothing else could be truer for some ten thousand square miles around the populous hamlet of Mogaung in the northwest, about which the Ava court had great claims and little information. The local suzerain, known as the Nora Raja or the King of Pong to his western neighbors, claimed overlordship over this large and varied topography in which a diverse population remained scattered in distant settlements. Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, and even before, the Nora Rajas (who controlled a vital nodal point in the Yunnan trade – the precious jade and amber mines in the Kachin Hills and the Hukawng Valley) perfected the art of shuttling between nominal patrons in stronger state spaces. The rise of the Konbaungs in Ava, however, effectively minimized the political presence of the Qing Viceroy or the Meetei Meetingu in the area. By the middle of the century, a non-local Woon or governor titled Ne My Reya Gyau Gowng was securely foisted on the area, with the express intention to push forth Ava’s sphere of influence to the fertile Kubo Valley by the Chindwin River. This was not exactly a piece of good news to the neighboring court in Kangla, which exercised authority over substantial portions of the valley.

For the suzerains at Kangla – who were now hesitatingly styling themselves as the Maharajas of Manipur – the control of the lush Kubo Valley was crucial. Apart from its immediate tribute, the valley also offered its location as an effective springboard for invading the possessions of Ava. In fact, till the mid-eighteenth century, Ava was frequently beleaguered by the forces from Kangla and its tributaries. But since the untimely death of King Pamheiba and the almost simultaneous emergence of the Konbaung power in Ava, the

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16 The transliteration is taken from Resident in Ava (H. Burney) to Secretary to the Government of India, Political Department (W. H. Macnaghten), 14 February 1835, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 24 February 1835, No. 23. [NAI].
17 "Kubo Valley is considered the richest portion of Upper Burma, the yield of rice being said to be one-hundredfold". J. Annan Bryce, “Burma: The Country and People”, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, New Monthly Series, 8: 8 (August 1886), 496
situation was reported to be abruptly reversed. 19 In their repeated invasions of the Kangla dominions between 1753 and 1764, the Konbaungs succeeded in carrying off an unusually large number of skilled inhabitants to resettle them as hereditary crown servants at Ava, apart from snatching much of the available wealth on the way. 20 The 1762 treaty with the British of Chittagong did not prove of much value as the Ava forces routed the Manipur troops in the battle of Langthabal (1764) and installed the Mairang Raja, a tributary prince, on the Manipur throne. 21 In a desperate attempt to recover his domains from the Ava appointee, Maharaja Chingthangkhompa Bhagyachandra 22 was forced to seek help from the Swargadeo at Garhgaon, Hsöremhpa Rajeshwar Singha, a neighboring suzerain to whom he offered his daughter as a price. After completing a quick marriage, the Swargadeo did assist his newest father-in-law in regaining his throne, but this was too temporary a success. The Ava forces made an annual routine of dethroning the Maharaja until he could be forced into a kind of vassalage by 1782. 23 Roughly from this date onward, Ava’s overlordship was grudgingly recognized even among the elites of the state spaces beyond the western banks of the Chindwin, 24 although, as was the case with most of Ava’s distant possessions, this hardly had an impact on the non-elite majority, who probably held the various surplus grabbers in equal awe.

We recall this bit of “high politics” in order to reiterate an obvious point. In the years following Chingthangkhompa’s death in 1798, when – amidst a climate of elite intrigues, palace revolutions and regicides – different claimants for the Manipur throne invoked the help of the Ava suzerain, they did not necessarily see themselves inviting a “foreign power” to invade Manipur, as many of the early twentieth-century nationalist histories explicitly alleged. The same was true for Badanchandra Barphukan, a disgruntled nobleman in the

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19 Pamheiba was more famously known as Garibniwaz in the local traditions. See *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, edited and translated by Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) for an interesting version of the developments in the Kangla court.


22 He figures as Jai Sing in the British records.


24 The Khaspur suzerain, now pompously calling himself the Lord of Heramba, also submitted his “land and person” to Ava. Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee, *Cachar under British Rule in North East India* (New Delhi: Radiant, 1977), 20.
Ahom territory who called the Ava forces to his help.25 “The multiplicity of allegiances and jurisdictions itself corresponded to the plurality of the forms of territorality.” 26 Through its expansionism, Ava was able to appropriate the presiding role in an emergent network of state spaces which considerably overlapped with, but was certainly not confined to, the Konbaung realm.27 If this network received its force from cross-lineage bride gifting, provisional asylum offering, and broad understanding of respective domains of authority, it also faced steep challenges from numerous nonstate space communities. Different bands of kingless peoples, who refused to be taxed by any of the emergent polities, were constantly unsettling these stabilized landscapes by touring through and seizing hold of the fringes of state spaces. However, a serious qualification must be added here to save this complex history from dissolving into an easy binary of state space and nonstate space people. As James Scott perceptively insinuates, there was no impassable civilizational barrier between the two, and we should not believe that the routes to state building were ethnically sealed in the late eighteenth century.

Put otherwise, it would be naïve to expect that certain groups, as comprehensive communities, were consistently opposed to or naturally incapable of forging and maintaining state spaces. Varying ecological conditions, contrasting cultures of power, fluctuating sex ratios, as well as dissimilar accesses to (and ideas of) resources, among other factors, shaped up the ways the different groups organized their collective existence. Things could and did change with circumstances. The Shans – a blanket ethnic term used to cover diverse human groups spread along the Mekong, the Salwin, the Chindwin and the Brahmaputra – were state space people at some locations, and non-state space people at other. Transition to state space was seen neither as a necessary progress nor as a moral decline. Similarly, what was considered as a state space before could be taken over and turned into a nonstate space. After Ava’s invasion of Mogaung, the stateless Singphos drove the stately Shans out of the Hukawng Valley, employed “their Assamese slaves”, and successfully resisted Ava’s

26 Mbembe, At the Edge of the World, 27
interference without growing into a polity. As the reference to "slavery" indicates, it would be equally simplistic to idealize the kingless communities as internally freer and more equal; many of these groups were deeply stratified, and harsh exactions from the underprivileged were not unknown. Seizing captives often held the key to the transition to state space. In fact, much of Ava's glaring success rested on the fact that it was frequently able to mobilize a large number of these nonstate space groups in its war efforts by allowing them a share in the human booty. Briefly, what continues to be represented as either stasis or chaos in official histories was in effect a dynamic, complex and creative political survival.

It is only predictable that in their continual effort to expand the territorial scope of the state in such a terrain, the rulers were also drawn to devising new legitimatory styles. While the eighteenth-century Ava court reinvented a vast world of Pali legends bolstering the suzerain's claim to embody the next Buddha (aririttiy), the states on the other side of the Chindwin were given to ride two horses of Puranic legitimation and community priests' non-Brahminical origin stories. Throughout the eighteenth century, the struggle to gain footholds in surplus-producing areas energized a new drive for authentication, which was in turn shaped by the specific criteria of the incommensurability of the subject groups, the routes and frequencies of human mobility, and the preservation and fabrication of community memories. The courts at Kangla, Khaspur and Jaintia all functioned along dual tracks of legitimation, but the most elaborate institutional network for maintaining a balance between the contending idioms of legitimacy was certainly established in the Brahmaputra basin by the Ahom Swargadeos.

28 Yule, On the Geography of Burma, 67-8. S. F. Hannay, Sketch of the Singphos, or the Kakhyens of Burmah: The Position of This Tribe as regards Baumo, and the Inland Trade of the Valley of the Irrawaddy with Yuman and their Connection with the North-Eastern Frontier of Assam (Calcutta: W. Ridsdale, Military Orphan Press, 1847), 2. During his 1835 journey to the Hukawng Valley, Hannay learned that "formerly, the population was entirely Shan, and previous to the invasion of Assam by the Burmese, the town of Meinkhwn contained 1500 houses, and was governed by the chef of Mogaung. From that period, the exactions of the Burmese officers have led to extensive emigration, and to avoid the oppression to which they were hourly exposed, the Shans have sought an asylum in the remote glens and valleys on the banks of the Khyendwen, and the Singphos among the recesses of the mountains at the eastern extremity of the valley. This state of affairs has led to general anarchy, and feuds are constantly arising between the different tribes, which the quarrel of the Beesa and Dupha Gaums has greatly contributed to exasperate." Hannay also observed that, excepting the central settlement of Mungkhum ["Meinkhwn"], "which has a Shan population, the whole of the inhabitants of the valley are Singphos and their Assamese slaves." R. B. Pemberton, "Abstract of the journal of a route traveled by Capt. S. F. Hannay, of the 40th Regiment Native Infantry, from the capital of Ava to the Amber mines of the Hukong Valley on the south-east frontier of Assam", Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, VI (1837), 270

29 In the sixteenth century, the Daphlas participated in Naranarayan's expeditions against the Swargadeos. Amanatulla Ahmed Khan Chowdhuri, kobhārer itihāds, vol 1 (Coch Behar: The State Press, 1936), 108
As their adopted names indicate, the Swargadeos did not completely vacate the stories of their Shan origins to settle for Sanskritization. However, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, the latter trend had been steadily gaining strength under the patronage of the reigning Tungkhungia house in tandem with, and in relation to, rice land expansion. Much like the sanjlas of the Ava realm, the satras in the Brahmaputra valley—the corporate networks for preaching a locally variable namā dhāramu—secured extensive land and labor grants from the Swargadeos. In return, they were expected to teach their respective clienteles the value of political loyalty and settled cultivation. One hundred years of royal patronage helped some of the satras emerge as important local stakeholders in different parts of the polity by the mid-eighteenth century while many others survived independent of the Swargadeos' patronage. Another significant source of legitimation was imported from the west: a Nadiya Brahmin was brought to settle in Kamrup, awarded some rent-free land along with the title of Parabtiya Gosain, and encouraged to preach āgāru mūrga. Over the years, he and his successors not only initiated a substantial number of the court nobles into their discipleship, but also worked to establish the hegemony of the smiṇta rules—hoping to bring western parts of the Swargadeo's polity in line with the dominant ritual network of the lower Gangetic plain.

Thus, inconstantly dotted with traces of different networks, the Swargadeo's political territory was hardly a singular ritual unit. Indeed, the majority of the state elites remained tied to a number of ritual networks, and the political success of the Swargadeos depended more on localized pacts with different authorities than on one overarching "religious" idiom of legitimation. The expansion of state space throughout and beyond the Brahmaputra Valley could occur only by encouraging different elites of discrete groups to participate in the polity

30 According to Moneeram Borwah, the Swargadeo Hsōkhrunghpa Rudra Singha (1695–1714) was not comfortable with the idea of acknowledging any of his hereditary subjects as guru, and hence brought Krishnaram Bhattacharya from the Shimla Malipota village near Shantipur in Nadiya. Moneeram [Dutt Borwah] Dewan, buranji vivekratna, edited by Nagen Saikia (c. 1838; Dibrugarh: Department of Assamese, Dibrugarh University, 2002), 21-2. See also Goonabhiram Barooa, dām buranji (1884: Guwahati: Publication Board, Assam, 2001), 77-9.
31 See also Leela Gogoi, beli mār g'ala (Dibrugarh: Suwagmani, 1983), 42.
32 One did not have to cease being an Ahom while claiming Purānic descent. The fowl-cutting ceremonies of the bailungs remained very crucial to both. Hsōkhrunghpā Rudra Singha, the king who invited the Parabtiya Gosain, was also a disciple of the Auniati Satradhikar. Bar Raja Phuleswari, who is often represented as a religious persecutor and a satra-hater, forced the Thakuria Mahajans to follow the liturgical rules of Auniati and Garamur satras. Padmeswar Gogoi, Tai-Ahom Religion and Customs (Guwahati: Publication Board, 1976), 39-40.
we are now taught to identify as Ahom. The slow but ongoing revision of the Ahom elite eventually necessitated a different remembrance of the collective past, best captured in the event of organized chronicle burning in the reign of Hsorempho Rajeshwar Singha, to whom we already had an occasion to refer. After his demise in 1769, the Parbatia Gosain emerged victorious in the struggle over the ritual control over the body of the dead king, causing a stiff reaction from the dêdhais, miharos and bailangs – the old community priests who had been the most active agents in yesteryears to organize community memories. But unsure of the Parbatia Gosain’s support, the new king – Hsônyehpa Lakshmi Singha – was compelled to create an alternative source of sanctification in the person and office of Na Gosain. In these rushed times of redefining legitimation, Ava’s devastation of Mogaung (c. 1756), which functioned as a larger center for fabricating Shan memories, possibly became crucial. The contempt with which the old Ahom aristocracy – recruited mostly from the eastern or upper parts (Ujam) of the kingdom – treated the non-warrior elite of Namani (western or lower parts of the kingdom, including most prominently Kamrup and Darrang)

33 Saikia, Fragmented Memories, 114 argues this point with great (probably too great) enthusiasm.
34 Apparently, in an account (“Sakar’i Pheti”) written by Numali [Madurai?] Bargohain, doubts were cast upon the Ahom credentials of Kirtichandra Barbarua, a newly risen noble whose influence over the Swargadeo had irked a number of old aristocrats. An enraged Barbarua is reported to have burnt all the extant buranjis. The numerous redefinitions of the “Sathgrahiy Ahoms”, or the principal seven houses of the Ahoms, in different political periods acutely point towards this revisionary process. See Hiteswar Borboruah, išim buranj’i, 85.
36 “Lakshmi Singha was born in the last days of Swargdeo Rudra Singha. His skin color and looks were so different from the king that [Rudra Singha] almost refused to acknowledge [Lakshmi Singha] as his son … Even Parbatia Gosain declined to initiate him into discipleship. A local schoolteacher called Ramamanda Bhattacharya educated the unwelcome prince and taught him to perform Siva’s worship. After Lakshmi Singha ascended the throne, he did not take the initiation mantra from the Parbatia Gosain, but turned to that Bhattacharya, took the Siva mantra from him, designated him as the Pahumariya Gosain, and entitled him to stipends etc.” Borooah, ñām buranjì, 85.
37 According to one version, Kirtichandra Barbarua (see footnote no. 34) was compelled to bring his relatives from “the Nora country” to prove that he was a true Ahom. See, Annie Hazarika, asamar titkāsat śri śri aniruddhadeva āru mâyāmarā baishnov sampradāy (Guwahati: Lawyer’s Book Stall, 2000), 160. Even later, during the reign of Hsôhitponghpa Gaurinath Singha (c.1780-1795), the Swargdeo had to turn to the Mo-Shams of Mogaung for the verification of community memories. He “caused a commission of Nora astronomers and other learned persons to be deputed to Mogaung to examine the histories of their race in possession of the Shan Buddhist priests of that place, and to verify the books (or traditions) brought into the country by Chau-ka-phâ [Hsôkahpa, the first Ahom king according to traditions]. The examination completed, this commission rewrote the Ahom history, in Asamese, and extended it backwards from Sam­lung-phâ’s conquest of Asam to the founding of the first Shan capital on the Shueli river”. N. Elias, Introductory Sketch of the History of the Shans in Upper Burma and Western Yunnan (Calcutta: Printed at the Foreign Department Press, 1876), 10

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intensified as steady expansion of tillage and trade in their western possessions eased the Swargadeos’ tilt towards the Brahminical.\textsuperscript{38}  

The so-called Moamaria Revolt emerged from the eastern quarters as a complex response to this many-headed legitimatory struggle. Contrary to dominant perceptions, the rebels were neither a neat ethnic unit,\textsuperscript{39} nor flagbearers of a horizontal solidarity of the underclass. Internally differentiated along several axes of privilege and lineage, the insurgents grouped around the symbol and institution of the Mayamara Satra. Though commanding considerable wealth and popularity,\textsuperscript{40} Mayamara was somewhat pressed down in the official satra hierarchy, presumably because of its unorthodox \textit{parbatiyā samarī} its principal clients were unwelcome entrants to the reified state culture.\textsuperscript{41} Among many things which the revolt exposed was the strength and readiness of an emergent elite among these people to burst open the closing doors of Ahom legitimacy and lodge itself in the state structure.\textsuperscript{42} In 1769, the rebels trounced the counter-insurgent forces in a number of battles, captured and imprisoned the new king, beheaded most of the old nobles they could get hold of, and in spite of initially toying with the idea of crowning a Tungkhungia prince, finally decided to

\textsuperscript{38} “The Kamrupis and the Darrangis were not ordinarily allowed to enter the Ahom capital. In Gauhati, the viceregal headquarters, this restriction was rigidly enforced. No Kamrupi was allowed to spend the night at Gauhati ... [Captain Welsh was told by Bulchand Barua that] ‘The distinction between the natives of Kamroop and Deringh remains to this day [1793] in so much that the Brahmin to the eastward of Kollabar (properly denominated Assam) will not be suffered by him of Kamroop and Deringh (which have never been considered as part of Assam) to join in his social and religious ceremonies.’” Quoted in Bhuyan, \textit{Anglo-Assamese Relations}, 271-2. In local proverbs, the common instance of a ludicrous and absurd statement was that of a Nagon resident telling the news of Garhgaon. See \textit{Some Assamese Proverbs}, Compiled and annotated by P. R. Gurdon (1896; Reprint, Guwahati: Lawyer’s Book Stall, 1998), No. 5.

\textsuperscript{39} It needs to be clarified that the “Moamarias” did not fight the “Ahoms”. In fact, Mohanmala Gohain, an exiled Tungkhungia prince, led the “Moamaria” forces in the first phase of the rebellion. A number of other disenfranchised “Ahom” aristocrats were also associated in planning and executing the insurgency. See Borboruah, \textit{āhōmar din}, 255-7; Bhuyan mentions that ‘Moamaria’ was not a territorial or ethnic identity. Bhuyan, \textit{Anglo-Assamese Relations}, 254. For an early example of the dominant understanding of the “Moamarias” as an ethnic group, see [Dr.] Gutzlaff, “The Country of the Free Laos”, \textit{Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London}, Vol. 19 (1849), 33.

\textsuperscript{40} For a somewhat inflated account of Mayamara’s wealth, see Bikash Kumar Bara, \textit{māloupāthār itihās} (Jorhat: Sandhini Prakash, 1999), 50ff. Guha, \textit{Medieval and Early Colonial Assam}, 114 provides a more dependable description, based on the authority of Moneeram Dewan.

\textsuperscript{41} According to one of the earliest available British accounts, the disciples of “Once Rood”, the first guru of the Moamarias, came from “the lowest classes.” S. F. Hannay, “A Short Account of the Moa Morah Sect, and of the country at present occupied by the Bor Senaputtee”, \textit{Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal}, VII (1838), 672.

\textsuperscript{42} The Mayamara Mahanta reportedly said to his soldierly disciples, “You may at best be ministers, Phukans, Baruwaś, Barphukans and Barberuwaś. Those who belong to the Gohān families only should take places open to Gohāns. Make only a Tungkhungiyā your king.” Maheswar Neog, \textit{Socio-Political Events in Assam Leading to the Militancy of the Māyiāmariyā Vaisnavas}. S. G. Deuskar Lectures on Indian History 1979 (Calcutta and New Delhi: K. P. Bagchi & Company for Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1982), 47.
enthrone a "Moran" chief more emphatically representing the new elite. Within six months, however, the dispersed Tungkhungia loyalists regrouped, struck back and reinstated Hsönyehpa Lakshmi Singha with some assistance from the Manipur Maharaja. The restoration regime carried out ruthless repression, massacred thousands, and tightened its hold over slipping manpower by forcing people to work in several construction projects. 43 Understandably, harsher exactions did not soften the rebel memories. Armed resistance and tax refusals continued in the undulating eastern terrains, while the local elites all over the polity began to twist the ailing arm of the defensive Swargadeo. 44 The summer of 1780 saw a second attempt on the part of the Moamarias to take over the capital cities of Rangpur and Gargaon, followed by a second and more merciless royalist suppression. Although Hsönyehpa Lakshmi Singha died in December, the continuity of the court establishment ensured that Hsohitponghpa Gaurinath Singha, the new Swargadeo, carried on his father's policy with greater vigor. "Fresh risings" and "terrible massacres" are reported throughout the seventeen eighties. 45 The Swargadeo's attempt to create a Brahminical enclave within the Mayamara Satra did not prove to be of much service, as the struggle by now had become too widespread to be controlled from one center. 46 Cabinet reshuffles, military conscriptions from tributary states and loyal satras, harmed convocations – nothing improved the royalist prospect. 47 By the early months of 1788, the rebel army "liberated the entire northern section of Ujani", forcing the Tungkhungia court to flee to Guwahati. 48 Even at Guwahati, the fugitives did not find the affairs overwhelmingly encouraging. The Darrang Rajas, who ruled over large areas in the much-despised Namani, had always been

44 The so-called "Kalita Phukan's revolt" is a typical example. Padmanath Gohain Barooah, asamar buranfi (1937; reprinted, Guwahati: Publication Board, 2004), 88.
46 The Swargadeo installed one Pitambar as a Brahminical leader of the Mayamara satra at Agnichapai in Majuli. S. F. Hannay, "A Short Account of the Moa Morah Sect, and of the country at present occupied by the Bor Senaputtee", Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, VII (1838), 672; Hazarika, asamar itihāsāt śrī śrī aniruddhadeva, 174. For reference to the difference between the two groups, see Tungkhungia Buranfi or A History of Assam, 1681 – 1826 A.D.: An Old Assamese Chronicle of the Tungkhungia Dynasty of Ahom Sovereigns, with marginalia, genealogical tables, bibliography, glossary, and index, edited and translated by S. K. Bhuyan, (Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press for the Government of Assam in the Department of Historical Antiquarian Studies, Assam, 1933), 108-9.
47 Gait, History of Assam, 201.
48 Amalendu Guha, baishnabvādār parā māyāmariyā bidrohalai (Guwahati: Students' Stores, 1993), 61.
good at playing off the distance between the Ahom Swargadeo, their ceremonial overlord based in the east and the [Koch] Bihar Maharaja, their powerful kin in the west. The physical presence of the Swargadeo in Namani not only threatened their local autonomy and intensified their tribute obligations, but also stirred up the old dispute about the status of the Kamrup pargānas. The Darrang Rajas always claimed that Kamrup had traditionally been a part of their patrimony, an assertion that seemed completely inadmissible to the Tungkhungia court. In fact, for the most part of the eighteenth century, the Kamrup villages were alternatively plundered by the Swargadeo and the Darrang Raja. Now, encouraged by the reduced strength of the Tungkhungia court, the Darrang Raja Hangsanarayan made a strong attempt to oust the Swargadeo from Guwahati and clinch the issue. The attempt however was thwarted by the Tungkhungia loyalists and Hangsanarayan was put to death, along with some other local magnates.

After Hangsanarayan’s death, the political struggle assumed the additional intensity of a family vendetta: Krishnanarayan, the new leader of the Darrang party, mustered the support of the powerful Chaudhuris of Kamrup, who in turn placed him in contact with Daniel Rausch, a Hanoverian salt merchant at Goalpara who had claims amounting to some three hundred thousand rupees against the Swargadeo and some influential Tungkhungia nobles. Through Rausch, substantial money from private European trade began to flow into the conflict. The concomitant developments in the military labor market – the availability of a number of armed “mercenaries” coming from the west – likewise defined the contours of the struggle. Both the Tungkhungias and the Darrangis employed a large number of private

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49 Foreign Department, Political Letter to the Court of Directors, 18 March 1793 [NAI]
50 Political Letter to the Court of Directors, Political Department, 13 August 1793, in Taraporewala (ed), Indian Records Series, 292-3
51 Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, 272-4
52 An Account of the Burman Empire and the Kingdom of Assam; compiled from the Works and MS. Documents of the following most eminent Authors and Public Functionaries, viz: Hamilton, Symes, Canning, Cox, Leyden, F. Buchanan, Morgan, Towers, Elmore, Wade, Turner, Sisson, Elliot, &c. &c. (Calcutta: Printed for the Publisher, 1840), 110
53 Rausch, it was pointed out in several correspondences, became thoroughly enmeshed in the local political games. He swayed his support between the Darrang Raja and the Swargadeo. The Ahom official “Rooder Ram Barrooah” made several charges against him, including one of “having carried off the Sonahpore Dooaniah with his family, and effects amounting to 50 or 60,000 Rs, and of having kept him in confinement.” Political Letter to Court of Directors, dated 8 April 1792 [NAI]
54 The identity of the “mercenaries” still remains to be established. While in the standard histories they are usually referred to as “Hindustani sepoys”, it is interesting to see that the Rangpur Collector Lumsden was desired to investigate about these recruits. The possibility of a connection between the Moamaria rebels and the contemporary Sanyasi-Fakir rebels has not yet been considered. Cf. ibid. Jenkins later mentioned that “some thousands of Hindoostanee and Sikh Fuqueers” were involved in the “Revolution.” F. Jenkins,
European and Upper Gangetic Valley soldiers to continue the fight, as their traditional subject-cultivators preferred to flee to the more peaceful northern quarters. Indeed, the entire series of challenges which the Tungkhungias had to face in their western frontiers between 1788 and 1815 - the “Dumdumiya revolt”, the revolts of Haradatta, Phopai Senapati and “the Naked Bangal” - was characterized by the remarkably multiethnic composition of the fighting forces and the concealed play of private European capital which was keen on piercing the Goalpara limits set by the Tungkhungia court. The neighboring powers of Bijni and [Koch] Bihar did not desist from facilitating these rebellions, just as the Khaspur court was delighted to offer shelter to the rebel Moamarias. It was in this context that the bandleaders like Gholaum Ali Beg - who in 1805 left the Ahom service and stormed the Kandar custom-house to ultimately control the Manas River trade and receive revenues from sixteen frontier villages with a gang of eighty “freebooters” - emerged as new local potentates along the western frontier of the Swargadeo’s realm.

This was the crisis the British imagined themselves responding to. Choosing to discover a scene of ethnic conflict all around, they reported a catastrophic breakdown of the state apparatus. The idea of an eighteenth-century Ahom crisis was (and continues to be) principally understood in terms of territorial disintegration: as if deprived of a powerful king and bereft of a focus of government, the vast Ahom territory broke up into innumerable separate regions. “As an offshoot of the general anarchy and confusion there appeared a number of petty rulers in different parts of the country”, wrote a twentieth-century statist history, typically insisting on the inauthenticity of their existence and smallness of their jurisdictions. The idealized image of the pre-revolt Ahom polity as a clearly bound and

Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontier, to A. J. Moffatt Mills, Judge of Sudder Court, on deputation, No. 275, dated Gowhattly, 23 May 1853, Appendix-B in Moffatt Mills, *Report*, 57-8. As a matter of fact, after coming back from the domains of the Swargadeo, Welsh was ordered to stay in Rangpur with “for the protection of the domains of that and adjacent countries from the depredations of fakers and sonassies.” Political Letter to Court of Directors, dated 18 August 1794 [NAI]. See also William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996) 55 Gohain Barooah, *asamar buranjf*, 95

56 Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam*, 60

57 *Account of the Burman Empire and the Kingdom of Assam*, 113

58 “Report Relative to Assam in 1797, made by the Persian Translator”, in *Memorandum of Proceedings regarding Assam, about 1792* [Transcript No. 68, Transcript Volume No. 50], 2-3 [DHAS]

59 Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, 237. Bhuyan further describes, “Bharath Singha ruled at Rangpur with Sukura as his Barbarua and Pitambar Mahajan as his chief adviser. At Bengmara or the Matak country the Morans had set up one Sarbananda as their ruler and Godha as their Barbarua. At Japariibita, in the districts from the foot of the Dafala Hills to the Luhit river, Tati continued to exercise an independent sway, while Howha ruled over Majuli as far as the Brahmaputra. The district of Sadiya was ruled by two Khampti
evenly administered territory that underwrites this perception is in need of a radical reinterrogation. Quite like their Konbaung contemporaries, the Tungkhungias did not govern all that they possessed. Nor was the state space a completely consolidated and compacted strip, uninterruptedly stretching from the Karatoya river to the Patkai range, as the colored blocks on modern historical atlases confusingly suggest. Settlements were usually scattered, often transitory and seldom homogenous ethnic units. Cultivated lands were hyphenated by inaccessible forests and unoccupied grounds. As Moneeram Borwah, a Tungkhungia official who became a sheristadar in the Company regime, distinctly mentioned, “In other countries one king conquers and takes up the governance, this Assam country is not like that. In Assam, there were only scattered settlements, there were large forests.”

In many places, the Swargadeo’s political authority had to coexist with other and locally more effective sets of rights and privileges. The success of the Moamarias is to be sought not in breaking a unity which was largely rhetorical but in partially capturing the translocally recognized symbols of Ahom legitimacy to assert their claim over specific surplus-producing blocks.

Sarbananda, the rebel “Moran” chief who set up and sustained “an independent kingdom” for almost ten years at Bengmara, the nerve center of the rebellion, originally styled himself the Swargadeo; the other “Moran” or “Matak kingdom” at Rangpur, a major “Ahom” settlement, headed by Bharat Singha retained almost all the titular designations we ascribe to the Ahoms. Through cross-genealogical inventions of ancestry and partial continuation of the Tungkhungia establishment, the rebel leaders were urgently negotiating their chiefs with the titles Burha Raja and Deka Raja. They had ousted the Assam governor Sadiya-khowa Gohain and assumed his name, dignity and jurisdiction, and reduced his subjects to dependence or slavery. In the district of Nagaon Sindhura Hazarika had succeeded in instigating the people to defy the authority of the Ahom Government. Besides the above three cropped up a number of mushroom Rajas with or without any territory. “In this state of anarchy and confusion,” said Gaurinath Singha to Captain Welsh, “any man who can pick up a hundred desperate fellows sets himself up for a Raja.” In a similar vein, Gait calls them “soi-disant Rajas”. Gait, History of Assam, 204

Van Schendel describes, “There was no question at all of different ‘tribes’ living in distinct territories; on the contrary, there were several ‘multi-ethnic’ arrangements, e.g. villages inhabited by swidden cultivators belonging to different language groups; villages that were ‘ethnically stratified’, being inhabited by an ethnic group together with its debt peons from different groups; and villages where the leaders had servants from several other groups. Moreover, ‘chiefs’ often collected tributes from households belonging to an amalgam of ethnic groups.” Willem Van Schendel, “The Invention of the ‘Jummas’: State Formation and Ethnicity in Southeastern Bangladesh”, Modern Asian Studies, 26: 1 (February 1992), 99

Moneeram, buranjī vivekaṇa, 109

Gait, History of Assam, 204-5

A similar example is the case of Ava and Pegu.
Chapter One

community memory into an "Ahom" structure. The remarkable survival of Ahom legitimacy in and through all these acts of defiance and rebellion troubles the semantic frontiers of Ahom-ness. Crisis is an inadequate expression to appreciate the complex crossroad at which the political process in the Brahmaputra basin stood by the end of the eighteenth century. New claimants opted for inhabiting the Ahom structure while a number of traditional elite groups were forced out. Though brushed aside as "tribal neophytes" in the standard histories, these new elite groups did not necessarily reflect ethnic additions. In Nagaon, Hsöhitponghpa Gaurinath yielded to the local demand for selecting state officials from new families. The nobility list available for the reign of Hsöningha Kamaleshwar Singha, who succeeded Hsöhitponghpa Gaurinath Singha in 1795, shows a veritable increase of under-caste persons.

Ava's incursions in the east had set off new waves of settlers into the Swargadeo's territory. Many of the leaders of these new groups showed a distinct willingness to inscribe themselves in the so-called Ahom structure. Foremost among them were the "Khamtis", who — according to the subsequent anthropological calculations — were also Shans like the Ahoms. Moving out of the Hukawng valley in mid-eighteenth century, they established their first settlement in the Swargadeo's territory: "a small colony of fifteen houses in the vicinity of the Tengapanee river." By the early eighteen thirties, at least four thousand of them were operating in the area between the Mishmi Hills and the Brahmaputra. Immediately after the flight of the Tungkhungia court from Garhgaon, the Khamtis moved to eject the Tungkhungia appointee at Sadiya and assume the Ahom title and privileges of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, an arrangement resentfully authorized by the drained Tungkhungia court.

If we go by the Singpho community memories as narrated by Waket Chungnong, a Singpho chief, to a Baptist missionary in 1843, a number of Singpho houses also accompanied the Khamtis to Tengapanee, but as soon as the Khamtis, "being the most powerful on this side

64 Guha, Medieval and Early Colonial Assam, 98
65 Tungkhungia Buranjii, 123
66 Ibid.
68 Extract Fort William Political Consultations of 7 January 1833, From T. C. Robertson, Agent to the Governor General on the North Eastern Frontier to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary to the Government of India, Dated 14 December 1832, F/4/1505, File No. 59025 [OIOC]

Dispersed Geographies, Mobile Landscapes
of the Patkai[,] demanded of the Singphos a sort of tribute", the Singphos "made a general rise, called in the aid of the Burmese, a party of whom came over, and the united forces drove the Kamtis down to the plains, and they ultimately settled near Sadiya". The Singphos retained their base at Tengapanee, and the Swargadeo acknowledged their right over this territory.70 Moneeram Borwah mentioned that these Singpho gaurs used to come to the Ahom capital once or twice in a year "to pay their respects" to the Swargadeo.71 In the Chandrakanta Singha administration (1811-8), the Singpho chief of Duffa was appointed as a Rajkhowa.72

Between 1758 and 1787, the Tungkhungias had already been compelled to come to terms with the people they called Daflas, a collection of stateless groups inhabiting the hills lying to the north of Sibsagar and Darrang, between the Bhairabi and Ranga rivers.73 The Daflas' right to fixed "quantum of service" from the neighboring villagers who were theoretically subjects of the Swargadeo was formally conceded in return for a token acknowledgement of the Ahom overlordship.74 Similarly, "a thousand houses"75 were kept earmarked for the Hrusso chief, called the Hazarikhowa Aka Raja in the Tungkhungia court parlance, recognizing his suzerainty over the hills lying to the north of Darrang between the Dhansiri and Dikrai rivers.76 The people who occupied the hilly country between the Dihong and

70 The Swargadeo, according to Waket Chungnong, fixed the boundary "on the south bank of the Dehing, at Namsang Mookhi and on the north bank as far as Tipanpeearly [?] opposite Jaipur and from thence across the country to Deriack on the Brahmapootro". Oliver Cutter to Francis Jenkins, dated Jaipur, 15 July 1843, in Foreign Department, Political Branch, 16 September 1843, Nos. 69-73 [NAI]
71 Moneeram to Francis Jenkins, undated, in ibid
72 A. White to F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General in the North-Eastern Frontier, dated Sadiya 11 March 1837, in Foreign Department (P. C.), 10 April 1837, Nos. 120-124 [NAI]
73 In 1758 Hsoremhpa Rajeshwar Singha organized expeditions against these people. In 1787, the so-called third wave of the Moamaria revolt began to surge.
74 Letter from Captain E. T. Dalton, the Officiating Political Agent, Upper Assam, to the Agent to the Governor General, North Eastern Frontier, No. 162, dated 19 March 1852, quoted in "'Posa' payable to certain Hill Tribes on the North Eastern Frontier", Foreign Department, Political-B Branch, July 1877, Nos. 83 – 86. [NAI] See also "Mr. Robinson's Note on the Daflas and peculiarities of their language", Commissioner's Office 1851, File No. 420 [ASA] for a short account of how between 1780 and 1838 the Swargadeos alternated between aggressive labor impressments from and "tacit submission" to the Daflas.
75 This phrase – like the expressions "seven Rajas" of the Monhaps, "eighteen Gaums" of the Singphos or "thirty-two Myos" of the Mons – does not necessarily reflect an exact figure. Cf. H. L. Shorto, "The 32 'Myos' in the Medieval Mon Kingdom", Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 26: 3 (1963), 572-591.
76 Report on the Akhas, the Akha Country, and the Akha Expedition, 1. See also 'Translation of a petition from Midhi Aka, Raja of Akachang, to the Deputy Commissioner of Durrung', "Claims of Kopas Chor Aka Chief to certain lands", Foreign Department, Political A, June 1874, Nos. 223 – 228 [NAI] In 1867, Reverend Hesselmeyer, however, translated "hazarikhowa" as "breakfast-eaters", probably prompted by the implications of the common Hindustani word हाज़री. C. H. Hesselmeyer, "The Hill Tribes of the Northern Frontier of Assam", Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 37:2 (1868), 195
Dibong rivers, to the north of Sadiya – collectively and imprecisely called Abors by the plains people – placed themselves in command of a few crucial hill streams (suitable for gold washing).\textsuperscript{77} The Tungkhungia court also granted them, as Vetch was to put it much later, the status of “auxiliaries”.\textsuperscript{78} In fact, if Robinson's source is to be believed, “a large body of them, to the amount of 20000 or 30000, came down to assist the Bura Gohain in repelling the Moamarias, who were devastating all the country east of Jorhat.”\textsuperscript{79} Purandar Singha, the last Tungkhungia king before the dynasty was pensioned off from Upper Assam in 1838, reserved the tributes of nine Duars in four mukuls (Choiduar, Banskata, Lakhimpur, Bordoloni) for the Daflas and the Tarbatia, Panibatia, Charak and Ghasi Miris.\textsuperscript{80} It was only in 1921 that the Naga Katakis' privilege of holding khats was discontinued.\textsuperscript{81} Even the hated Moran chief Sarbananda was eventually acknowledged as the Bor Senapati (Chief Commander) of the Swargadeo, “on condition of his paying an annual tribute of elephants and silk”. After Sarbananda’s death, his son Mati became the next and more famous Bor Senapati.\textsuperscript{82} Of course, these acknowledgements and authorizations were forcibly extracted by the new elite groups, but even the pre-revolt Ahom state did not exist as an act of mutual volition and collective consensus.

Since the last decades of the eighteenth century, therefore, the Tungkhungia regime was increasingly forced to enter into a series of negotiations with new powerholders, without necessarily vacating its legitimatory status. Welsh and his gang arrived in this conjuncture with their dogma of indivisible sovereignty, insistence on well-defined hierarchies and ethnically preprogrammed understanding of intergroup conflicts. Underlying such perceptions was the anticipation of a fixed state structure dominated by a defined racial

\textsuperscript{77} A list of such streams and the related details (e.g., how the “tax” on gold used to be shared between the Ahoms and these communities) can be obtained in Moneeram, “Native account of washing for gold in Assam”, communicated by F. Jenkins to the Coal and Mineral Committee, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, VII (1838), 621-5

\textsuperscript{78} Hamilton Vetch, Political Agent of Upper Assam, to Francis Jenkins, the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier, dated 3 January 1848, in “Report on Captain Vetch's visit to the Abor tribes”, Foreign Department (Political FC Branch), Nos. 199-201 [NAI]

\textsuperscript{79} Quoted in St John F. Michell, Report (Topographical, Political and Military) on the North East Frontier of India (Calcutta: Intelligence Branch, Quarter Master General's Department, 1883), 55

\textsuperscript{80} ‘Extract from the Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner of Assam in the Judicial Department, No. 718, dated 4 May 1885', in “Posa payment to the Hill Tribes of the Lakhimpur District”, Foreign Department, External B, June 1886, Nos. 96 - 100 [NAI]

\textsuperscript{81} Robert Reid, History of the Frontier Areas bordering on Assam, from 1883 – 1941 (Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1942), 166

\textsuperscript{82} The brief history of the Upper Muttock country drawn up by E. T. Dalton in Moffatt Mills, Report, 646. See also Hannay, Short Account of the Moa Morah Sect, 673
group which squarely fitted into the lamenting narrative of the old Ahom aristocrats who became increasingly more helpless to resist the redefining process. The complex of political interdependence was underwritten by “a patchwork quilt of subsistence strategies.” The unsurpassable, ideologized barrier which the late twentieth-century historians have erected between wet rice cultivation and dry rice cultivation makes us forget that there can be other ways of appreciating the relationship of the two entities than one of opposition and conflict: one of the two “systems” may often “form an auxiliary labor pool” for another. Moreover,

In some situations [wet-rice cultivation] may be desirable only with certain minimum levels or concentrations of population. This is so because it is apparently sometimes less productive per unit of labour than swidden cultivation and because it often requires substantial modifications of the environment – such as terracing – which are most feasible for larger population units.

In fact, in a radical and revealing essay, Michael Dove argues that “because of [its] lesser susceptibility [to surplus extraction] and because of its inherent tendency to produce higher yields per unit of labor, swidden agriculture is usually more attractive to the peasants themselves.” However, even as we draw attention to the growing archaeological and ethnographic literature (particularly on insular Southeast Asia) that substantially complicate and question the simple binary between wet-rice and dry-rice regimes, we wish to stay close to our story. The point is simple – even banal: the Elwinian cosmos has not emerged in the late eighteenth century. While our search for a “tribal policy of the Ahoms” may unfailingly produce such a thing, the conditions of that search cannot be said to have been at work in the period we are now discussing. The difference between the “Ahoms” and the “tribals” – coded either as an irreducible cultural essence or as a fundamental economic hiatus – was

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83 This phrase is taken from Jim Allen, “Comments” [on Karl L. Hutterer, “An Evolutionary Approach to the Southeast Asian Cultural Sequence”], Current Anthropology, 17: 2 (June 1976), 227. Amalendu Guha, the great advocate of the wet-rice-is-superior theory, admits that “[a]griculture was multiform, with its settled and shifting sectors coexisting side by side.” Guha, Medieval and Early Colonial Assam, 101
84 Karl L. Hutterer, “An Evolutionary Approach to the Southeast Asian Cultural Sequence”, Current Anthropology, 17: 2 (June 1976), 226
86 Dove, Agroecological Mythology of the Javanese, 32-3
87 See also Pierre de Schlippe, Shifting Cultivation in Africa: The Zende System of Agriculture (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956)
88 Cf. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, 31-48
89 Cf. ibid
not as substantive and timeless as it seems today. Overlaps of ritual practices and subsistence modes were expressed in a protean language of kinship ("bhai-raja" or "brother-king") facilitated by an absorptive political organization.

The strength of the new elite groups came from a number of sources. Making the captured humans work and eventually accommodating them within the evolving and hierarchical clan structure through a complex code of signification and marriage rules appear to have been shared features of many of these communities. We shall discuss these issues in greater details in the subsequent chapters. In this chapter, we choose to focus on the ways in which they had been able to employ— as Francis Jenkins exasperatedly put it in 1852— "the powers the locality gives them." 91

Geobodies, Hydrobodies

The powers of the locality were different and many. What appeared as a difficult and inaccessible terrain to the Europeans was almost a form of communal capital for the people inhabiting it. It is interesting to see how the people who possessed the knowledge of the routes across hills always appeared as secretive, evasive, and even jealous about this knowledge in the representations of British officials and native informants from other communities. Knowledge of inhabited places and frequented routes could be crucial in determining the relation of power between the different communities. 92 It was extremely

90 Cf. Amalendu Guha, "The Ahom Political System: An Enquiry into the State Formation Process in Medieval Assam (1228-1714)", Social Scientist, 11: 12 (December 1983), 9. A revised version of the essay is also available as Amalendu Guha, "The Ahom Political System: An Enquiry into State Formation in Medieval Assam (1228-1800)", in Surajit Sinha, (ed.), Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North-Eastern India (Delhi and Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi & Company for Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1987), 143-176. We are obviously far from arguing, as some critics of Guha have argued, that the situation "in the beginning of the 20th century" was "not ... qualitatively different" from that of the 5th to the 13th centuries. Cf. Nayanjot Lahiri, "Landholding and Peasantry in the Brahmaputra Valley c. 5th – 13th Centuries AD", Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, vol. 33 (1990), 161
91 F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General in the North Eastern Frontier, to C. Allen, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, dated Gowhaty, 27 May 1852, in Foreign Department (F. C.), 18 June 1852, Nos. 134-136 [NAI]
92 For an early and very interesting account of how the Khamtis kept a path secret from the Singphos, see R. Wilcox, "Memoir of A Survey of Asam and the Neighbouring Countries, executed in 1825-6-7-8", Asiatick Researches, XVII (1832), 444-5. In 1837, William Griffith noted that in the Mishmi Hills "[t]he paths are of the very worst imaginable descriptions, always excessively narrow and overgrown by jungles in all

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difficult if not altogether impossible to effectively intervene in the complex of intergroup exchanges and trans-territorial expeditions without this knowledge. This mundane perspective helps us to remember that the long resistance to European survey and travel was not simply about defending access to the resources of territory, it was also a struggle over knowledges.

The objective of the Welsh Mission, we must recall, was understood in the Calcutta circle precisely in these terms.

However extraordinary it may appear, we are still under the necessity of admitting that, owing to the constant jealousy which the chiefs of those countries have hitherto shewn of the English, we know little more of the interior parts of Napaul and Asam than of the interior parts of China; and we therefore thought that no pains or attention should be spared to avail ourselves of so favourable an opportunity to obtain good surveys and to require every information that may be possible, both of the population and of the manners and customs of the inhabitants as well as of the trade and manufactures and natural productions of countries with which it must ever be our interest to maintain the most friendly communication.93

Hence Thomas Wood, a Surveyor, and John Peter Wade, an Assistant Surgeon, were attached to Welsh’s army, just as Wilford and Freer were attached to Kirkpatrick’s Nepal expedition force which left Calcutta at around the same time. Until this time, the only available English sources of information about the north-east frontier of Bengal were Henry Vansittart’s 1785 translation of Muhammad Kazim’s *Muntakhabat i ‘Alamgir-nāmah* 94 and

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93 Political Letter to the Court of Directors, Political Department, 14 October 1792 [NAI]

94 "Translation of a Passage in Mohammed Kazim’s Alemgeernameh; or History of the First Ten Years of the Reign of Aurangzeeb: In which the Author describes the country of Assam; and also relates the Precautions which were taken by the Imperial General to secure the Army employed in the Conquest of it, during the rainy Season", in *The History of the First Ten Years of the Reign of Alemgeer. Written in the Persian language by Mohammed Sakee. Translated by Henry Vansittart.* [The text and an English translation of Muhammad Saki’s abridgment of Muhammad Kāzim’s ‘Ālamgīr-nāmah known as Muntakhabat i ‘Ālamgīr-nāmah, with an English translation of the description of Assam extracted from the ‘Ālamgīr-nāmah.] (Calcutta: Daniel Stuart, 1785). This was separately published as Henry Vansittart, "A

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James Rennell’s 1781 *Account of the Ganges and Burrampooter Rivers.* In the standard eighteenth-century European cartographic representations of “Hindostan” or “that rich and most spacious Empire of the Great Mogul”, Assam was the name given to an ill-defined region to the east of Bengal, usually drawn with irregular lines that seldom spelled out its full boundaries. For example, in the 1752 edition of D’Anville’s celebrated *Carte de l’Inde*, there was no representation of the territories east of “Bengale”. The extreme northeastern point was Azoo (a few miles up from “Rangamati”) through which the “Brahmaputren” was shown as flowing. Coastlines remained the major obsession of this map and on the area representing the vast South Asian landmass, it was scribbled “dont on n’a point de connaissance particulière.” Even in the early nineteenth-century topographical accounts one notes the position of this region as an interstitial outside to British India. In Walter Hamilton’s chronicle, for example, Assam was grouped along with Baloochistan, the Birman Empire and Bootan in the category of “countries adjacent to Hindostan.” In Orme’s history, again, “the kingdoms of Tepra, Assam, and Aracan” were understood as separated from “Indostan” by a number of “marshes and rivers”. Similarly, in Rennell’s *Memoir of A Map of Hindoostan*, it was briefly discussed in the sixth “section” which included “the countries situated between Hindooostan and China; namely, Thibet, Bootan, Assam, Pegu, Aracan, Ava, and part of Siam”. Even Wade’s *Geographical Sketch of Assam* (1800), the first description of Assām by Mohammed Cazim. Translated from the Persian” *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. 2 (1790), 171-185

95 Originally published in the *Philosophical Transactions* of 1781, this text was reprinted as an Appendix (“An Account of the Ganges and Burrampooter Rivers”) in James Rennell, *Memoir of A Map of Hindoostan; or the Mogul Empire: With an Introduction, illustrative of the Geography and Present division of that Country: And a Map of the Countries situated between the Head of the Indus, and the Caspian Sea, to which is added An Account of the Ganges and Burrampooter Rivers* (London: M. Brown for the Author, 1788), 255-284

96 This phrase is taken from the title of Edward Terry, *A Voyage to East-India; wherein some things are taken notice of, in our passage thither, but many more in our abode there, within that rich and most spacious Empire of the Great Mogul: mixt with some parallel observations and Inferences upon the story, to profit as well as delight the reader* (1655; London: J. Wilkie, W. Carter, and E. Easton, 1777). Terry accompanied Thomas Row, Lord Ambassador to the Great Mogul, as his Chaplain. His account does not even mention “Assam”.


99 Quoted in Phillimore, *Historical Records of Survey*, vol. I, 67

100 Rennell, *Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan*,
of its kind, opened with a suggestive underscoring of the geographical contiguity of Assam and China. ¹⁰¹

These are little but crucial facts, because at least two tracks need to be identified in telling the story of geographical production of Assam. Along one track, it is possible to trace the obvious, slow and linear inclusionary process through which the representation of “Assam” was subsumed within a much broader and relatively more stable representation of “India”. The tale of the gradual and checkered emergence of Assam within, as distinct from near, India – which, as we shall see in Chapter Four, would later be eternalized, in different languages, by both the nationalists and the imperialists – may be narrated in relation to the connected histories of territorial conquest, tea plantation and cartographic knowledge. At the same time, these very conditions indicate the second track: a pre-existent Assam did not simply resurface in the nineteenth-century maps with certain ignorable alterations of boundaries, but what could be called Assam (and increasingly, Assam proper) was always an effect of intense disputes, silent interests and continual modifications of cartographic foci. We cannot discuss one without the other. The tempting forms of territorial coherence, expressed either through the language of the national or through the dialect of the regional, were produced in tandem.

In 1765, Robert Clive, requested by the historian Robert Orme, commissioned Rennell for constructing “a vast map of Bengal.” Before Rennell was formally given the office of the Surveyor General in 1767, he had almost completed his survey of the Brahmaputra River as far as Goalpara (beyond which the Tungkhungias did not usually allow the Europeans to proceed). ¹⁰² It must be remembered that there was yet no “all seeing eye” of the modern map “that views everywhere at the same time.” ¹⁰³ Several unconnected, localized, linear surveys had to be compared, collated and compiled by Rennell over a long stretch of fifteen years for laying the foundations of the scopic regime with which we have become so accustomed. These surveys “owed their certainty and truth”, in turn, “to being fitted into the

graticule of the geographical map."104 Rennell's famous *Bengal Atlas* (1780) included areas five degrees beyond Goalpara, but could not submit the entire territory of the Swargadeo to the cartographic grids. Wood was required to take up where Rennell had left.105

In producing some of the earliest detailed "charts" of the region beyond Goalpara, Wood proceeded in the same way as Rennell had. He conducted several linear surveys without immediately generating a geographical map.106 The list appended in the preceding footnote testifies that, in the same way as in Rennell, the uncharted river Brahmaputra emerged as the major axis of Wood's enquiry. "[T]ill the year 1765," Rennell wrote with much relish, "the Burrampooter, as a capital river, was unknown in Europe."

On tracing this river in 1765, I was no less surprized, at finding it rather large [sic] than the Ganges, than at its course previous to its entering Bengal. This I found to be from the east; although all the former accounts represented it as from the north: and this unexpected discovery soon led to enquiries, which furnished me with an account of its general course to within 100 miles of the place w[h]ere Du Halde left the Sanpoo. I could no longer doubt, that the Burrampoter and the Sanpoo were one and the same river: and to this was added the positive assurances of the Assamers, "That their river came from the north-west, through the Bootan mountains."107


105 There is a possibility that in 1787, Reuben Burrow also surveyed parts of the Brahmaputra. But we have been unable to locate anything of relevance.

106 (1) 50 x 109 cm. Route from Gwahatty to Kolllloh Koosy on the borders of Bootan. As likewise along part of the boundary of Assam and Bootan. Surveyed in February 93 by Ensn. Wood Bengal Engrs. Surveyor with Capt. Welsh's Detachment. (2) 42 x 73 cm. Map of part of the Burrampooter River in Assam reduced from the survey of Ensn. T. Wood Engineer. (3) 50 x 100 cm: The Burrampooter River from the Jahzee to the D'hekowe. Likewise the march of the troops to Rungpore with a route thence to Ghurgong. Surveyed in the months of April and May 1794 by Ensn. Thomas Wood Bengal Engrs. Surveyor with Capt. Welsh's Detachment in Assam. (4) 45 x 60 cm. Survey of Gwahatty in Assam and of the adjacent country shewing the situation of the different Chokies intended for the protection of the place, by Ensn. Thomas Wood Bengal Engrs. Surveyor with Capt. Welsh's Detachment, 1794. (5) 42 x 66 cm. No. 1. The Burrampooter River from Noghurbera to Gwahatty in Assam. (6) 45 x 65 cm: No. 2. The Burrampooter River from Gwahatty to Littoree. (7) 41 x 55 cm: No. 2. The Burrampooter River from Littoree to Kolliabar. Surveyed in the months of November & December 1793, by Ensn. Thomas Wood of the Bengal Engineers. Surveyor with Capt. Welsh's Detachment in Assam. (8) 41 x 66 cm: No. 4. The Burrampooter River from Kolliabar to the confluence of the Booree Lewit River. Surveyed in the months of December 1793 and January 1794, by Ensn. Thomas Wood of the Bengal Engineers. Surveyor with Capt. Welsh's Detachment in Assam. (9) 46 x 64 cm: No. 5. The Burrampooter River from Booree Lewit to the Jahzee River. Surveyed in the month of January 1794, by Ensn. Thomas Wood of the Bengal Engineers. Surveyor with Capt. Welsh's Detachment in Assam. These nine maps, along with many others, are in Private Papers of Francis Buchanan-Hamilton, IOR Mss Eur D. 97 [OIOC]

107 Rennell, *Memoir of A Map of Hindoostan*, 276-7
Du Halde’s account of Tibet, of which D’Anville’s map (generally regarded as the most authoritative representation in eighteenth century Europe) was a graphical representation, had prompted the general impression among the interested Europeans that the bulky “Ava river” or the Irrawaddy was a continuation of the great Tsangpo. The Brahmaputra, on the other hand, was known “as one of the inferior streams that contributed its waters to the Ganges, and not as its equal or superior.” Rennell’s limited surveys and wide-ranging conjectures substantially challenged and modified such understandings. The immensity and expanse of the waters called the Brahmaputra continued to excite British geographical imaginations as nothing much was known about the origin and the course of the river. However, even then, as Rennell so self-consciously pointed out, the emergence of the Brahmaputra “as a capital river” on the map crucially redefined the extent of “Hindoostan”.

As the term Hindoostan has been applied in a lax sense to this whole region, it may be necessary to distinguish the northern part of it, by the name of Hindoostan proper. This tract has indeed the Indus, and the mountains of Thibet and Tartary, for its western and northern boundaries: but the Ganges was improperly applied as an eastern boundary; as it intersects in its course, some of the richest provinces of the empire: while the Burrampooter, which is much nearer the mark, as an eastern boundary, was utterly unknown.

The Brahmaputra, according to Rennell, was the real eastern boundary of Hindoostan proper. Like the “mountains of Thibet and Tartary” (“the Himalayas” was an expression of a later date: Orme always knew it as the Mount Caucasus), it provided a definite natural frame to the theater Indian. On Wood fell the task of ascertaining the exact extent of the frame. He was mapping a frontier.

Carrying a series of measured lines along the banks of the Brahmaputra, Wood proceeded as far as the Dikhu River in Sibsagar, while Welsh mediated between the Darrang Raja and the Swargadeo, alternatively fought and encouraged the “freebooters”, forced a commercial treaty on Hsöhitponghpa Gaurinath, and with great difficulty captured the twin capitals of Rangpur and Jorhat from the Moamaria forces. In early 1794, however, the new Governor-General John Shore ordered Welsh and his party to conclude all military

109 Rennell, Memoir of A Map of Hindoostan, 275
110 Ibid, ix
111 Shakespear, History of Upper Assam, 54-55
operations in the foreign territory and precipitate "a return to India." According to the English sources, neither the Captain nor the Swargadeo were delighted by the instruction. As the British troops stumbled out of the Swargadeo's nominal jurisdiction, encountering and fighting several rebel armies on the way (including the very damaging clash with the 4000-strong Maamarias somewhere near the Darika river), the Tungkhungias again lost the control of Rangpur to the rebels. The royal jurisdiction became virtually confined to Jorhat, where Hsöhitponghpa Gaurinath died without a son in December 1794. His premier Purananda Buragohain consolidated his hold over the court by crowning an insignificant Tungkhungia prince Kinaram as Swargadeo Hsöninghpa Kamaleshwar Singha. When asked about "the consequence of recalling the detachment of Assam without further measure or interference on the part of [British] Government", Welsh unhesitatingly replied that things would immediately swing back to the situation before the British intervened. In other words, nothing of enduring importance was achieved by the expedition for which more than two hundred thousand rupees was spent by the British Government. No wonder that the subsequent accounts always reflected upon the Welsh Mission as a lost opportunity, as Assam's missed train to the mainstream. The importance of the Mission,
we argue in contrast, had been originally conceived in terms of gathering information, and
the texts which it managed to produce (Welsh’s report, Wade’s tract and Wood’s maps, apart
from the regular series of official correspondence) were quite successful in constituting a
profile of the emergent discursive structure through which “useful information” about the
place was to be processed to the metropolis from this time forth. There were two major axes
of this structure: the Ahoms and the Brahmaputra.

Ahom does not occur as a term in any of the texts written during the Welsh Mission, but we
hear of the “Assam Government”, and of “the race of Surgee Deo” – “the descendants of
Sookapah [by tradition, the first Ahom king].”\textsuperscript{117} However, through his occasional references
to the contemporary absorptive structure of “aristocracy”,\textsuperscript{118} Welsh consistently conveyed
his support and sympathy for “the descendants of the hereditary nobility” – “the
descendants of the associates of Sookapah”. Indeed, diversion of state power from “the
lawful channel of the Gohains” was identified by him as the chief cause of the Moamaria
insurrection.\textsuperscript{119} In a few years’ time, Francis Hamilton supplemented Welsh’s descriptions by
putting the expression “Ahoms or governing nation” into wide circulation.\textsuperscript{120} The succeeding
rounds of ethnicization of the term have been discussed elsewhere.\textsuperscript{121} Here we simply wish
to indicate that Welsh erected the edifice of the ethnic code in and through which the
questions of sovereignty came to be negotiated hereafter. “The right of conquest had vested
the dominion of this Kingdom in the race of Surgee Deo and the descendants of the
principal associates of Sookapah, the original conqueror.”\textsuperscript{122} Within this paradigm it was
difficult to think of the belated entrants in the Tungkhungia elite quarters as anything else
but usurpers and encroachers.
The following chapters will take up the implications of this subtle epistemic maneuver. In
this section we must conclude the story of the Brahmaputra. Rennell’s theory and Wood’s
map combined to encourage the idea of discovering a shorter trade route to western China.

\textit{journey made in an attempt to penetrate Thibet from Assam to open new routes for commerce} (London:
Henry S. King & Co., 1873), 74

\textsuperscript{117} Welsh’s Report in Mackenzie, \textit{History of Relations of Government with Hill Tribes}, 377. For an
interesting account of “Sookhapa”, see Foreign Department (P. C.) Nos. 50-59 [NAI]

\textsuperscript{118} Welsh’s Report in Mackenzie, \textit{History of Relations of Government with Hill Tribes}, 381, 382

\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Ibid}, 379-81

\textsuperscript{120} Yasmin Saikia, “A Name without a People: Searching Tai-Ahom in Modern India”, unpublished Ph. D.
dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison (1999), 185-6

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Ibid}, 186-93

\textsuperscript{122} Welsh’s Report in Mackenzie, \textit{History of Relations of Government with Hill Tribes}, 377
Chapter One

But the admittedly "conjectural" nature of the proposition that the Brahmaputra was a continuation of the Tsangpo was especially complicated by the political inaccessibility of Tibet and the practical impossibility of traveling upstream along the Dihang, the Dibang or the Lohit. Understandably, much scope was left for speculations. D'Anville's previous identification of the Irrawaddy with the Tsangpo was still not entirely dismissed. Before the question of the China trade could even be broached, the Brahmaputra had to be produced as a continuous hydro body connecting the Tibetan highlands with the plains of Bengal. The thrill was doubled by the theory of the highest waterfall lying somewhere on its course (inferring its existence from the difference in height between the Tibetan plateau and the Brahmaputra basin). Opportunities did not arise until 1824 when the British were again drawn into the political developments in the Swargadeo's territory.

By the middle of 1795, the East India Company thought that it had washed off its hands: "We are not now much interested in the affairs of Assam, having withdrawn all interference whatever in them on the recall of Captain Welsh's battalion." However, the image of the "general anarchy", "injustice" and "horrid cruelties" of the Tungkhungia court did not really desert the official mind at Calcutta. The rumors of disorder and chaos were reinforced by the 1801 account of Comul Lochun Nundy, a native agent who was sent to recover the arrears of deceased Daniel Rausch and the 1809 petition of Brajanath, a Tungkhungia...

123 Wade, Account of Assam, 3
124 As early as 1768, the Court of Directors of the East Indian Company in London had asked its Bengal officials to explore the possibility of opening Tibet and West China as markets of English goods. Within ten days of the signing of the 1774 peace treaty with the Bhutias Warren Hastings deputed George Bogle on an embassy to visit Teshoo (Panchen) Lama of Tibet. Bogle reached Tibet after six months, met and made friendship with the Lama, but before this personal relationship could be exploited by the Company, both Bogle and the Lama expired within next five years. In 1783, Hastings took another chance of sending Samuel Turner, Samuel Davis and Robert Saunders to Tibet via Bhutan, apparently to congratulate the reported re-incarnation of the Grand Lama. But nothing came of it. Schuyler Cammann, Trade through the Himalayas: The Early British Attempts to Open Tibet (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 22 and Ch 4
125 Political Letter to the Court of Directors, Political Department, 12 May 1795, in Taraporewala (ed), Indian Records Series, 425
126 These are Comul Lochun Nundy's words. See Account of the Burman Empire and the Kingdom of Assam, 110-1. For a brief account of the rumors about the deposition of Hsöhitpongpa Gaurinath by a great grandson of Hsöremhpa Rajeswar in 1794, see Taraporewala (ed), Indian Records Series, 542-3 n.
127 Daniel Rausch, to whom reference has already been made, had obtained the lease of the salt trade at Goalpara in 1768 and within years grew into a virtual monopolist of the entire trade. "Captain Welsh wrote to Lord Cornwallis on February 21, 1793, 'Mr. Raush being the principal merchant at Goalpara, entered into an agreement with the Baruas to furnish them with whatever quantity of salt they might require, and in return for it almost the whole trade of Assam came through hands to him, which was in fact enjoying an exclusive privilege. This monopoly, injurious to the Raja (of Assam), prejudicial to trade and oppressive to the inhabitants, must ... be abolished.' Raush maintained a detachment of sepoys and even interfered in...
prince who came to Calcutta to solicit the Company's assistance to place him on the throne. This was also the time, as we have examined in the previous section, of intense redefinition of the Ahom elite. The number of the families of “the descendants of the associates of Sookapah” rose from four to twelve. The Konbaungs were not sitting idle either. In 1785, they had captured the town of Mrohaung after years of depredations. By 1795 the modest kingdom of Rakhaing, of which Mrohaung was the capital, lost at least twenty thousand subjects as war captives who were deported to the Ava heartland for working in the gigantic Meiktila lake project, south of Amarapura. The luckier Arakanese – a modern-day appellation to cover the remarkably diverse population of Rakhaing – ran off to Chittagong in the north, a strip of land ceded to the English East India Company in 1760 by the Nawab of Bengal. In fact, as the Ava forces progressively advanced towards the north from the banks of the Muresi river over the next couple of decades, drifting to Chittagong became a standard way to escape Ava’s levy. The Ava appointees (the “four Rajahs” led by the Raja of Ramree) wanted the British to send back these people, many of whom were involved in organizing guerrilla ambushes on the occupant forces, which the British were not very willing to comply with. The issue of political troubles within the Ahom kingdom. His partner was Robert Brydie, an indigo merchant of Rangpur, who obtained a permit to trade in Assam in 1790. In the same year another merchant named Thomas Cotton was favoured with the same concession: Banerjee, Eastern Frontier of British India, 6. He was eventually also allowed to trade in Darrang. Golain Barooah, asamar buranj, 95. In 1796, Rausch was “treacherously assassinated” by the men of the Raja of Darrang on his way to the Ahom capital, an event not exactly anticipated given his deep imbrications in the court politics of Darrang and beyond. Receiving a petition from Rausch’s wife, Wellesley in 1801 and George Barlow in 1806 made unsuccessful efforts to recover Rausch’s “arrears” from the Tungkhungia nobles. See An Account of the Burman Empire, 110-2.

128 Francis Hamilton Buchanan, An Account of Assam (rep. Guwahati: DHAS, 1963), 10
129 David Scott’s notes on Welsh’s Report in Mackenzie, History of Relations of Government with Hill Tribes, 379
130 Earlier, writes Myint-U, Ava’s “imperial dreams had rested on the conquest of the Chao Phraya valley and had led to the bloody sacking of Ayuthaya, the Siamese capital in 1767. But now [in the 1780s] the new and vigorous regime at Bangkok ended any real hope of expansion to the east, and it was an entirely new empire, to the west, which could now provide fertile ground for royal ambitions.” Myint-U, Making of Modern Burma, 14
131 Ibid., 18
133 In 1798, Francis Buchanan reported from the field that “between the kingdom of Arakan subject to Ava and Chitigang subject to Britain ... there was no district boundary; but there extends north, along the whole of the Chitigang district, a mountainous frontier occupied by several rude tribes.” Francis Hamilton, “An Account of the Frontier between Ava and the Part of Bengal Adjacent to the Karnaphuli River”, 1825. Reprinted in SOAS Bulletin of Burma Research, 1: 2 (Autumn 2003), 11

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persuasion of the Arakan guerrillas across the Naaf river boundary caused the relation between Ava and Calcutta to sour.

In 1811 another huge exodus of Arakenese refugees to Chittagong reinforced the local guerilla resistance under Chin Byan (or Khyen-bran) which eventually succeeded in defeating the Ava garrison and taking over Mrohaung. In 1817, through the Raja of Ramree, the Court of Ava revived the question of surrender of the Arakanese insurgents who had taken refuge in Chittagong. The British refused and feared that “an attempt might be made on the district of Chittagong, or the neighbouring British possessions, by the Burmese”. No doubt, Ava’s invasion into the Khaspur dominions, now alternatively called Cachar and Heramba, in the same year made the British more worried. In April 1822, six Khedda personnel of the British were seized by the Burmese to Aracan. On 24 September 1823, the Burmese chiefs of Arracan occupied the island of Shapuree, inflicting loss of lives on the British side. In October the Governor General issued a declaration of warning to the Burmese Government in Ava. In November a detachment was sent from Calcutta and two companies of the 20th Regiment took over the island. The Ramree Raja replied on 29 Oct 1823, “I will cause to be taken, by the force of arms, the cities of Dacca and Moorshedabad, which originally belonged to the great Arracan Rajah, whose chokies and pagodas were there.”

In the meantime, we must remember, Kamaleswar Singha had died from small pox, and his twelve years old brother Chandrakanta Singha was crowned as the next Swargadeo in 1811 by the indefatigable Pumananda Buragohain. The increasing power of the Buragohain accentuated court intrigues in course of which some of the new nobles under the leadership of Badanchandra Barphukan planned an overthrow of the powerful premier. The Buragohain retaliated by sending troops to arrest the Barphukan, who, however, sneaked out of Guwahati to reach Ava by Calcutta, and secured the help from the emperor Bodawpaya.

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134 “Extract from a Despatch from the Governor General in Council at Fort William, in Bengal, to the Court of Directors of the East India Company; dated 20th December, 1817”, in Horace Hayman Wilson (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, with an Introductory Sketch of the Events of the War, and an Appendix (Calcutta: Government Gazette Press, 1827), 2.
135 Private papers of Francis Jenkins, IOR Mss Eur F257/3 [OIOC]
136 “Letter from the Sub-Assistant Commissary General at Chittagong to the Commissary General; dated the 22nd April, 1822”, in Wilson (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, 14.
137 “Extract from a Dispatch from the Magistrate of Chittagong, dated the 28th September, 1823”, in Wilson (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, 17.
139 Raja Chunder Kaunt Singh, Ex-Rajah of Assam to the Governor General, received 10 May 1833. Foreign Department, Political Branch, 30 May 1833, No. 116. [NAI]
The overlordship of Ava in the Brahmaputra valley was finally formalized as Chandrakanta was forced to shift the weight of his support from the Buragohain’s clique to the Barphukan’s party. Within a couple of years, Marjit Singh was similarly confirmed on the Manipur throne by the Ava forces, and thousands of armed soldiers professing allegiance to Ava crossed over the Patkai to defend Chandrakanta against Purandar, another prince from the Tungkhungia lineage who was proclaimed as the Swargadeo by the late Buragohain’s party, and Marjit against his brother and rival Chooret. In 1818-9, the Ava forces took possession of Jorhat, reinstated Chandrakanta, grabbed a large war indemnity and withdrew home. It did not take much time for the disgrunted local elites of the Brahmaputra Valley to realize how helpless they were in terms of technology and manpower against the vast war machine of Ava, and its successful deployment of the several non-state space peoples in its expeditions. The British in Calcutta seemed as the only other source of worthwhile patronage. In September 1819, Purandar Singha petitioned to the Governor General, stating that he had been driven from his territories by a hill tribe called Maun, and had taken refuge at Chilmaree in the district of Rungpore; he solicited the protection and assistance of the Honourable Company, and offered to become tributary, and to pay the expence [sic] of the detachment that would necessary to effect his restoration to the Musnud of his ancestors; this application was repeated in the following month.

The new Buragohain, Ruchinath, himself came to Calcutta to persuade the British government to interfere in favor of Purandar while Chandrakanta’s court asked the British to return the asylum seekers. In the same year, however, a permanent Ava garrison was

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140 “[B]ut the new raja soon became impatient of the control of a servant, and encouraged his adherents to enter into a conspiracy against his minister. The plot was, however, discovered: the raja was obliged to disavow all participation in it, and his adherents were put to death with the most horrible cruelty. The bara phokun, who was one of the conspirators, made good his escape [12] to Calcutta, where he applied, on behalf of his master to the British government. Meeting with but little encouragement in that quarter, he had recourse to the Burman envoys then at the Presidency, and accompanying them on their return to Ava, immediately procured military succours. 6000 Burmans, and 8000 auxiliaries accompanied him to Asam, where the boora gohain had breathed his last two days before their arrival. The son of that minister, who succeeded to his father’s station and ambition, retreated to Gohati on the approach of the Burmas, leaving the raja at Jorhath to welcome their arrival, and reward the activity of the bara phokun, by making him his minister. The Burmas were reimbursed with their expenses, and dismissed with honour, and a female of the royal family was sent with valuable presents to Amerapura.” Horace Hayman Wilson, Narrative of the Burmese War, in 1824-26, as originally compiled from official documents. With a map (London: Wm. H. Allen, and Co., 1852), 12-13. Also see, S. K. Bhuyan, “Introduction”, Tungkhungia Buranji.

141 Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier, 47

142 “Extract from a Despatch from the Governor-General in Council at Fort William, in Bengal, to the Court of Directors of the East India Company; dated 12th September, 1823”, in Wilson (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, 6.
stationed at Manipur, “backed up by a long supply line up the Chindwin river”, following the breach between Marjit Singh and the new Ava suzerain Bagyidaw Paya.\(^{143}\) As the British decided to stay away from the dispute, Purandar engaged in collecting troops from among the subjects of Deb Raja in the north, apparently with some help from a “Mr. Bruce, a native of India, who had long resided at Ingigopa.” In May 1820, however, Purandar was defeated by Chandrakanta’s men near Bijni and his advisor Robert Bruce was captured and sent to Guwahati. But Chandrakanta, who had expressed his growing disgust with the Ava forces through a murder of his own pro-Ava noble Barbarua, was ousted by the Burman general Mengee Maha Silwa within four months. Thus “avenging” the Barbarua’s murder, Maha Silwa raised a “pretender” named Pooneadur or Phunzader to the Assam throne. Chandrakanta fled to the British division of Goalpara while the Burmese troops pursuing him committed “various outrages” on the British frontier villages at Habbraghat. Quite strategically, the self-professedly neutral British allowed Chandrakanta’s muskets and gunpowder to pass through the British territory. By the end of 1821, Chandrakanta in fact appeared triumphant over the Ava army.\(^{144}\)

Maha Silwa’s reinforcements arrived in the summer of 1822. A 20000-strong army (of which half were reported to be Singphos) under Mengee Maha Bandula was sent from Ava. Maha Bandula – who was called “the sable Bonaparte” in the contemporary British military circle\(^{145}\) – was “one of the main proponents at Bagyidaw’s court of an offensive policy against Calcutta.”\(^{146}\) The Ava troops easily established their base at Rangpur and occupied the valley. By June, “Chandrakant fled to Bengal and Bandula sent insolent messages to the English officials saying he would carry the war into their territory if the fugitive was not given up.”\(^{147}\) The British who till now had only an oblique interest in bridling Ava’s expansionism were

\(^{143}\) Marjit Singh did not attend the enthronement ceremony of Bagyidaw Paya, as he was expected to in the capacity of a subordinate king. This symbolic violation of Ava’s overlordship was presumably underwritten by the increasing conflict between Ava and Kangla over the rights to the Kubo valley timber. As the Ava forces approached, Marjit fled to Cachar, where his brother Choijit had already established himself in large part of the Khaspur king Govindachandra’s dominions. While the Ava army installed a certain “Shoobol” on the Manipur throne, the three Manipuri princes (Marjit, Choijit and Gambhir) continued to fight the Ava forces till 1826. These are often referred in the popular histories as “the seven years of Manipur anarchy” (“Chahi-taret Khuntakpa”).

\(^{144}\) “Extract from a Despatch from the Governor-General in Council at Fort William, in Bengal, to the Court of Directors of the East India Company; dated 12th September, 1823”, in Wilson (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, 7.


\(^{146}\) Myint-U, Making of Modern Burma, 19

\(^{147}\) Shakespear, History of Upper Assam, 62-3
truly alarmed and Lieutenant Davidson, guarding the small Goalpara post, was asked to strengthen his forces. When Gobinda Chandra, the Raja of Cachar, invited Maha Bandula to assist him against the Manipur princes operating in his kingdom, the British lost no time in unilaterally imposing a protectorate status on Cachar and Jaintia by making Gobinda Chandra sign the treaty of 19 June 1823. Skirmishes began in early 1824. On 21 February, the Ava troops inflicted a heavy loss on the British in Doodpatlee. On the 24th, the Governor General in Council ordered the British troops assembled at Goalpara to advance “into the territory of Assam, to dislodge the enemy from the commanding position which they occupy at the head of the Burhampooter.” The war was formally proclaimed by the Governor General Amherst on 5 March 1824.

After a two-year long war, which proved particularly costly to them in terms of finances and lives, the British assumed direct control of Manipur, Arakan and the Tenasserim. Apart from agreeing to pay an indemnity of 10 million rupees in four installments and to accept a British Resident at their capital, the Konbaung court was also forced by the Treaty of Yandabo (24 February 1826) to formally renounce all claims over Jaintia, Cachar and

148 Myint-U, Making of Modern Burma, 18. See also, “Translation of a Letter written by the Governor of Assam, one of the Nobles of the King of Ava, an Emperor of the Burmah Country” [c 1824], in Wilson (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, 17* [sic].
149 Gobinda Chandra was required “to pay 10,000 Rs. for our protection”. This was after the “overtures [of alliance with “the Manipuri brothers”] fell through”. See Aitchison (ed.), Collection of Treaties, Volume II, 146
150 “Copy of a Report from Lieutenant Colonel H. Bowen, Commanding in Sylhet, to Captain Bayldon, Major of Brigade, Dacca, dated Jattrapore, 22nd February 1824”, in Wilson (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, 23* [sic].
152 William Prinsep, a Calcutta businessman, wrote in his unpublished memoir, “About the middle of this year [1826] the Burmese war took place creating a perfect revolution in the money market, which from a complete plethora of unemployed capital became suddenly completely bare. The houses of business had been refusing to take money on deposit even at 3 p. cent. We were soon glad to offer 8 p. cent for it. The Govt. expenditure was so large that their treasuries were soon drained and they opened unsuccessfully a 4 p. cent loan followed immediately by another at 5 p. cent. – This led to a run upon the houses to invest all loose balances, creating a most inconvenient drain, rendered the more irksome by its suddenness. I attribute to this withdrawal of very large sums from that which was in fact the working capital of the 5 great Banking houses the chief cause of the great breakdown which followed in 1830 to 1833.” “[Typescript of] Memoir of William Prinsep, Part. 2”, c. 1870, pp. 23-4, Private Papers of William Prinsep, IOR Mss Eur D1160/4 [OIOC]
153 See Chapter Eight for details. See also D. A. Macleod, A Sketch of the Medical Topography of Bishnath, and Its Immediate Neighbourhood; with an Account of the Diseases Generally Prevalent in Assam (Calcutta: G. H. Huttman, Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1837), 31 for a reference to the severe outbreak of cholera among the warring British troops. See also Horace Hayman Wilson, Narrative of the Burmese War, in 1824-26, as originally compiled from official documents. With a map (London: Win. H. Allen, and Co., 1852)
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Assam. It is in this document that the Indian nationalist historiography usually locates the founding moment of British colonialism in the north-east, just as the imperial British archive unfailingly positions the Treaty as the legal foundation of all territorial claims in that frontier. The importance of the Treaty of Yandabo, for us, lies rather in its inauguration and consecration of this very archive. Its eloquence is valuable only as long as we remain sensitive to the silence that it gestures at. In the sequence of the imperial archive, Yandabo keeps the Swaragdeo's domain suspended between the inglorious exit of the Welsh Mission and the triumphant reentry of David Scott. All that precedes the Treaty becomes an indefinite chaos. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the issue of the overlordship of Ava in Assam—visibly formalized since 1818, but certainly present in a more amorphous form from at least 1811—becomes invisible within this archive. In declaring Assam's insertion into a new series of geographies, called the British Indian empire, the Treaty of Yandabo attempts to erase its other serial locations. The Assam of the Yandabo Treaty is situated outside the currency landscape of [Koch] Bihar, beyond the political claims of Ava, and away from the memory

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154 The full text of the treaty is available in Wilson (ed.), Documents Illustrative of the Burmese War, 209-210. However, the Yandabo treaty was actually signed on 23 November 1826 at Ra-ta-na-para. Ireland, Province of Burma, 28-29. In Manipur, Gambhir Sing was installed as a tributary prince by the British. In Cachar, Govind Chandra, who had earlier fled into British territory, was reinstated on the condition that "Tularam Senapati's country" was to be left unmolested. India Political Despatch from the Court of Directors, Foreign Department, No. 14 of 1834 (3 December).

155 It should be emphasized here that even what is commonly understood as the natural divider between "Burma" and "Assam"—the steep Patkai Range—was not uncontested. It took more than twelve years after the signing of the Yandabo Treaty before Ava could be forced into accepting the Patkai Mountains as its northwestern border. "The Government will learn with some surprise," wrote Jenkins, "that the Burmese extend their claim to lands in Assam as far as Jeypore and that it was the intention of the Governor of Hookoom to proceed thither had he not been stopped by our officers Captain Hannay and Mr. Bayfield." When the British representatives read out "an extract from the records of Assam" to invoke "historical" sanctity of their claim, the Mogaung ruler (Ava's representative) immediately "produced a manuscript from the records of the Kingdom of Mogaung showing that the boundary extended as far as Jeypore in Rajah Poorunder Singh's territory." Adam White considered "the principle upon which this extension of boundary is claimed, to be altogether unsound, as it rests not upon the substantial right of the Burmese to this territory by conquest or otherwise, but upon the antiquated claim of its feudatory state, the Raj of Mogaun, in bygone times." White said, it would be as absurd as the British Government advancing "claims to the territory of ... Hyderabad or the Kingdom of Lahore." Of course, he had no idea that in twelve years Lahore would be invaded by the British army. See the correspondences in Foreign Department (P. C.), 23 January 1837, Nos. 24-25; Foreign Department (P. C.), 10 April 1837, Nos. 120-124; Foreign Department (P. C.), 15 May 1837, Nos. 15-16 [all in NAI]. See also Report of the Burma Frontier Areas Committee of Enquiry, 1947 submitted to His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and to the Government of Burma, presented by the Secretary of State for Burma to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, June 1947 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1947) Ch. 1.5
networks of Mogaung. It is a discrete, disengaged, and "detachable piece of a jigsaw puzzle."\textsuperscript{156}

We shall read in Chapter Four how this frozen scene after a particular geographical shuffling came to be eternalized in the early twentieth century by imagining the pasts of Assam as always lying within the geographical confines of an essential India. Prior to that, we need to engage with the modalities of geographical itemization of Assam: how a distinct geobody was produced in the wake of the war as a variety of survey and route maps, medical topographies and expedition journals became available. David Scott, who was appointed the Governor General's Agent for North-Eastern Frontier in November 1823, concentrated on extensive documentation after he took his charge in April 1824.\textsuperscript{157} The large \textit{Geographical Sketch of the Burmese Empire} was compiled in 1825 at the Surveyor-General's Office.\textsuperscript{158} In October 1824, some Revenue Officers were placed under the superintendence of Major Schalch,

\begin{quote}
in order that accompanying the several divisions of the army and receiving his instructions, they might derive advantage to the utmost practicable extent of the opportunities so suddenly and unexpectedly opened of pushing our investigations beyond those barriers which the well or ill-founded jealousy of our Eastern neighbours had hitherto opposed to us, and which we had till then no immediate hope of surmounting.\textsuperscript{159}
\end{quote}

After the 1824-6 war, as Henry Yule said, "an army of surveyors were thrown upon" the frontier: Bedford, Wilcox, Bedingfield and others in "Assam"; Grunt and Pemberton in "Munnipore", and Montmorency in "Burma". The western sources of the Irrawaddy were reached by Wilcox; much information was obtained concerning the course of the Chindwin, and its lower valley was surveyed by Montmorency in 1828.\textsuperscript{160} But, unsurprisingly, the Brahmaputra remained the major focus of mapmaking. When James Bedford was given the charge of the survey in "Assam" in December 1824, he was specifically instructed

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{156} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}
\textsuperscript{157} Adam White, \textit{A Memoir of the Late David Scott} (1831; Guwahati: DHAS, 1988) contains an interesting description.
\textsuperscript{158} Resident in Ava (H. Burney) to Secretary to the Government of India, Political Department (W. H. Macnaghten), 14 February 1835. Foreign Department, Political Branch, 24 February 1835, Nos. 23-26 [NAI]
\textsuperscript{159} Wilcox, \textit{Memoir of Survey of Assam}, 315
\textsuperscript{160} Henry Yule, "On the Geography of Burma and Its Tributary States, in illustration of a New Map of Those Regions", \textit{The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London}, vol. 27 (1857), 55
\end{quote}

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to consider the Brahmaputra as the chief object to which his attention should be directed. He was to endeavour to unravel the mystery ... respecting its fountain head, by proceeding up its streams as far as ... the safeguard of a detached escort might permit.\footnote{Wi!cox, \textit{Memoir of Survey of Asam}, 315-6}

Confusions multiplied as the military explorers did not know whether the Dihong was the "true body" of the Brahmaputra or the Lohit. Voluminous streams were not missing in the region. Wade had already listed 58, apart from the "various...branches [of the Brahmaputra] of considerable size".\footnote{Wade, \textit{Account of Assam}, 14-5} The more the officers were compelled to fall back on local knowledge, the more complex became the issue: different groups knew the river at different stretches by different names.\footnote{For an imaginative account of what he calls "the puzzles shrouding the identity of the Brahmaputra", see Ritupan Goswami, "Rivers and History: Brahmaputra Valley in the Nineteenth Century", unpublished M. Phil. Dissertation: Jawaharlal Nehru University, (2005), Chs. 1 and 2. See also Arup Kumar Datta, \textit{The Brahmaputra} (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2001), Ch. 2} After all, popular testimonies were not linear surveys, which could be geometrically connected and collated into a singular cartographic image. The incitements for producing a continuous hydrobody from "Tibet" to "Bengal" were definitely absent. The scattered settlements, as we have noted in the beginning of this section, maintained their existence and autonomy by agreeing to exclude each other from the knowledge of their rivers.\footnote{Cf. Rev. Fr. Krick, "Account of an Expedition among the Abors in 1853", translated by the Rev. A. Gille, \textit{Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal}, New Series, Vol. 9 (1913), 108} Moreover, what constituted one river was not a universally shared definition. In 1825, when the locals, at the insistence of Scott and Burlton, did present a map "drawn in their own incorrect style, shewing the situation of the notable villages or districts, and exhibiting the various nalas feeding the Brahmaputra within their limits", the sahibs were amazed to find "that in this production, the Dihong and the Dibong were not distinguished from other tributary streams."\footnote{Wilcox, \textit{Memoir of Survey of Asam}, 316-7}

In 1825, after John Bryan Neufville had obtained a list from the locals of the twenty stages of a putative route from Sadiya to Tibet "by the upper waters of the Brahmaputra",\footnote{John Bryan Neufville, "On the geography and population of Assam", \textit{ Asiatic Researches}, Vol. XVI (1828), 331-352} Bedford's Assistant, Wilcox, was again asked by the Surveyor General Blacker to trace "the sources of the great body of water which the Brahmpootur pours through Bengal." Put on this special duty, Wilcox traveled along the left (southern) bank of the Brahmaputra to some thirty miles east of the Brahmakund, where he was stopped and compelled to return by a
group of people whom his assistants from the valley called Miju Mishmis. This point indeed remained the furthest reached by a European surveyor until 1911-12, when the upper Luhit basin above the Brahmakund was visited by the survey detachment of the Mishmi Mission. By 1828, Wilcox published his much-awaited map, collating data “from his own Surveys and from those of the Captains Bedford and Jones and Lieut. Bedingfeld”.

The District of Sylhet including as far as Aquee on the road to Muneepoor from Lt. Fishers late surveys. Muneepoor and its Tributaries from Lt. Pemberton, and the Kyandwany between Nat Kyn and its mouth from Lt. Montmorency's Surveys, and between Monfoo and Thumanthe from a map by Lt. Bedingfeld on information given by Burman Traders. The Irawadi in Umeerapoora from Lt. Wood's map and to Bhanmo from maps previously constructed on Dr. Buchanan's data. The whole of the intermediate countries between Assam and China including the heads of the Brahmaputra, Irawadi, and Kyandwany from information collected by Lt. Wilcox while at Sudiya or in the course of his various journeys [sic].

The collation, Wilcox clarified, was based on independent astronomical observations of eclipses of the “satellites” from Amarapura, Calcutta, Madras and Sadiya. Such a wide range of locations, certainly unavailable to the inhabitants of the mapped territory, simultaneously confirmed the enormity of the empire as well as the clarity of the imperial gaze. His map, which claimed to cover 20½° to 30° in latitude and 90½° to 99° in longitude, reduced the worldly complexities of this wide swathe for a specific purpose: through dots and lines, abstract and linear connections between the dispersed geographies were depicted, conjured and naturalized. The hydrobody of the Brahmaputra was the best metaphor of this connectivity, even though much of it could be represented only through dots (signifying conjecture and deduction, uncertainty and unfamiliarity).

Wilcox's map, which through reproductions eventually dissolved into metropolitan common sense, continued to be supplemented by the subsequent localized surveys and explorations.

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167 R. H. Phillimore, *Historical Records of the Survey of India*, vol. III: 1815 to 1830 (Dehra Dun: Survey of India, 1954), 59. The furthest marches of T. T. Cooper (1869-70) “were several marches short of that attained by Wilcox in 1826”. The Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Judicial Department, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, No. 1194, 21 June 1886, in “Mr. Needham’s report of his visit to the Zayul Valley of Eastern Tibet, and the grant to him of an honorarium of Rs 2,000 for his philological works”, Foreign Department, Secret-E, February 1887, Nos. 451 – 462 [NAI].

168 The Countries lying between the 21½° & 29½° N. Latitude and 90° & 98° E. Longitude Shewing the Sources of the Irawadi River and the Eastern Branches of the Brahmaputra, comprising Assam, Muneepoor, the Hilly Districts of the Singphos, Part of Sham and of the Chinese Provinces of Yunan and Thibet by Lieut. R. Wilcox. B. N. I. 1828. Engraved (from a copy of Lt. R. Wilcox’s Original Map) in the Office of the Surveyor General of India, July 1830. Scale 16 Br. Miles = 1 inch. [OIOC]

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His travel to the sources of the Irrawaddy conclusively discredited D'Anville's surviving supporters, and earned much applause from the British geographers. But what is not usually recognized by the historians is the larger context of the early nineteenth-century attempts by the government officials (Neufville in 1825, Burnett in 1828, Hannay in 1835-6, Griffiths in 1837, to name only the most important ones) to explore an overland commercial route to China either through "the Khampti country" or via Mogaung within which the 1826 exploration of Wilcox and Burton was self-consciously situated. As an amateur explorer was to put it in the 1880s, "[f]ormerly most of us supposed that if once out of Assam, there would be little or no difficulty in entering China." Still not sure of the profitability of the new possession (which looked insalubrious, jungle-ridden and sparsely populated), the British were initially inclined towards treating "Assam" — an ill-defined and imprecise geography even after the conquest — as more an interstitial outside to British India than a full-fledged constituent of the imperial space. Wilcox's cartographic focus on the Brahmaputra was a logical corollary of the figuration of Assam in the early nineteenth-century state documents as a possible gateway for accessing the supposedly large Chinese market.

It is interesting to observe how little it took for capital to change the informational economy. The "discovery" of tea plant "growing wild" on some hills around the Tungkhungia capital Rangpur by Robert Bruce in 1823 was recalled by the Calcutta authorities with an unparalleled sense of urgency after a decade as the English East India Company lost its

170 For a comprehensive account of the early British endeavors, see Ma Thaung, "British Interest in Trans-Burma Trade Routes to China, 1826-1876", unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, University of London (1954)
171 S. E. Peal, 'Notes of A Trip up to the Dihing Basin to Daphla Pani, &c.', Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 52: 2 (1883), 172 "Assam ... lies on exactly the same parallel with the districts of China; and the soil is very nearly the same, and the climate and seasons but little different." Robert Mudie, China and Its Resources, and Peculiarities, Physical, Political, Social, and Commercial; with a view of the Opium Question, and A Notice of Assam (London: Grattan and Gilbert, 1840), 195
173 David Crole, Tea: A Text Book of Tea Planting and Manufacture, comprising chapters on the history and development of the industry, the cultivation of the plant, the preparation of the leaf for the market, the botany and chemistry of tea, etc. etc. with some account of the laws affecting labour in tea gardens in Assam and elsewhere (London: Crosby Lockwood and Son, 1897), 23. For the role of Andrew Charleton in another subsequent "discovery," see Jayeeta Sharma, "British Science, Chinese Skill and Assam Tea: Making Empire's Garden", The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 43: 4 (2006), 438-40.
precious monopoly in the trade of tea with China. The mapping priorities in the north­
eastern frontier changed. After a map “shewing all the Tea Tracts that have hitherto been
discovered by Mr. C. A. Bruce, Superintendent of Tea Culture to the Hon'ble East India
Company” was published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in June 1839,174 the
renowned lithographer Jean-Baptiste Tassin (who had been especially responsible for
popularizing Wilcox's map) published a larger version, in five sheets on ½-inch scale.175
This Map of Upper Assam focused on “the districts of Joorhat, Luckimpore and Sudiya” while
indicating the imaginary lines of “the Roads proposed to be opened from Sudiya to the
Booree Dihing”. Large white spots, representing “Uninhabited Jungles”, governed
substantial portions of this map. And even larger territories to all sides of the core realm
were assigned away, without any attempt at drawing borders, to “Duphala Tribes”, “Meeree
Tribes”, “Lootoo Kottea Tribes”, “various Abor Tribes”, “Mishmees” and “Singphos”. The
tea tracts were located in a longish strip south of which was the “unexplored hilly country
inhabited by Nagas” and north of which lay the imagined trajectory of the Gossain Comla
Allee (imagined, because “[i]t was found impossible to penetrate the thick Forest to trace its
continuation – It is supposed however to continue under the Northern Hill as far as the
Dihing”). Between 96½° and 97° E. longitude, and up above the 28° N. latitude line, the
name “Tibet” was printed in large fonts, as if to suggest its tempting propinquity. The more
explicit emphasis on the “allees” (āls) announced the agenda of bringing these far-flung
strips in unison and in connection with the centers of organized market. On the whole, the
map enumerated 120 “tea tracts” (80 in the “Muttock Country”, 12 in the “Singpho
Country” and 28 in the “West of the Boree Dihing River”).176
From 1839, rules began to be drawn up for “the granting and measuring of the Tea Tracts,
as … applied for by Companies or by individuals.” Broad sheets of Wilcox's map were

174 C. A. Bruce, “Report on the Manufacture of Tea, and on the Extent and Produce of the Tea Plantations
in Assam,” Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. VIII (1839), 497-526. It must be mentioned here
that there is reference to a “luminous map of tea districts in Upper Assam”, provided “by a shokun
[phukan?] who accompanied Lieut. Burnett in an expedition” as early as 1834. But we have been unable to
locate it. Cf. “Extract Private Letter from Captain F. Jenkins to Mr. Gordon, dated the 19 May 1834”, in
Return to an order of the Honourable House of Commons, dated 15 February 1839: - for, Copy of papers
received from India relating to the measures adopted for introducing the cultivation of tea plant within the
British possessions in India. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 27 February 1839. [GL]
175 See Foreign Department (Political), 4 October 1841, No. 38 [NAI]
176 Map of Upper Assam comprising the districts of Joorhat, Luckimpore and Sudiya shewing the Tea
Tracts discovered by Mr. C. A. Bruce, Superintendent of Tea Culture to the Hon'ble East India Company in
Assam. Also the Roads proposed to be opened from Sudiya to the Booree Dihing, by J. B. Tassin. Original
Litho Press, Calcutta September 1839. [OIOC]
usually sent from the Surveyor General's office, on which the Agent's assistants were required "to fill up ... such topographical detail as they might be able to furnish." The work turned out to be so heavy and difficult that professional cartographers like Robert Ellis and Francis Morton were ultimately entrusted with the task of drawing maps of the Tea Districts.\(^{177}\) The popularity of these maps is confirmed by the number of reproductions they underwent, receiving both private and public endowments, at least until the eighteen sixties.\(^{178}\) The steady success of Assam Tea in the international market unmistakably altered the location of Assam in the imperial map of utility. Assam now required to be developed, the officials concurred, more as a definite plantation province than as an elusive entrance to China.

As Timothy Mitchell argues, the act of representation, ceaselessly repeated, makes its referent appear as an object that exists prior to any representation, "as something given, material, fixed in its unique time and space, not fissured by replication, not open to serialization and interlinking, and to the difference, instability, and misrepresentation that endless repetition might introduce."\(^{179}\) Much has been written to show that this is particularly the case with the diagrammating of a geobody through maps.\(^{180}\) Mapping unleashed possibilities for new rounds of abstraction, and nothing would be more incorrect than to think that this abstractive process of coding the territory did not "belong to what is called the real world."\(^{181}\) As Thongchai Winichakul says in the somewhat comparable context of Siam, "a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent."\(^{182}\) We shall shortly discuss how the British Indian state organized its resources in order to realize

\(^{177}\) Quoted in R. H. Phillimore, *Historical Records of the Survey of India*, vol. IV: '1830 to 1843: George Everest' (Dehra Dun: Survey of India, 1958), 203-4

\(^{178}\) OIOC possesses *Map of the Tea Districts of Assam* (1863) (Calcutta, 1863) and *Map of the Tea Countries of Assam and Cachar*, by Major Briggs (Calcutta, c. 1865). Bodleian Library, Oxford possesses *Map of the Tea Districts of Assam*. Compiled in the Office of Colonel Henry Hopkinson, Commissioner & Governor General's Agent. North Eastern Frontier. Scale 4 Miles = 1 Inch. (c.1863). Surprisingly, the importance of the tea tract maps has been largely ignored. For a brief reference, see Keya Dasgupta, "Survey, Mapping and Colonisation of the Brahmaputra Valley", *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, Thirteenth Session (Shillong, 1993), 175-6

\(^{179}\) Mitchell, *The Stage of Modernity*, 19


\(^{181}\) Mitchell, *The Stage of Modernity*, 33 n

\(^{182}\) Thongchai, *Siam Mapped*, 310
and concretize on the ground the dotted and striped projections on the broad sheets. But here we pause to note the bringing together of dispersed locations within one scopic regime – the putting forward of one picture before any other image is possible. Through this act of framing, coherence is forced even before force begins to cohere.

Unlike most of the British Indian possessions, the tradition of “constructing maps from route surveys and astronomical observations” did not fall into disuse in the north-eastern frontier after the commencement of the work of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India in 1802. In the eighteen thirties, the Agent to the Governor-General, Francis Jenkins, was still not eager to “waste” fifty thousand rupees for “the trigonometrical survey of the islands and the shifting banks of the Burhampootra”, which, said he, would “serve only the purpose of science”. The Meridional Series of Thuiller on the meridian of 90° (called the Brahmaputra Series) came only in 1867, when “Lieutenant Larminie commenced a chain of secondary triangles to be carried through the valley of Assam” The triangulation reached Sibsagar in 1874 and Dibrugarh in 1876. Revenue settlements in the districts could not wait so long for the exact measurement of intangible “base lines” and precise calculation of imagined triangles. As the Surveyor General Blacker told Wilcox, “Abundant information, if of ordinary accuracy, will be of more consequence than a very limited quantity that may possess higher pretensions to mathematical correctness.”

In 1827, quite independently of the initiatives of Burton, Bedford and Wilcox, a revenue survey was started in the districts of Lower Assam under the supervision of Bedingfield, Matthews and Hudson to determine “the superficial area” of cultivated and cultivable land.

The work was almost entirely performed by native surveyors, Bengalees or Assamese. The European surveyor or his assistant marked out the given tract and surveyed the boundary.

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184 Quoted in Phillimore, *Historical Records of the Survey*, IV, 202
185 Markham, *Memoir of the Indian Surveys*, 129
186 The work of trigonometrical surveying was understood in three stages. “First, the selection of sites for base lines to form the ends of certain ranges of triangles; their setting out; and their measurement with the utmost attainable accuracy. The base line becomes the side of a triangle, the length of which is thus known, and by trigonometry the distance of other points, visible from its extremities, can be ascertained through angular observations with suitable instruments. Second, the construction of the range of triangles. This is done by ascertaining the position of selected points on the earth’s surface by angles taken at first from the ends of a measured base, and then carried on from point to point in succession so as to form a network of positions fixed by this triangulation along a belt of country. The accuracy of the work is checked by the base line which terminates it. The primary triangulation is completed by a sufficient number of such belts across the area of the survey, both in the direction of latitude and longitude. Third, as a further check to the triangulation, astronomical observations for latitude and longitude are made at selected points.” Ibid, 61
187 Quoted in Phillimore, *Historical Records of the Survey*, vol. III, 56
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The interior portion ... was entirely filled up by native surveyors, and protracted by European surveyor or his assistant.188

By early 1834 Hudson submitted a map of the Kamrup district, "compiled entirely from the fieldwork of native ameens", only on the basis of which "the country could be apportioned into 'chowdreeships'".189 Similar maps were prepared in Darrang and Nagaon. In 1838 John Thornton was brought from the Chittagong Survey to take charge of the surveys of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts. Wilcox's 1830-1 survey of Goalpara was complemented by Bedford in 1839-42.190 Rather than authoritatively laying down the boundaries of the districts, these surveys were focused on generating approximate area statements of the grain-growing areas and the registered tea tracts as well as finalizing the cadastral inventories of settled mouzas. In fact, in 1868, the survey officers were categorically instructed not to "extend their operations beyond the country which is unmistakably and undeniably in our possession."191 Boundaries of "Assam", as we shall shortly see, continued to be an unstable, resource-responsive and revisable rim for the entire stretch of the nineteenth century. Indeed, as late as 1940, considerable parts of both eastern and western Dafla country had still to be mapped.192 Substantial areas in the Rangpang Naga territory were brought under the Triangulation Survey Operations only by the end of 1936.193 As the survey office was explicitly told in 1904, in the entire north-eastern frontier

there appears to be no defined territorial boundary and no attempt should be made to show such a frontier on the map. From this point, therefore, the boundary will be a purely

188 Quoted in ibid, 146
189 Phillimore, Historical Records of the Survey, vol. IV, 201
190 Ibid, 201-3
191 "The survey officers should not attempt operations near the frontier without communication with, and permission of, the Deputy Commissioners, and the Deputy Commissioners should be instructed not to allow the survey parties to extend their operations beyond the country which is unmistakably and undeniably in our possession. No debatable or disputed tract should be touched." Letter from the Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 21st October 1868, quoted in A. Mackenzie, Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, No. 595T, 14 June 1873, in "Massacre of Borlangee Nagas by Kamsinga Nagas", Foreign Department (Political-A), July 1873, Nos. 469-507 [NAI]
192 Annual Report on Frontier Tribes of Assam for the year 1939-40 (Shillong: Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1940), 1
193 Annual Report on Frontier Tribes of Assam for the year 1935-36 (Shillong: Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1936), 3

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jurisdictional or administrative line. Such border should be indicated by an engraved dotted line and a thin continuous ribbon.194

Even the maps produced by the revenue surveys, as Jenkins had complained in 1834, were often “imperfectly filled up and disconnected”.195 Throughout the forties and fifties, surveys were made of several isolated “tracts” – “a few Assamese villages and a mile or two of cultivation” – lying within an otherwise “dense jungle”, and “two or three main circuit traverse surveys” in each division (“along the best roads to be found in the country”) were “connected with the survey of the Brahmaputra river”.196 For long, it was typical to read in the north-eastern frontier survey reports of the “endeavour to reduce the insignificant blank composing that tract, which appears hitherto to have baffled all attempts to describe or delineate on any map.”197 In the eighteen seventies a number of topographical survey teams worked in tandem to fill in such blanks here and there, and frequently became entangled in quarrels and skirmishes with the local communities,198 the most severe one having been the armed encounter between the Naga warriors from Ninu and the survey party led by Holcombe, Assistant Commissioner of Jaipur in February 1875.199

194 “Revision of the map of India, 1 inch = 32 miles, political, education correction and verification of boundaries. Approval to the colour tints to be used in the production of the map”, Foreign and Political Department (Secret – Frontier Branch), May 1916, Nos. 1 – 2 [NAI]
195 Quoted in Phillimore, Historical Records of the Survey, vol. IV: ‘1830 to 1843: George Everest’ (Dehra Dun: Survey of India, 1958), 201. “In 1830 a survey was commenced to connect the map from Goalpara, where it terminated in Captain Wilcox’s survey of the Assam valley, with the survey of the Ganges. In 1834 Lieutenant Ommanney was engaged in tracing the line of the Brahmaputra from Goalpara, round the difficult country at the root of the Khasia hills, to within thirty miles of Dacca, when a sudden order of the Government directed the work to be suspended, thus rendering it comparatively useless for want of the connecting ink which it would only have taken three month to complete.” Markham, Memoir of the Indian Surveys, 99-100.
197 General Report on the Topographical Surveys of India, and of the Surveyor General’s Department, Head Quarter Establishment, for season 1868-69, by Colonel Sir H. L. Thuillier (Calcutta: Office of Superintendent of Government Printing, 1870), 35
198 See Markham, Memoir of the Indian Surveys, 171-5 for a concise account.
199 For detailed accounts of the encounter, in which 80 men including Lieutenant Holcombe were killed, 51 were seriously wounded and none of the 197-strong survey party was left unhurt, see “Report by Captain W. F. Badgley, in charge No. 6, to the Surveyor General of India, – No. x/8 A, dated Jaipur, 7th February 1875, on the treacherous attack made by the Nagas”, in General Report on the Topographical Surveys of India, and of the Surveyor General’s Department, Head Quarter Establishment, for season 1874-75, by Colonel Sir H. L. Thuillier (Calcutta: Office of Superintendent of Government Printing, 1876), 51-53 and the statement of Captain W. F. Badgley, in charge No. 6 Survey, to Colonel Nuthali, C. B., Commanding 44th Regiment Native Infantry, No. X 3 B, Debogurth, 10 February 1875, in “Measures for Punishment of Naga Villages concerned in the attack on Lieut. Holcombe and his party”, Foreign Department (Political A), March 1875, Nos. 480 – 498 [NAI]. In December 1875, “Captain Butler too was killed by the Lhota Nagas of Pangti near Wokha, while he was leading his survey party through the hills.” Birendra Chandra
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What Woodthorpe recognized in Mogaung in the eighteen eighties was by and large valid for most of the frontier in the entire nineteenth century: "it might be dangerous for a small party to attempt to pass through ... and a large party could not have attempted it for want of carriage and supplies."200 Added to this were, by the surveyors' own admission, the faulty chronometers, the imperfect sextants, the uncertain methods, and of course the myriad forms of resistance from the local communities. Most of the surveys were recognized to be imperfect, incomplete and even misleading. Without military occupation of the ground to be surveyed, it was rather difficult to ascertain the classification of soil and crops, the assessment of revenue according to the value of the produce, the statistical information regarding population and agriculture – all of which were considered to be the jobs of the early surveyors.201 Nevertheless, the impact of cartographic abstraction was severely felt in the surveyed territories. In fact, it was more through the ambiguities and incertitudes of the evolving cartographic rationality than through its much-hyped claims of decisiveness and finality that the course of the spatial realignments came to be negotiated. Nothing illustrates the point better than a history of the formation of the Garo Hills Districts, "a country both physically and politically opposed to [survey] operations."202

Indistinct Districts

"[The Garos] are the first of the Assam mountain tribes with whom we came into contact", wrote Mackenzie in 1884. The very framing of the Regulation X of 1822 – the first legal fabrication of the figure of the "savage tribes" in British India – was prompted by the British encounter with the "Garo Mountaineers."203 Since the close of the eighteenth century, separating the Garos from the jurisdictions of the permanently-settled estates in northern

Chakravorty, British Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam since 1858 (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1964), 95
201 Phillimore, Historical Records of the Survey, vol. III, 146
202 General Report on the Topographical Surveys of India, and of the Surveyor General's Department, Head Quarter Establishment, for season 1869-70, by Colonel Sir H. L. Thuillier (Calcutta: Office of Superintendent of Government Printing, 1871), 23
203 The full text of this Regulation is available in Mackenzie, History of Relations of Government with Hill Tribes, 250-3.

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Rangpur and Mymensingh had been a consistent concern of the British authorities in Bengal.\textsuperscript{204} The so-called Garo Hills were chosen as the jurisdiction of the said Regulation (along with the three thanas of Goalpara, Dhubri, and Karaibari detached from the District of Rangpur), although there was no attempt to define or demarcate the extent of the hills. Sustained resistance to surplus extraction from the various settlements scattered across the area continued to defer revenue surveys until W. O. A. Beckett was appointed to lay down “the best and most practical general boundary” in 1873. Meanwhile, the Act XXII of 1869, replacing the 1822 Regulation, had authorized the Lieutenant-Governor to define the boundary of the “territory known as the Garo Hills should question arise as to its alignment.” A Special Officer was also placed at Tura to take care of the unsurveyed area lying between Goalpara and Mymensingh.\textsuperscript{205} John Kelso’s geographically unconnected traverse surveys in the eighteen forties of the parganas of Mechpara and Habraghat were understood as providing the line between the district of Goalpara and the territories of the Garo Hills.

“Kelso had run close to the foot of the main block of hills, following the inundations of the valleys running into them,” thus in effect marking off all grounds except the “main block of hills” as belonging to the settled estates. Beckett did not follow Kelso’s line. He pointed out that the zamindars of Karaibari, Kalumalupara, Mechpara and Aurangabad – the adjacent settled estates in Goalpara – “claim such a large extent of the hills themselves, that the

\textsuperscript{204} Reports of mutual ill feelings between Garos and the Chaudhuris of Karaibari and Mechpara animated the Company correspondences since 1775, when the said Chaudhuris invaded the adjacent hills and “by a protracted stay of some 2 years in the area succeeded in bringing the tribes of a vast tract of country under their control.” Allegedly, the Chaudhuris continued to collect miscellaneous cesses or sayer (which had been declared illegal in 1788) from the Garos, subjected them to various unauthorized market and ghat duties and imposed “forced loans” on them to be repaid in cotton. The Garos retaliated by organizing counter-invasions (the most dramatic one, in 1816, ended up in burning down the palatial residence of Karaibari zamindar). David Scott, then the Commissioner of Rungpore, was specially entrusted to enforce an administrative division of the Garos into three separate groups, namely, the Zemindari Garos (who lived as ryots within the estates but were treated under Regulation X of 1822 rather than under Regulation XLI of 1793), the Tributary Garos (who lived on “the outer ranges of the hills” and were assessed to yearly tribute) and the Independent Garos (living further inland and were subjected to occasional levies as and when they visited the markets in the plains). For the first two groups, Scott devised elaborate schemes of “internal government”, which we shall discuss shortly. \textit{Ibid}, 245-50. See also B. W. Dellarhon, Deputy Commissioner of Gowalparah to H. Hopkinson, Agent to the Governor General on the North-Eastern Frontier, dated 3 October 1861, in “Correspondence regarding the political relations with native states”, Commissioner’s Office, 1861, File No. 424 [ASA]. For a list of the “independent” Garo Villages between 1868 and 1873, see Parimal Chandra Kar, \textit{British Annexation of Garo Hills} (Calcutta: Nababharat, 1970), 135-152.

boundary laid down does not in any way pretend to show the respective rights of any party.”

Preferring a straighter geometrical line, cutting off many of Kelso’s “inundations”, Beckett “did not pretend to shut off the Garos from the Hindus.”206 The result was not exactly what the Government had intended. On the one hand, a number of important Garo settlements lay outside the territory of “Garo Hills” scattered in the settled parganas of Habraghat; on the other hand, the Goalpara zamindars challenged the Government in court citing Kelso’s established surveys. While “Beckett’s line was finally legalised by Regulation I of 1878”, which formally constituted the Garo Hills as a separate district charge, and while Macdonald’s survey of the Garo Hills-Goalpara boundary (1873-5) followed it truthfully, the government found itself in a discomforting legal complex in enforcing Beckett’s line.207

The question of boundaries, as the continued Garo protests till the end of the nineteen thirties indicated, was not a matter of “mere lines”. Whether a particular village or a specific forest-tract came under the jurisdiction of the permanently-settled estates of Goalpara or whether they belonged to the Garo Hills district ruled by Act XXII of 1869 determined the communities’ degree and freedom of access, apart from the thorny question of paying land-revenue.208 In the mid-thirties, therefore, the authorities determined to fix the true boundary by comparing Kelso’s traverse and Macdonald’s survey.

[T]wo points were established common to the two surveys based on natural features, Y and T of Macdonald’s with Y’ and T respectively of Kelso’s which were accepted as the basis of combining the two surveys, and the traverses were reworked in terms of the present origin. Ten salient points were then selected along Kelso’s southern boundary pf pargana

206 Bampfylde Fuller’s Minute, dated 26 February 1905, in “Memorial from Sonaram R. Sangma and 33 Others, praying that Bibhagnama and Nazarana lands within the Goalpara and Garo Hills districts may be set free from the dependence of the Bijni zamindar”, Assam Secretariat, General Department (Revenue-A), June 1905, Nos. 144-75 [ASA]

207 Fearing a legal defeat in the hands of the zamindars, the Government hurried to settle the issue through an extra-judicial compromise, by offering the zamindars “compensation in money and in other ways.” Complicated arrangements, including Government’s undertaking to pay substantial portion of the rent of the nazarana lands to the zamindar, were made with the estates. Usually, in ‘Mahal A’ of an estate, the British officer collected all the dues on behalf of the zamindars and paid 75% of the collection to the estate, retaining the remainder as collection charges, while in ‘Mahal B’, the zamindars were allowed to collect all rents and profits at the rates fixed by the Government.

208 Bampfylde Fuller’s Minute, dated 26 February 1905, in “Memorial from Sonaram R. Sangma and 33 Others, praying that Bibhagnama and Nazarana lands within the Goalpara and Garo Hills districts may be set free from the dependence of the Bijni zamindar”, Assam Secretariat, General Department (Revenue-A), June 1905, Nos. 144-75 [ASA]. See also Annual Report of the Assam Survey Department for the year ending the 30th September 1940 (Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1941), 3-4. Ribbentrop lamented the loss of “a very large tract of valuable sal forest” to Government in the Garo Hills-Goalpara boundary debacle. Berthold Ribbentrop, Forestry in British India (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1900), 104-5
Mechpara and the values taken from the map of 1849-50, – as there is no traverse data available, and the co-ordinates of these obtained in reference to his main circuit (now in terms of present values). With the aid of these 10 points offset field books were prepared for all the minor bends and deflections of the boundary line and the co-ordinate values of all these points together with their bearings and distances from one another were calculated.

Rather than plotting the line on the topographical maps and identifying it on the ground from “such natural features as the stream junctions”, it was thought more scientific “to lay the boundary from the computed values based on the stations of Triangulation.” This caused severe “mislocation[s] of boundary marks”, and a petulant bureaucrat sent a note insisting that

the whole operation of relaying Kelso’s southern boundary of Mechpara pargana with meticulous accuracy from mathematical calculations by theodolite savours of the supererogatory and was only resorted to as a matter of professional caution in case the work should ever be challenged. The purpose would have been equally well served had the line been laid by planetable survey at probably ¼ the cost and time.

Even during the course of the survey, “discrepancies” were already recognized as Kelso’s station of origin for the pargana, now cryptically termed Y₃, was found to have been mis-plotted in the new chart. But it was too late to alter. The force of abstraction was in full swing.²⁰⁹

Sextants’ sway over lives was felt even more acutely in the Duars. Between the Tista and the Dhansiri, along the base of the lower range of the sub-Himalayan hills, there was a narrow tract of fertile land, sloping downwards to the plains, and varying in breadth between ten and twenty miles, “the possession of which has always, to the inhabitants of the barren hills above, been a matter of importance. Cotton, rice, and other staples grow there…”²¹⁰

Entering into this tract from the Hills are eighteen passes; each Pass is under the authority of a Jungpen (Governor of a Fort), or as we call them Soubahs, and under the administration of each Jungpen is a certain Division of Territory which bears the name of the Pass to which it

²⁰⁹ Bampfylde Fuller’s Minute, dated 26 February 1905, in “Memorial from Sonaram R. Sangma and 33 Others, praying that Bibhagnama and Nazarana lands within the Goalpara and Garo Hills districts may be set free from the dependence of the Bijni zamindar”, Assam Secretariat, General Department (Revenue-A), June 1905, Nos. 144-75 [ASA]
²¹⁰ Mackenzie, History of Relations of Government with Hill Tribes, 9
is attached, and thus the whole locality came to be called as the Athara Dooar, or Eighteen Passes or Dooars.\textsuperscript{211}

Later, in the British records, seven were called the Bengal Duars (Dalimkot, Zamarkot, Chimarchi, Lukhi, Baxa, Balka, Bara), five Goalpara or the Eastern Duars (Guma, Ripu, Chirang, Sidli, Bagh), five Kamrup Duars (Gharkola, Banska, Chappagori, Chappakhamar, Bijni) and two Darrang Duars (Buri Guma, Kalling).\textsuperscript{212} However, such tidy classifications make us forget at least two important issues: that the territories lived were much less defined than the territories classified; and (as a British officer recognized in 1841) that there were other passes connecting the hills and the plains (most notably the Koriapara Duar, Na'duar, and Char Duar, held by, as they came to be called, "the extra-Bhutan Bhutias")\textsuperscript{213} while new paths were frequently opened and used by the people to escape the monitoring of the authorities.\textsuperscript{214} The operative territoriality was itinerant: goods were exchanged, cultivators traversed, and loyalties stretched across the divide which seemed natural to the British.\textsuperscript{215}

The domain we understand as political was also necessarily connected to such itinerant territoriality. The British used the term rotational jurisdiction to understand the prevailing forms of sovereignty: in the so-called Darrang Duars, along with Koriapara, "the Booteas ... were allowed to keep possession and act as sovereigns only during eight months of the year (the season of cropping)"\textsuperscript{216} while the Tungkhungias ruled for the remaining four months.\textsuperscript{217}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[211] Ashley Eden, "Report on the State of Bootan, and on the Progress of the Mission of 1863-64", in \textit{Political Missions to Bootan, comprising the Reports of The Hon'ble Ashley Eden,— 1864; Capt. R. B. Pemberton, 1837, 1838, with Dr. W. Griffiths's Journal; and the Account by Baboo Kishen Kant Bose (Calcutta: Printed at the Bengal Secretariat Press, 1865)}, 7-8
\item[212] This makes the number nineteen instead of eighteen. The standard list often omits Sidli. Aitchison (ed.), \textit{Collection of Treaties}, Volume II, 287.
\item[213] In other words, these communities were not subjected to the Deb Raja’s authority. See Mackenzie, \textit{History of Relations of Government with Hill Tribes}, Ch. III.
\item[214] Assistant Agent to the Governor General, North-Eastern Frontier, to the Agent to the Governor General, North-Eastern Frontier, dated 15 February 1841, in "Proposal to abolish blackmail paid to Booteah Chiefs", Foreign Department (Political), 12 April 1841, Nos. 75-76 [NAI]
\item[215] A valuable description can be found in J. Tweedie, Deputy Commissioner, Western Dooars of Bootan, "Note on the Land Tenures of the Western Dooars of Bootan") in "Revenue Administration of Western Dooars", File No. 385 BG, Sl. No. 1-39 (1867-69) [ASA]
\item[216] If we are to go by the linkages of power as understood by the British in the late eighteenth century, these "Booteas" were the subjects of the Deb Raja (\textit{Dah Terriah}) in Punakha, who was a vassal to Teshoo Lama (or Panchen Lama) at Lhasa who again was a functionary of the court of the Dalai Lama. With the government of the Deb Raja, the British had been involved in a series of disputes and negotiations since 1772. In 1772, the Deb Raja’s army “invaded and took possession of a great portion of [Koch] Bihar, ... with the intention of placing on the throne a Raja of their own.” Captain Jones pursued the “aggressors” beyond the British frontier. In 1773 Teshoo Lama of Lhasa sent “a Hindoostanee pilgrim named Porungheer Gossein” and “a Thibetan named Paima” as the emissaries to Calcutta to negotiate for peace. The full English translation of the original Persian letter of the Panchen Lama is available in John Stewart, "An
\end{footnotes}
Between the Jongpens and the Chatgaree Rajas, the respective representatives of the Deb Raja and of the Swargadeo, the duties of revenue collection were distributed. Reportedly they received, along with the village heads, "a very liberal Dustooree or Commission" on the collection and exercised "civil and criminal authority" in the area. An annual tribute of gold dust, ponies, musk, daggers, blankets and yaks' tails used to be paid to the Tungkhungias by the Deb Raja's officials. Over the revenue of the Kamrup Duars, however, the Tungkhungias had no claim.\textsuperscript{218} The cultivators, "all of the Cacharree tribe", were granted "a most liberal remission" on occasions of bad harvest.\textsuperscript{219} Nothing but an abstract line could determine the boundaries of the two authorities, tied up, as they were, complementarily with myriad local customs. And it was this line that the British now proceeded to enforce on ground.

For some years in the eighteen thirties the British tried to perform as the Tungkhungias were expected to do in the Duars. Every 15\textsuperscript{th} June they religiously received the charges of the Duars from the Jungpens.\textsuperscript{220} The services of the Chatgaree Raja for collecting the tribute due from the Jungpens were similarly continued with, although the tribute was now immediately converted into cash through an auction and a strict 16\frac{2}{4} per cent of the money was reserved for the Raja. Despite such self-gratifying good-boy accounts, to no student of imperial history will the fact appear extraordinary that by 1841, the British completed their

\begin{flushleft}
Account of the Kingdom of Thibet", \textit{Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London}, Vol. 67 (1777), 489-92. In April 1774, a peace treaty was signed. Among other provisions, the Raja was required to respect the British territory, refuse shelter to the Sanyasi rebels, "deliver up Ryots running away from the Company's Territories", use the British courts to prosecute the British subjects, to allow the Company to cut timber in the forests under the Hills. The full text of the 1772 treaty concluded with the Deb Raja is appended to R. Boileau Pemberton, "Report on Bootan", dated Calcutta, November 30, 1838, in \textit{Political Missions to Bootan}, 100-1. George Bogle's Lhasa Mission followed immediately. For a brief, charged account of the Deb Raja's claims on Habraghat pargana and the Baikunthapur mehals, see Eden, \textit{Report on the State of Bootan}, 4-5. As the accounts generated by the Missions of George Bogle and later of Kishen Kant Bose substantially modified the earlier European understanding — in which "Bootan" had not been sharply isolated from "Thibet" [ Cf. John Stewart, "An Account of the Kingdom of Thibet", \textit{Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London}, Vol. 67 (1777), 469-70] and therefore the Deb Raja had been thought of as a decisive figure for accessing Tibet — Calcutta's attitude hardened against the Raja and his subjects.
\end{flushleft}
annexation of the Duars, calculated as a total of 1600 square miles. The slow and gradual occupation of the Duars had a tremendous implication for the surviving subjects of the Deb Raja: it turned the Raja’s territories into a Hill State, disrupting and denying the mobile and flexible order of circulation between the administrative cores of state space in the hills and the surplus-producing quarters scattered in the valleys beneath. The expansion of the British Indian state space was gradual and multi-rational, but in the northeastern frontier its success mostly depended on its relative ability to intercept, disrupt and restructure the spatial sequence of circulation. This had been clearly recognized by the Directors of the East India Company in 1835, who, while routinely complaining about “Bhootan’s aggression” on the northeastern frontier, acknowledged with a startling coldness that that country appears to be dependent for its necessary supply of grain upon the districts which it possesses in Assam. This circumstance[,] says Mr. Robertson[,] places it in our power to reduce Bootan to our terms by merely shutting up the Doars or passes during the cold season and preventing its subjects from receiving any supplies therefrom. By such means you could (we have no doubt) enforce reparation when required without resorting to any other measures of hostility.

In the same year Matthie termed “[t]he arrangement of allowing these mountainous tribes to hold land on the plains under our jurisdiction” as “extremely objectionable.” The Duars, said he, afforded “a safe harbor for every vagabond in the province.” Moreover, since taxation was insubstantial in “the Bootan possessions”, the northern part of the newly constituted British Division of Darrang also had to be taxed correspondingly lightly, or else the cultivators would cross over to the foreign domain. The new lines of political control did not change the world of the cultivators at once. The British officers themselves were divided on the issue of determining where exactly the plains began, even if they agreed in principle that the jurisdictions of “the mountaineers” did not extend to the plains. Jenkins, the longest serving Agent to the Governor General in the North-Eastern Frontier, clearly formulated this principle in 1833 when he wrote that

221 Mackenzie, History of Relations of Government with Hill Tribes, 10-12. See also Surgeon Rennie, Bhotan and the Story of the Doorar War including Sketches of a Three Months Residence in the Himalayas, and Narrative of a Visit to Bhotan in May 1865 (London: John Murray, 1866)
222 Jenkins closed the duars in 1851 in order “to interdict all traffic between the people of Bootan and our own territory.” Political Despatch from the Court of Directors, 13 August 1851, No. 29 [NAI]
223 See also Chapter Five.
224 India Political Despatch from the Court of Directors, 12 April 1835, No. 44 [NAI]
225 Matthie, Report on Darrang, 14
I should consider the right to all the plains as being undoubtedly vested in us and that any portions of lands held below the hills by the mountaineers had been usurped from Assam during the troubles of its Government as the hillmen have held possession conjointly with us for some years.\textsuperscript{226}

However, only three years later, Jenkins contradicted Archibald Bogle, the Principal Assistant in charge of Kamrup, in asserting that Dumooreah belonged to “the Khyram Rajahs” of the hills below.

Captain Bogle’s argument is founded principally upon the unbroken succession of the family of the Rajahs of Dumooreah. I am of opinion however that this does not at all prove that the Khyram Rajahs had not alienated Dumooreah either for rent or black mail. The petty Rajahs of the Doars finding themselves placed between two powers each greater than themselves no doubt, adopted the policy of propitiating both and probably refused payment to each as the arms of either happened to predominate.

Jenkins based his understanding on a reading of Welsh’s letter dated 21 February 1793 to the Governor General. Welsh had reported how the Dumooreah Raja had “excuse[d] himself” from attending the court of Hsöhitpongpa Gaurinath “on the grounds that he was tributary not only to the Assam Government but also to the Khyram and Jynteah Rajahs.” Indeed, “what were the respective rights of the Hill Rajahs and the Desh Rajahs”, said Jenkins, “might be now very difficult to determinate and inexpedient to agitate.” But he was “confident that the Khyram Rajahs are not unacceptable to the great body of the people” in the plains and that they enjoyed a “more intimate connexion with the districts on the plains” than what Bogle was prepared to admit.\textsuperscript{227} The valley possessions of the “mountainous tribes” could not be very easily separated. It is worth mentioning here that while in 1835 Matthie had acutely recognized the difficulties of distinguishing the Chatgaree Duar from “the Bootan possessions”,\textsuperscript{228} in 1854 Moffatt Mills thought that the Duar was an integral part of the plains of Desh Darrang, the first site of maz-a-wise land settlement in the whole province (1833).\textsuperscript{229}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{227} F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General in the North-Eastern Frontier, to J. G. Lister, Political Agent, Cherrapoonjee, dated Gwahatty, 15 June 1836, in Foreign Department (F. C.), 18 July 1836, No. 88 [NAI].
\bibitem{228} Matthie, \textit{Report on Darrang}, 14. See also Extract of a letter from Mr. Rae, dated Gohati, 6\textsuperscript{th} January, 1830, No. VI, in Periodical Accounts of the Serampore Mission, New Series, Volume 1: From January 1827 to December 1833 inclusive (Edinburgh: A. Balfour & Co., 1834), 408 for a suggestive reference to the differences between the inhabitants of “of a province called Chatgarree” and “the Assamese”.
\bibitem{229} Moffatt Mills, \textit{Report}, 401.
\end{thebibliography}
Although usually expressed in a language of natural landscapes, fixing the exact jurisdictional boundaries on ground continued to generate considerable perplexity amongst the officials. "A boundary at the very foot of the hills is among the worst which can be selected", explained an official in the eighteen seventies, "because the marks cannot be placed in conspicuous positions, and because the jungle is there densest. ... [N]o conspicuous spots presented themselves for the erection of pillars." Theoretically, in the northern Duars, "[t]he principle followed has been to trace the boundary along the base of the higher hills leaving the talus or inclined plain in our possession and the actual hills in that of the Bhootoeas." But even there, at several places the boundary ran across "low hilly spurs of a 100 feet elevation or so, which could not be excluded without great inconvenience, for they are occupied by the inhabitants of the plains." At some other places – as in Dalimkote, Buxa, and Dewangiri – it was considered important to include even the "actual" hills "by a loop" for controlling the strategic entries. It was not easy to decide what belonged to whom. "Nobody appears to know anything here", bewailed the Assistant Commissioner at Mangaldai, who decided to keep his settled subjects away from the Bhutias: "no Assamese should be permitted to work any forests beyond the first rising ground, and perhaps it would be advisable to draw the line even lower." Others followed more aggressive lines. Whether "the crest of the outer range" should be taken as the boundary or "the foot of the hills" triggered conflicting judgments. However, the people could not care less for such legal fine points. The wood-cutters, cattle-grazers and boat-builders from the valley frequently moved about in the forest up the hills, alternatively making use of their own unauthorized understandings with and the government's force against the "hillmen." In the north, it was not before 1864 that the Governor-General in Council reluctantly [sic!] resolved to occupy permanently and annex to British territory the Bengal Dooars of Bhootan, and so much of the hill territory, including the forts of Dalimkote,

230 Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, No. 142, Shillong, 20 May 1874, in "Inner Line" of the Sibsagar District, Foreign Department (Revenue A), September 1874, Nos. 14 – 21 [NAI]
231 Letter from Colonel Haughton, undated, in "Demarcation of British Frontier between Assam and Bhootan", Foreign Department (Political-A), June 1872, Nos. 633-664 [NAI]
232 A. Mackenzie, Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, No. 1418, Dated 6 April 1872, in ibid.
233 Letter from Lieutenant Boyd, the Assistant Commissioner at Mangledey, (c. 1870), in ibid.
234 Cf. A. Mackenzie, Junior Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, No. 1418, Dated 6 April 1872, in ibid.
235 See the correspondences in Foreign Department (F. C.), 26 July 1841, Nos. 81-82A. [NAI]
Poonakha, and Dewangiri, as may be necessary to command the passes and to prevent hostile or predatory incursions of Bhootanese into the Darjeeling district or into the plains below.236

But the British did not delay in claiming and enforcing their singular authority over the nine southern Duars of Kamrup (Mourapur, Bholagaon, Borduar, Pantan, Chhuylgaon, Bogoi, Boko, Bongaon and Luki), which opened into the so-called Khasi Hills. Entrusted to prepare a directory in 1836, Bogle repeatedly insisted on the fact that in these strips of land, the political and revenue rights had been shuttling for the last fifty years between various “Casheeahs”, “Assamese”, “Bengalees”, “half Bengalleel half Assamese”, and “Cossyahs [who] became Hindoos.” The plain moral lesson of Bogle’s account was that the southern Duars — yielding almost 22000 Furruckabad Rupees per annum — could hardly be called “Casheeah territories” and therefore the British should not feel in any way bound to entertain any local claim over them.237 Jenkins’ specific objections to Bogle’s interpretation have already been mentioned, but both of them agreed in principle that the territorial realignments ought to move along the clear lines of ethnic demarcations. The process of creating a series of (allegedly) ethnically compacted “hill districts” in Assam (Garo Hills District, Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, Naga Hills District and Lushai Hills District), as distinct from the valley or “Assam proper”, could proceed only through calculated disruption of and indifference to the surviving traces of the circulatory network.

“[A]t the time of our accession to the Government of the country”, said David Scott, “the chiefs of the [southern] Dowars exercised criminal jurisdiction and made war upon each other with perfect impunity.”

As it was impossible to tolerate such procedures under our Government, and as it clearly appeared that the chiefs of the Dowars possessed no legitimate independent authority in the plains, they were subjected like other Assamese subjects to the ordinary laws; but in order to conciliate them as far as practicable and to ensure to them the observance of the peculiar customs of the tract in question, a separate court was established composed of the chiefs themselves and a few of their principal local functionaries, before which all civil and criminal cases have hitherto been tried.

236 The Order of the Governor-General in Council, quoted in the Note by C. U. Aitchinson, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department in “Demarcation of British Frontier between Assam and Bhootan”, Foreign Department, Political-A, June 1872, Nos. 633-664 [NAI]

237 “List of the Nine Dooars or Pass Tracts on the Southern Frontier of Zillah Kamroop” [Prepared by A. Bogle c. 1836] Foreign Department (F. C. Branch), 18 July 1836, No. 88 [NAI]
Under the Tungkhungias, the chiefs of the southern Duars did not pay any regular annual revenue, although large sums used to be exacted on the accession of every new chief, and they were required to furnish *paiks* for the royally ordained services. In introducing regularized money payment between 1824 and 1827, Scott had obviously hoped for a smooth transition to a regularized form of temporary settlement with the chiefs. But in spite of concessions, abatements and shuffling of chiefs, the British did not manage to extract as much *jumru* as they had fixed. Blaming the chiefs for "their total incapacity for business and the roguery of their servants", Scott decided to "attach" a number of their estates. 238

The widespread discontent which his decision provoked in the concerned settlements, exposing the helplessness of the British army in face of the guerilla ambuscades, 239 induced Scott to pursue two modes of control at the same time: "that of reducing to practical subjection the tribes bordering on the Dowars" and that of "establishing amongst them the same sort of internal Government which has been maintained among the Garrows of the North Eastern parts of Rungpore since the year 1817" 240 The idea of "internal government" will be taken up in the next section, here we confine ourselves to an unfashionable point—that of annexations. In 1829, after the revolt was repressed, four Syiemdoms were forcibly attached to the British possessions: Bairang (also known as Wahlong, and including Sohkhyllum and Maothang), Mao-smai (including Nong-thymma), Mao-mluh, and Soh-bar (also called Supar-punji). Moreover, the Syiem of Cherra was coerced to cede lands for the Cherrapunji Station (including Maopunkyr-tiang and Saitsoohpen) for establishment of a European sanitarium in exchange for land at Bholaganj in Sylhet. In the dry terms of land revenue and manpower these were certainly not considerable gains. The total number of people inhabiting these land strips was counted as 2556 and the land revenue was calculated

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238 D. Scott, Agent to the Governor General in the North Eastern Frontier to G. Swinton, Secretary to the Government, Fort William, dated 12 January 1830, in Foreign Department (F. C.), 11 February 1832, Nos. 26-32 [NAI]
239 U Tirot Singh, the Syiem or chief of Nongkhlao—who had been pursued by David Scott to place himself under "the British protection" by a treaty in 1826 and to assist in the opening up of a road across the "Khasi Hills" joining Assam with Sylhet—rose up against the British in 1829. On April 4, a band of about 500 Khasis killed sixty government sepoys at Nongkhlao, burnt down the recently built bungalow, and released the convicts employed on the road. Two British lieutenants, Bedingfield and Burlton, were also killed. The revolt of the Nongkhlao Syiem was soon joined by other villages and communities in the hills concerned. K. N. Dutt, *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam* (Guwahati: Lawyer's Book Stall, 1969), 6
240 D. Scott, Agent to the Governor General in the North Eastern Frontier to G. Swinton, Secretary to the Government, Fort William, dated 12 January 1830, in Foreign Department (F. C.), 11 February 1832, Nos. 26-32 [NAI]

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as 1055 rupees. Nor were the square mile figures overwhelmingly attractive. But their geopolitical benefits undoubtedly outweighed their economic disadvantages. Next year, when the three populous settlements of Lait-lyngkot, Lait-kroh, and Mao-beh-lar-kar were wrested from the Syiem of Mylliem for the establishment of another sanitarium, the entire plateau to the south and east of the Bograpani River was opened to the movements of British troops and goods.\(^\text{241}\)

Compared to his neighboring Syiems, the Raja of Jaintia held sway over a more diverse population and a more varied topography. In the early nineteenth century his mountainous possessions lay scattered between the Khasi Hills and North Cachar, stretching from the southern ends of Kamrup and Nagaon districts to the Surma Valley. He also controlled some fertile lowland tracts lying south of the hills in a corner of the British Indian district of Sylhet. The most revenue-yielding of all the little kingdoms in the region (estimated variously between 100000 and 143233 rupees in the early eighteen thirties), Jaintia's strikingly high population density figures (more than 80.3 per square mile) and stunningly low military force ("about 200 infantry") did not fail to catch the attention of the British authorities.\(^\text{242}\) In 1835 it was suddenly discovered "that the [Jaintia] Chief, Rajendra Singh, had in 1832, while heir-apparent, connived at, if he had not actually ordered, the kidnapping of four British subjects for the purpose of being sacrificed to an idol."\(^\text{243}\) This was deemed an adequate reason to "confiscate" his possessions in the plains, which meant that the source of the greater part of Jaintia's revenue was to be surrendered to the British. The proposed reduction of Jaintia into a Hill State forced Rajendra Singh to resign his hill territories as well, in lieu of a monthly pension of five hundred rupees.\(^\text{244}\) The lowland tracts were immediately attached to the district of Cachar and Henry Thuiller was given the charge of carrying out a survey.

\(^{241}\) This paragraph is constructed from the detailed table provided in 'Acquisition of Territory by the British Government in the Khasi Hills' [Prepared by J. D. Anderson, Assistant Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Shillong, 3 August 1882] in "Acquisition of Territory by the British in India", Foreign Department, A - General - I, May 1883, No. 140. [NAI]

\(^{242}\) Extract Fort William Political Consultations of 7 January 1833, From T. C. Robertson, Agent to the Governor General on the North Eastern Frontier to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary to the Government of India, Dated 14 December 1832. F/4/1505, File No. 59025, [OIOC]

\(^{243}\) "Acquisition of Territory by the British in India", Foreign Department, A - General - I, May 1883, No. 140 [NAI]

\(^{244}\) Rajendra Singh came to Calcutta to negotiate his claims, but was not granted an audience by the Governor General. See, Political Letter to Court of Directors, Foreign Department, Political Branch, 20 October 1837, No. 53 [NAI]
This meant that Panch Punji (comprising the five self-regulating settlements of Long-kading, Jimmang, Um-niuh, Tyngriang, and U Tymer) and Nong-jri – previously Jaintia's possessions in the Khasi Hills – were now integrated into the Khasi Hills district. In less than thirty years time, the Syiem of Mylliem and Khyrim was required to cede Shillong – then only ten square miles – for establishing a third sanitarium in the area. It is important to note here that the slow, almost village-by-village expansion of the British Indian state space in this area was not necessarily attended with bloodshed and visible force. As in the Bhutan border, here also the disrupted circulatory sequence made it impractical to hold on to earlier notions of allegiance. Hence, the villagers of Nong-bah filed a petition in 1870 to the Deputy Commissioner pleading to be separated from “the Shella federation”, a nominally independent conglomeration of the hill chiefs recognized by the Government, and treated as immediate subjects of the British Government. Similarly, the settlements of Mynteng, Mong-lyngkim, Nong-riat, Nong-kroh, Ram-dait, Tyng-rong, Tyrna, and Synei-Nongshluit (including Synai-Mao-shunrut) are said to have been brought under the direct control of the British Government at the request of their inhabitants. In 1878, the residents of the large settlement of Marbisu (including Maolum, Longwai and Maopun) applied to the Deputy Commissioner to be separated from the Syiemdom of Mylliem and incorporated into British India.

Elements of very similar histories are more easily available for the Naga Hills District in the east and the Lushai Hills District in the south. Annexation was never a one-time affair in the north-eastern frontier of the British Indian empire. While the Treaty of Yandabo was formally upheld as the legal basis of the territorial claims of the British Indian government in the undefined frontier, that piece of paper had hardly given the officials or the companies the required access to the territories separating the Brahmaputra basin from the recognized boundaries of other traditional sovereignty centers such as Lhasa, Yünanfu or Ava.

245 As late as 1885, the “Khasi” syiems held mahals “in the submontain portions” of certain “Jaintia” parganas. Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Revenue Department (B), March 1885, File No. 308, Sl. No. 195 [ASA]
246 “Acquisition of Territory by the British Government in the Khasi Hills” [Prepared by J. D. Anderson, Assistant Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Shillong, 3 August 1882] in ‘Acquisition of Territory by the British in India’, Foreign Department, A – General – 1, No. 140. [NAI]. Most transliterations in the last three paragraphs are taken from this document.
247 See Mackenzie, History of Relations of Government with Hill Tribes, ch. 12 and Reid, History of the Frontier Areas, Ch. 1.
248 For a brief reference to the Lhasa authorities’ intervention in favor of Miju Mishmis against Digaru Mishmis in 1836, see Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India, Vol. 4. Compiled in the Intelligence
However, annexations were rarely called as such. The usual administrative practice, which was formalized in the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation of 1880, was to specify the British boundary only on the side abutting on the settled part of the adjoining districts of Assam proper, and the tract beyond could be declared a “frontier tract” without any specific demarcation of its furthest boundary. This was particularly the case in the northern part of the frontier while in the southern part vast areas were technically included in the “hill districts” lying between the settled possessions in Bengal and those in Assam proper without making the intervening landscape completely visible to the cartographic eye. As and when the government “thought it necessary” (frequently for pursuits of tea, timber, rubber, coal and oil), it extended survey and settlement operations, built roads and military posts, and started to intervene in the matters which till then had been left to the communities. In the language of the imperial archive, however, these were not acts of annexations but instances of “jurisdictional extensions.” We shall discuss the peculiarities of this system in the next chapter. At the moment let us just point out that the incompletely and contradictorily mapped geobody of Assam, unlike most other regions in the empire, did not stand as a well-defined and stock-still entity; rather, it was characterized by a constant revisability and gradual expandability. Extensive additions to the administrative space of Assam continued to be made as late as 1936. Settlements — indeed, entire districts — were added to and taken away from this space.


Cf. Annual Report on Frontier Tribes of Assam for the year 1935-36 (Shillong: Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1936), 4

In 1832, after Govindachandra’s death, a British firm in Sylhet (the Libsay Brothers) was offered the ijārā of Cachar in exchange for an annual 10000 rupees revenue. After they declined, the kingdom was annexed to the empire [Upendrachandra Guha, kächhāre itibritta (c. 1910; Guwahati: Publication Board, Assam, 1971), 168-9]. Sylhet, which was made into a district under the Dhaka Division in Bengal in 1782, was formally attached to the Chief Commissionership of Assam in 1874 by Home Department Notifications nos. 2343 (12.09.1874) and 2344 (12.09.1874). Proposal to transfer the District (not the Division) of Chittagong to Assam was seriously considered in 1892 and 1896 [Cf. “Reconstruction of the Province of Bengal and constitution of a new Province to be called the North Eastern Provinces”, Home Department (Public-A), February 1905, Proceeding No. 164, Para. 12; From the Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department
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The difficult task of shuffling a spatial sequence could be accomplished only over a long stretch of time and, even then, the traces of the preceding order could never be completely erased. In the “perpetually settled” district of Goalpara, for instance, the British rent roll recognized some twelve hereditary estates, varying in size between 984 and 20 square miles. Most of these estate-holders are usually depicted as the peshekshi zamindars who exchanged their nominal subservience to the Mughal authority for British protection since the transfer of the diwani rights in 1765. They were confirmed in their estates during the course of the permanent settlement, and were even granted ample compensation after the separation of their Garo subjects. However, the overemphasis on the Mughal antecedents of the Goalpara powerholders misses the simple fact that many of the peshekshi zamindars were also vassals of the Deb Raja, and that, as a matter of fact, for the most part of the nineteenth century the Rajas of Bijni and Sidli continued to be so.

The Raja of Bijni held the largest estate in British Goalpara. Taken together, the two parganas of Habraghat and Kuntaghat comprised an area of 984 square miles, of which less than one-fifth was under plow in the middle of the nineteenth century. Almost fifty thousand people were under the direct authority of the Raja, who in each year paid about 1762 Company Rupees to the British in cash and about 1300 Narayani Rupees to the Deb Raja “in dried fish &c.” The Raja of Sidli, who held no territory within the British Indian jurisdiction until 1867, was required to send tribute worth 700 Narayani Rupees to the Deb Raja. “On the death of the Rajah of either of these States his successor is confirmed in the Raj by the Bootan authorities, by whom a sunnud is also granted.” Despite a stray proposal in the early eighteen forties from the Rajas of Bijni and Sidli “to exchange the authority of the Bhootes for that of [the British] Government”, the British authorities did not find it opportune to encourage the “exchange” at the cost of aggravating their political relations with the Deb

(Calcutta, 6 April 1904) Confidential]. Between 1892 and 1898, the Lushai Hills District was gradually formed and added to the Chief Commissionership. Under the well-known 1905 scheme of territorial redistribution, Divisions of Chittagong, Dhaka and Rajshahi and the districts of Hill Tripura and Malda were added to the Chief Commissionership of Assam to constitute a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. In 1912 when the scheme was annulled, Assam was restored to Chief Commissionership (with a Legislative Council) and its secretariat shifted to Shillong. See Guha, Planter-Raj to Swaraj, 166-7 for an interesting description of the question of “transfer” of Sylhet to Bengal in Legislative Council in the nineteen twenties.

253 William Agnew, Collector of Goalpara, “Memorandum on Our Relations with Cooch Behar, Bootan and the Garrow Tribes”, in Moffatt Mills, Report, 191
Raja.\textsuperscript{254} Since then, the consistent claim of the Bijni Raj that its possessions in the British Indian territory constituted a “tributary state”, and not a zamindari (hence, not liable to be “sold or attached by [the British] Government”), continued to derive its strength from this fact of dual commitment. The British had no claims over the Bijni Raj’s territories “across the Aye Nuddee”, which were technically understood as falling within the Bhutia overlordship.\textsuperscript{255} The consequent difficulties were succinctly expressed by the Collector of Goalpara, William Agnew, in 1853:

The owner of these Pergunnahs [,] Omertonanin, Rajah of Bijni, claims to being considered as a tributary of the Government, and this right has in a measure been conceded to him. In consequence, he has never furnished the village accounts, which, by Regulation IX, of 1833 Zemindars are bound to deposit in the Collector’s office. I have therefore no means of ascertaining the increase of the profits of Habraghat and Kootaghat since the Perpetual Settlement...\textsuperscript{256}

For more than hundred years, the British Government’s revenue demands from the Bijni Raj continued to be “received under the head of Lallbundee” (i.e., not credited as “Revenue” but as “tribute”). Despite strong resentment of the local officials, the Raj was also in effect exempted from sending the “hustabood” papers to the British authorities (“required to form the Quinquennial Register”), a practice which was considered obligatory for the ordinary zamindars.\textsuperscript{257}

If the largest zamindari of Goalpara came to be inadvertently treated as a tributary fief, the second largest estate called Karaibari – comprising some 800 square miles – paid absolutely nothing to the British authorities for most part of the nineteenth century but, indeed,

\textsuperscript{254} Political Letter from the Court of Directors, 21 April 1843, No. 9 [NAI]
\textsuperscript{255} See Sanghamitra Misra, “Spaces, Borders, Histories: Identity Construction in Colonial Goalpara”, unpublished Ph. D. dissertation: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (2004), ch. 2 for a perceptive discussion of this issue through an appraisal of the debate between the British officials in the eighteen sixties. Let us also mention here that the polity of Sidli (roughly an area of 170, 000 acres) became a part of the British empire only after the Bhutan war of 1864, following a nominal “enquiry” by Haughton. According to the new arrangements, the zamindar of Sidli was entitled to only 20\% of revenue from the British government, which was “entrusted” to run the zamindari. Padmalochan Das, “guwałpār īthāḥ”, ārasām sāhiyya sabhā patrikā, 2: 3 (1927), 129-30.
\textsuperscript{256} William Agnew, Collector of Goalpara, “Statement showing the Number of Zemindars and Amount of Revenue, according to Quinquennial Register”, 20 April 1853, Appendix B to “Gowalparra”, in Moffatt Mills, Report, 301-2.
\textsuperscript{257} C. S. Reynolds, Officiating Collector of Gowardanka, to F. Jenkins, Commissioner of Revenue and Agent to the Governor General, North-Eastern Frontier, dated Gowardanka, 20 June 1848, Appendix-C in Moffatt Mills, Report, 306-9. Bijni became a zamindari, so to speak, only after its territories “across the Aye Nuddee” – called the Bijni Duars in the British register – were declared annexed by a proclamation of the Government of India on 4 July 1866 in the wake of the Bhutan War.
received Rs. 602-10-8 per annum from them. What made this unparalleled incongruity possible in the ordered British empire was, to go by the English archive, a simple clerical oversight in 1813. In that year, specific money amounts were calculated to compensate for the abolition of the different zamindari cesses (sapers) on the hats in the Garo Hills, and the Karaibari zamindar – who owned more hats in the Garo area than anybody else – was sanctioned a huge sum of Rs 3627-7-5. Since it did not occur to the officials that the amount of revenue fixed on the Karaibari zamindar at the time of perpetual settlement was only Rs 3062-7-5, the Lahiris of Karaibari became legally entitled to the difference between the sums.258

The consistent praise that the “Rungamattee Boorooahs” or the Gauripur Raj earned in the imperial documents for aggressively extending the agrarian frontier is understandable.259 “[I]n 1793 [Goalpara] was quite a waste”, said Robertson in 1834, “and now has in it one estate (that of Rungamuttee) which then assessed at three thousand three hundred rupees is at present understood to yield about a lac of rupees annually to its proposition.”260 A comparison between the official rolls of 1838 and 1853 discloses that the “very scattered” and separately assessed holdings of Gurla, Makrampur, Jamira and Aurangabad were gradually amalgamated into one zamindari estate. The comparison further reveals that in spite of the vigorous start, the Rangamati Baruas – who acquired the once-rich Kalumalupara estate (assessed at the time of permanent settlement at Rs 2562-14-7) from “the widow of family of Lahoree” (the Karaibari zamindar) in the meantime – could not effect any increase in the revenue of that particular estate. In fact, Agnew classified Kalumalupara as the only holding “not having shared in the otherwise universal improvement in the Estates in the

258 "The Board of Revenue noticed the gross blunder that had been committed by the authorities in adjusting the compensation, and consulted the Legal Remembrancer as to whether the claim of the Zemindar in the event of Government discontinuing payment of the sum in excess of the remission of Revenue allowed, could be opposed with success. Mr. Trevor was of opinion that the adjustment made in 1813 was final, and thus the matter dropped.” Moffatt Mills, Report, 284

259 In 1838, Jenkins said, “The Boorooah is the only Zemindar in the division who manages his estate at all tolerably and he deserves the greater credit for his good management as he has no example in all the neighbouring zamindars, but the course he has adopted is entirely owing to his own good sense. His tenants are everywhere happy and there is not I believe against him any one of his ryotts. The estate of Ghoorlah is in very fine order indeed and the Boorooah is very proud of its being noticed.” Francis Jenkins, “The Valley of the Bumphooteer”, (c. 1838), in Private Papers of Francis Jenkins, Mss Eur F 257/5 [OIOC]

260 Quoted in India Political Despatch from the Court of Directors, Foreign Department, 3 December 1834, No. 14 [NAI]
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District.” As the extension of wet rice cultivation became the sole measure of this universal improvement, the inhabitants of Kalumalupara, shut out from the traditional cotton trade networks, were abruptly consigned to the destiny of becoming poor ryots.

Although “settled”, Goalpara was not included in the category of Assam proper. It “properly belongs to Bengal”, said Mills. The British traced their legal rights to the revenue of Goalpara to Shah Alam’s 1765 *fattam*, preceding the Treaty of Yandabo by more than sixty years. In spite of its administrative separation from the Bengal division of Rangpur in 1822, Goalpara’s *zamindari* settlement (and the consequent growth of the rural *jotedar* elite) was always viewed in the British Indian revenue discourse as a tenurial anomaly in the *nyotewari* province of Assam. Therefore, when Dewangiri and the five Eastern Duars were wrested from the Deb Raja and “incorporated” in Goalpara in 1867, a year after the Garo Hills District was formed out of the large and indistinct Division, efforts were made to introduce elements of temporary settlement in the district. “[A] 10-year settlement was offered, whereby, the Raja and the Rani of Bijni and Sidli respectively received a 20% and a 7% of the gross rental of these estates, which were now held *khas* by the government and settled annually with cultivators like the other Doors.” But for the most part, the district of Goalpara remained a *zamindari* landscape underwritten by a string of intermediate tenures, restricting the much-trumpeted “direct relation” between the State and the *ryot* which allegedly was the defining characteristic of Assam proper (that is, the five districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur). As we shall see in Chapter Three, even beneath the palimpsest of Assam proper, it was not difficult to find a conflictual economy of territorial flux. The itinerant territoriality of the world now abbreviated as Ahom could not be immediately converted into the definitive intransience of abstract state-space.


262 Moffatt Mills, *Report*, 1

263 See “Province of Assam: Statement shewing the acquisitions of territory by the British Government”, in “Acquisition of Territory by the British in India”, Foreign Department, A – General – I, May 1883, Nos. 126–149 [NAI]. Hence Goalpara was the only Division in Assam where imperial revenue from the sale of stamps and the Abkaree Regulations were in full force since its inception.

264 For a standard description of British Goalpara’s revenue arrangements, see Amalendu Guha, *jamidārkātin gowalprār jīlār ārtha-sāmājik avasthā: ēti aitihāsik drishṭipāt* (Guwahati: Natun Sahitya Parishad, 2000); Barman, *Zamindari System in Assam*.

265 Aitchison (ed.), *A Collection of Treaties*, vol. II, 142

266 W. E. Ward, *Notes on the Assam Land Revenue System* (Shillong: Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1897), 6
In spite of the massive attempts at territorial reorganization, the "districts" of British Assam remained undefined in varying degrees.

Re-territorialization and Tea-territorialization

For the early nineteenth-century British officials, *khel* became a password to the vanishing Ahom universe. Usually understood today as "localized kin-groups" who "were severally or jointly in control of adjacent fields, pastures and jungles"\(^{267}\), this term has come to suggest a degree of contiguity, compactness and consistency which is remarkably missing in the documents describing the early British encounter with the phenomenon. Historians declare that the entire *paik* population of the Ahom state space — "the whole of the free male population" who "owe[d] service to the State"\(^{268}\) — was divided into several *mel* or *dagis*, each of which consisted of some 1000 to 6000 *paiks* and was subdivided into a number of *khels*. A *khel* in turn comprised of numerous *gos*, or units of three or four *paiks*.\(^{269}\)

The early British sources however make it clear that this standardized definition of a *khel* is more a derivative of the British reconfiguration of the existing arrangements than an eternal verity of "the Ahom system". *Khels* were not necessarily organized in a compact territory before the British intervened. In fact, a *gos* was defined in an official letter as an "arbitrary class ... consisting of a certain number of ryots or Pykes who however distant from each other in their place of abode were jointly and severally responsible for the amount of the tax."\(^{270}\) One of the major tasks that the early British administration set itself in both Upper and Lower Assam was to stabilize and consolidate the shifting and scattered revenue geographies. As Major White frowningly reported:

> In the realization of revenue great inconvenience has arisen from the circumstance of many of the Paiks residing at a great distance from the centre of their khels, thus rendering it difficult for the Kheldar (or subordinate collector) to collect their proportion of revenue. In some khels a proportion of the Paiks live in the north [.] others in the south side of the river

\(^{267}\) Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam*, 47
\(^{268}\) Bengal Political Department, 10 March 1830, No 3, E/4/727, CXII [OIOC]
\(^{270}\) India Political Despatch from the Court of Directors, Foreign Department, 3 December 1834, No. 14 [NAI]. Emphasis added
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and it is not uncommon to them to reside at a distance of 3 or 4 days journey from each other. To rectify this [sic] an exchange of Paiks or a new classification should take place.271

Sixteen years later, in his “Report on the Revenue Administration of the Province of Assam”, submitted to the Board of Revenue at Fort William, Major Francis Jenkins, then the Commissioner of Revenue, attributed this annoying dispersal to the weakness of the late Tungkhungia dynasty.

When the Khel system existed in its purity and the personal services of all the ryot had to be given for so many months in the year, the members of the Khel must have resided together; but in process of time, when it became convenient to the Government, or the great Officers to whom Pykes were assigned, to commute personal service for money payments, the Pykes were allowed some liberty of migration, and latterly many had eloped from their Khel Officers to escape taxation and persecution; so that when we took possession of the province very few Khels remained together in any body, but were scattered throughout Assam, and the Pykes of many Khels were frequently mixed up together in the same villages, each party of family paying their taxes to different collecting Officers, and many of these latter were constantly travelling through the province after stray Pykes.272

Even without disputing Jenkins’ simplistic assumption of an original, uncontaminated state of affairs – “[w]hen the Khel system existed in its purity” – it is possible to track the ways in which the territorialization of revenue was achieved during the early years of the British rule. It took the British a few years to realize that the Ahom Swargadeos had never presided over one homogenous revenue landscape. Different customary arrangements were made with different groups of people for extraction and passage of revenue. Uneven monetization, pulls of diverse local traditions, varying nature of the terrains and therefore of cultivations, elastic pattern of trade, scope for collective flight and resistance, and fluctuating political control were some of the major determinants in the eighteenth century. Puzzled by the diversity, David Scott in 1831 proposed to divide “the whole country” into four distinct divisions, each administered by a European Assistant or Civil Commissioner (excepting the

271 “Memorandum regarding the Management of Upper Assam under a Native Prince by Major White”, Foreign Department (Political), 30 May 1833, No. 87 [NAI]
272 From F. Jenkins, Commissioner of Revenue, Assam to The Board of Revenue, Fort William, dated Gowahtty, 13 November 1849, No. 192, in ‘Report on the Revenue Administration of the Province of Assam’, 1849-50, Selections from the Records of the Bengal Government, No. 11 [b], IOR MF 1/ Fiche No. 868, p. 58 [OIOC]
second division which he was ready to relinquish to the Tungkhungia Swargadeo), and insisted that the collections must be made with regard to the limits of Local Divisions, whether fixed upon the land or in the shape of capitation tax, instead of being levied as at present by means of their respective officers from the individuals of each khel or corporation, who live dispersed all over the country.

The proposed divisions themselves were separated by "large tracts of intervening and nearly impassable jungul [sic]" and even within the Divisions, there were "natural limits to the more open spots where the scanty population have settled." Scott agreed that such a landscape would not be very easily administrable; "but", said he, "after mature consideration I have been unable to suggest any less objectionable plan." With some modifications, this plan remained the favorite diagram of the early British revenue officers.

In the western possessions of the Swargadeo as well, where the Mughal form of pargana collection was said to be in vogue, disaggregated revenue geographies were quite regular features. In preparing a detailed report in 1833 on the six parganas recently added to the

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273 The first, consisting of some 4000 square miles around Sadiya, ("East Narrow, West Booree Sheen Mookh, South Naga Hills, North Abor Hills. Length about 100 miles, extreme breadth about 65. Population 30,000"), "affords at present no revenue but furnishes about 700 militia men." In fact, the "refractory and predatory disposition" of the resident population, Scott thought, would not be very conducive to systematic revenue collection. The second division, defining some 5000 square miles around Jorhat ("East from Burhath and Debaroo Mookh, West Shes Lal Paut, South Naga Hills, North the great bund and Dapla Dowars. Length 110 miles, extreme breadth 60. Population 2,50,000"), was estimated to provide a revenue which "will not as far as I can judge exceed for some time to come one lac of rupees per annum". The anticipated revenue of the third division, some 2000 square miles around Kolibhar or Bishnath ("East Shes Lal Paut, West Muha Chowkie, South Hills and Cachar, North Bhootan Dowars. Length 70 miles, breadth about 35, Population 1,00,000"), was "between 40,000 and 50,000 rupees". The most lucrative fourth division, covering roughly 5000 square miles around Guwahati ("East Buha Chowkie, West Nugurberua, South Cossya Hills, North Bhootan Dowars. Length 100 miles, extreme breadth 60, Population 4,50,000"), was calculated to be in a position to yield "somewhat less than two lacs of sicca rupees." D. Scott, Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontier, to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary to Government, Fort William, dated Gowalpara, 15 May 1831, in Foreign Department, Political Branch, 10 June 1831, Nos. 50-59 [NAI] 274 D. Scott, Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontier, to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary to Government, Fort William, dated 18 May 1831, in Foreign Department, Political Branch, 10 June 1831, Nos. 50-59 [NAI] Emphasis added.

275 Secretary to the Governor General to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary to Government, Fort William, dated Shimala, 18 July 1831, in Foreign Department, Political Branch, 2 September 1831, Nos. 1-4 [NAI] 276 D. Scott, Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontier, to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary to Government, Fort William, dated Gowalpara, 20 May [1831], in Foreign Department, Political Branch, 10 June 1831, Nos. 50-59 [NAI]

277 Kamrup, primarily, "was divided by the Mahomdean rulers into Pergunnahs, under the management of Chowdrees. The Pergunnahs were sub-divided into Tangonies, of which there are three on the North and two on the South bank, and were further sub-divided into mouzahs", Moffatt Mills, Report, 317
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Goalpara Division with extensive comments on the pre- and early British modes of taxation and land revenue in Assam, the Officiating Collector of North Eastern Rungpore noted that it was “unfortunately a most common thing to find Talooks of one Pergunnah in the centre of another or removed several Pergunnahs off and in like manner the villages of one Talook are scattered in the midst of others.” In this report Captain Bogle gave amazing examples of how talooks could even be separated by an intervening space of more than 110 miles which would be occupied by some other parganas. Jenkins also complained “that the Pergunnahs in Kamroop were not all districts comprised in one locality or compact lot within one boundary, but some of the Pergunnahs had Talooks throughout the whole Division, and Pergunnahs were of very unequal sizes.” In addition, the “various independent Talooks” stood within the Swargadeo’s revenue landscape causing, according to the British officers, “a great inconvenience if not a positive evil under the system.”

Therefore, Bogle, 

abolished the whole of the former local divisions, excepting those on the South bank of the Brahmapootra (sic) which were not intermixed, and having thrown all the pargunnahs into one mass parcelled them out into mehals or mouzahs.

The situation was no different in Jaintia, one of the richest additions to Assam. Before Henry Thuiller completed the survey of its six parganas, “no known boundaries have ever existed, and it has been the main object of [the survey] operations to define them.” By the end of 1839,

Every mouza has been distinctly separated, and the Boundaries marked, ... and the larger division or pargunnahs likewise definitely arranged with five natural boundaries. Previous to the survey the whole district was ... subdivided without ... uniformity or compactness. Every village contained lands of five or six outer villages intermixed with its own.

278 Their names are given as Bouse, Chake Bouse, Barnagar, Barpeta, Bagaribari and Nagarberra.
279 A. Bogle, Officiating Collector, North Eastern Rungpore, to T. C. Robertson, Agent to the Governor-General, North-Eastern Frontier, 10 July 1833, in Foreign Department, Political Branch, 30 May 1833, No. 86-111 (NAI)
280 F. Jenkins, Commissioner of Revenue, Assam, to the Board of Revenue, Fort William, dated Gowahtty, 13 November 1849, No. 192, in “Report on the Revenue Administration of the Province of Assam”, 1849-50, Selections from the Records of the Bengal Government, No. 11 [b], IOR MF 1/ Fiche No. 868 [OIOC]
281 A. Bogle, Officiating Collector, Goalpara, to the Commissioner of Revenue, Assam, dated 25 February 1833, in Foreign Department, Political Branch, 30 May 1833, No. 86-111 (NAI)
282 Moffatt Mills, Report, 318
283 Phillimore, Historical Records of the Survey, vol. IV, 199-200. See also Final Report on the 6th Settlement of the Jaintia Pargans effected during the years 1892-97 by Chandra Kanta Sen (Shillong: Dispersed Geographies, Mobile Landscapes 90
In other words, revenue collection was not necessarily the fundamental principle for organizing the lived space before the British intervened in the area. Communities which were imagined to be together only in the tabular space of revenue records were now relocated as compacted groups in the occupied space of the political territory. The British intervention which produced “land” as the unit of a uniform system of resources was directed to condense revenue flows into clearly bounded, completely compacted and absolutely administrable secular geographies. Possibly we can call this process the territorialization of revenue: compressing the far-flung strips together into a consolidated and continuous territorial unit of revenue exaction which, in turn, was made to function as the foundational site of collective survival. The majority of the population felt the force of the process through a mandatory regrouping, a considerable restructuring of landscapes, a number of serious constraints on their mobility, and a radical relearning of the power map.

In 1853 E. T. Dalton, the officiating Political Agent of Upper Assam, while expressing his utter irritation with the “migrating habits” of the Mataks for “the dispersion this causes in the khels”, tabled the general agenda of the British Indian state in these terms:

To break up the khels [area-wise], divide the population into defined circles paying from two to five hundred rupees each, reduce the number of head men accordingly, and then introduce a land-rent in supercession of the present tax, are the objects I have in view...

As is easily understandable, territorialization of revenue could not leave the untaxed scattered. If the khels were to be brought together in a bounded place eventually to be shoved into becoming bands of “ryots” tied to specific plots of land, then the “tribes” could scarcely be allowed to move at their will. Their exemption from taxes was acknowledged only on the condition of their refraining from infringing on the settled landscapes. Convinced of “the impossibility of controlling the Sing Phos while living in their present dispersed state”, Scott proposed “that the whole of the Sing Phos residing in the Assam Territory should be required either to assemble under the orders of the Beesa Gaum or to recross the mountains [to go back to Mogaung].” It was routinely insisted that even the zones beyond the British political jurisdiction should be understood in terms of

Assam Secretariat Printing Office, (1897), 24-5 for a brief account of Thuiller’s “scientific” reorganization of the “confused intermixture” of villages.

284 Quoted in Moffatt Mills, Report, 647-8

285 D. Scott, Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontier, to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary to Government, Fort William, dated 18 May 1831, in Foreign Department, Political Branch, 10 June 1831, Nos. 50 – 59 [NAI]
unambiguous "territorial boundaries" of different ethnic groups; the Agreement forced upon
the Moran Bor Senapati and the Khamti Sadiya Khowa Gohain in 1835 is a typical
example. The territorial recentering of the dispersed humans was predicated on the
enforcement of a political center within those communities. In the case of the people called
Singphos, Scott's personal preference for the Bisa Gaum over the other Gaums, as already
evident in the abovementioned proposal, was endorsed by the higher authorities:

There appears to be thirty ... subdivisions of the [Singpho] tribe in the Assam side of the
Patkoye Hills, each having its own petty chief. Of these the Beesa Gaum through not in reality
possessing any admitted control over the others, has been recognized on account of his present
influence as the organ of communication between them and the British Government.

This is not the place to discuss the protracted series of clashes that this self-consciously
arbitrary decision of the British caused among the Gaums of Bisa and Duffa throughout the
early eighteen thirties which eventually necessitated British diplomatic exchange with the
Court of Ava. Nor can we elaborate how Scott's darling creatively used his position to
shuttle between the patronages of Ava and Calcutta, to eventually become implicated in an
anti-British insurrection for which he was confined for life at Dibrugarh. But, the sheer
attempt to raise the Bisa chief to the position of an overarching leader of all Singphos is
adequately suggestive. Likewise, it has been shown how in the eighteen eighties the Chief
Commissioner Charles Elliott, like his predecessor S. C. Bayley, made a quite successful
attempt "to create headmen as part of a structure of local management." This, as Peter Robb
duly emphasizes, was "an innovation" in several Naga villages, "marked by particularly

286 No. XXXVII: 'Translation of an Agreement entered into by Matee Bur Senapattee, on the 23rd January 1835, in the presence of the Political Agent, Upper Assam', in Aitchison (ed.), Collection of Treaties, Volume II, 138-139.
287 Extract Fort William Political Consultations of 7 January 1833, From T. C. Robertson, Agent to the Governor General on the North Eastern Frontier to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary to the Government of India, Dated 14 December 1832. F/4/1505, File No. 59025, [OIOC] (emphasis added). See also Bhupesh Chandra Mukherji, 'The Reconstruction of Assam in 1826', The Journal of the Bihar Research Society, Vol. XXIX, Part IV (December 1943), 195-6: "David Scott considered it politic to invest one or two of the Singpho chiefs with authority over the rest, so that the acquisition of power would make them responsible men. Thus the recognized chief of the Singphos would be almost equal in status to the Bar Senapati in Matak, and the Sadiya Khowa Gohain in Sadiya. The device would also maintain a rough balance of power among the potentates of Upper Assam. The Gam of Beesa was the person who received this distinction."
288 See India Political Consultations of 9 August 1837 (draft 342/ 1837, E/4/753, pp. 63-84), F/4/1582, File No. 64353 [OIOC]; F. Jenkins to W. H. Macnaghten, No. 23, undated, in Foreign Department, Political Branch, 20 March 1837, Nos. 79 - 83 [NAI]; Foreign Department (P. C.), 18 July 1836, Nos. 39 - 46 [NAI]
obvious social engineering and standardization in the interests of the state\textsuperscript{290}. Similar evidences of creating “internal governments” are available for the communities referred to as the Garos, the Khasis and the Nagas\textsuperscript{291}.

In short, while a structure of unbendable authority focused on compacted immobile settlements was being put in place, the new devolution of power operated on two obvious and interconnected levels. On the one hand, there was definite hierarchization among the communities based on the degrees of their integration in the new labor regime — a point which we shall elaborate in Chapter Five. On the other hand, there was the calculated gathering and concentration of authority in the hands of the chosen chiefs within these communities. This could and did happen through a number of forms. But the most important mode was uneven militarization. The British Agent fixed the number of firearms that each community was permitted to possess. The Sadiya Khowa Gohain, for example, was allotted 100 muskets out of the total 110 muskets earmarked for the Khamtis, thus leaving the other pro-British Khambi chiefs like Derak Gohain, Dighala Gohain, Tawa

\textsuperscript{290} Peter Robb, ‘The Colonial State and Constructions of Indian Identity: An Example on the Northeast Frontier in the 1880s’, 
\textit{Modern Asian Studies}, 31: 2 (1997), 261

\textsuperscript{291} “[T]he system of government introduced among the Garos by Captain Williamson, or rather revived by that officer, David Scott having the merit of first proposing it. As the police force at Tura could never detect and punish each crime in the hills, the Garos themselves, through the heads of villages and communities, are made responsible for the preservation of order. The head of a village is called the Lukma, or Nukma, his duties being to collect the revenues of his village, to maintain order in it, to report all crimes to the Luskur, and arrest the offenders. The Luskur is the also head of a circle of villages, ten or twelve; he receives the revenue from the Lukma, and remits it to the Deputy Commissioner; he disposes of all petty cases occurring within his jurisdiction by punchayet, appeals from which, as well as grave cases, are heard by the Deputy Commissioner. Great success has attended the adoption of this system; the presence of a force at Tura giving great moral support to the Luskurs in carrying out their duties.” “Report on Survey Operations in the Garo Hills during Field Season 1872-3”, by Lieutenant R. G. Woodthorpe [Assistant Superintendent, Topographical Surveys], in 
\textit{General Report on the Topographical Surveys of India, and of the Surveyor General’s Department, Head Quarter Establishment, for season 1872-73}, by Colonel Sir H. L. Thuillier (Calcutta: Office of Superintendent of Government Printing, 1874), 69. This model of “internal Government”, which had been introduced among the Garos of the north eastern parts of Rangpur in 1817 by David Scott, was proposed for the Khasis after the revolt of 1829. D. Scott, Agent to the Governor General in the North Eastern Frontier to G. Swinton, Secretary to the Government, Fort William, dated 12 January 1830, in Foreign Department (P. C.), 11 February 1832, Nos. 26-32 [NAI]. In 1907, a certain U Bajur Khasi alleged that the British were turning the Siyems into Zamindars with unprecedented powers. “Petition, dated the 6th February 1907, from U Bajur Khasi, praying for the setting aside of the sale of his holding in Mawkhar by the Siem of Mylliem for realisation of land tax (Power of the Siem with regard to the Khasi foreigners living in his State)”, Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Home Department (Political-A), August 1907, Nos. 22-26. [MSA] For the Naga case, see Gertrude M. Godden, “Naga and Other Frontier Tribes of North-East India”, 
\textit{The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland}, vol. 26 (1897), 161-201
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Gohain, Runud Gohain, Toru Gohain and Rumra Gohain at a decided disadvantage. Similar measures were adopted for the warring Singpho and Naga chiefs. Such serious interventions in the networks of loyalty and protection did not snap the older connections everywhere at once. In fact, the experienced Political Agent in Upper Assam Adam White advised Samuel Hannay in 1837,

You are doubtless aware that various Naga tribes are dependent upon the Singpho chiefs ... and very possibly this connection may be of somewhat an oppressive nature as usually happens when one barbarian tribe is brought under subjugation by another more energetic and powerful. But as it would be inexpedient to break off the connection suddenly more particularly at the present moment, when there is a very distant probability of a Burmese War, I have to request that you will issue no orders having a tendency to alter the [relation?] of the Nagas and Singphos.

Although cautious and gradual, the reconfiguration of the loyalty structure was somewhat unmistakable, as was its effect on the pattern of settlements. Encouraged to territorially consolidate their mobilization pools, the chosen chiefs of the large villages made “constant demands on the smaller ones for cattle and daos, and in case of refusal a feud [was] established resulting in the loss of several lives.” Unforeseen developments often forced the authorities to revise their original plan. As large parts of the Sema country were annexed to the Naga Hills District between 1900 and 1904, the “independent” Sangtam village of Mangaki – which had been a traditional protégé of the powerful Sema neighbors of Seromi, Tichimi, and Yehim – appeared virtually defenseless to the mightier settlements of Mozungjami, Sodomi, and Lotoka. Since their Sema protectors were now British subjects, the Sangtams did not receive any help when, on 25 November 1904, Mangaki was ruthlessly stormed and burnt by the warriors from these distant “independent” villages. “On grounds of humanity”, pleaded the Deputy Commissioner, Mangaki required to be annexed, and the

292 See Jenkins, Report on the North-East Frontier, 11 fn.
293 “It was at Captain Neufville’s suggestion that such arms were placed in these chieftains hands, and so great was the ascendancy which circumstances combining with his own great energy and talents had given him over their minds that under his management an experiment might safely be ventured on” Extract Fort William Political Consultations of 7 January 1833, From T. C. Robertson, Agent to the Governor General on the North Eastern Frontier to G. Swinton, Chief Secretary to the Government of India, dated 14 December 1832. F/4/1505, File No. 59025 [OIOC] See Appendix-??
294 A. White to S. F. Hannay (on special deputation), dated 13 September 1837, in Extract Fort William Political Consultations to 16 October 1838, No. 92, F/4/1749, File No. 71307 [OIOC]
295 McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, quoted in Reid, History of the Frontier Areas, 105
compassionate authorities only too eagerly authorized the acquisition. As the experienced official Hutton realized in 1921,

Villages on either side have land, cattle, cousins and relations-in-law on the other. Feuds, alliances, trade, cultivation - all the interests in life in fact except the payment of revenue and the freedom to hunt heads - run counter to the frontier line and not parallel to it. Under these circumstances no one could administer the district without being perpetually brought up against the question of interference beyond the frontier.

Traditionally, let us repeat, the autonomy of a settlement had been largely dependent on the distance it could generate and maintain from other, particularly larger, settlements. The government endeavors to amalgamate the several scattered patches of human habitation into a continuous, governable territorial unit of revenue extraction worked in the reverse direction. The entire issue was understandably plaited with the several projects of road building and "jungle clearing".

In 1833 Jenkins clearly said that he did not believe "that we can ever contemplated placing the different gaums of these petty tribes on the footing of independent and allied states although we have at present granted them immunity from all assessments." He suggested that "these petty tribes" should be persuaded to remove "the intervening jungles" between the settlements, to build a number of permanent bridges over the various hill streams, and to work for making roads adequately broad for the passage of troops. "[T]hese works ... are essential to our affording them protection", said he. The fifteen-mile long belt of woods which separated the well-cultivated "Bar Senapati's country" from Sadiya was a typical target.

The first measures towards establishing a compacted homogenous revenue geography received considerable impetus from the sudden emergence and phenomenal extension of tea plantations.

It has already been mentioned that in 1833, the East India Company lost its previous monopoly in the trade of tea with China. Consequently, the trading fleet of the Company

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296 L. J. Kershaw, Officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, No. 1601-J, 11 April 1905, in "Modification of the eastern boundary of the Naga Hills District so as to include the small village of Mangaki", Foreign Department, External-A Branch, October 1905, Nos. 37 - 40 [NAI]

297 Quoted in Reid, History of the Frontier Areas, 155. For a somewhat comparable instance of the "independent" Borduria Nagas motivating the "Inner Nagas" to attack a British Indian survey party, see H. Luttman-Johnson, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to C. U. Aitchinson, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, No. 1960, Shillong, 5 June 1875. 'Surrender of a Tract of Country by Nagas', Foreign Department, Political-A, May 1874, Nos. 219 - 223.

298 Jenkins, Report on the North-East Frontier, 16-17
was denied access to all Chinese ports except the one at Canton. A frantic search for the possible alternative sources of tea supply began throughout the Indian possessions of the Company. Jenkins and Charlton were entrusted with the task in the northeastern frontier. By the time the Tea Committee – comprising eleven Europeans and two Indians – was set up to systematize the investigation, these two trusted officers of the army had finished their tour in the frontier to report the existence of indigenous tea tracts in several parts of the country.

In 1834, the Governor General who professed to be “a practical agriculturist” was assured by his advisors that unlike many other shrubs, the tea plant did not languish when transplanted, since it “flourishes over a space embracing many degrees of longitude and latitude.” The “only real difficulty”, said Bentinck, was “the impossibility of having access to the tea countries, and of thus having personal and local knowledge of all particulars relating to the cultivation and manufacture.” Towards the end of 1835, an experimental plantation was started on a “chur” land at the confluence of the Kundil and the Brahmaputra rivers, near Sadiya with imported seeds and plants. The commercial failure of this plantation only increased the desperation of the Tea Committee to locate suitable fresh spots.

The winter of 1835-6 was a busy time for the tea people. Two Assistant Surgeons, William Griffith and John M’Clelland, were deputed along with the Superintendent of the Calcutta Botanical Gardens, Nathaniel Wallich, to the frontier to scientifically ascertain the findings of Bruce, Jenkins and Charlton, while G. J. Gordon was sent to China to hire expert tea-makers.

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299 Bentinck appointed “a Committee of Gentlemen for the purpose of preparing and maturing a Plan for the Cultivation of the Tea Plant in the Company's Provinces. Mr. G. I. Gordon, who was at one time in the Medical Service of the Honble Company was appointed Secretary of the Committee with a salary of Rupees 500 per mensem.” Revenue Letter from India, No. 2, 13 March 1825 [1835], in Private Papers of William Henry Cavendish-Bentinck, IOR Mss Eur E424 [OIOC]

300 Crole, Tea, 24. Jenkins reported that tea was indigenous in Upper Assam, “being found there through an extent of country of one moths march within the Honourable Company's territories from Sudeya to the Chinese frontier province of chyna, Yunnan.” Quoted in Despatch from the Court of Directors, India. Revenue Department. 23 August, No. 11 of 1837, para. 10. [GL]

301 “Minute by the Governor-General”, dated Calcutta 24 January 1834, in Return to an order of the Honourable House of Commons, dated 15 February 1839; - for, Copy of papers received from India relating to the measures adopted for introducing the cultivation of tea plant within the British possessions in India. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 27 February 1839. [GL]

302 Crole, Tea, 25

303 Posthumous Papers Bequeathed to the Honorable East India Company, and Printed by Order of the Government of Bengal: Journals of Travels in Assam, Burma, Bootan, Affghanistan and the Neighbouring Countries by the late William Griffith, arranged by John M’Clelland, Volume I (Calcutta: Bishop’s College Press, 1847), 12
proceed further upwards, and on 4 February 1836, Wallich impatiently wrote to the Secretary of the Tea Committee that "[t]he unexpected discovery of tea forests in the Bursunaputi's and Raja Purundur Sing's territories, within the British influence and control, renders it indispensably necessary that Mr. M'Clelland and myself should proceed on our route to examine them..." 304 Within a week, Wallich reported that the "tea forests" near Bengmara "deserve our immediate attention, lest further mischief be done by the ignorant and semi-barbarous hands under which they at present suffer." 305 After spending a month in the area, Wallich and M'Clelland spotted five major tracts of "natural or wild tea", scattered between the political jurisdictions of the various Singpho Gaums, the Matak Barsenapati and the Tungkhungia Swargadeo. 306 They "most anxiously recommended" that all these tracts should be put under a systematic course of management in our own hands, in order that we may be enabled, with far less cost, and with vast saving in point of time, compared to what would be the case were we to depend exclusively on artificial plantations, to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to the capability of the Assam tea of yielding a good and merchantable produce.

Wallich and M'Clelland advocated taking a long lease of the "tea forests" from the local chiefs, insisted that a thorough fencing be put around the tracts "to protect them from encroachment and depredation from man and beast", and suggested that Bruce be put in their charge. 307 Though theoretically agreeing with the proposals, the Tea Committee did not want to rush, and advised Jenkins to scale down the operations "to two or three spots." 308 Calcutta's caveat was not very seriously taken by the frontier officials. The enthusiasm of Jenkins and White was no less than that of Wallich and M'Clelland. It was quickly reported that the Matak chief was willing "to make [the tea forests] over to [the British] Government..."

304 'Extract India Revenue Consultations, April 4, 1836, No. 14 (A): From N. Wallich, Esq., MD, on Deputation to Upper Assam, to J. W. Grant, Esq., Officiating Secretary to the Tea Committee, 12 February 1836, Return to an order of the Honourable House of Commons, dated 15 February 1839; - for, Copy of papers received from India relating to the measures adopted for introducing the cultivation of tea plant within the British possessions in India. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 27 February 1839, p. 53 [GL]'

305 Extract India Revenue Proceedings, April 11, 1836: From N. Wallich, to J. W. Grant, dated Rungagora, 26 February 1836', in ibid.

306 '1st. At Kookoe; 2nd. Near Ningroo, on the Booree Dehung, among the Singfo; 3rd. Near Nuddooa: In the Muttock country; 4th. At Tengrae: In the Muttock country; 5th. At the foot of the Nagu range, at Gubhroo, in the Rajah's territories." 'Extract India Revenue Consultations, May 23, 1836, Encl. to No. 3, From N. Wallich to Captain F. Jenkins, dated 15 March 1836', in ibid.

307 ibid, 66-8.

308 'Extract India Revenue Consultations, May 23, 1836, No. 42, W. H. Macnaghten to F. Jenkins, dated 23 May 1836', in ibid, 68-9
unconditionally, for the prosecution of the experiment, and is ready to supply labourers, a guard &c." Purandar Singha was also represented as willing to relinquish half of the "Gubroo Hills" to the Company for the said experiment while proposing to "carry on the cultivation of the tea plants" in the other half. Only the Singpho Gaums of "Koochwo" and "Nugroo" could not be said to have been exactly thrilled by the idea. Within three months, however, Bruce worked his way into the Singpho territory with liberal gifts of opium and managed to send the necessary details to Calcutta. For the next few months, he traveled extensively in the entire region, cataloguing unnoticed tea tracts, employing coolies to clear away what he considered useless jungle as well as to trim the shrubs for improving the quality of the foliage, and trying to induce the local chiefs to leave the charges of the tea tracts to European hands. Unsurprisingly, his actions caused great suspicion among the local communities, and by the end of 1836, "a good deal of jealousy in regard to our occupation of the tea forests" was reported to be the prevailing mood in the area. Early in 1837, Bruce declared

I have discovered plenty of tea in the [Matak country]; in fact the whole of the Muttock is a tea country. There is plenty of tea in the Singpho country also, and some of the tracts very large, larger than I have seen in Muttock; but I am sorry to say that I cannot get the Singphoos to do as I wish; they work how and when they please. They are under no control, and wish not to work at all; the underwood of the two tracts they have in a great measure cleared, and one tract they cut down, but the wood was not removed. They told me that they would not clear the jungle when it grows up; so I am afraid the tea in our own country, i.e., the Singphoo country, cannot be available, unless we import men to make the Singphoos more industrious. The Singphoos are all under their own petty chiefs, so coolies cannot be had, and these men will not work for any as long as they have sufficient opium and rice of their own. As long as coolies can get four rupees per month at Suddeeyah, they will never go to the Singphoos for that sum.

Annexation looked as the simplest solution to these difficult problems. The moral justification of seizing the "tea countries" came from the repeated official assertion that prior to the British intervention the local communities hardly knew the value of the tea bushes — a

309 'Extract India Revenue Consultations, July 11, 1836; Captain F. Jenkins to N. Wallich, 5 May 1836'; and 'Extract India Revenue Consultations, June 20, 1836; Major White to Captain F. Jenkins, 30 May 1836' in ibid, 69-70
310 'Extract India Revenue Consultations, August 15, 1836, No. 7; From the Tea Committee to Macnaghten, 6 August 1836', in ibid, 77-9
311 From C. A. Bruce to F. Jenkins, 10 February 1837, in ibid, 92
claim with which we shall have to struggle in Chapter Seven. Kinkaid reported that a devastating famine at Mogaung, aggravated by the feuds with the Shans, had already reduced the force of the Singphos by two-thirds. Neufville's repeated expeditions against them had also substantially weakened the community. But to make things safer, the Assam Light Infantry moved further to take possession of the undependable Duffa Gaum's stockade. The friendlier chiefs of Bisa and Ningru were successfully persuaded to participate in tea cultivation.

By this time, "experiments were made in foreign territory". The Government Experimental Tea Garden at Chabua and three private gardens, all situated within a few miles of Tinsukia, were established in Upper Assam, still a Tungkhungia jurisdiction. Between 1837, when the first successful manufacture of Assam Tea was reported from the Chabua Garden, and 1856, when the proverbial "tea prosperity" finally took off and lasted uninterrupted for a decade, a series of territorial annexations facilitated the fuller play of private plantation capital. In 1835, after the death of Chomsalon, the Khamti chief who was still functioning as the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, the British placed higher demands on Chowrangpha, his successor. As Chowrangpha "failed to act up to the stipulations made", the Khamti territory was annexed. In the same year, monetization was forced on the Mataks who were now required to pay 1800 rupees annually in lieu of 300 men. Within three years the Tungkhungia prince Purandar Singha was pensioned off from the charge of Upper Assam, and in 1839 citing the "unsettled state of affairs in Muttock" after the death of Bor Senapati Mati, the Government annexed the Doab between the Buri Dehing and Brahmaputra rivers to

313 Jenkins, Report on the North-East Frontier, 4
314 Hannay, Sketch of the Singphos, 19
315 Later, "[t]he districts of Lukhimpur and Sibsagar were thus added, without much trouble or bother, to the British dominions, and as a natural consequence private enterprise received an impetus, and from that day forth rapidly increased." Crole, Tea, 28
316 Forty-six boxes of processed tea were sent down to Calcutta out of which 12 were selected and sent to England. William Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam: with a sketch of the local geography, and a concise history of The Tea-Plant of Assam: to which is added, a short account of the neighbouring tribes, exhibiting their habits, manners, and customs (Calcutta: Bishop's College Press, 1841), 144.
318 On 15 September 1838 Major White reached Jorhat and unceremoniously proclaimed the regime change. A touching description of the event can be found in A. White, Political Agent in Upper Assam to F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General on North Eastern Frontier, 16 September 1838. Foreign Department, Political Branch, 10 October 1838, No. 85 [NAI] See also File no. 299 BG [ASA]
Sadiya. It was "the unsettled state of the Muttacks" which was widely recognized to have "prevent[ed] the resources of this fine district from being fully available to the public". In 1839, again, the "portion of north Cachar not included in Tularam's dominions was annexed to Nowgong." Finally, in 1854, the "Tularam Senapati's country" too was annexed after the detection of a "tract of waste land between the Dhunseri River and Doorgang" falling within his jurisdiction which were recognized to be "well adapted for the cultivation of tea and sugar."

In the textbook histories these blatant acts of annexations are usually mentioned without any reference to the growing tea interest. But an 1839 list of the tea tracts makes it very clear that almost all of the one hundred and twenty tracts spotted till date were scattered across these jurisdictions, and the formation of the Assam Company in England in February 1839 with a capital of 500,000 pounds sterling (in 10,000 shares of 50 pounds each) put open pressure on the Government to bring these dispersed geographies under the British jurisdiction. J. Masters, "a gentleman well-known in Calcutta for his botanical and agricultural pursuits", was employed by the new company to Assam to supervise the occupation of the tea tracts. The newly formed Bengal Tea Association was also merged into it. In fact, within less than a year, two-thirds of the Government Experimental Tea Gardens ["all the tea Barries between the Bari-Dihung and Tingri, and the high road from Jaipur to Sudiya, joining these two rivers, (a tract comprising nearly 70,000 British acres)"]

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319 Mati’s successor, Maju Gohain, refused the terms offered to him by the British Government. Shakespear, History of Upper Assam, 65.
320 Robinson, Descriptive Account of Assam, 143.
321 Revenue Department. 26 April (No. 5 of 1840), Proceeding Nos. 84-5 [WBSA]. See also Aitchison (ed.), Collection of Treaties, Volume II, 147.
323 The list is appended to Map of Upper Assam comprising the districts of Joorhat, Luckimpore and Sudiya shewing the Tea Tracts discovered by Mr. C. A. Bruce, Superintendent of Tea Culture to the Hon'ble East India Company in Assam. Also the Roads proposed to be opened from Sudiya to the Booree Dihing, by J. B. Tassin. Original Litho Press, Calcutta September 1839.
324 James Leonard, Assam: Sketch of its History, Soil and Productions; with the Discovery of Tea-Plant, and of the Countries adjoining Assam, with maps (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1839), passim.
325 Robinson, Descriptive Account of Assam, 142-3. "After visiting Jaipur, and the tea tracts on the eastern districts, he [J. Masters] established his headquarters at Nazira, close to the old fort and capital of Ghergong, pending negotiations with the Government for the transfer of their experimental factories to the Assam Company. Mr. Masters was subsequently joined by several assistants, and was shortly enabled to establish plantations at Sathseyah, Gabru-Parbut, and China-doe." However, within a year his services were deemed "by no means required", although Bruce and Parker were retained. Proceedings of the Committee of Directors held at Calcutta 22 October 1842, in Ms. 9925, Volume 2: Assam Company, Proceedings of Committee in Bengal. 1841-44 (GL) Bruce and Parker were dismissed in 1844. H. A. Antrobus, A History of the Assam Company, 1839-1953 (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable Ltd., 1957), 324 and 328.
326 Antrobus, History of Jorehaut Tea Company, 15-16.
were transferred to the Assam Company, rent-free for the initial years. Bruce was also released from the government services by the Governor-General to join the Assam Company.\textsuperscript{327} This rapid amalgamation of several discrete jurisdictional entities into a compacted “tea country” to be economically supervised by a large joint-stock company was valorized as “[t]he natural transition of the country, from a disorganized barbarous condition to a peaceable state.”\textsuperscript{328} As the tea gardens rapidly multiplied, the pressing necessity to connect the outlying gardens with the district headquarters and the steamer stations obliged the government to undertake several construction works in different parts of the frontier.\textsuperscript{329} Particularly “the neighbourhood of Tea plantations” became sites of vigorous “public works.” The emergence of Dibrugarh as a nodal point of the road constructions in Upper Assam is especially well-documented,\textsuperscript{330} but evidences abound to indicate how several other patches of roads in various tea localities were worked by seizing on convict and community labor.\textsuperscript{331} In 1866 the project of making a trunk road connecting these different access roads throughout the entire Province was undertaken.\textsuperscript{332} Although by the middle of the eighteen seventies

\textsuperscript{327} Robinson, Descriptive Account of Asam, 143. Also see Assam Company, Report of the Local Directors made to the Shareholders, at A General Meeting, held at Calcutta August 11th, 1841 (Calcutta: Bishop’s College Press, 1841), 4. There were some minor differences between the President of the Board of Directors, the Governor General, the Tea Committee and the Commissioner of Assam regarding the course of transfer, Government of Bengal, Revenue Proceedings, dated 7 April 1840, No.47 [WBSA]

\textsuperscript{328} W. O. A. Beckett, Deputy Commissioner, Sibsagar to Henry Hopkinson, Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontier, dated 5 October 1861, in “Correspondence regarding the political relations with native states”, Commissioner’s Office 1861, File No. 424 [ASA] Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{329} Throughout the eighteen thirties and forties, frontier outposts were spaced along the border. Record rooms, treasuries and store rooms were built in Dibrugarh, Sibsagar and other local headquarters. Block houses were built in Saikhowa, Koojoo, Mugroo, Jeypore, Sadiya, and Taizee. Fortification at Rungagorah was at full swing. See the correspondence between the Military Board, the Superintending Engineer, the Agent to the Governor General in the North-Eastern Frontier and the Governor General in Council, in Foreign Department (Political), 3 August 1840, Nos. 96-97 [NAI]. Between 1837 and 1840, Butler “perceived a vast change” in Guwahati, particularly visible in the clearance of vegetations, the creation of brick buildings, and the establishment of “numerous native shops” [Butler], Sketch of Assam, 4

\textsuperscript{330} Report of the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the State and Prospects of Tea Cultivation in Assam, Cachar, and Sylhet (Calcutta: Calcutta Central Press Company, 1868), 22 [Henceforth, RCSPTC]. The trunk road lay from to Dibrugarh to Deopani, while roads to Jaipur, Sadiya and Dibru Mukh from Dibrugarh was painstakingly built. \textit{Ibid}, 104-105. The Calcutta-Dibrugarh steamer service became regularly operative since 1848. Dibrugarh was also the first site for railway construction in Assam. On 1 May 1882, the first meter-gauge locomotive in Assam ran between Dibrugarh steamer-ghār and Jaipur Road. \textit{The Assam Railways and Trading Company Limited, 1881-1951} (London: Harley Publishing Co. for The Assam Railways and Trading Company, 1951), 16. See also Dambarudhar Nath (ed.), \textit{dibugarar buranj} (Dibrugarh: Reception Committee, 66th Conference of Assam Sahitya Sabha, 2001).

\textsuperscript{331} See Chapter Five.

\textsuperscript{332} “[T]he Assam Trunk Road was begun with the design of making it a first-class metalled and embanked highway, twenty-four feet wide, and aligned in a manner that should render it possible to convert it at any

Dispersed Geographies, Mobile Landscapes
more than 2000 miles of local roads were built in Assam, practically no executive establishment was maintained by the government for road work. "The money is usually distributed to planters, who are willing to undertake the repair of the roads in their own neighbourhood, in which they are interested."\(^{333}\) The requirements of the private companies and the rhetoric of public utility became increasingly indistinguishable.

Years later, faced with stiff resistance in the Naga Hills, Henry Hopkinson, the Agent to the Governor General on the North Eastern Frontier, admitted,

Had we allowed Raja Poonunder Sing to retain Upper Assam, we should not have been troubled about the Seebsaugor Nagas; but in that case neither should we have seen the creation, rise, and progress of the "great tea interest." The discovery of indigenous tea had not a little to do, if all accounts be true, with our remaining in Upper Assam; at the same time our predecessors knew well enough that we should have to reckon with the Nagas and other hill tribes if we did stop; but they thought that "tea" was worth it, and that they would hand down to their successors the precious legacy of a successful rivalry with China; their successors, in accepting the legacy of this great estate, cannot justly refuse to pay off the encumbrances with which it is saddled.\(^{334}\)

Annexations did not mean that the resident communities suddenly vanished from the frontier landscape. They continued to occupy what they considered as their territories, frequently forcing the Assam Company and its auxiliaries to modify their preset plan according to their terms. For a freer operation of capital, the conquered space had to be cleansed of such constraints. The responsibility fell upon Keatinge, the successor of Hopkinson and the first Chief Commissioner.