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The label on this stunning sculpture in London's Victoria and Albert Museum notes it was "collected by the Ex Younghusband Expedition to Tibet, 1904." A short ■ about the horrors this polite wording conceals. <https://t.co/beAYU4rcPr>



The Padmasambhava
(Padmasambhava)
11th-13th century
Meditation
Padmasambhava, known as the Lotus Hermit, is a key figure in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet. He is the form of a Buddha, the Padmasambhava, who most people know. He is often depicted as the most beautiful and most powerful of all the Buddhas, and is the one who brought the Buddhist teachings to Tibet.
The statue is made of gold and is highly ornate. It is a standing figure, and is shown in a meditative pose. The statue is highly detailed, with a tall, multi-tiered crown and intricate jewelry. The statue is displayed in a glass case, and is surrounded by other artifacts. A small circular sign with the number '18' is visible on the wall.



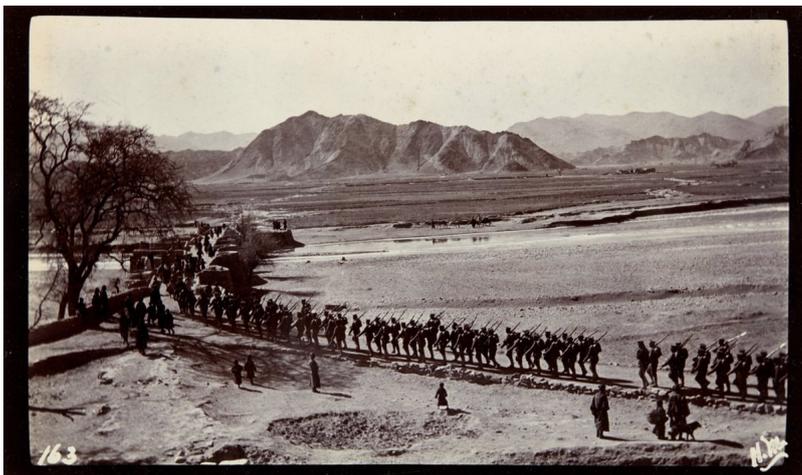
The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Padmapani)

1300–1400
Malla period

Padmapani means 'Bearer of the Lotus'. He is an important manifestation of Avalokiteshvara, the most widely worshipped of all bodhisattvas, known as the 'Lord of Compassion'. The figure's left hand once held the stem of a flowering lotus or *padma*, a symbol of spiritual purity. This sculpture was acquired in Tibet but made by Nepalese craftsmen.

Nepal
Gilded copper with precious and semi-precious stones
Collected by the Ex Younghusband Expedition to Tibet, 1904
Museum no. IM.239-1922

In 1903, Sir Francis Edward Younghusband led a British force to invade Tibet on the flimsiest of pretexts. At Chumik Shenko, his troops used Maxim machine guns to kill c. 600 Tibetan soldiers armed with matchlock muskets. <https://t.co/u2FBk2vsWU>

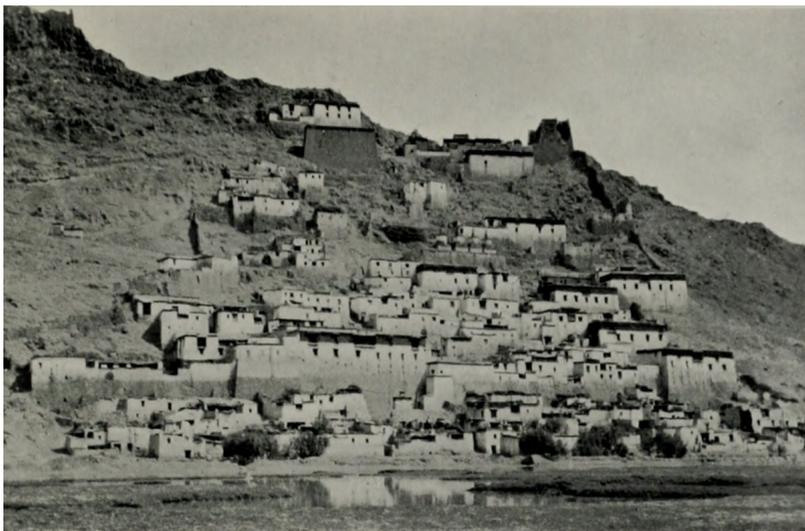


Younghusband eventually withdrew, chided by his superiors and excoriated by the English public for the needless violence. Even the Encyclopedia Britannica is still giving him side-eye: <https://t.co/xOGSrBFSqS>

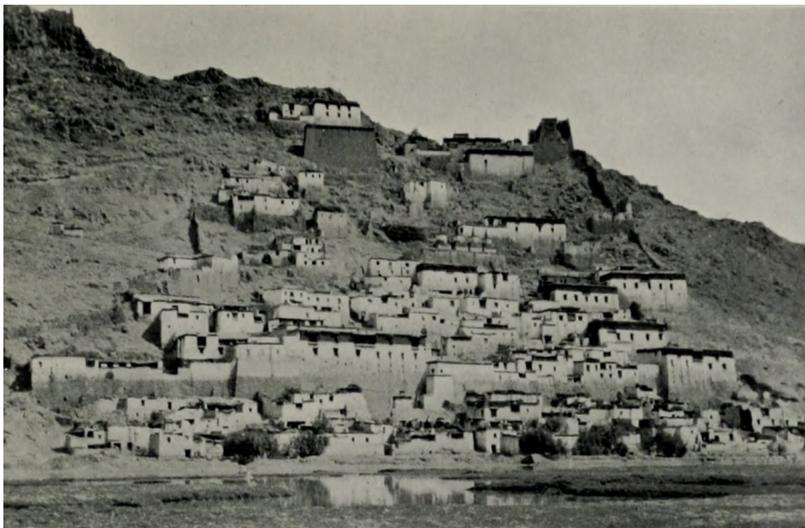
After repeated British attempts to gain trading rights with Tibet, Lord Curzon, viceroy of India, authorized Younghusband to cross the Tibetan border accompanied by a military escort to negotiate trade and frontier issues (July 1903). When efforts to begin negotiations failed, the British under the command of Major General James Macdonald invaded the country and slaughtered some 600 Tibetans at Guru. Younghusband moved on to Jiangzi (Gyantze), where his second attempt to begin trade negotiations also failed. He then marched into Lhasa, the capital, with British troops and forced the conclusion of a trade treaty with the Dalai Lama, Tibet's ruler. This action brought him a knighthood in 1904.

As Charles Allen showed by researching British primary sources (in his 2015 book *Duel in the Snows*), the invaders looted monasteries along their route, in supposed reprisal for inciting resistance to the invasion.

At the Tsechen monastery, "I at once made for the cellars," one soldier wrote his mother, "where we found some things hidden away.... I got rather a nice gong which no doubt you will find useful when I am able to get it home." <https://t.co/Di6PC7NYjy>



A captain wrote his wife that he had secured a "few trifles" from the monastery, including paintings that fetched high prices when auctioned at Christie's later in 1904. The Brits then burned the monastery to the ground. <https://t.co/xvK13dQpxe>



An astounding instance of looting happened at the Pelkor Chode Monastery at Gyantse, Tibet. Major William Beynon described it in a letter to his wife, which I'll quote at length: "Ross 2nd Gurkhas was in the big monastery here and was looking for grain with his coolie corps... <https://t.co/1akDXyObnM>



...when one of his men was stoned by a Lama. They caught the beggar and tied him up & gave him 20 lashes on the spot and then told him if he didn't show where the grain was hid he would be shot. So he showed them two places very cleverly hidden...

but when Ross began to get the things out he found instead of grain that the man had shown him where the monastery's plate & robes were kept. Ross reported to the General who told him he might keep what he liked and to send the rest to the man who collects for the British Museum.

(end quote). This man who collected for the British Museum was L. Austine Waddell, who wrote home sneering about how "there was nothing the people were not willing to sell in exchange for rupees." He claimed that

"Even the sleek Lamas brought out their sacred scrolls and books and images and bargained them for cash, and everybody seemed supremely pleased, never having had so much money in their lives before" - without regard to what they feared might happen if they said no.

And what about the Bodhisattva in the V&A? The museum's webpage gives just a scrap of info about how it left Tibet, leaving you with the impression that it was a willing sale. <https://t.co/UQjEhqCLGg>



Newar craftsmen made this finely jewelled image for Tibetan patrons. It was probably produced in Shigatse, central Tibet, from where it was acquired. It exemplifies a long tradition of Newar craftsmen from the Kathmandu Valley working for Tibetan patrons in Tibet. This tradition can be dated back to the 7th century A.D. This masterpiece of Newari metal-casting was acquired by Brigadier-General C.G. Rawlings at Shigatse in 1904, whilst he was en route to Lhasa as part of the British Younghusband expedition. It is recorded that several members of the expedition acquired examples of 'Lamaist' art during the course of this journey.

FYI, many people have written much more about looting during the Younghusband Expedition, for example, [@oxfordtim's](#) articles http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/ret/pdf/ret_21_07.pdf, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24572147>, and https://brill.com/view/journals/inas/14/1/article-p61_4.xml (which includes Tibetan primary sources).

Do I know what should change about the [@V_and_A's](#) holding/description of the Bodhisattva? No. But I think it must - because "acquired" is not the word to describe a transaction in which one party probably rightly feared being whipped or machine-gunned if they said no.

(I will also add by thanks to my friend [@_MTAnderson](#), who first told me about looting during the Younghusband Expedition, and looked through his notes to find these quotes when I sent him the photo of the V&A label.)