

***Recollecting the Past:  
the Missionary Collections and Representations of Tibetan  
Buddhism within the Finnish Free Church Movement***

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**1. Mission Societies in the Field**

Christian mission societies were founded in many Western countries as early as 17th century. These movements were motivated not only by the Gospel and the evangelical awakening but, especially at the end of 19th century, by strong expectations of the coming of the millennial age. In the Christian world, the Messiah was expected to return soon to Earth and, accordingly, converting the non-Christian peoples was considered to be an urgent mission, or rather a duty.<sup>1</sup>

In Finland, a branch of the Finnish Free Church movement, the Finnish Alliance Mission (hereinafter FiAM) was one of the Protestant mission societies who started to practice foreign work, first in China and from 1899 onwards in the Himalayas in order to convert Buddhist Tibetans. Among other Finnish organizations which sent workers to foreign countries in the late 19th and the early 20th centuries were, for example, the Finnish Mission Society, which started the work in Ovamboland (Namibia), the Finnish Evangelical Society acting in Japan, and the Salvation Army working in Dutch East India (Indonesia). Many of them had firm contacts and co-operation within the international evangelical network.

**1.1 Missionary Materials as Historical Sources**

Interest towards archive materials produced by missionaries and concerning mission work has increased in the last decades, not only in theological studies, but also in anthropology. For example, Jean and John Comaroff (1991, 1997) have used the archives of the London Missionary Society in their study on Tswana society, and James Clifford's (1982) doctoral thesis was on missionary and anthropologist Maurice Leenhardt, who worked in French colonial New Caledonia in 1902–1926. In general, materials produced by missionaries deal with a vast range of topics: political and economic as well as cultural and religious, both at home and in the field. The preconceptions the missionaries were likely to have do not detract from their value as historical witnesses and actors, who often came to know peoples and their languages with great intimacy. These

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<sup>1</sup> Ward 2000b: 21–22; Hämelin & Peltoniemi 1990: 26; e.g., SVL 1896: 24, 188; SVL 1897, 1, 4; SVL 1897: 32, 255; SVL 1897: 38, 302; HM I Ff-4: 896–897; HM I Ff-5: 186, 206.

materials are to be used critically, but they should not be underestimated (Ward 2000a: 3–4).

The FiAM missionaries, too, have produced a vast body of written materials. I have used it, not so much to obtain knowledge about the Himalayan cultures, but to investigate the collecting and use of Himalayan ethnographic artefacts as well as Christian interpretations of them, and the exchange relations both in the field and at home. Firstly, the chief organ of the movement, *Suomen Viikkolehti*, (“Finland Weekly”, referred hereinafter as the *SVL*) is an important source of information on various matters, both ideological and more practical. In addition to organizational and other topics, it has published missionaries’ accounts from the field.

The newspaper was started in 1888, around ten years before the first four FiAM missionaries left for the Himalayas. It spread among supporters across the country, and presumably influenced their opinions and views on various matters. Writings concerning the “other religions” like Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism were frequent, and usually the foreign faiths were presented in a relatively negative tone. Many of the reviews were originally released by other international missionary societies, such as the China Inland Mission, the Evangelical Alliance, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, and the London Missionary Society, and by well-known figures like Sir Monier-Williams and Grattan Guinness, the founder of the Missionary Institute in London. Soon after arriving in India near the Tibetan border the Finnish missionaries, too, started to write authentic descriptions and reports for the home audience, continuing the negative attitude towards “other religions”. After all, in a situation where maintaining the foreign mission became an economic burden for the movement, it was considered essential to convince the supporters at home of the necessity of the work by publishing reports and figures from the field.<sup>2</sup> In short, the contents of the *SVL* materials can be labelled as “for the public”. It explains the values and goals of the movement as well as the motivation to carry on the work abroad, in other words, the mission of the movement.

Secondly, there is rich material consisting of unpublished archival documents, hereinafter referred as the HM materials.<sup>3</sup> It includes a correspondence of over 1,500 letters, which I have used as sources along with the 1888–1920 volumes of the *SVL*. This part of the materials is more private in nature as it was not written for the public but consists of, for example, intimate letters between the missionaries in the field and the society leaders and other activists at home. These materials, especially, contain information on practical circumstances at the field stations, interaction between the missionaries and the local actors,

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<sup>2</sup> HM I Fd-5: 1163; HM I Ff-2: 865, 867–868, 877, 897, 898, 901, 908, 909.

<sup>3</sup> The archival materials of the Evangelical Free Church of Finland are preserved at the Hämeenlinnan maakunta-arkisto (Hämeenlinna County Archive, here HM), Hämeenlinna, Finland.

including the colonial authorities and other international missions, on financial matters, and so on. The central themes are the overwhelming economic deficiency and shortage of resources, and the actual slowness and difficulty of the evangelical work. Before arriving in the village of Ghoom in the Darjeeling district, the Finns knew surprisingly little about the local conditions, languages, cultures or life styles, and combined with the challenging circumstances this aroused personal contradictions, which are often discussed, too. In addition, writing on the whole was therapeutic for the missionaries since it maintained the connection to their homeland (Sihombing 2002: 31–32). This section of the materials can be labelled as “private”, as it reveals the actual conditions and relationships and thus draws on wider scenes for reciprocal activity and exchange relations in the field.

### 1.2 Ethnographic Collecting

Besides writing on their work and life, some missionaries collected ethnographic artefacts. In fact, many old collections now hosted at ethnographic museums have been gathered by non-anthropologists or non-museum professionals, excluding missionaries, and by administrators, merchants and travellers, in many cases people involved in Western exploration and colonial expansion (Clifford 1988: 26–28). However, at museums the importance of systematic collecting and documentation has been stressed and the value of collections not established by professionals might be questioned, because inadequate or absent documentation makes their use as research material and exhibition items problematic (Nason 1987: 40–42).

This was the case in 1908 when the first ethnographic collection of Himalayan artefacts collected by a FiAM missionary, Hilja Heiskanen, was bought by the National Museum of Finland. Missionaries were regarded as incompetent collectors by the governmental Antell Delegation, which consisted of distinguished representatives of science and fine arts and was responsible for the acquisitions (the Antell Collections 3, Minutes 1908–1911: 11.11.1908 and 18.12.1908). Nevertheless, two Himalayan collections by Heiskanen were acquired for the National Museum’s “Exotica Collections” in 1908 and 1912, respectively. They were the first Tibetan, Bhutanese and Hindu items at museum collections in Finland and are the primary ethnographic materials of my study. Heiskanen classified the 65 items in the first collection as *Religious items from Tibet*, and *Bhutanese, Tibetan and Hindu items*. The second collection is larger, 121 artefacts, and consists for most part of various *Tibetan items*, most of them religious.

Provided that there are additional written sources available, ethnographic artefacts can be used as supplementary sources to obtain, on the one hand, deeper synchronic knowledge about the culture in question and, on the other, diachronic knowledge, about the cultural and social relations and circumstances under which the items have been used and transmitted in time and space (Nason

1987: 60). With respect to the Heiskanen's collections, this is the case. Even if there are just a few direct references to material culture or ethnographic objects in the *SVL* and the *HM* texts, the accounts and descriptions concerning "other religions" are particularly interesting since, apart from their role as a media for the wider audience, they provide direct information about the values within the movement both internationally and at home, and about the evaluations of "pagan" religions. I suggest that the Christian interpretations of the Tibetan Buddhist artefacts can be traced from the text materials, in other words, the published and archival materials can be used as sources in investigating the historical interpretation of the objects at one point of their circulation, i.e., the interpretations they were given in a Christian context.

O'Hanlon sums up some approaches of what he calls the ethnography of collecting: the role of the local agency in creating exchange relations with the foreigners and in creating of markets for ethnographic artefacts; ethnographic collecting within colonial processes to the extent that colonial society provided the framework through which collectors (officials, missionaries, traders, museum curators) operated; the role of the intellectual backgrounds of the collectors in relation to the content of the collections they gathered; and illuminating the ethnography done in the museums where the collections are often held (O'Hanlon 2000: 2–4). He suggests:

In thinking about the sets of questions posed by an attempt to recover collecting as a topic, it is useful organisationally to distinguish broadly between what might be called its "before" (the theoretical baggage which collectors took with them, and their institutional arrangements); the "scene of collecting" (the processes of making collections, their content, and issues of local agency and impact) and the "after" of collecting (the fate of collections once made, and their museum lives). (2000: 9.)

Besides the "before" of the collectors, the "before" of the artefacts in their original cultural contexts, i.e, before they were collected, has to be dealt with. Artefacts can be contextualized to any period of their circulation in order to examine the culturally-bound intentions, transactions, calculations and values. The further an artefact has spatially and temporally been distanced from its origins and perhaps crossed cultural boundaries, the greater will be the number of meanings given to it and the larger will be the number of new ways in which it is used. When the physical circumstances of the object change, so do also its sets of significances as it accumulates a history. (Appadurai 1986: 5; Reynolds 1987: 155–156; Godsen & Knowles 2001: 4–5, 17, 23.) It is also a question of strategies of how and why these meanings are formed and presented. An artefact or a collection has to be placed in succeeding historical and social contexts in order to trace its history.

Overlapping with O'Hanlon's ideas, and for methodological reasons, I have divided the circulation of the artefacts into three historical phases or contexts of

interpretation. Firstly, the “Himalayas” refers to the original Tibetan or Himalayan contexts where the artefacts were made and originally used. Secondly, there is the “field” – which is also the field of the present title – i.e., the phase when the artefacts were detached from the first context by collecting. Here we find O’Hanlon’s “before”, the primary information of the objectives and motives of the mission; the “scene”, the interaction in the field, including material and non-material exchange, the collector’s activity and her interpretations; and “after”, the exchange at home when the items were exhibited in the money raising tours and finally sold to the Museum.<sup>4</sup> The third context is the “Museum” referring to the National Museum of Finland where both collections ended up.

This kind of a symbolic approach concerns the relations created by people to the artefacts in different cultures and different ages. Theoretically, as such an artefact is meaningless, and it gains significance only in relation to the subjects who use and handle it. The symbolic dimension of an artefact is a link to people’s value systems and world views. Arvidsson speaks about the communication chain of an artefact: the intentions of the manufacturer, the mediators and the users may be independent from each other, and the symbolic substance of an artefact is created in relation to the backgrounds of the people who handle it, and to those roles in which they act in different phases of the circulation (1990: 13). An artefact “communicates” between its users’ and holders’ values and intentions, world views and symbol systems, and manufacturing and using it in specific and particular ways expresses something about these variables.

## **2. Christian Perceptions of Himalayan Cultures**

The ideological material about “other religions” published by the *SVL* can be seen to represent the prevailing view among the Free Church movement, and the same tendency is reinforced in the more private HM documents. The Christian presumptions and preconceptions about “pagan” faiths strongly influenced the missionaries’ approach to the Himalayan cultures and religions. Also their writings from the field acted as a means for mediating images of Tibet, her culture and religion in contemporary Finland.

### **2.1 Comparing Christianity to Tibetan Buddhism and Other Religions**

The first narration on Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism was published in 1888. It summarized Sir Monier-William’s and pastor Francis Ellingwood’s presentations on *Pagan religions and Christianity* at the 100 years jubilee of the mission held in London in June of the same year. Sanskritist Monier-Williams was of

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<sup>4</sup> Only the first collection was exhibited on the tours and was acquired by the Museum subsequently in 1908, the second one was ordered from Heiskanen by the intendant A. O. Heikel and was sent directly to the Museum from India.

the opinion that knowledge of Indian culture was a way to convert its people to Christianity (see Wikipedia: Monier Monier-Williams).

In this article and in the *SVL* materials in general, the conceptual dichotomy between Christianity on the one hand and “paganism” on the other is clear. The starting point is nearly always comparative. According to the prevailing view, all religions were arranged into a kind of evolutionary continuum where monotheism was assumed to be the primordial mode. Thus, Judaism and the later Christianity were considered to be at the top of the hierarchy of all religions, they were the “primordial light” upholding the monotheistic essence from which all the other religions were regarded as have declined or degenerated. “African animism” was seen to be at the lowest level of all. In the case of India, the Veda religion was considered to have been monotheistic, with Indra as the original god, but gradually other gods had been adopted and eventually with the beginning of Hinduism the truth of monotheism had been lost in the crowd of false gods. And even if among the ethical principles of Buddhism there sometimes arose ones generating more understanding and even some approval – like the equality of men as compared to the caste system of Hinduism – the strict juxtaposition between Christianity and Buddhism and the other non-Christian faiths was the basic rhetorical level. Moreover, it was stated, for example, that the noble eightfold path and the other ethical principles of Buddhism were already and originally presented in the Jewish writings, the books of Moses and the prophets, from which they had been adopted.<sup>5</sup>

In 1894 and 1895, the newspaper published two notices on Christian mission attempts in Tibet. In the first the Jesuit mission of Abbé Huc and Joseph Gabet in the 1840s was reported, for example, and some general information on Tibet was given. The country was reported as being closed to foreigners because of the influence of China. The religion was considered to be a mixture of Hinduism, Buddhism and Roman Catholicism, at least in terms of its external features. The monastic institution was presented as a kind of religious-economic consultancy holding authority over the people as well as over their property. Lhasa was described as a city of “spiritual darkness”, and it was hoped that the whole “dark country” would “open” to the “light of the Gospel” despite the “Devil’s objection” (*SVL* 1894: 26, 205). In the other notice a metaphor of *clean–unclean* was used to compare Christianity and Tibetan Buddhism, and, again, it was hoped that the “light of the Gospel” would spread purity over the land (*SVL* 1895: 14, 108–109).

At a more theological level, the central argument for the antagonism between Christianity and the “Indian religions” was connected to the concept of mercy. Mercy was considered to be lacking from both Buddhism and Hinduism and was restricted to Christian ideology alone. It was understood to be a gift

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<sup>5</sup> *SVL* 1888: 27; *SVL* 1889: 9; *SVL* 1896: 4, 28; *SVL* 1896: 26, 206–207; *SVL* 1896: 27, 213.

from God, and accordingly a person did not have to strive to receive it – and hence an immortal afterlife – the only thing that was needed was contrition and repentance for one’s sins, i.e., something that happened inside the mind. In contrast, making offerings and paying to the monks and lamas for religious services was considered to be an external and empty action to gain meaningless merit, and sometimes Buddhism was even called slavery. Moreover, Buddhism was often described as a pessimistic religion without the hope of salvation, because a person’s own deeds could never be enough. Also, the question of the concept of the soul and its accountability aroused criticism, since if a soul was transmigrating from one incarnation to another it could not be responsible for its former actions as it could not remember them (*SVL* 1888: 27; *SVL* 1889: 11; *SVL* 1896: 26, 207). The concept of *karma* is not ever mentioned.

Indeed, pairs of contradictory core metaphors were repeated through the writings for years and even decades. As already noted, one of the commonest was the *light* of Christianity versus the *darkness* or *night* of Tibetan Buddhism and the other heathen faiths. To Christianity was attached the idea of *being inside* pointing at salvation and the God’s kingdom, while Buddhists were considered to be *out* or *outside*. Christians were *free* as they possessed the *truth* in Christ, while Buddhists were *bounded by ignorance*. Christians worshipped the *living God*; Buddhists worshipped *idols* and *false gods*, and so forth.<sup>6</sup>

These ideas were not only highly Christocentric and ethnocentric, they tell clearly that any attempt to understand the Himalayan cultures and the system or logic of Tibetan Buddhism in all its forms was lacking. On the contrary, apart from being ideological statements, one of the main purposes for using this kind of strict rhetoric was practical: as the “pagans” were described as living in such miserable conditions they were in urgent need of the Gospel and conversion; using the contemporary rhetoric: they had to be driven from the “darkness” into the “light”. This was the main argument for the work abroad.

## 2.2 Writings from the Field

Sigrig Gahmberg and Klara Hertz were the first Finnish missionaries to arrive at the field in the Himalayas, in 1895 and 1896, respectively. Initially they joined the Scandinavian Alliance Mission’s community and in due time the work of the FiAM. They were the first to send letters and descriptions from the field. Gahmberg stayed at the Chunabatti village station in Baxa Duar, near the Bhutanese border, and following the prevailing rhetoric the Bhutanese were described as being nominally Buddhists but were said to actually worship the Devil (*SVL* 1895: 42, 332; *SVL* 1896, 24, 188). Probably this refers partly to the animistic practices deeply mixed in with Tibetan Buddhism, and it was prayed

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<sup>6</sup> E.g., *SVL* 1888: 27; *SVL* 1889: 9; *SVL* 1889: 11; *SVL* 1894: 26, 205; *SVL* 1895: 14, 108–109; *SVL* 1896: 3, 19; *SVL* 1896: 26, 206–207; *SVL* 1898: 47, 372; *SVL* 1899: 15, 115; *SVL* 1899: 27, 212; *SVL* 1900: 12, 92.

that God would end the “stupidity” of the ignorant people. Hertz, for her part, described the many ethnic groups around the Darjeeling area, the Nepali, Lepcha, Tibetan, Bengali, Chinese and Mongolian people, and classified all as idol worshippers (*SVL* 1896: 46, 364).

Gahmberg wrote about funeral ceremonies in the village of Chunabatti as follows:

One day we heard drumming and hustle and bustle and when we went out we heard that a man had died and his body was taken to be cremated. The body was in a sitting posture in a pot which was carried in a sedan chair with a big umbrella above. The priests were walking ahead and making terrible noise. They climbed on a mount where the bodies are cremated and where the priests make the offerings. These poor people know nothing about the afterlife. If someone wants to be blessed he goes to a priest who hits him on the head with the supposedly holy books [...].

The editor summarizes Gahmberg’s description by noting: “In such darkness the poor people live. Let there arise in us greater sympathy and love towards the mission work and bring about tireless intercessions!” (*SVL* 1896: 3, 19). As seen above, the account is a good example of the repetitive theme in the *SVL* materials: poor people practising a pagan religion with its formal rituals were living in spiritual darkness, i.e., were ignorant of the salvation Christianity was offering and thus were in need of guidance, so prayers and greater enthusiasm were needed from the supporters of the mission. In practice, this meant also material contributions.

Hilja Heiskanen, who gathered the National Museum’s first Himalayan collections, followed the same schema in her writing, too. The “darkness of the paganism” was a typical phrase both in her private letters and in published texts.<sup>7</sup> But, especially at the start of her field work, Heiskanen, who was originally a seamstress, sometimes seemed to have appreciated some features of the material culture around her. For example she described the interiors of a Tibetan Buddhist temple mentioning the beauty of the temple horns, and she admired the Bhutanese homespun textiles (*SVL* 1899: 15, 115). Nevertheless, in general her attitude towards religious issues did not differ from the official, and sometimes the “darkness” also seemed to refer to matters other than religious, i.e., the overall cultural conditions in the Himalayas.

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<sup>7</sup> HH-VR 7: d, HH-VR 11: d; HM I Ff-2: 884, 889, 980; HM I Fd-2: 740–742, 573; *SVL* 1899: 15, 115; *SVL* 1899: 27, 212; *SVL* 1899: 32, 251.



### 3. Context and Interpretation

There is no doubt about the sincere concern the FiAM missionaries felt for the “poor pagans” who were considered to be in need of spiritual – and cultural – guidance. In fact, the general idea of the religious degeneration is compatible with the common mode of evaluating the “other” or “foreign” by denying the otherness or difference by classifying the other peoples as imperfect versions of oneself. This concerns intercultural contacts in general and the Christocentric world view, and the rationale for mission activity, in particular (Robertson 1989: 7, 8).

In order to see the logic of the judgements and actions of the FiAM missionaries, they have to be put into the relevant contexts, i.e., in the historical and international background of the wider mission field. The view that the “poor pagans” were in need of conversion was, of course, not restricted to the Free Church movement alone but had been the prevailing standpoint in the Christian world since the Crusades. The view of the “ignorance” of the “pagans” as it is stated in the materials here fits seamlessly with the early idea of dividing non-Christian peoples into two groups: heretics and heathens. The first term referred to Muslims, who were regarded as stubbornly maintaining their erroneous beliefs, and the second to the perhaps more archaic peoples who had not yet attained the knowledge of the Gospels (Bitterli 1989: 46, 55), or had lost the truth of monotheism over the course of time. As Bitterli puts it:

[...] the heathen, such as the Africans and the Brazilian Indians, were generally judged more indulgently. It was argued that some inexplicable mishap had deprived them from Christian enlightenment, leaving them in the blindness of idolatry. Fundamentally, however, they were thought to be ready and willing to accept the true faith, if the Europeans could only manage to dispel the infernal forces that had taken possession of their souls. (1989: 55.)

Also Thomas notes that:

Race may be the key differentiating category of much nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourse, but the characterization of others as heathens rather than blacks or Asiatics has obviously persisted in evangelical representations [...]. (1994: 54).

Indeed, after spending some time in the field the Finns began to be surprised and frustrated that the work was not progressing (e.g., *SVL* 1900: 11, 83). Their ignorance about the local cultures, languages and the overall circumstances made the situation even more tricky, and it is no wonder that many of the missionaries, if not all, experienced a prolonged culture shock. Moreover, they were heading to Tibet itself, but as Tibet was closed to foreigners for political reasons they had to stay on the Indian side of the border, where many other

mission societies were competing with them, the Scotland Mission being the biggest. So, preaching to the Tibetans was difficult or even impossible.

The role the Devil was given in these circumstances is interesting. According to the Christian world view and the evaluation of Tibetan Buddhism, the personal “enemy” was offered as an explanation for the obstacles. It was repeatedly noted that not only the evil spirits but also the Devil himself was holding up progress in spreading the Gospel, and was accordingly accused of causing discord between the missionaries or even possessing them, transforming the *angels* at home into *devils* in the field.<sup>8</sup>

Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism were thought to be merely devil worshipping and the people needed to be saved, but the enemy was holding onto his territory, both spiritual and mundane.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that Hilja Heiskanen was exhibiting items brought from the “enemy’s” territory while she was touring in Finland in 1906–1908, i.e., the Tibetan, Bhutanese and Hindu artefacts of the first collection, is not mentioned by the “Finland Weekly”, but the tours are recounted in the yearly reports of the movement in 1906 and 1907 (HM I Fd: 7, 652–653, 664). Only after Heiskanen had been dismissed from the mission, due to the worsening disputes in the field, did she write a number of private letters to the leading figures in the mission in Finland insisting on the return of the funds she had collected by exhibiting the artefacts at home and selling them to the Museum.<sup>10</sup> She does not explain in what tone the items had been presented, but it is only reasonable to assume that she followed the movement’s official ideology clearly depicted in the textual materials, both public and private. After all, besides being a member of the movement she was one of the writers. The lists and catalogues of the collections she wrote for the Museum give some ideas of her interpretations, too, although they were written for museum professionals, not for the Christian audience.

The two collections contain both religious objects and examples of everyday secular articles, such as attire and household utensils. Heiskanen’s personal penchants affected her choices, especially in the first collection, as along with the religious items it contains, for example, a complete Lhasa-style woman’s dress with jewellery and a Bhutanese woman’s dress. The second collection was more systematically gathered, according to the orders by the Museum, and contained chiefly Tibetan Buddhist ritual objects. The documentation gives relatively neutral description of most of the artefacts, but some expressions concerning the religious items follow the official standpoints presented above. For example, the collector discusses the “ignorance” of the people and the

<sup>8</sup> HM I Fd-5: 1018, 1027–1028, 1033–1034, 1097; HM I Ff-2: 884–885, 889, 923–924, 927; HM III-1: 1211; HM I Fd-2: 750, 759; SVL 1897: 34, 269; SVL 1898: 22, 174.

<sup>9</sup> This explanation has been given also recently by my Christian informants both in Finland and in India.

<sup>10</sup> HM I Fd-5: 1354–1355, 1356–1358, 1360–1363; HM I Ff-2: 923–924, 929; HM III-1: 1219, 1231; HM I Fd-2: 754, 798–805.

privileged position of the lamas and, in connection of some ritual objects, notes that the temple ceremonies are usually incomprehensible even to the monks themselves. Some statues – including a statuette of Milarepa – are labelled as “false gods”, but on the whole even the ritual items are described quite objectively (verifications 8/1908 and 5/1911 of the National Museum’s Exotica Collections).

In the analysis, the difference between the rhetorical options the collector was using on different levels has to be made, i.e., the difference between the *description* in the “museum” context and the *interpretation* in the Christian or the “field” context. The collector used the artefacts by presenting them to specific audiences according to what seemed to be relevant and expected in a given situation: in the Christian context to show “pagan” life and to collect money for the mission; in the museum context to give the relevant information about the uses of the artefacts in order to obtain funding for the mission in return. Thus the collector’s personality, changing goals and conditions of travel and settlement do influence the choices of action, both in collecting and in using what has been collected (see Cannizzo 1998: 155, 156).

#### 4. Summary

Historian Urs Bitterli divides the encounters between European and non-European cultures into three basic types: contacts, collisions and relationships. While a contact is understood as an initial, short-lived or intermittent encounter and a collision or conflict as an entirely ethnocentric approach from the European side with the principal aim of increasing their power, by a relationship he refers to a prolonged series of reciprocal contacts on the basis of political equilibrium and mentions traders and missionaries as examples on the European side (1989: 20, 29–30, 40). In many cases the missionaries “became the professional group which [...] possessed the fullest information about the alien culture. Since they were ordered to send in reports, they also provided the most detailed ethnographic accounts until the beginning of anthropological field work [...]” (idem: 47).

This is somewhat compatible with the Finnish Alliance Mission’s activity, but concerning the ideological basis of the movement there was a strong ethnocentric and Christocentric tendency. The movement was ideologically a part of the Protestant revivalist network, and the messages from the foreign mission fields supported the basic statement of the supreme rank of Christianity compared to the “darkness” of paganism. The Finnish missionaries in the Himalayas did not “go native” either, but retained their Western lifestyle as far as possible, and joined in the colonial structure in India in many ways. In the field, the local people were evaluated above all according to their respect for

Christianity.<sup>11</sup> More reciprocal or trade-like exchange relationships were formed as employment and medication opportunities offered by the missionaries were exchanged for convergence to the mission or conversion. In many cases the converts came from segregated conditions or were orphan children, who were expected to work for the mission in return for an upbringing and education.<sup>12</sup>

The ethnographic collections were formed as a by-product of these multi-level exchange relations in the field, and at home they were used in exchange for financial funding for the mission. The artefacts were concrete examples of the Himalayan cultures and Tibetan Buddhism, i.e., “paganism”, and as such they were needed to convince the home audience of the necessity of the work abroad, to spread the Christian propaganda and to collect funds.<sup>13</sup> After shifting to the “museum” context the artefacts have been re-interpreted repeatedly over the decades, first in making the original catalogues and thereafter in connection with several exhibitions. If the interpretations of Tibetan Buddhism and the Himalayan cultures by the FiAM actors in the “field” context can be reduced to the core idea of the battle between Christ and the Devil, good and the evil, in the “museum” context there has been an attempt to restore these concrete examples of Himalayan cultures not only physically, but also to re-establish the cultural patina that derives from the original environment and interpretations.

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<sup>11</sup> E.g., HM I Fd-7: 773–774; HM I Ff-1: 1210–1211, 1214; HM I Ff-2: 879–881, 904; HM I Ff-3: 1538.

<sup>12</sup> HM I Ca-1: 12–13; HM I Ce-1: 1; HM I Fa-1: 680; HM I Fd-5: 1343–1345; HM I Fd-6: 946–950; HM I Fd-7: 635–636, 677; HM I Ff-2: 881–882, 887–888, 892; see also Bitterli 1989: 47–48.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, even better evidence than the artefacts for the need of salvation was a Nepalese girl called Ruth, whom Heiskanen brought to Finland in 1906–1908 after the mission had saved her and her brother from slavery (HM I Fd-5: 967, 1357, 136; HM, I Fd-7: 650, 664). Thomas has written about the “before-after” narrative of conversion and the role children were given in it: “The category of ‘children’ is stretched beyond any particular culture, and the plight of those who (as it were contingently) live with ‘wicked people’ is stressed. If the social circumstances change, these children can grow up being no less Christian than any others.” (1994: 131.)

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