

**THE ADVENTURES OF
JEAN-BAPTISTE CHEVALIER
IN EASTERN INDIA (1752-1765)**

**HISTORICAL MEMOIR
AND
JOURNAL OF TRAVELS IN ASSAM
BENGAL AND TIBET**

Introduction & Commentaries

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Introduction

Jean-Baptiste Chevalier, one of the most remarkable French agents in India, is mainly known for his diplomatic activities in Bengal when he was the Governor of Chandernagore (1767-78). After the disastrous Treaty of Paris, he worked actively to bring back prosperity to the French factories by freighting ships to Mokha, the Persian Gulf, Pegu, Siam and Indochina, while the Company was increasing its purchases in Bengal. Above all, he was an ardent defender of the French cause in Hindustan, maintaining close relations with the Indian princes through French officers like Gentil and adventurers like Madec, with the conviction that France could still create a sphere of influence in north India. In all his letters to the ministry, he repeatedly laid stress on the poor position of the French in Bengal compared to the powerful situation of the English, and complained at not having received even a single response to the numerous letters that he had sent. Unfortunately, in his heroic fight against Warren Hastings, the powerful English proconsul of Calcutta, his pen was the only weapon that he could use. This extensive correspondence preserved in the French archives was analysed by Emile Barbé¹ and S.P. Sen² to determine his role in the last phase of the Anglo-French rivalry in India.

However, no serious research was done on his active life until he became the chief of the French factory. His travels in the districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur, in 1757-58 (with Courtin, the French representative in Dhaka), have been mentioned by S.C. Hill in his book *Three Frenchmen in Bengal*.³ However, his adventures through eastern India, particularly his expeditions on the edge of the Himalayan range, have always eluded mention. The journey he made in Assam in 1755 has remained a mystery. We knew vaguely that it was undertaken under difficult conditions, but we ignored the details of the odyssey and its length. Even the well-known English geographer James Rennell, who made the survey of the Brahmaputra 10 years later, did not exactly know when this expedition had taken place.⁴ J.P. Wade, in his

¹ E. Barbé, *Le Nabab René Madec*, pp. 58, 61, 94, 101, 115.

² S.P. Sen., *The French in India*, pp. 86-90, 112-20, 124-35.

³ S.C. Hill., *Three Frenchmen in Bengal*, pp. 137, 139, 148, 159, 164.

⁴ "Mr Chevalier, the late Governor of Chandernagore, by permission of the king, went as high up as the capital of Assam, about the year 1762, but was under considerable degree of restraint, with respect to making remarks either on the course of the river, or on the country. As Mr Chevalier however went on a very large embarkation, we are convinced that the river is navigable for large boats..." (Rennell, *Memoir*, 1792, p. 299).

geographical description of Assam compiled between 1776 and 1802,⁵ mentioned that Chevalier had written a journal when he was going up the Brahmaputra, but no historian after them tried to find out if this document had been preserved.⁶

In fact, this *Journal* does exist and it has been found, along with other *Memoirs* and *Journals*, at the *Bibliothèque de l'Institut*, in Paris, where, in 1926, Mrs. Henri Cordier had donated the papers of the Chevalier de Conan's family.⁷

The Manuscripts

(a) The manuscript, *Journal de mon voyage à Assem (Journal of my Travels in Assam (ms 5489))*,⁷ consists of 49 folios, written on one side. It is in poor condition. The paper is partially destroyed by worms. This damage is quite extensive till folio 11, after which the condition gradually improves. However, a perforation remains right up to the last folio. The text is incomplete; it stops in the middle of a sentence and it is difficult to read. An extensive work of thinking has been done in order to find intelligible sentences from a recognised word. We had to proceed with rigour and patience to note down the repetitions and, for the toponomy, to compare the spelling of the writer to the one mentioned in the *Bengal Atlas* and the *Journal* of Rennell. These two last documents allow us to follow almost all the stages of the journey between Dhaka and the border of Assam, and therefore, except for a few words that resisted our efforts of identification, we have been able to re-establish the text in a satisfactory manner.

⁵ J.P. Wade, *A Geographical Sketch of Assam*, pp. 1-2: "He has left some information relative to the geography of the country; or more probably the banks of the river, which lay in his course... the few hints which Major Rennell seems to have obtained from the conversation or the notes of Chevalier, are marked by such obvious errors, that we cannot regret his information from his quarter has not proved more copious".

⁶ In his book about the relations between Assam and the English Company (*Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 63-5), the modern historian of Assam, S.K. Bhuyan, mentions many incorrect facts about Chevalier.

⁷ In the *Bibliothèque de l'Institut*, in Paris, under the classification mark *ms 5489*, we find the following manuscripts, in addition to the two texts that we are publishing:

— Mémoire du Conseil de Chandernagor sur les violences commises par le Conseil de Calcutta dans le Bengale, au sujet d'un fossé qu'ils avaient authentiquement permis aux François de creuser autour de leur Colonie, qu'il a ensuite détruit à main armée au moment où il touchoit à sa perfection et après y avoir laissé travailler pendant deux années consécutives, 1767-69, pp. 1-36, followed by Correspondance respective, pp. 36-129.

— Extrait de la lettre de MM. les commissaires de la liquidation passive à Chandernagor à MM. les directeurs de la Compagnie des Indes de France à Paris (31 août 1774), 9 p.

— Récit de tous les événements qui se sont passés dans le Bengale à la déclaration de guerre annoncée par les Anglois entre la France et l'Angleterre (1778), 109 pp.

— Copie de la lettre adressée par Mr Hastings, à Mr Chevalier, lorsque celui-ci fut fait prisonnier dans la principauté de Naguepour (10 août 1778), 2 pp.

(b) Under the same classification mark, we find a text of a hundred pages, written on both sides, in a good state but without any date, entitled *Mémoire historique de mes travaux et de mes services dans l'Inde copié sur mes différents journaux* (*Historical Memoir of my work and services in India copied from my different journals*). The title mentioned on the first page is *Mémoire historique depuis mon arrivée aux Indes en 1752 jusqu'à ce jour* (*Historical Memoir from my arrival in India in 1752 to date* (meaning till the nomination of Chevalier as Governor of Chandernagore). It is an old copy that seems faithful, but leaves a lot of proper names unwritten, particularly names of places, mentioned by a number in the margin. Most probably the copyist could not read the draft properly and wanted to set up a list of the words he did not know in order to get the right name from the author or a competent person, but was not able to do so ultimately.

We have been able to solve this problem by comparing the memoir of Chevalier to other texts from the same period. We can easily find the missing words of his text about Assam, by consulting his *Journal* (ms mentioned *supra*), which is the source of his information. Regarding his travels in the north of Bengal (along with the chief of Dhaka), it is easy to restore the text in its entirety with the help of Courtin's description (translated and commented by S.C. Hill (*H.T.F.B.*, pp. 132-73) and of some English documents, such as the correspondences exchanged between Clive and the indigenous princes (*Bengal and Madras Papers*, vols. II and III). It has therefore been possible, in most cases, to guess with near certainty the missing parts. We also had to correct some funny alterations due to tiredness. The copyist read 'Hide' instead of 'Forde', and we are really not sure if he wrote 'Elise' or 'Clive', Séraffin or Scrafton. A touch of patience and imagination was enough to come to terms with these difficulties.⁸

— Récit abrégé de la manière dont j'ai échappé aux Anglois et dont je leur ai été livré ensuite, violences qu'ils ont employées pour, après que j'ai été entre leurs mains, me contraindre à me reconnaître prisonnier de guerre, ma lettre en forme de protestation et condition de ma signature forcée, 12 pp.

Under the classification mark *ms 5490*, we find, in addition to the Memoir extracted from letters... by Armand Chevalier, mentioned *infra* :

— Mémoire détaillé sur l'Inde, sur les moyens d'empêcher la nation angloise d'en faire la conquête, de la chasser de ses établissements et de ses possessions et de procurer ce riche et vaste empire à la France ou au moins de lui faire payer la masse de ses dettes (10 mai 1779), 147 pp.

— Journal de mon voyage du Bengale en Europe par l'Isthme de Suez sur le vaisseau danois, le *Fredericknagor*, capitaine Le Franc, 1778, décembre, 213 pp.

— Mémoire politique sur l'Inde. Plan de rétablissement à suivre pour rendre à la nation française sa considération, son indépendance et un degré de puissance qui balance celle des Anglois (10 février 1784), 25 pp.

⁸ We have summarised in the margin, in bold character, the main developments, and the punctuation has been adapted for modern use. The numbers in brackets incorporated in the text correspond to the pagination of the manuscripts.

(c) Under the same classification mark, is another account entitled *Mémoire tiré des lettres, notes et journaux de voyage de M. Chevalier, ancien gouverneur général du Bengale, par Armand Chevalier de Conan, son fils (mémoire historique, 1ère partie)* (*Memoir extracted from letters, notes and journals of Mr. Chevalier, ex-governor general of Bengal by Armand Chevalier de Conan, the son of Jean-Baptiste Chevalier (Historical Memoir, 1st part)*), 161 pp. This text writes out (pp.1-125) most of the previous one about the career of Chevalier and adds (pp.126-161) details on the seizure of Chandernagore by the English in 1778, the escape and the arrest of the Governor.

It is a draft full of alterations, which tries to present the facts of ms 5489 under a new form. We notice that Armand Chevalier worked on the text of his father (since crossed sentences on parts of the text can still be seen), that he cut and simplified it and added some notes that he probably invented. The journey in Tibet, in particular, was the most modified. For example, in the first version, Chevalier specifies that he did not go inside the country further than the provincial capital (in the south-east of the country probably) and that he did not speak Tibetan. In the new version, it is said that he went to Lhasa, where he met the Dalai Lama and that he learned the local language, which allowed him to manage without a translator. These details are made up in such a clumsy way that the trick is obvious.

We therefore considered that it was not necessary to compare the two texts and to note down the differences, however, when we happen to mention some passages from the second *Memoir*, we always specify that it comes from the *ms A.C.*

Content

The *Journal of my Travels in Assam*, that first caught our attention, is incomplete because the last pages have been lost. The end of Chevalier's adventure would have remained a mystery if we had not found the *Historical Memoir*, which states the nature of Chevalier's services from his arrival in India till his nomination to the position of Governor of Chandernagore, and helps us to discover the rest of his eventful journey in Assam and many other episodes of his life that we had previously ignored.

These two texts complement each other and can be combined in a fruitful manner; their dominant theme being that of adventure, and this is the reason why we gave this title to the book. The *Journal* gives us spontaneous notes thrown on paper at the end of each day, written after difficult hours of navigation or in the irritation of a forced and neverending stopover; we find frank and direct remarks, without any artifice, about the places he saw and the people he met. Through these genuine remarks, which have not been edited or corrected for the purpose of being published or due to an official order, the man shows his real face and appears to be full of life with his merits and his faults, his successes and his miseries.

The *Memoir* is the result of long thinking: a skilful plea, where the writer shows his faithfulness and devotion to the *Company*, but cleverly omits some of his activities — significant oversights in order to hide some of his weaknesses. This story has been skilfully⁹ made and has to be read carefully always with a critical eye.

The analysis of these two accounts allows us to determine with precision the different moments of the career of Chevalier between 1752 and 1764 as well as to highlight the main characteristics of his personality; we also discover little-known aspects of eastern India, particularly interesting features of the ancient bed of the Brahmaputra and the kingdom of Assam.

Jean-Baptiste Chevalier:

A. His Travels in Eastern India (1752–1764)

Let us first consider his years of travels in eastern India.

1. 1752–58

Jean-Baptiste Chevalier, born in Blois in 1729, left Lorient, France for India in February 1752 to reach Bengal in November of the same year. In 1753, he was appointed to work with Courtin, in Dhaka. He was then sent "inside the provinces" to gather any information that could be of interest to the nation. In April 1755 the Governor of Chandernagore, Renault de Saint-Germain, gave him a more important mission to go to Assam in order to acquire some land for the establishment of a factory.

(a) Journey in Assam (June 1755–June 1757)

The journey in Assam is extensively described in his *Journal*.¹⁰ He left Dhaka on the 14th of June 1755 and, after going up the rivers Lakhya, Banar and then the Brahmaputra, he reached Rangamati on the 8th of July, Jogighopa on the 14th and Goalpara on the 27th, from where he sent some letters and presents to the king of Assam. The authorisation from the sovereign took a lot of time to reach him. When it arrived, he crossed the river and reached the border post Kandhar chauki on the 29th of November. From there the goods he carried were transferred to Assamese boats. On the 11th of December he crossed Guwahati, and on the 6th of February 1756 he was half a day away from Gargaon, the capital. On the 7th of February he handed the letter of accreditation from the Company to the sovereign. On the 16th of April he reached Rangpur. The diary stops on the 14th of May.

⁹ We find three speeches, written in the style of the ancient historians, where he draws, with a certain rhetorical practice, either the psychology of a character (hence the diatribe of the *raja* of Bijni, p.72), or the politics of a government or the activities of a religious order (hence the long monologue of the *raja* of Assam pp.33-4, and the explanations given by the Tibetan lama, p.90).

¹⁰ Before sailing up the valley of the Brahmaputra, he has "in vain attempted to open a way through the mountain of Silhet", but we ignore the details of this expedition, see *infra* p.63 note 1 and p.169.

We know from the *Historical Memoir* that during the three months that Chevalier spent in the capital, he was invited to many festivities and to the royal hunting parties. The sovereign promised to give a response to his request on his return from an expedition that he undertook on the borders of his kingdom. After 6 weeks, having no news from the king, Chevalier planned to go to China by crossing the kingdom of Katha (in Burma), but then he had to give up his project. The king came back after 6 months and at last gave him his response. He told him that he had welcomed him solely in a personal capacity, but that he could not grant him permission to establish a Company and that Assam would remain closed to foreigners. After giving him his notice, he invited him to a pilgrimage in Guwahati. The journey by boat was interrupted by games and entertainments and lasted for twenty-five days. In May 1757, when the news came about the resumption of the hostilities between France and England and the capture of Chandernagore, the sovereign asked his guest to leave the country. In 15 days Chevalier arrived in Bengal and joined Courtin in Dhaka, after escaping an ambush from the *faujdar* of Rangamati.

(b) Wanderings in Bengal with Courtin (June 1757–March 1758)

He found the chief of the French factory ready to leave with the goods of the Company that he had loaded on a fleet of 40 boats. Together they went up the Ganges, but, when they were near Murshidabad, they learned of the victory of Palasi (Plassey) on the 23rd of June. Then, they decided to go towards Dinajpur where they were badly received: on the 10th of July. Luckily, the young *raja* of Sahibganj welcomed them in his principality, where, near the Tista, they built a stronghold called *fort de Bourgogne*. In September, they were foolish enough to give assistance to a *nabab* who had revolted against Mir Jafar and ultimately had to try their luck somewhere else. In January 1758 they came under the attack of the army of the *faujdar* of Rangpur and in March they had to give themselves up to the English of Murshidabad.

2. 1758–1762

Until this point, the events have been described clearly, well situated in time and space. But between 1758 and 1762, Chevalier indulged in some lesser-known activities and few precisions are given. Chevalier describes only his expedition against the principality of Bijni (December 1760 to February 1761), and his journey to Tibet (November 1761 till March 1762). And still he does not mention the base from where he planned his movements, nor the routes he took. In none of the documents from that period do we find any reference about these travels. If they did take place at all, the intervention in the dynastic quarrel of the *rajahs* of Bijni should have left some traces in the correspondence exchanged between the *nabab*

and the Governor! Therefore, we wonder if Chevalier did not try to conceal his collaboration with some English merchants in this part of the *Memoir*. Indeed, as mentioned, *infra*, (p.63 note1) in the documents of the *East India Company*, it is almost certain that he was settled in Goalpara, that he used to trade in salt with Assam for an English "friend" and that he was "usurping the English name" in order to impose himself on the local population. He used to be tyrannical with the people and it is possible that the expedition against Bijni was an initiative of the same nature as the one denounced by the *nabab* in his correspondence with the Company (p.63 note 1, p.92 note 32). Finally, it is probable that his arrogant attitude alienated the English merchants from him and that they forced him to go back to Chandernagore at the end of December 1762.

3. 1763–1767

Chevalier gives more details about his activities from 1763 to 1767. He briefly mentions his trip in Hindustan (April 1763–November 1763) which led him to Purniya, Faizabad, Agra and Allahabad, where he met the emperor Ali Gauhar or Shah Alam II, and the general Najaf Khan. These were contacts that he was to exploit later. Determined to go back to France, he sent his goods to Europe on the 1st of December 1764. He then boarded the *Saint-Jacques* for the coast of Mergui, where he stayed from April till November 1765. Upon his return he met Law, who had recently arrived from Europe to take back possession of the French establishments given back by the treaty of Versailles and with whom he collaborated. Law asked him to stay back for two more years. He was then admitted to the Council of India and in July 1767, appointed Governor of Chandernagore.

Such are the main features of the career of the French chief in Bengal, who wanted to change the current of history in favour of France. His experience of the realities of Indian life had been decisive and it heavily influenced him in the elaboration of his future diplomatic projects. Through these various adventures, the true character of Chevalier appears.

B. His personality

Chevalier is not a poet. He is not a contemplative or a dreamer; he is a man of action. His descriptions are desperately dull as, for example: "*this mountain is well wooded and makes a charming sight (p.132)*". But when it is a matter of business or when someone tries to interfere with his projects, then his mind works, and his style becomes incisive and aggressive; we enjoy the brilliant style displayed in the reports sent by him at a later period to the minister in Paris. Hence, when he left Jogighopa, disregarding the threat of the *darogah*, he wrote: "*before leaving, I told him that my intention was to depart; the threats he had made to stop us did not intimidate me much and I was going to give him proof of it. I also advised him not to come to his acts, because I was determined to push them away in the most violent manner;*

in which he was. His attitude towards the Assamese high civil servants is ridiculous. He feels continuously aggressed by ceremonials and matters of etiquette. He shows himself to be spiteful, chauvinistic and ludicrous, to such an extent that, in Guwahati, the *bara phuukan* once pretended to have diarrhoea in order to get rid of him (p.170). It was brought to his attention that Europeans before him in Assam had submitted to the old customs and that his attitude was "a small obstinacy around a small trifle and a simple ceremonial" (p.190). His fiery temper appears all along his stay. He considers that to obey the customs would have been "a misdeed that would tarnish the name of the nation and make it appear despicable in a country whose people had just heard about it." (p.189)

This unwelcome intruder continuously irritates his hosts, who tactfully try to calm him down by showing him a lot kindness. Having perfectly understood his weakness: when money is at stake, he always manages to find a compromise. Even after creating a storm, he would always write an ordinary letter of apology, because he would insist on selling his goods at the most expensive price. He simply confesses that his "new quality of ambassador was incompatible with the one of merchants" (p.192) and accepts "to submit to the shameful customs", confessing: "I preferred to close my eyes and sacrifice the prerogatives of the first [quality of ambassador] to the interest of the second [quality of merchant]". It is this trait of character that Modave underlined twenty years later, when he met Chevalier in Chandernagore and described him as ambitious, lacking in political sense and mostly concerned with his personal interests.¹⁴

In his *Journal*, Chevalier appears as a kind of "Astérix in Assam," brave, bold, but impatient, besides being fiery, full of his 'Gallic' superiority and incapable of appreciating any other type of culture. He simply missed the magic potion of the cartoon hero to make a feat of this journey!

He nevertheless was an astonishing personality. Living dangerously, he often landed in some unworkable situation. However, he would manage to come out of the worst situations with his honour intact, using all sorts of clever devices. When he became the head of the French establishment in Bengal and tried to drive the English out of India, he continually suggested "expedients" to the minister, and it has to be admitted that had they been tried twenty years earlier, i.e. before the English had established their grip on Hindustan, they could have had positives results.

II. The Brahmaputra valley and the kingdom of Assam

The other point on which we have to pay particular attention is that Chevalier's notes on his travels in Assam give a solid and original documentation on many little known or unknown aspects of eastern India and the Himalayan foothills.

¹⁴ Modave, *Voyage en Inde*, pp. 105, 115, 129.

Assam, a forbidden kingdom

In those days, it was not an easy task to penetrate into Assam. The people were hostile to all foreigners. This attitude developed from the fact that the Muslims from Bengal carried out sporadic attacks on them from 1205 to 1682. Although the Ahom sovereigns, since their conversion to Hinduism, accepted and welcomed certain Indians who would contribute to their social life such as religion, literature and arts, etc. it was always on the stringent conditions that these new entrants should sever all umbilical chords with their country of origin, to merge totally with the Assamese community and never leave their foster land. Violators of these rules were punished harshly; an Indian architect who had constructed the buildings in the new capital, Rangpur, was executed because documents including information about the kingdom¹⁵ were found on him. They were even more cautious of Europeans: access to the territory was theoretically forbidden to them.

Few Westerners had ventured into this area. In the second half of the 15th century, Nicolo Conti might have gone till the border.¹⁶ The Jesuits Cacella and Cabral, with their plans to go to China, reached Hajo in September 1626. They visited Pandu, near Guwahati but retraced their steps in October of the same year.¹⁷ The invasion of Assam by Mir Jumla in 1662 started attracting attention to this land. A Dutch sailor named Glanius, who accompanied the Mughal troops up to the capital, left a brief story about his adventures.¹⁸ However it was not until the first half of 18th century that a few commercial attempts in Assam materialised. The first attempt, it seems, was a personal enterprise in which Dupleix took part. In 1739-40, three traders, namely James Mill (an ex-employee of the Company of Ostende), Goodingt, a Dutch national and a certain Mathews, could bring goods until the capital of Assam, but had to return emptyhanded.¹⁹

In 1742, Mill escorted boats carrying salt to the border and, for a few

¹⁵ S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 57.

¹⁶ N. Conti, *The Travels of*, in Major, *India in the Fifteenth Century*, p. 10.

¹⁷ C. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, pp. 123-4.

¹⁸ Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam, *A Contemporary Dutch Chronicle, Bengal: Past and Present*, vol. XXIX, Nos. 57-58, January-June 1925, pp. 7-29.

¹⁹ About the first Europeans merchants who have tried to penetrate into Assam and particularly on the journey of James Mill, S.K. Bhuyan (*Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 63-5) gives rather vague information. About this business penetration attempt we found traces in the French documents that Martineau has used (*Dupleix*, vol. I, pp. 398-401) and that is summarised herewith. This operation seems to have been decided in the greatest mystery among three men: a previous English dealer of Calcutta, called Elliot, Dupleix and Sichterman, who during the year 1738, formed a business association. James Mill, a former employee of the Company of Ostende, dissolved in 1732, became an adventurer and was employed as a scout. He was soon followed by a Dutch, named Goodingt. We ignore the incidents that marked this trip. In May 1739, Mill was in Calcutta (which he left soon for Assam), preceded by a man called Mathews or Mathée. On 27 June the two men met on the Brahmaputra; on 11 July, they were in Rangamati; then they reached Khandhar, a border post where their goods

years, traded with Assam. Having helped the king to subdue a revolt, he could carry out his trade easily, but he was never allowed to settle in the country.²⁰

It seems that other Europeans tried their luck in Assam, particularly Auteuil, as mentioned in the *Journal* (pp. 190,192). In any case Chevalier was the first ambassador of a European Company to make a request for establishing a factory in this country.

Hydrographical Network of East Bengal

Ten years before Rennell, Chevalier described the Brahmaputra and its many branches, which have changed a lot since that time (second half of the 18th century).

At that time, the Padma, which canalised a large part of the current, had stronger meanders than today between Boaliya and Goyalanda (Goalundo) and had a mouth separated from the Brahmaputra. The major bed of the Brahmaputra was shaped like an "S" with its lower loop reaching the Meghna. Between 1787 and 1820, the river Janai (currently the Yamuna) became the main channel of the Brahmaputra, which left his oriental bed to be united to the Padma at Goyalanda to create the enormous estuary that is known today. These significant changes were not isolated. The Tista, that represented a kind of pivot in the draining of north Bengal, was heading straight towards the south; after the floods of 1787, the Tista left its lower course, and by heading towards the south-east, it came to reinforce the Yamuna.²¹

The Lakhya, which lead to the region of Dhaka consisted of the union of were transferred to Assamese boats. From Guwahati, troubles started. They had to pay duties on all the customs posts (*chauki*). They finally reached Rangpur where the king welcomed them but did everything to discourage them. In November, it was known in Bengal that they had problems. Finally, four months later, on 8 March 1740 a letter was received from Mathée (written on 22 February) declaring the failure of the expedition. This last one came back with a part of the goods he had carried. An Assamese chronicle (quoted by S.K. Bhuyan, *op. c.*, p. 63) mentions the visit, to the court of the king Siva Singha, of three Europeans: Gudimwill, Distirbill and Mistirbill, probably referring to Goodingt, James Mill, and Mathews.

²⁰ Seton-Karr, *Selections from Calcutta Gazette*, 1864, vol. I, pp. 153-4, mentioned by S.K. Bhuyan, in *op.c.*, p. 63 & note 112.

²¹ These colossal variations have impressed Buchanan (*B.M.E.I.*, vol. V, p. 358) who wrote at the beginning of the 19th century, in the district of Rangpur: "Since the survey was made by Major Rennell, the rivers of this districts have undergone such changes that I find the utmost difficulty in tracing them, the soil is so light, and the river in descending the mountains have acquired such force that frequent and great changes are unavoidable; so that whole channels have been swept away by others, and new ones are constantly forming. The nomenclature is therefore exceedingly difficult. After tracing the name of a river from some distance you all of a sudden lose it, and perhaps recover the same name at a distance of 20 miles, while many large rivers intervene, and no channel remains to assist in discovering the former connection. The old channels have not only lost a current water, but have been entirely obliterated by cultivation, or by beds of sand thrown into them by newly formed rivers. In some instances different portions of the same river remain, while others have been lost; and

many branches of the Brahmaputra. There were three main channels: the first (the Banar river) left the river to the east-south-east of Jamalpur, the second (river of Soquia of Chevalier) left it near Baigunbari; the third (the largest) came out near Toke and united with the others at Ekdalla; today this last one is silted up and is not linked anymore to the Lakhya during the dry season.

The river traffic has been affected very much by the changes; the old bed of the Brahmaputra, nowadays, has an insignificant role to play; as for the Lakhya, if it can be sailed up from Dhaka to Maymansingh during the rainy season, it does not allow boats with a draught of 1.50 m to go much further than Lakhpurchar.²²

In the valley of Assam, the wanderings of the river have been less spectacular, because many rocky shoals in Biswanath, Guwahati and Goalpara have provided some steadiness to its bed.²³

Navigation

In his *Journal*, Chevalier mainly mentions the problems of navigation. The rivers he first followed, namely the Lakhya and Banar, were narrow but deep and hence did not pose any problems for the passage of his large boats (pp.114-115). On the other hand, the progression was difficult on the Brahmaputra, a vast water surface scattered with many islands carrying huge alluvial deposits and, on each side of the islands, a maze of branches joining the main riverbed. He insists on the danger of sand bars, of the tree trunks that could rip open the boats (p.117), the floating islands made of stumps and reeds (p.121) and finally the strength of the current and the crumbling of the banks, the fragments of which "could submerge any the boats coming in their way" (p.121). Near Guwahati, the intensity of the lateral erosion was such that the banks collapsed with a "terrifying noise" (p.167) ... "a noise comparable to shots of big canons" (p.173). Near Dhubari, the current was so swift in a rocky passage that we had to tie up the boats to a rope, which in breaking almost caused the loss of all the boats (p.125). It was not often possible to drag up the boat for the banks were often covered with thickets and reeds; there was no towpath. They had to clear the way through reed stalks on the high bank which could collapse at any time, or on the sandbank on the river (pp.123, 125, 180). Most of the time, they had to use the pole in shallow water or the oar elsewhere (pp.115,125). In Assam, the intervals are filled up by new channels, so that apparently the same river has various names in different parts of its course.

The confusion that has arisen from these circumstances is so great that Major Rennell seems to have been overpowered, or unwilling to waste time on the investigation; and, owing to the contradictory accounts given by the natives, he seems to have altogether avoided giving names to many of the rivers..." (see also B.D.G., *Mymensingh*, pp. 7-8).

²² E.B.D.G., *Dacca*, p. 7.

²³ E.B.A.P.G., pp. 167-71.

during the dry season, most of the branches of the river did not have enough water for the big barges. Between Goalpara and Guwahati, our man had lots of troubles to make the boat pass through; he had to unload it, pull and carry it up to the main bed, where the strength of the current broke the ropes and also the rudder of his *bajara*, and the boat ran aground on a sandbank. (p.165)

The river route was therefore very difficult, but it was the only permanent way to link Bengal to Assam. In the valley during the rains, the paths were impassable. Only the tracks of Sylhet and Guwahati by the Khasi Hills were taken by bearers

Landscapes, Flora and Fauna

The landscapes on the riverbanks were desperately monotonous. For days and weeks, there was nothing to see but the sandbanks and the cloudy water of the Brahmaputra and its arms. The horizon on both sides presented the view of an impenetrable line of trees or reed, interrupted sometimes by human establishments. In Assam, this platitude was broken by wooded hills with their conical blue summits and, in the distance, by the snowy peaks of the Himalayan range.

Chevalier has not been sensitively aware of the charms of the river Lakhya, of its steep banks of reed earth, with its villages hidden in the groves of areca; described more elaborately by Rennell ten years later.²⁴ Everywhere he was impressed by the forest infested with wild animals that posed a permanent threat to arable land.²⁵ It has to be remembered that numerous changes have occurred in this area since the 18th century. Cultivated lands have been extended at the expense of the jungles. But the greatest catalyst for the changes is jute cultivation, a sector in which Bengal almost has the monopoly in the world. In Rangamati, he noted down that "*besides, the entire landscape along the route to get there is always the same : a deserted country full of jungles where tigers are the only inhabitants*" (p.131). Before reaching Yogighopa, he experienced "*throughout the night the charming symphonies of buffaloes, tigers, rhinoceros and elephants howling continuously; a frightening noise which echoed through the mountains*" and the animals walked right up to the boat (p.133). In the area of Goalpara, he met a rhinoceros "*monstrous and of the height of the strongest elephant*", as well as hundreds of wild buffaloes which made a big impression on him (p.149). He also mentions a strange hunt or rather a strange way of

²⁴ "There is a pleasant prospect, the river being transparent and serpentine and flowing through a country made up of pleasant meadows intercepted with grooves and villages" (R.J., p. 97).

²⁵ Even the region of Dhaka faced the same. In 1790, the collector wrote about Bhawal: "one half of it is an entire jungle swarming with elephants and every other wild beasts". And since the governor offered rewards to hunters, in 1804, 270 skins of tigers were brought to Dhaka (E.B.D.G., Dacca, pp. 8-9).

'fishing' wild boars. During floods, the water can rise up to 10 metres, and many islands are submerged; animals that had settled there during the dry season must then reach the bank by swimming, and at this point the people try to catch them, like these young wild boars hunted with a dugout and presented to him (p.149).

Climate

In addition to the hostility of the vegetation, there is the unhealthy climate, which is reminiscent of the one of Bengal, but differs from it because of the geographic location of the valley that lies between two mountain chains from where the cold winds come. "*Daily, about five to six times successively, we were passing from suffocating heat to a bitter cold. If it was a bit windy by any chance, we had to cover ourselves as in winter and as soon as the wind stopped, we could scarcely breathe because of the heat*". (p.146) "*During the rainy season that starts in April and ends only in September, the inhabitants are prone to a wasting disease that wears them down slowly and from which they die.*" (p.134)

The cool season is characterised by a thick fog that covers the valley of the Brahmaputra in the morning. On 20th December he wrote, "*The fog during a part of the morning was so extensive and so thick that we had to wait until it cleared to start out. As we were going forward we felt the most biting cold, to the extent that all my people, Europeans and others, could hardly bear it.*" (p.174) It is therefore not surprising that his crew suffered violent fevers.

Human Settlements

Chevalier and his fellow travellers did not get the opportunity to appropriately observe the human settlements. In Bengal they stopped at nightfall in places and left at dawn. In Assam, they were not allowed to move away from their boat. The villages they stayed in were often established on high banks, surrounded by fruit trees, such as Dhubari, situated "*in the middle of a highly raised mango grove with a river flowing at its foot.*" (p.125) Towns are badly described. Chevalier has been touched by the "*picturesque site of Guwahati*" (pp.171-172), whereas others centres did not inspire him.

What should be noted in his account is that, contrary to what is generally believed on the basis of some information collected by Buchanan and badly interpreted,²⁶ the border post of Rangamati was already in decline in 1755; its fortress was dilapidated and its trade, nil. Here, the Frenchman did not even find food to feed his crew.

Trade in Assam

The aim of the expedition was to establish commercial relations between the French Company and Assam. In order to understand the problems

²⁶ S.K. Bhuyan (*Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 51) wrote: "about the year 1770, it contained nearly 1500 houses, several of which were inhabited by the Mogul chiefs and others Portuguese".

Chevalier had with the local authorities, we have to keep in mind the administrative situation on either side of the border. In Rangamati, on the Bengali side, there was a *faujdar* (pompously called "nabab" in the *Journal*) who was controlling the north-east region and was in charge of the relations with Assam. Chevalier shows how easy it was to divert the customs rules because of the disorganised administration of this province

On the Assamese side, the representative of the government, known as *duvariya baruva* (*duaria barua*), lived in Khandhar chauki (also called Assam Choky in English documents). He had the exclusive privilege of commerce with Bengal and received customs duties on all the goods. Exports consisted mostly of muga silk, eaglewood (*Aquilaria agallocha*), elephants' tusks and the imports mainly consisted of salt from Bengal. There was a big demand for salt, and it was the perspective of a big profit that attracted Bengali merchants to Assam.²⁷ Chevalier points out that salt was stored at Yogighopa and that merchants had to pay heavy taxes in Alamganj and in Rangamati (20% per transaction) (pp.131,134).

Assamese authorities were less accommodating than the Bengali civil servants and Chevalier experienced it to his cost. He first tried not to declare the value of his goods, which were contraband for one part, but then he had to transfer them on Assamese boats (pp.151, 160-1). After this illegal attempt, he was not allowed to have contacts with anybody; he was fed at the expense of the state, and his men were not allowed to buy provisions from the people of the country (pp.163,166). As he became impatient to contact Assamese merchants, he was pointed out, "*The tradition in the country is that nobody can buy from a newly arrived merchant until the king had previously been provided with what he wants. Following this, the King calls the other merchants and orders them to take the surplus at the price fixed by him and his ministers.*" (pp.198). We ignore how the story ended but for sure the lack of confidence of the Assamese made business transactions difficult.

Royal Splendour and Despotism

The description of the relations of the French representative with the Assamese sovereign and his ministers gives us a unique document on the splendour of the ceremonies, the activities of the court and the true nature of the royal absolutism.

Along the river all the border posts (*chauki*) were packed with armed guards (p.163). On his arrival in Guwahati, he saw the bank covered with a crowd of soldiers carrying bows and arrows (p.169); when entering the city he noticed a phenomenal number of people, which he estimated to be about 50,000 men, 50 ceremonial boats and 28 elephants (p.171). Near the capital, he attended a big ceremony on February 24, 1756 in which more than 500 decorated boats took part. Then there was the royal procession "*composed*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

of an infinite multitude of elephants and of sepoys armed only with long pikes". Three large ways had been made, the middle one for the king, the right one for the first vizier (accompanied with many elephants and riders) and the left one for the second vizier and his retinue. The entire mob was prostrated, in front of the king riding an elephant (p.186), a behaviour which shows the servility of the people continuously in the service of the sovereign who, according to Chevalier, "*has a despotic power on all his subjects and they are literally his slaves*". (p.187)

On the 7th of February, there was a new party with elephant fights, horse-racing, and a great many covered palanquins sheltering the women of the harem. The other expression of the royal absolutism which could be seen was that the viziers stayed lying on the floor in front of the king until he allowed them to squat on their knees (pp.193-94). On the morning of the 10th of the same month, Chevalier crossed a royal procession of 300 elephants followed by 20,000 men. In the evening, more than 80 ceremonial boats containing 100 rowers each accompanied the prince on a river cruise. There was an orchestra "*composed of drums, indigenous oboes and many other instruments which together formed a very disagreeable, dissonant harmony, but well admired by them*". To conclude, "*it is difficult for a monarch even much more powerful than him to walk with more pomp and swank. I was surprised and looked at the march with admiration*". (pp. 195-6)

In the *Memoir*, Chevalier describes the royal palace by emphasising the luxury of the decoration. "*Columns covered with gold and silver strips inlaid in ivory, ceilings made out of planks covered with thick sheets of gold*", a throne made of a "*block of gold and covered with carpets and pillows*". (pp.26-27) He writes that the houses were built of materials able to resist earthquakes that are a common phenomenon in this region: "*But what I found most surprising was that an ordinary roof of straw covers this room containing so much wealth. The explanation given to me about this was that the frequent earthquakes in the land did not allow the construction of a stone one*". (p.27)

We have to note the extraordinary hunts that the sovereign organised during his journeys, such as the *baj* hunt (pp.35-6) and above all these beats "*which are made with a display that we have no idea of in Europe*". Ten thousand men surrounded the ferocious animals with a fence and a fire was lit inside this enclosure. Then, in no time, "*with terrible howling and roaring*", thousands of wild animals were destroyed, elephants, buffaloes, tigers, rhinoceros: "*a superb horror to see and to hear*". (pp.28-9)

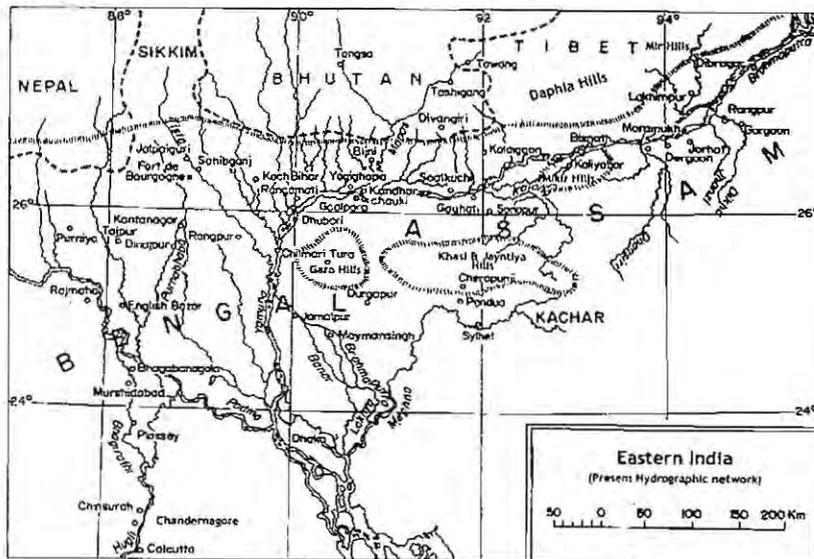
At the same time, in Delhi, the great Mughal himself did not live in such magnificence. Modave, who visited the court of Shah Alam twenty years after Chevalier's journey, lays stress on "*the squalid misery in which this formerly so remarkable monarchy has fallen*".²⁸

²⁸ Modave, *Voyage en Inde*, pp. 33-4, 217-23.

him to promptly issue the necessary order for allowing me access into the capital in order to meet him.

But what really was most miserable was the fact that the town was six weeks away and it took me three months to have an answer that would allow me in. I had no option but to submit to this undesirable situation and be patient. I took this as an opportunity to learn the local language, which I did in a few months.

When the period during which I was supposed to receive news from the court came to an end, my worries and embarrassment intensified because nothing had arrived. I started suspecting the faithfulness of the Assemese governor, but his attitude towards me was so friendly that I had to content myself with it. At last, after six months, my perseverance was rewarded. A messenger of the court came along with about thirty large boats belonging to the king, the order to load them with all my goods and most important, the permission for me to enter the kingdom.



The people I had brought with me from Bengal were sent back; a list was presented to me, with names of those who would be allowed to accompany me into the kingdom; only three of them were given permission to enter and I had to dismiss the rest.

All arrangements made, I crossed the river to enter the kingdom [3] and [Canar choqui]² was the first place that I touched.

Entry in Assam
(24 November 1755)

I was welcomed there by the Governor, who told me that I was under his protection and that he had orders from his master to satisfy all my needs. I thanked him with presents that appeared to please him.

I continued my trip the following day and travelled for two months before reaching the capital of the kingdom [Gorgan].³ This was where the king himself lived.

Arrival in the capital

A house had been arranged for my people and myself. The foreign minister visited me the day after and I returned his visit. There were talks about my meeting with the king and the princes on the following day and they explained to me the protocols to be observed; arguments about this ceremonial lasted for many days. It was asked that I should get off my palanquin at the view of the palace and walk across the immense yards till the door while being watched

Difficulties with the protocol

over by large numbers of palace guards, until I reached the audience chamber. After entering the room where the king was seated, I would have to bow with my face against the floor and remain in that position until the king would ask me to rise. No matter how much I objected and gave reasons to avoid this ceremony so humiliating for Europeans, I was told that all the ministers and the great men of the kingdom had to submit to these rules and this was the truth.

I was not convinced with the explanations. At the end, I declared that, if they did not want to make exceptions in their customs for a foreigner, i.e. someone who was not their subject, I would leave and tell my countrymen about the insulting reception thrown to one of their

Resolved in favour of the guest

representatives and they would know how to express their resentment in return. This threatening language had the desired effect on these people who are the most timid, cowardly and the most pusillanimous among all people living in India. I had already succeeded in creating some partisans through my ability to speak the local language and through the presents that I had showered on the ministers and important courtiers. At last, after numerous talks and to my satisfaction, I was allowed to cross all the courtyards on my palanquin escorted by a dozen of my own guards [4]

² Kandhar chauki.

³ Gargaon.

Assem have ever seen sitting in front of them. He added that he was pleased to give me this mark of distinction to demonstrate the high regard he had for the nation that I was representing.

After discussing various other things during the audience, I was presented with betel and perfumes, and dismissed. While leaving, the king expressed that he would be pleased to see me frequently during my stay in his state and in the coming days, but with less formalities and ceremonies.

The following days were spent in paying visits to various members of the royal family including the princes, the ministers and the chief lords of the court. These resulted in return visits by these people, which worked out to be a very costly affair for me, since I was obliged to offer presents to each one of them as per the

Visits to the great men of the country

customs of the country. A few days later the king himself paid a surprise visit to my house along with his entire retinue, on the pretext of going hunting. I rushed outside to greet him. He talked to me very courteously and continued on his course. As a result of this royal attention and the visits paid by all those great men, I started enjoying everyone's high esteem within the country.

During my stay in this country, I became particularly close with the foreign minister, called [Soledara Foucon],⁵ who visited me almost every day at my place. He often stayed over for dinner. Our friendship developed to such an extent that we started treating each other like brothers. Such a positive beginning made me optimistic about the success of my trip.

Friendship of the foreign minister

The king invited me to all his parties. He made me sit next to him with the intention of talking to me more properly. He had a very inquisitive mind, always trying to educate himself on all topics, which his clear, vivid and penetrating brain [7] grasped with ease. His

Invitations from the king

main areas of interest were government and politics. Considering the fact that he was a monarch of a country whose fundamental laws prohibited him from communicating with foreigners and learn about foreign lands, the king's knowledge was surprisingly extensive and far above the expected level.

I was invited to the king's hunting party, a show unimaginable in Europe and something that deserves curiosity. The army units under one command number from 1,000 to 1,200 men or sometimes more. Each soldier has to carry two to three stakes. They are assembled

Royal hunts by setting fire to the forest

⁵ Cholahara Phukan.

across an area, previously earmarked, that is expected to have the maximum density of wild animals. The troops make an enclosure around the area with fences made of the stakes brought by them. Outside the fence, a large scaffold like a giant watchtower is built for the king and his invitees to watch the show from a vantage point. After the arrival of these dignitaries, some men step inside the fence and set fire from all sides to the long dry straws, within which the trapped animals are hiding. The rising flames excite the animals which, in their rage and fury, try to escape from every side. As they throw themselves on the fence trying to break it, their dreadful howling and roaring fill the air. But instead of freedom, it is the spears held by the people positioned outside the fence that pierce their bodies. Firing guns and darting arrows thrown by the amused king and his retinue spare no animal that passes back and forth below their scaffold.

At last the hunt is over in a day as the flames eat up all the ferocious animals; thousands of wild buffaloes and elephants, quantities of tigers and rhinoceros are destroyed in an instant. It is a superb horror to see and to hear. It is the safety of the country and of the crops that authorise such bloody pleasure and, in fact, it is necessary. The various animals are in such great number and they multiply at such a rate that if they were not destroyed that way, the inhabitants would not be able to step out of their houses without risking their lives and the seeds would be eaten up as soon as they germinate.

Three months had passed since my arrival in Gorgan. I spent my time amidst distractions and spectacles such as dancing, horse racing and animal fights that were often held at the court, but soon I got bored with it.

I was impatient to return. Every time I saw the king, the ministers [8] and the elite whose support I tried to gain, I reminded them of the purpose of my visit. However, all my questions were shrewdly evaded and I could not get a positive answer. The embarrassment came more from my ignorance of the fact (already decided in the King's council) that I should be refused the permission to set up a factory along with the freedom, privileges and prerogative necessary for its extension and usefulness. This decision was a well-kept secret and nobody dared to reveal it to me. My worries increased with each passing day, as my hopes on my entire mission were fading.

An invitation to me from the king to attend a dance in his palace provided me the opportunity to discover his real intentions. During this dance, I poured out my heart while expressing my gratitude towards his kind welcome and explaining the advantages that he would enjoy by forging an alliance with my country. As I expressed my bitter regrets at having to go, I also told him that my duty was stronger than all these pleasures and I had no doubts that by giving me

Refusal of the authorities to take any engagement

Regarding an eventual commercial establishment

they obey their voice. Each one of them [15] unmistakably recognises the man who takes care of them. They land on the master's fist and, as a reward, each is given a bird that he has caught, after it has

Falcon hunt

been cut open through the middle of the stomach. The *baye* darts on it and quenches its thirst with the blood. These hunting birds are rare and found only on the highest hills, from where the people fetch them from their nests during the season and trade in them. If well trained, they can be sold for up to one thousand *écus*¹¹ each.

Goaty is one of the largest cities of the kingdom.¹² A viceroy governs the province; he came on two occasions to pay his respects to his sovereign. The city is located at the foot of a hill on the bank of the [Barampoutou].¹³ On the top of this hill is the much-revered pagoda.¹⁴ I asked the permission of the king to attend the sacrifice and he agreed. What a surprise it was to see an immense park surrounded with fences containing a couple (male and female) each of all species of quadrupeds and birds known in the entire kingdom. All the governors of the provinces and the chiefs of the villages have to provide their share and send it to the pagoda every three years. When the time arrives for the sacrifices, this entire fauna is immolated at the altar of the goddess. In the past, it was not only animals that had their throats cut, but also a man and a woman,¹⁵ who were part of the ceremonials. What was

astonishing was that all the families hurried to provide these victims. Each one considered it as a benediction from heaven and as an action that is

Guwahati

the most virtuous and commendable. The grandfather of the king, a genius of a man, free from these ghastly superstitions, was the first to abolish these barbaric practises.¹⁶

I learned the origins, motives and circumstances of this ceremony by questioning some of the temple priests, the learned

Temple of Kamakhya

folks and the king himself. They told me that the practise was established a long time back upon the order of the goddess herself. The goddess

demanding from the king of Assem, the founder of the monarchy, that such

¹¹ French money, a coin of gold or silver.

¹² Guwahati.

¹³ Brahmputra.

¹⁴ It is the temple of the goddess Kamakhya, on the Nilachala Hill, about 5 km to the west of Guwahati. According to the *Kalikapurana*, it would be there that the genital parts of the goddess *Sati* had fallen after her body had been cut into pieces.

¹⁵ It is commonly believed that it is in this province that Assamese Tantrism originated. The temple bears the mark of this influence; it was famous for its animal offerings, often accompanied with human sacrifices. The Koch king, Naranarayana, in 1565, on the day of the consecration of the shrine, offered 140 human heads to the goddess (D.C. Sircar, *The Sakta Pithas, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Letters*, vol. XIV, No. 1, 1948, pp.15-17). It could be the *balidana* (offering of oblations) advised by the *Kalikapurana* (57.1-6):

sacrifices be done for her glory, simultaneously warning him that as long as he and his successors faithfully executed this order, the kingdom would enjoy all kinds of happiness and prosperity. But that, on the contrary, failure to abide by this would result in all kinds of diseases to befall the kingdom whose inhabitants will suffer unimaginable scourges, besides plague and hunger.¹⁷ The bizarre connection between the tradition of the sacrifice of the Assemese and the one of Abraham makes one think about a possible connection

Origin of these customs

between the two peoples. Perhaps the former had a notion of the latter and perhaps one created the other. I leave it [16] to those who are wellversed in the

knowledge of Antiquity to discover if this conjecture is likely to have any foundation. To achieve it, one would have to go back to the time when the Assemese started forming a nation and to find out from where they descended.

The common explanation of the origin of this race, similar to all nations, is wrapped up in so many fables and so obscure that it is impossible to see through it. The Assemese sincerely assure that the current king is the 192nd of his family,¹⁸ without any interruptions in the lineage and that the founder of this historical dynasty was sent by heaven to the people. He had come down on a thick cloud amidst lightning and thunder, armed with a sceptre and a crown, holding in his hand a book of their religion and the code of laws by which they have been governed since then. If, instigated by an investigative and rational mind, one asks them what could be the character of a king who came down in this manner, they would give a straight answer saying that he was a divine king. One would then raise the questions of the connection between his immortality and the annual celebration of his death. Their answer is that he was made of two substances, one divine and the other material. As a material body, he was submitted to the ordinary course

"Afterwards one should do a *balidana* that will make the goddess happy... Birds, turtles, alligators, goats, boars, the buffalo, the lizard, le sosa (?) and the nine species of deer, the yak, the spotted antelope, the hare and the lion, fishes and the ones own blood, are considered as oblations... If one cannot obtain them, horses and elephants are offered instead; goats, sarabhas and men are respectively considered as oblation, great oblation and very great oblation" (Van Kooij, *Worship of the Goddess according to the Kalikapurana*, part I, p. 52).

¹⁷ The account of Chevalier is interesting, because it is generally believed that it was Gaurinatha Singha who banned these practises (1780-95) (Das J., *op.cit.*, p. 35). If we follow Chevalier's account, it will then be Gadadhar Singha (1681-96), grandfather of Rajesvara Singha, who would have put an end to the human sacrifices.

¹⁸ During the time when he was viceroy in Guwahati, Harnatha Senapati Phukan (who died in 1784) would have made more than one thousand offerings to the temple, mainly buffaloes, goats, pigeons, and other animals, with the aim of pacifying the gods responsible for the sufferings in the province (S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 222).

¹⁹ In fact, Rajesvara Singha (who reigned from 1751 to 1769) was the 33rd king of the Ahom dynasty (*ibid.*, p. 614).

of nature, and ultimately got destroyed. Once the prescribed time arrived, he left his human form and returned to heaven to reunite with his divine essence, leaving to his posterity the task of ruling on earth. His descendants enjoy the same divinity and, like him, only leave their human form when they abandon this world after their work is completed. It is because of this belief that we could probably attribute the pompous titles given to the kings of Assem. They are called: *The God King who never walks on the earth, as he is worthy of being carried.*

As descendants from the blood of a god, these kings combine both temporal and spiritual powers; they are king and pontiff and decide about religious matters, besides other affairs of their kingdom. Through this grotesque fable, based on ignorance and superstition, we nevertheless suppose that these peoples have formerly had a feeble and false notion about Jesus Christ, who, although a god, wanted to subject himself to the pains, sufferings and vicissitudes of a human being. I do not think however that the kings of Assam have, about their existence, the same faith as their subjects. What confirms this idea is the love they have for their own lives, the precautions they take to involve all the people of their house for their longevity. When the king dies, his body is placed in a large and magnificent tomb¹⁹ [17] where his cooks, doctors, officers and in fact all the people who serve him are shut up along with him. The entrance is then walled up and these miserable people perish of hunger and thirst or indulge in cannibalism. This barbaric custom does not prevent the prince from finding servants. The madness of men and their ambitions make them desire and seek with fervour this type of position, which makes them enjoy a great degree of respect, honour and credit amongst their fellow citizens.

Royal funerals: servants
buried alive

Let us go back to the ceremony of sacrifices, the subject from which we deviated.

Just as they were about to start, I entered inside the temple where the victims are brought one after the other during nine days and beheaded in front of the idol. It represents a woman of a gigantic stature, made of solid gold, as I have been assured. She wears a crown on her head, holds a book in one hand and a sabre in the other.

¹⁹ In the *Tarikh-i-Asham* (p. 98), that describes the expedition of Mir Jumlah in Assam, we can read the following description:

"When it is one of the princes who has lost his life, a big excavation is dug for him, then his wives and servants are killed, and they are thrown in the pit with the executed elephants, some utensils of gold and silver, a pelisse, a carpet, few clothes, provisions, in fact all that could be useful for a leaving of a few years. After burying these people and these things next to the deceased, the excavation is filled with enormous poles, so that the underground edifice should not be destroyed for a long time. Next to the grave are kept a torch, some oil and a man in charge to maintain a light and keep it burning continuously. When the *nabab* heard about this tradition of burying the dead, he opened about ten of them; vessels and utensils of the value of almost nine thousands rupces were thus excavated..." According to the old Assamese chronicles that describe the royal funeral rituals, the servants of the sovereign were buried

Around her are quantities of other figures representing angels or subordinate divinities. Looking at her feet, we can see that she is stepping on many creatures, which I have been told represent demons. A multitude of yellow copper torches were lit around the altar made of ivory and encrusted with golden strips. There, varieties of aromatic wood were burning, spreading a very pleasant fragrance.

The king was sitting on a magnificent throne and presiding over the ceremony. He held in his hand, a book containing all the customs and practises.

Idols

When everything was ready, I saw two gigantic elephants being escorted to the feet of the altar. The king immediately got down from his throne and, after bowing to the goddess, prayed to her to bless

his kingdom and his people. He asked her to receive with kindness, and as a mark of gratitude, his offerings. The prayer over, the two elephants were brought back to the front yard of the temple, an immense area of one league in square surrounded by walls. It was there that they succumbed under the sword of the executioner after being tied up by the four feet and the trunk with enormous iron chains between four columns where they were chained so tightly that they could not move.

Then came the rhinoceros, tigers, buffaloes and quantities of other animals [18] of all kinds and all were subjected to the same ritual. When the sacrifice of the quadruped, lasting

Throat cutting
of victims

for several days, is over, comes the one of the volatiles and finally the one of the fishes. The large numbers of people that fill up all the yards of the temple and

surrounding areas seize the meat. They eat one part and keep the other after drying them up in the sun. Each one takes some portion to his house; superstition and credulity attribute to it some wonderful effects for the soul as well as for the body.

This celebration brings in large amounts of money and food to the temple priests. Even the poorest inhabitant of the kingdom has prepared himself so that he could make his offerings. Those from the villages, who cannot attend the sacrifice send their donations through others and they could be assured of the carrier's honesty. The temple is cared for by more than two thousand priests dedicated to its worship, besides a great number of young girls, the most beautiful of the kingdom, devoted to dance in front of the altar during the days of the celebrations.²⁰ Priests make with them what they do with the meat, leaving of them only the aroma, and making a show of the

alive in the grave with his corpse. Rudra Singha (1696–1714) abolished this practise but it is probable that it was still in use in the middle of the 18th century and, according to the excavations made in 1846, it would have existed until a more recent period. All this information, extracted from *The Deodhai Assam Buranji* (pp. XVI–XVII), has been provided by Professor Alamendu Guha and Indrani Ray from the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta.

delicious moments that they spend in their arms. However, we have to give them credit for the fact that they willingly share their pleasures with those who are tempted and who have the capacity to pay them. As soon as the deal is over, these charming priestesses, with the most beautiful faces and shapes,

Priests and temple
dancing girls

with the fairest complexion and the brightest colours that nature has ever produced in any country of the universe, come to initiate the [novice] to the mysteries of love. It is then that, submerged by rapture and blackout, bodies tenderly merge and allow their

souls to fade away. These souls, scarcely back from such a sweet lethargy, immediately miss this wonderful feeling and, burning with a new fire, plunge again their bodies into it.

It is there really that nature should be pleased and satisfied with its creation. It is there too that it finds ever-burning hearts, always ready to pay the first of the tributes that it imposes on humanity and all living creatures.

The temple is a vase [sic] of a surprisingly enormous size²¹ and I do not know of any such structure in the entire of Europe that can [19] be compared to it. It is perhaps also the richest of the world, judging by the quantity of gold that has been accumulated there throughout the centuries. The source of such vast riches lies in the vow that a devoted king made to the goddess at a time when the kingdom was being afflicted by a certain calamity. This vow was to present her with as many golden animals as the ones that were immolated during the great sacrifice and with the same shapes and resemblances. In case his life was not long enough or if his wealth did to permit him to fulfil his promise, he should direct his descendants to do the same, on pain of malediction. The tradition adds that immediately after this vow was made, the scourge that afflicted the people, stopped. What is certain

Decoration of
the temple

is that all princes that succeeded since then, made it a law and a duty to carry out this act of piety. It is also since then that one part of the state expenses was dedicated to it. Therefore it is difficult to count the amount of golden animals placed around the

²⁰ The temple dancing girls appear particularly during the festival of *Devaddhvani*, linked to the worship of the snake-goddess *Manasa*. And it is a very well appreciated show to see these young girls who themselves perform their movements in front of the goddess (Das, *Folklore*, pp. 97-9). The puritan Robinson (*R.D.A.A.*, p. 258) tells us that towards 1840, the temple employed about 500 women to do these obscene dances: "Here the most abominable rites are practised, and the most licentious scenes exhibited, which it is hardly possible to suppose the human mind, even when sunk to the very lowest depths of depravity, could be capable of devising".

²¹ According to the tradition, a prince from the time of the *Mahabharata*, named Naraka, would have built the temple. Destroyed during the Muslim invasion, it was re-built in 1565 by the Koch king, Naranarayana. Sculptures from the 8th to the 17th century were found there (see *A.S.R.*, 1923-4, pp. 80-1; 1924-5, pp. 100-1; 1930-4, p. 129; 1936-7, pp. 60-1).

temple. I have seen elephants, rhinoceros of medium and even small sizes, and quantities of life sized replicas of other species. The king added two golden stags, as big as the ones we have in our forests in Europe, to this treasure. Although all these statues are hollow and the gold is of a very pale colour, the entire collection as a whole represents a treasure of great value. We cross very large enclosures before entering the main temple enclosure. The priests, the priestesses and the servitors live there. In front of the first gate there is a large terrace made of stone; large steps in the centre lead to a magnificent square pond that has a surface measuring more than a quarter of a league from each side, which is also cut in stone. There, the priests and the priestesses offer their ablutions. All around this pond there are some magnificent paths, giving an impregnable shade and cutting off the rays of the sunshine. In various points are placed beautiful rest rooms for the priests

Enclosures

and their charming companions to refresh themselves; there, exhausted from the process of worship, they relax together by employing this idle time in useful regeneration. A priestess who becomes pregnant is neither punished nor dishonoured, she simply stops performing her holy duties. The order

of the priests takes care of the child, and gets the mother married. She honours her husband in the same manner as the greatest lords of the court, when the king allows them to marry the children he had from his concubines.

[20] After witnessing all what I just related, I judged it was time to leave a country where my almost forced stay had held me back for nearly fifteen months. But, when I was ready to leave (in May 1757), I received the disturbing

Pond

news that war had been declared between France and England and that the English had crossed the Ganges with a fleet and forces under the command of Admiral Watson²² and Colonel Clive.²³ I learned that they had taken back Calcutta from the Moor

who had defeated them the previous year, that they had declared war on the *nabab*²⁴ Surajah-[dolat]²⁵ and defeated him, to finally take control of Chandernagore. All these unfortunate events put me in great embarrassment. I was in a dilemma regarding the decision that I should take on my next course of action. Going back to Bengal represented for me the risk of being arrested, looted and jailed by the English. I told the king about my position. He was very touched and displayed his sympathy in the most gracious manner. But, at the same time, he declared, with the honesty he always had with me, that he could not offer me refuge in his country despite his affection and special consideration. His principal concern was the peace of his kingdom and the safety of his crown.

News of the war and of
the English successes
(May 1757)

[20] After leaving Rangamaty, we made our way towards the east. It can be reckoned to be 6 leagues.

Thursday 10

We set sail in the morning at dawn. As the way that we found was very difficult, our progress was greatly reduced. With great pain, we managed to reach the foot of a mountain called Doud Komov,⁸² it was there that we moored. This mountain is well wooded and makes a charming sight. At the bottom, there is a kind of meadow crossed by a river that passes along the bottom of the mountain when its water level rises. By going forward into the woods we see a great quantity of wild buffaloes and stags, but the numerous tigers found there make hunting impractical. Our route could be reckoned to be about 3 leagues towards the north-northeast.

Friday 11

We left in the morning. We sailed for the major part of the day along side the mountain of Doud Komov, which was restful for the eyes on which endless jungles on all sides put a strain. This mountain is totally uninhabited. Only when arriving from Rangamaty, we see at the foot a small hamlet that consists of 4 or 5 huts. On that day, we had to overcome incredible currents. The ropes of our boats broke repeatedly, making them drift far away.

At about 11 o'clock we had a westerly wind that came to our rescue. At about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, we started to see the mountains of Bisili⁸³ belonging to a *raja*. His kingdom is enclosed between the mountains of Bhutan and Rangamaty. In former times, he was very powerful in his states, but today he pays tribute to the *soubah*⁸⁴ of Moxoudabad. The tribute consists of 85 elephants sent every year. The approach to these mountains makes the most determined of navigators shudder. The entire bank is studded with tapered rocks that stick out to the river. We found it very difficult to get out of this place and escaped [21] only due to the precautions taken by us. This spot is regarded as a barrier for all the merchants who go to Jouguigoupat. Every year many boats run aground there. On the other side of the river, to the east-southeast, are the

⁸² Doadkoar Hills, in *R.B.A.*

⁸³ Bijni, Rennell visited the country in 1765 (see *R.J.*, pp. 159-60). As the delivery of elephants posed problems, this tribute in kind was replaced by an annual payment of 2,000 rupees (*E.B.A.P.G.*, pp. 526-7).

⁸⁴ *Subah* (Pers., H.), a province; the word is often used by the Europeans for *subahdar*, a governor of province.

mountains of Bhutan.⁸⁵ We travelled until the evening in these gorges between mountains separated only by the extremely large riverbed. The view on both sides would have been very entertaining if our attention had not been continuously diverted by the worrying difficulties of the navigation. All these places are deserted, the country inhabited only on the other side of the mountains.

The route covered could be reckoned to be about 6 leagues to the east-southeast. We moored at the foot of one of the mountains of Bisili, called Dir.⁸⁶ Throughout the night we had the charming symphony of buffaloes, tigers, rhinoceros and elephants howling continuously; a frightening noise which echoed through the mountains. They came up to the edge of the river next to our boats. All the rowers were petrified with fear and went into hiding into the bottom of the boats. The soldiers, however, kept off these wild animals by firing a few rifle and cannon shots.

Saturday 12

I waited until 11 o'clock for all the *moutous*⁸⁷ that could not join me during the night. Afterwards, as a small but favourable wind had started blowing, I made way under sail. After travelling for one hour at the entrance of a small river called Oripani,⁸⁸ a branch of the Barampoutou, we saw some rocks of an enormous size that spread well into the river. We had great difficulty finding a passage through the middle. Finally, after looking carefully and sounding, we found a small channel about 12 feet wide, through which we entered a small river. However, this place is as dangerous as the one I mentioned above, because if the towing lines that are used to pull the boats towards the land, were breaking after crossing the rocks, the swift currents would inevitably crash the boats on the rocks and smash them to a thousand [22] pieces.

Miserable human establishment

While entering a bit deeply the river of Ouripani, we come across a small village called [?]. The people of the country seemed of a mixed blood, Bengali and Bhutanese. They get that from both. However, they are not dependent on Rangamaty.

⁸⁵ Mistake. They are the first heights of the Garo Hills.

⁸⁶ Deheer Hill, in *R.B.A.*

⁸⁷ *Mutua* (?). In *Fort William-India House Corresp.*, vol. II, p. 271, we find: *mutua*, a kind of boat.

⁸⁸ Haarypaany, in *R.J.*, p. 156, Haripani or Hathbatia that has its source in the Salmara range and flows into the Brahmaputra in front of Goalpara (*H.S.A.A.*, vol. II, p. 21).

into Assem and that they had brought the *bouroua* into their fold. He also said that he did not ignore the presents I had sent to him to get his help and that it was for this very reason that this betrayal was for him unbearable. He, therefore, came to offer me his services and swore by all that he held sacred that he would take me to the king himself and that, if I wanted to abandon myself to him and listen to nobody else's advice, he would give me proof of his commitment. Consequently, if I agreed, he would send one of his fakirs to the king himself to inform him of what was plotted against me. From a fakir, this characteristic of integrity appeared to me too surprising to be true. Therefore, I wanted to sound him out, and see whether there were some hidden motives or interests behind such kind offer. I thanked him overwhelmingly, promised to reward him handsomely and even to start paying for the expenses involved in sending his people. He refused and told me that he wanted nothing in advance and would accept the rewards and payments after the job was over. Such gestures among Asiatic are too heroic to be considered genuine. I therefore found it hard to believe that they were truly coming from his heart. However, I pretended to believe him and showed my gratitude, urging him strongly to look after my interests. He promised me more than I could hope for and whether truthfulness or deceitfulness, to encourage him, I had to give him a small gift. But he refused it as if he was offended. Because of this attitude, I started having a good opinion about him, even if, later on, he might deceive me.

Sunday 27

The diseases, instead of decreasing were only spreading and showed no signs of curbing. Every day, seven to eight of my people, both blacks and Europeans, were attacked by a fever so violent that by the second bout they lost their strength even to move. Everyone attributed it to the [37] poor quality of the water of the river Panchonia but I think that the bad air contributed to it even more. Daily, about five to six times successively, we were passing from suffocating heat to bitter cold. If it was a bit windy by any chance, we had to cover ourselves as in winter and as soon as the wind stopped, we could scarcely breathe because of the heat. My people told me that they could not stay in such an unhealthy place without running the risk of falling sick and maybe even of dying. They asked me to take the fleet to the other side of the Barampoutou, in front of Canar *choqui*, at the foot of a mountain, where there is a small village called Gualpara.¹¹⁶ For many days I had wanted to do so but I thought it would be difficult. Poutram,¹¹⁷ who was the chief of the

¹¹⁶ Goalpara.

¹¹⁷ Is it the same man as the one mentioned *supra*, p. 137 note. 93.

village, did not bother to attract me there and did his utmost to divert me. But that did not upset me, the main reason that stopped me was that we would have to go very high up the large river thus entering the country of Assem and then turn back. I had already consulted the *bouroua* of Canar *choqui* on this matter and he did not seem to be accommodating about it. However, I took my decision and at dawn break, I sent a *peon* to tell him that it was not possible anymore for me to stay in Panchonia and that I was proceeding to Gualpara; I also requested him not to think bad when I passed his land a bit. I assured him that I would stay there for a very short time since it was the only way for me to get back to the country of the Moors, in Gualpara. When he saw that my decision was already taken and that I would not change it, he granted my request and effectively I departed at about eight o'clock to Gualpara. My *bazara* reached there at about midday, but it was with a lot of pain that the rest of the fleet managed to join me at sunset, because the currents are so violent that they makes a noise like torrents falling from a mountain top, so that to open the way, we had to go one league upstream and still we landed down river from Gualpara.¹¹⁸

Arrival in
the town

[38] One hour after reaching this place, I saw a boat from afar with a white flag that seemed French. The worry I had about the one I had sent since so many days to Rangamaty made me fervently desire that this was the one. My wish was granted; I recognised it. Aboard there was the *ouquil* that I had kept in Rangamaty. This one was the bearer of the response from the *nabab* to my letter. It was very satisfactory and did not belie the goodwill he had displayed during my visit to him. He wrote that he was annoyed with the unfair hurdles posed to me in Jouguigoupat and that he had ordered that it did not happen anymore and that free access would be given to me wherever I wanted to go. He added that if I wanted to go to Assem, he would allow me to decide. But he felt obliged to warn me that all the private merchants would be very jealous and that they had already complained about the wrong and the loss done to their business. He ended his message by stating that in spite of all the hurdles, he was offering me this service with pleasure but that he was forced to demand the ordinary duty on the goods that I would

¹¹⁸ According to Buchanan (*B.M.E.I.*, vol. V, p. 477), in 1809, the town contained about 400 houses made of palm tree that were, for most of them, inundated during floods. According to M'Cosh (*M.C.T.A.*, pp. 76-83), around 1835, there was a population of over 5,000 inhabitants. On this year, a dam was built across a torrent to limit the flooding. The English were settled on a hill dominating the Brahmaputra (see a drawing of this hill and a basic map of the town, f. p. 76 and 79 of the same book). In 1897, a terrible earthquake destroyed all the public buildings. The administrative offices had been rebuilt on the hill, and works have been done to protect the lower town of the flooding (*E.B.A.P.G.*, pp. 528-9).

carry from Assem and to search my boats but that, however, he would treat me as a friend. The manner in which he ended his letter, made him lose a lot of his merit in my eyes; however, as this threat was not in the immediate future, I had to grin and bear it.

This last reservation was due to the repeated complaints of the merchants at the instigation of the *divan* of Rangamaty, whose soul seemed to pursue me everywhere. Every day, he regretted having let me escape at such a cheap price. He was looking at me as a prey that should be seized and devoured, hence he spared nothing to harass me.

In the evening, I hunted in the mountains of Gualpara which are filled with an amazing number of various kinds of game, especially peacocks and stag. Wild boar are also found in abundance, besides bears, but they are not dangerous. [39] We saw many running away in front of us. Our hunt ended with the death of 50 peacocks, a stag and a wild boar. The people of the country brought me two wild boars as a present. Hence, the distribution I made to the soldiers of my detachment was ample.

Upon my return from the hunt, the *jamadar* of Gualpara came to pay me a visit aboard my *bazara*. He brought some amounts of practically everything that his country could produce in terms of rice, other grains and fruits. I was touched by his gesture and I gave 10 rupees to his people, i.e. the double of the value of what he had brought me.

Monday 28

The *jamadar* came to pay me another visit in the morning and prayed me to visit his country. He also ordered a *musalca* on all the rice merchants, which forbade them from selling to anybody until the members of my fleet were amply provided with. I acknowledged all his gestures with a present that seemed to satisfy him.

In the evening I was hunting by boat. We found some partridge in large numbers. As the plain was covered with water, we shot them on the top of the trees where they were perched, finding no other place to land. A large number of them were killed; they are soft, they taste very good and I dare say that they have an aroma almost as delicious as the best partridge in Europe.

Tuesday 29

In the morning, I went to Jouguigoupat for different businesses that required my attention. On my return, I was surprised to see many people

in canoes, hunting a group of young wild boar that the torrents had probably pushed in the river. These animals were swimming in order to escape, but the people caught almost all. Someone brought me seven of them for one rupee. I immediately distributed them amongst the soldiers.

Wednesday 30

All morning, we had the pleasure of "fishing" wild boars. The river was dragging many and my people brought me four of them.

In the evening I went hunting in the mountain. We saw many games of [40] all kinds. We were hunting with all the enthusiasm of a hunter that sees his prey, when a monstrous rhinoceros¹¹⁹ of the height of the strongest elephant stopped us. A few gunshots were not enough to make him escape. It looked at us rather carefully and finally came towards us. We did not wait for him; we all escaped separately and left the field open for him.

Thursday 31

I sent my *cr en* to Canar *choqui* in the morning to find out if any news had come from Assem. He did not bring me any satisfying response, except that two fakirs had specially left to go and get the order from the king. Such delays made me painfully impatient. The area I was living in was infected by disease to such a point that every day my people, both Europeans and others, were falling sick by the dozen. But what resources other than patience did I have to remedy to it? The answer was, none.

In the evening, while we were hunting, we came across a herd of more than a hundred buffaloes.¹²⁰ Bothered by the fact that these ferocious animals happened to be on our path every day, and having had to give up the place several times, I asked some soldiers who were with me to shoot them and immediately climb the trees; as for me, I did the same. But the animals did not attack us; they escaped as promptly as they could. Many were wounded; judging by the trace of blood they left behind; but none remained on the spot.

Friday 1 August

I received some news from Rangamaty indirectly. I learned that the *daroga* of Jouguigoupat, angered by the orders he had received from the *nabab* to allow me free access, had left to complain and to try to harm me

¹¹⁹ *Rhinoceros indicus*, See M.C.T.A., pp. 45-6; R.D.A.A., p. 97.

¹²⁰ The buffaloes from Assam are a lot bigger than the ones from Bengal and their horns are very long. See M.C.T.A., pp. 47-8; R.D.A.A., pp. 98-9.

that these waters carried made me infer that they flowed through some gold or other metal mines.

Our route was reckoned to be six leagues towards the north-east.

20

The fog during a part of the morning was so extensive and so thick that we had to wait until it cleared to start out. As we were going forward we felt the most biting cold, to the extent that all my people, Europeans and others, could hardly bear it.

[67] I noticed that our guides often changed the route and made us take the longest one. When asked the reason for it, they refused to even admit it.

Inexplicable detours
in the progression

I could think of no other reason but the fact that they wanted to give me the idea that the size of their country was very large and thus impress me. It would be impossible and useless to describe the childish behaviour they had daily in this respect.

Our route was reckoned to be nine leagues towards the east-northeast.

To the north, I left a rather sizeable river that seemed to lead to Bhutan. It was impossible for me to find out its name from the people of this country. It passes through a large city called Calinagar¹⁶ dependent on the king of Assem and has a government similar to the one of Goaty. It appeared to me that by passing along this river, we could reach our destination in less than two days instead of the four days that it took me because of the route my guides made me take.

21

The fog being cleared, we weighed anchor. The swiftness of the currents that were even stronger than in the past, the shoals and the hurdles to pull the towline slowed down our progress considerably. To add to our misfortune, the rudder of my *bazara* broke down and we had a real job repairing it during what was left of the day and all throughout the night. The cold was so excessive that it was no more bearable at midday than at any other hour.

Currents and highs
and banks

The route was reckoned to be less than three leagues to the east-northeast on that day.

22

The quantity of shoals that we came across obliged us to take so many detours to avoid them that we went more than four times around the

¹⁶ Is it Kalaigaon (Darrang district), mentioned by *E.B.A.P.G.* (p. 555)?

compass. The most remarkable things we saw during the day were the numerous herds of buffaloes and wild elephants that we discovered at gun range on the bank of the river. Some of the animals in both species were of a phenomenal size; we also saw one rhinoceros. We moored at about 6 o'clock in the evening, close to a small village called [?].

The route was reckoned to be about two leagues to the north-east.

23

All day, we sailed very closely alongside the high and prodigious [68] mountains of Bhutan. We discovered three of them, which appear to form an amphitheatre; the second is much higher than the first one and the third higher than the second. They are all covered with snow; therefore we had to bear a freezing cold. The entire country looks deserted, at least on the riverbank. We see only dense jungles and ferocious animals of all kinds appearing from the thickets in the evenings.

View of the wooded
foothills of the
Himalayas

We had a very good day. The route could be reckoned to be ten leagues towards the north-northeast.

Saturday 24

As there was no fog, we left very early in the morning. Moving away from the mountains of Tibet, we got closer to the east. The country that we crossed appeared to be sparsely inhabited and this was confirmed by the presence of the ferocious animals that we could see from time to time. As we moved farther away from the mountains of Tibet, we found the river currents to be slower and the weather getting more bearable. It is to be noted that during the course of our journey from Gualpara, we constantly had easterly winds and not northerly winds, as in Bengal at this time of the year. This made me surmise that the monsoon is different and could well be directed from the east to the west. The distance we covered was reckoned to be nine leagues towards the east.

East winds

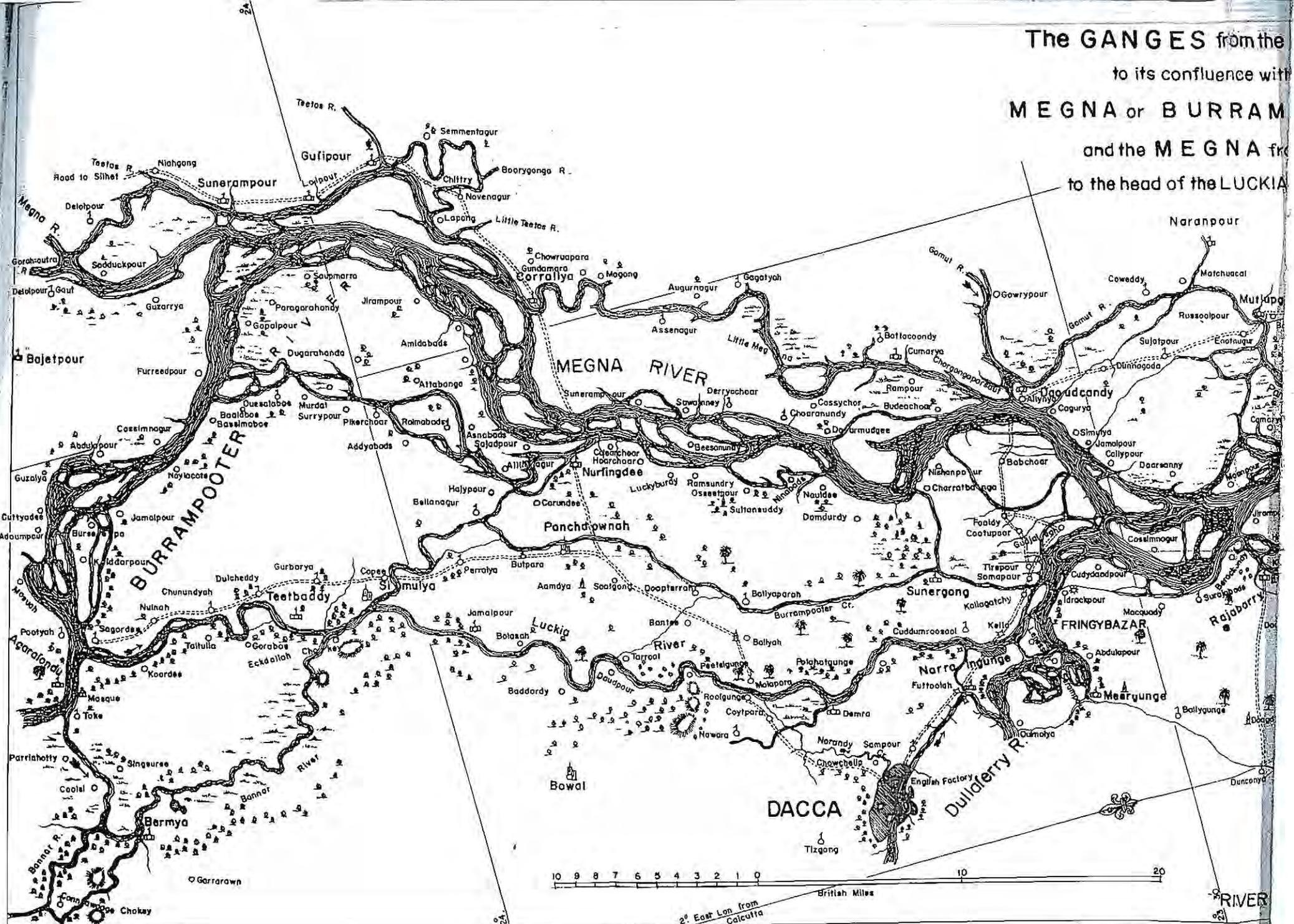
Sunday 25

We left at dawn, running alongside the mountains of Mocouet and Qualaqueram.¹⁷ We leave them to the south of the mountains of Bhutan. It is there that the larger part of *mangadoutis* and the thread appropriate for its production are found. They are adjacent, in the

Mikir Hills

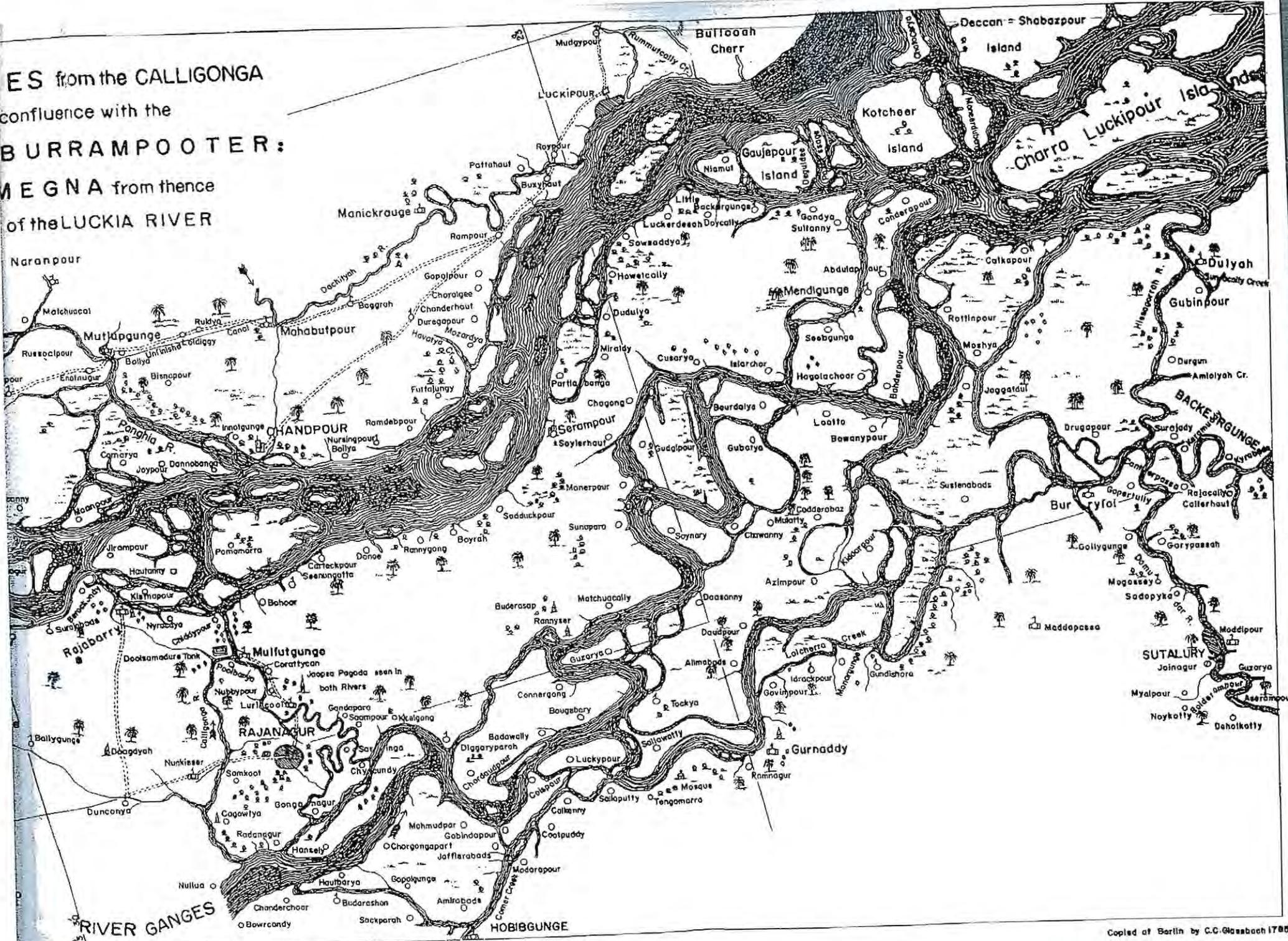
¹⁷ The mountains of Mocouet are probably the Mikir Hills that are in the valley to the south of the Brahmaputra; those of Qualaqueram correspond may be to the Kamakhya Hills that stretch from the Brahmaputra to the north bank of the river Kalang (*E.B.A.P.G.*, p. 562).

The GANGES from the
to its confluence with
MEGNA or BURRAM
and the MEGNA from
to the head of the LUCKIA

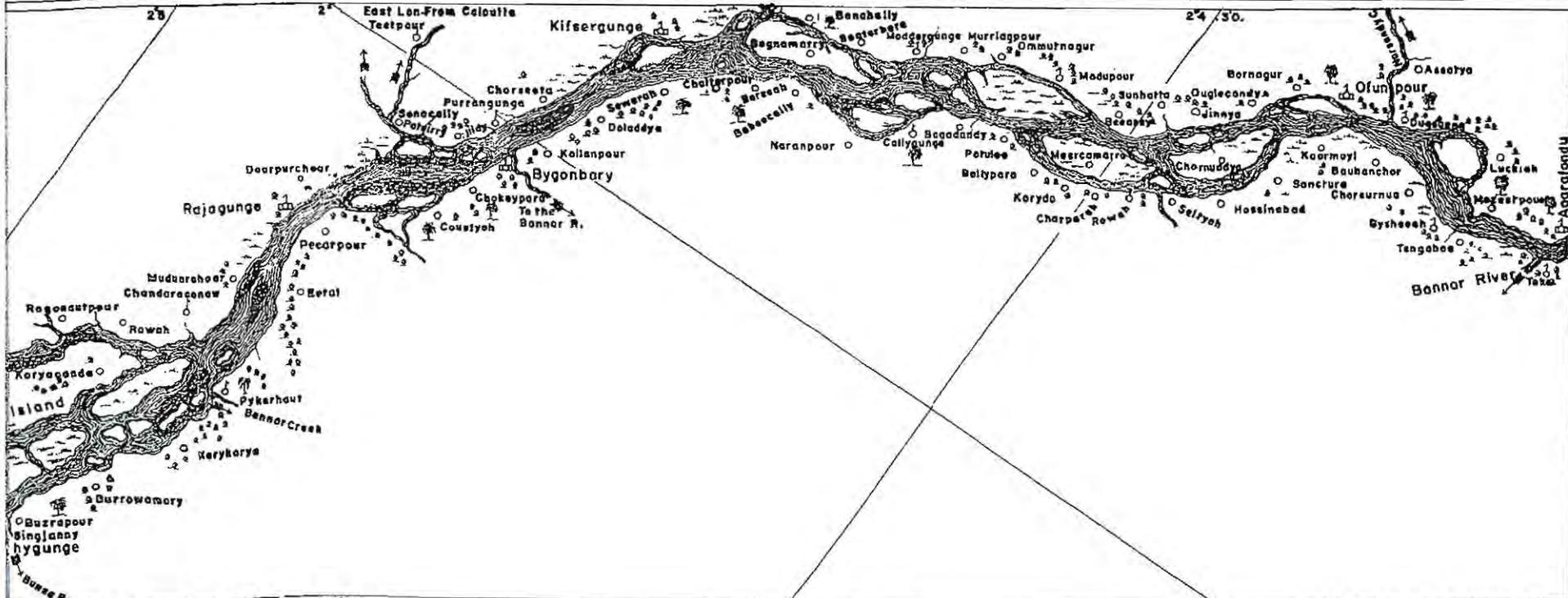
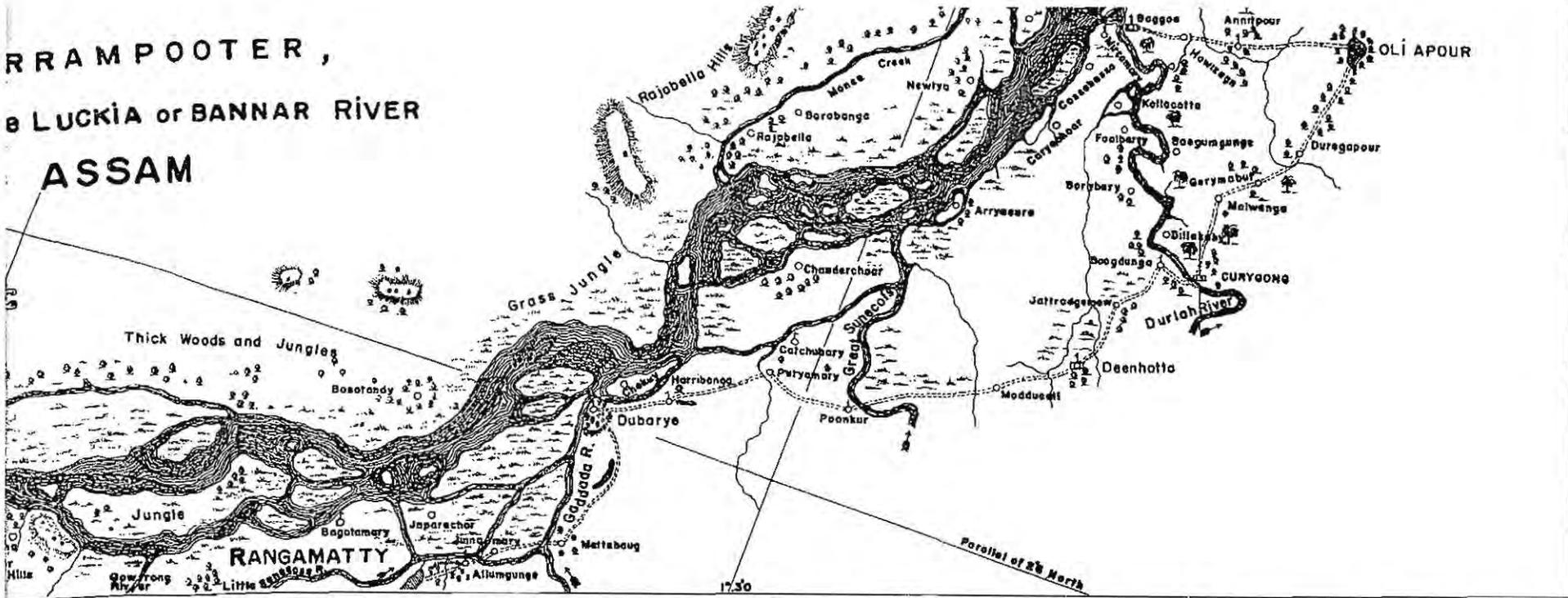


Published according to Act of Parliament by

ES from the CALLIGONGA
 confluence with the
BURRAMPOOTER:
 MEGNA from thence
 of the LUCKIA RIVER



**RRAMPOOTER ,
B LUCKIA or BANNAR RIVER
ASSAM**



According to Act of Parliament by J. Rennell August 1 1780

Copied at Berlin by G.D. Blafsch 1786.