

In the villages of the Konyak tribe, the fronts of the houses are decorated with skulls of the Mithun cattle and the killed game.
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The Naga *of* Burma

HOLGER HOFFMANN



First thing in the morning, the fire is lit in the longhouses, which causes clouds of smoke over the village.
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” **M**y wife and I first visited the Naga

people in 2007 on the Indian side. Years later, I saw on Google Earth that there are numerous intact villages on the Burmese side of the Naga Hills, which can take up in their originality with the most beautiful in India. They are mainly located on a ridge of the 4500 to 5500 feet high hills and consist of 100 to 250 longhouses covered with palm leaves.

It took several years of intense effort before we received permission from the Burmese government to visit these villages. Thus, we are often the first Western visitors and are given a correspondingly warm welcome.

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Left Page Top: Fetching firewood and water is a daily task.
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Left Page Bottom: The father crafts a crown from bamboo that his son will wear at the Aoleang festival.
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Konyak lady at the Aoleang festival.
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“**T**he only way to reach the Naga villages of the Layong and Konyak people in Burma is by motorcycle. Often the wooden supporting logs of the house entrances are decorated with carved animals such as stylized tigers and hornbills, sometimes skulls or abstract symbols. The roof is re-covered with dried palm leaves in several layers every five years. Inside, hung like hunting trophies, are the skulls of the animals eaten by the families, especially Mithun (a semi-domesticated species of buffalo), game of all kinds, but also corn on the cob for drying. Racks full of baskets and other kitchen utensils, blackened by the smoke, hang above the fireplaces. Most elderly villagers still have their faces decorated with typical facial tattoos.

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New fields are created by slash and burn.
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Shortly after sunrise, women and men often leave for their fields with the younger children. In the burn-cleared steep slopes, rice, corn, millet, taro, cassava, various types of beans, pumpkin, and leafy vegetables are cultivated. Meat or fruits rarely complement the daily menu. The workers return to the villages only shortly before sunset, the collected firewood and crops loaded in large woven baskets.



Top: At the fireplace in the longhouse. Holger Hoffmann © All rights reserved.

Right: The rice is separated from the chaff. Holger Hoffmann © All rights reserved.



Young women bring palm leaves to the village to cover the roofs of the longhouses. Holger Hoffmann © All rights reserved.

Lainong man. Holger Hoffmann © All rights reserved.



The reason for this, our third trip to the Nagas, was an invitation from a village chief two years ago to come back when they celebrate the Aoleang festival in early April. At the Aoleang festival, the Konyak celebrate the arrival of spring and pray for a good coming harvest. On the festival days, all the men and women adorn themselves with traditional dresses. Some of the men wear a helmet decorated with wild boar teeth, a necklace with dog teeth and brass heads as a symbol of headhunting, a shield, a spear, and a bag decorated with monkey skulls and tufts of hair. Dancing is separated by sexes. The women form a circle, and the men march in battle formation.



It is dark in the longhouses since they have no windows. Holger Hoffmann © All rights reserved.



The rice is separated from the chaff. Holger Hoffmann © All rights reserved.



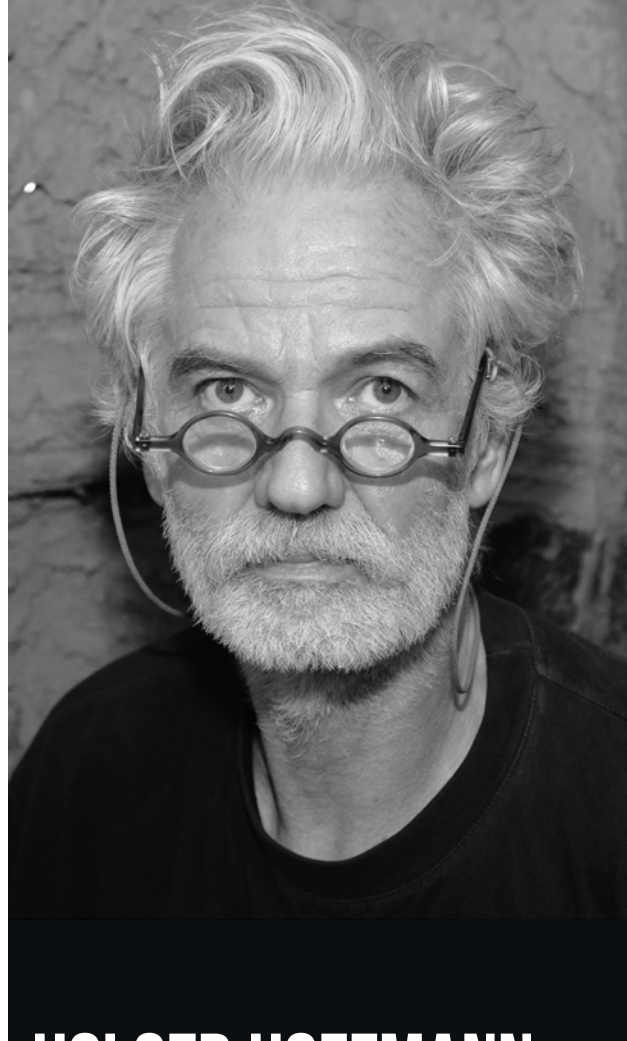
Dancing men at the Aoleang festival.
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Unexpectedly, the men
fire a cracking volley from
their muzzle-loading rifles.
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Growing opium for
personal use is legal.
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Holger Hoffmann is a Swiss travel and documentary photographer. To date, he has traveled to over 100 countries. He is particularly fascinated by the customs and daily life of people who have preserved their traditional culture. He is deeply impressed by how they cope and adapt to the advances and pressures of the modern world. He has published numerous travel and photo reports in various magazines.

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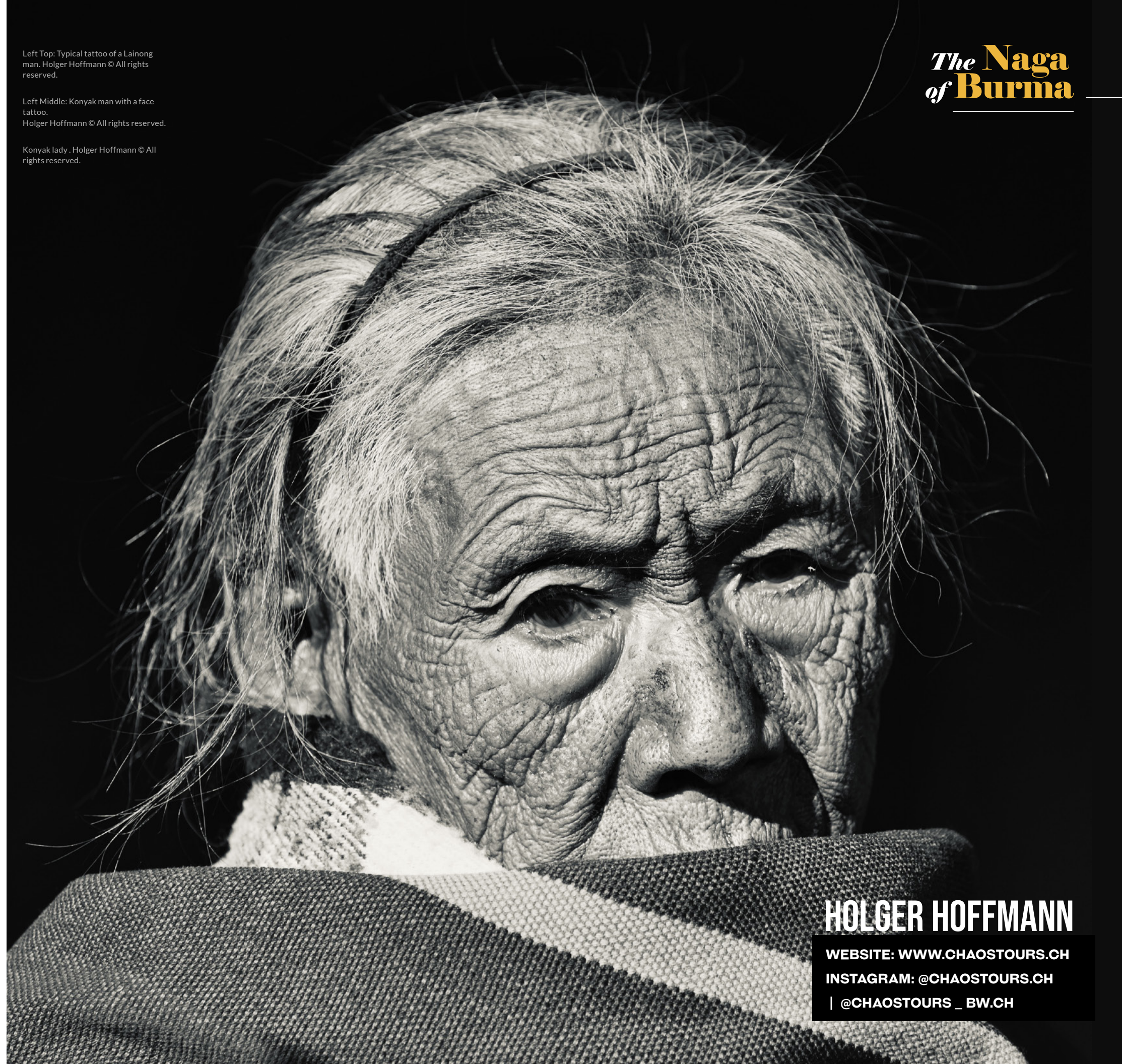
Left Top: Typical tattoo of a Lainong man. Holger Hoffmann © All rights reserved.



Left Middle: Konyak man with a face tattoo. Holger Hoffmann © All rights reserved.



Konyak lady. Holger Hoffmann © All rights reserved.



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