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# Headwater Flow Geochemistry of Mount Everest (Upper Dudh Koshi River, Nepal)

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10 **Keywords: major ions, trace elements, stable isotopes, precipitation, river flow, water use,**  
11 **Central Himalaya.**

12 **Abstract**

13 The aim of this work, conducted in the upper valley of the Khumbu on the southern part of Mount  
14 Everest, is to approach in parallel **three topics**: (i) the dynamics of the water geochemistry, major ions  
15 and trace elements; (ii) the stable water isotopes of precipitation and rivers; and (iii) the water uses by  
16 the inhabitants. **As in most mountain environments, the Khumbu area** is threatened by climate change,  
17 which impacts the cryosphere and consequently the people and the landscapes. Moreover, changes in  
18 water use are also related to new needs stemming from tourism, which strongly affect local livelihood.  
19 For the first two topics, new results are presented. They provide details on the global chemical quality  
20 of the river water and show how certain elements are seasonally influenced and how other elements  
21 allow us to distinguish the water origins within the study zone. Beside the use of stable isotopes to  
22 determine mainly the origin of the water flow in the rivers, the isotopic patterns confirm the double  
23 climatic influence of the westerly fluxes in the winter season and of the Asian monsoon in the summer  
24 season. **Regarding water use, the study confirms that the chemical quality of the water course is good,**  
25 **but does not conclude on the biological quality, which has not been investigated.** In conclusion, we  
26 attempt to predict the future of the geochemistry patterns submitted to the double pressure of climate  
27 change and the surge in tourism.

28 **1 Introduction**

29 The future of the cryosphere (glacier and snow cover) in the Hindu Kush Himalaya high mountains is  
30 a major concern (Pörtner et al. 2019; Wester et al. 2019); it is threatened not only by global warming  
31 due to greenhouse gas emissions, but also by local air pollution due to the atmospheric brown cloud,  
32 and especially the transportation and deposition of black carbon aerosol (Bonasoni et al. 2010; Kaspari  
33 et al. 2011; Jacobi et al. 2015) from human activities in the densely inhabited regions of the south and  
34 southwest of the central Himalaya mountain range as well as the rapid increase of tourist activity  
35 (Jacquemet 2018).

36 In this context, the Paprika and Preshine projects (see Funding section) joined the efforts of Nepalese,  
37 French, and Italian research teams (see Acknowledgments section) to explore the impact of these  
38 anthropogenic constraints on the water cycle dynamics in the Dudh Koshi River Basin (**Figure 1**) on

39 the south side of Mount Everest (8847 m). Several reasons justified the choice of this study zone that  
40 is characterized by two confluent watercourses, the Imja River and the Khumbu River, respectively,  
41 originating from the southern and western faces of the main range of Mount Everest and its satellite  
42 summits.

43 Among these reasons, the following are particularly important in the context of this article:

- 44 • Relative **facility** of access with the Everest Base Camp Trail;
- 45 • **Settlements at high altitude (above 3500 m) where inhabitants are facing a wide range of**  
46 **changes beside climatic one as a more tourism-centered economy involving integration to**  
47 **global markets, agropastoral and lifestyles changes, and new migration patterns (Puschiasis**  
48 **2019);**
- 49 • Presence of a high-altitude scientific laboratory, the Pyramid of Lobuche (5050 m),  
50 administrated by the Italian Ev-K2/CNR association in agreement with the Nepalese Academy  
51 of Science and Technology (NAST).

52 In this framework, a working task of the Paprika and Preshine projects has been devoted to the  
53 identification of water resources and the perception of this held by the local inhabitants. **In the**  
54 **preliminary exchanges with the scientists of the Paprika and Preshine projects, the Khumbu valley**  
55 **inhabitants manifested a deep concern regarding their water resource and its future. They were acutely**  
56 **aware that climate and economic changes will have a direct impact on the environment in which they**  
57 **live. As a consequence, it appears as a necessity to also aboard the climate processes and the water**  
58 **balance through the geochemical angle, even though this was not the primary route chosen for these**  
59 **projects.**

60 The village of Pangboche, which includes several settlements, was chosen as the most convenient. The  
61 main settlement is located at an elevation of approx. 3950 m on the right bank of the Imja River, 4 km  
62 after the confluence of its two main branches: the Khumbu River flowing from the north and the Upper  
63 Imja River flowing from the west. An important concern of the local population is the future of the  
64 water resources, not only in quantity, but also in quality. Considering the latter point, it was also stated  
65 that the water quality could be a **substantial** indicator of the water flow processes, especially regarding  
66 the different origins of these flows: glacier melt, **snowmelt, groundwater**, or direct surface flow.

67 During the past decade, geochemistry studies have been conducted of the Himalaya water flows (e.g.,  
68 Jeelani et al. 2011; Ghezzi et al. 2017), but no study has been undertaken in the context of very high  
69 altitudes covering dynamically an entire year. This issue underlines the exploratory character of the  
70 current study, which, however, does not aim to address all the questions raised in this exceptional  
71 framework.

72 Numerous isotopic precipitation and river studies have been carried out in Himalaya at the local or  
73 regional scale in the past few years (Garziona et al. 2000; Wen et al. 2012; Jeelani et al. 2013; Balestrini  
74 et al. 2014; Balestrini et al. 2016; He and Richards 2016; Ren et al. 2017; Florea et al. 2017; Jeelani  
75 and Deshpande 2017; Jeelani et al. 2017; Guo et al. 2017; Li and Garziona 2017; Kumar et al. 2018;  
76 Verma et al. 2018; Shen and Poulsen 2019; Singh et al. 2019). The main aim of these studies was to  
77 link the isotopic variability recorded in precipitation to climate parameters and air mass circulation  
78 and the transfer of this isotopic signal through the global and complex altitudinal hydrosystem from  
79 glaciers to tropical valleys. Regional precipitation studies of the southern external border of Himalaya  
80 (Jeelani and Deshpande 2017) from Kashmir (western Himalaya) to Assam (eastern Himalaya), or of  
81 the whole Tibetan Plateau (Li and Garziona 2017), showed that the isotopic variation observed in  
82 precipitation across the Himalayas conforms to the regional repartition of the two main moisture  
83 sources: the westerly fluxes and Asian monsoon. Local studies of precipitation isotopes were carried

84 out in central Nepal, Kathmandu, and the north of Kathmandu (Wen et al. 2012) as well as in the  
85 Khumbu Valley at the Pyramid Laboratory (Balestrini et al. 2014; Balestrini et al. 2016).

86 The current paper aims to present, analyze and discuss, on the one hand, the geochemical behavior of  
87 the water flows used by the inhabitants of Pangboche for their activities, during the year 2011,  
88 exploring the conductivity, pH, major ions, and trace elements dissolved in the water; and, on the other  
89 hand, the water-stable isotopes in the precipitation and river flows of the Khumbu area, during the  
90 period from November 2014 to May 2017. The paper aims to link these data to the water origins and  
91 seasonal variability in the context of global change.

## 92 2 Study area and methods

### 93 2.1 Study area

94 The climate of the study area is dominated from June to September by monsoon dynamics (Wang  
95 2006; Bookhagen and Burbank 2010; Immerzeel et al. 2010; Turner and Annamalai 2012), but winter  
96 and pre-monsoon precipitations can occur from December to April due to the Western Disturbances,  
97 which are part of the westerlies entry, originating from the Mediterranean region (Pisharoty and Desai  
98 1956; Madhura et al. 2015).

99 Above 5000 m in general, and lower during the winter, satellite imagery shows that the snow cover  
100 can be wide; however, the difficulty of monitoring snowfall in high mountains (Sevruk 1989; Tahir et  
101 al. 2011) does not allow us to quantify precisely the volume of snowfall in the study area. Recent  
102 studies have explored the spatial distribution of precipitation in this area (Savéan et al. 2015; Gong-  
103 Saholiariliva et al. 2016; Eeckman et al. 2017; Mimeau et al. 2019). They roughly show, beside a large  
104 local heterogeneity mainly due to the steep relief, the valley orientation and the slope aspect, a positive  
105 gradient with the altitude until a peak of annual precipitation between 2500 and 3200 m and a negative  
106 one above.

107 The geology of the southern area of Mount Everest has been detailed by Bortolami (1998) and by  
108 Searle et al. (2003). It is dominated by Precambrian-Early Paleozoic sillimanite gneisses in the high  
109 faces, which alternate in some places with intrusive Miocene leucogranites. The highest zone (Everest,  
110 Lhotse), above 6500 m, presents Ordovician shale series and limestone layers. Except for those slopes  
111 covered by glaciers or rock glaciers, the valley slopes and valley bottoms are mainly composed of  
112 fluvio-glacial deposits and debris, with the presence of moraines of different levels and ages.  
113 According to Bortolami (1998), the composition of the rocks leads to a low weathering and a low  
114 impact on the chemical composition of the flows. The same author notes that the aquifers located in  
115 the debris material have a high porosity. Their thicknesses are largely unknown. By contrast, the  
116 fissured rocks, which constitute the bed rock, are generally impermeable. A few other studies are  
117 devoted to groundwater storage in the Himalayas. Although their findings are not very helpful with  
118 regard to the geological characteristics (Dongol et al. 2005; Jeelani 2008) or the scale of the approach  
119 used (Andermann et al. 2012), these studies highlight a notable contribution of snow and glacier melt  
120 to groundwater. Andermann et al. (2012) assess the storing capacity of the whole Dudh Koshi basin  
121 (3700 km<sup>2</sup>) to be approx. 300 mm, i.e., less than 20% of the average annual discharge, which represents  
122 a low impact of the groundwater in our study area, considering that most of the reservoirs are very  
123 likely concentrated in the bottom material of the middle and low elevations. Other authors, including  
124 Nepal et al. (2014), Savéan et al. (2015), and Eeckman et al. (2019), consider in their modeling  
125 approaches that the volume stored over a long period in groundwater reservoirs is negligible.

## 126 2.2 Water resources for local population

127 The Khumbu zone (Figure 1) encompasses an area of approximately 1100 km<sup>2</sup> along the border  
128 between Nepal and the Tibet Autonomous Region of China. It is included in the Nepalese  
129 administrative division of the Solu-Khumbu district. The area is divided into three major distinct  
130 valleys—Imja Valley, Dudh Koshi Valley, and Bhote Koshi Valley—forming a U-shape, a testimonial  
131 to the glacial erosion and draining of the main rivers in the region. The Dudh Koshi first meets the  
132 Imja Khola on the eastern side of the region, and it then meets the Bhote Koshi before running out of  
133 Khumbu toward the south into a deep gorge. Khumbu settlements span elevations from 2805 m  
134 (Jorsalle) to 5170 m (Gorak Shep). The villages are located extensively on the rare alluvial terraces,  
135 hanging valleys, and amphitheater slumps and comprise mostly south- and north-facing slopes.  
136 Khumbu corresponds to the former Village Development Committees (VDCs, before administrative  
137 restructuring in 2017) of Khumjung and Namche hosting approximately 3500 residents belonging  
138 mostly to the Sherpa ethnic group with a growing number of non-Sherpa residents (Rais, Tamangs,  
139 Magar, and Bahun-Chhetri). With the establishment of the Sagarmatha National Park (SNP) in 1976  
140 and its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, the economy of the region has shifted  
141 to a more tourism-centered form (Spoon 2011). The number of visitors to the SNP increased to 45,000  
142 in 2017 (Jacquemet 2018) leading to an important trekking and expedition tourism hub, including the  
143 popular trekking route to Mount Everest Base Camp.

144 All these territorial and economic mutations have led to profound changes in water resources,  
145 increasing needs previously limited to domestic (drinking water, cooking, personal hygiene),  
146 agricultural (irrigation of barley), and religious purposes (water-driven prayer wheels, water spirit  
147 shrine) (Aubriot et al. 2019). Water is taken directly from springs or small streams flowing through  
148 the settlements or channeled by pipes to houses, since large rivers are not the primary source of water  
149 for villagers (McDowell et al. 2012). In Pangboche village, changes appeared some 20 years ago with  
150 the installation of running water supplying guest houses, a bottled-water manufacturing plant in 2003,  
151 and a micro-hydroelectric plant in 2004 (Puschiasis 2015). Water has become a “commodity” (André-  
152 Lamat 2017) with a proliferation of uses for tourism (shower, flushing toilets, bottled water) and for  
153 electrification. Khumbu inhabitants have become highly dependent on reliable water supply systems  
154 to respond to the new types of usages, which is key to local development. Nevertheless, there is a lack  
155 of a proper management system at a regional level to reduce the pressure on water resources.

## 156 2.3 Methods of sampling and analysis

157 Labels A to Y refer to the sampling points shown in Figure 1 and described in Table 1. They are  
158 ordered by altitude from bottom to top.

### 159 2.3.1 Conductivity, major and trace elements

160 Temperature, pH, and electrical conductivity ( $T_{\text{ref}}=25^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) were measured in the field, using a portable  
161 pH meter and conductivity meter (WTW 3210i®). Water samples (125 mL) were filtered in the field  
162 with a PP syringe and Durapore® membrane (0.22  $\mu\text{m}$ ) and stored in acid-washed HDPE bottles.  
163 Aliquots for major cations and trace elements were acidified with ultrapure  $\text{HNO}_3$  (1% v/v). Samples  
164 were stored at 4°C before reaching Montpellier for analysis.

165 Five sites in the surroundings of Pangboche village were selected for the water sampling (G, H, I, J,  
166 L):

- 167 • The G point on the Imja River represents the reference site for the main river after the  
168 confluence of the Khumbu branch and the Imja branch. These catchments include, on the one  
169 hand, the large glaciers of the south side of the Everest Range and, on the other hand, the Imja

170 moraine lake, which concentrates the melting runoff from the majority of the glaciers of the  
 171 upper Imja Valley.

- 172 • The Tauche point (J) on the east stream of the southern slope of the Tauche Peak (6542 m).  
 173 This watercourse collects the melt flow from the very small glacier located on the peak summit.
- 174 • The Teouma (L) and Kisang (I) points on the central stream flow do not receive water of glacial  
 175 origin. Because this watercourse flows through the village of Pangboche, the first point was  
 176 chosen upstream and the second downstream from the village in order to analyze how the water  
 177 quality of the stream is influenced by the village.
- 178 • The Chomar (H) source on the west side of Pangboche was also sampled, because its water  
 179 was drawn and bottled in 2011 by a small company to be sold to tourists under the brand name  
 180 of “*Namaste Sabina Tabuche Beiu.*” After 2013, the company no longer produced bottled water  
 181 for unknown reasons.

182 The water flows were sampled 18 times between February and November 2011 following the complete  
 183 annual cycle (Figure 2). A total of 12 samplings benefitted from a complete protocol (64 samples) and  
 184 6 more samplings, in winter and autumn, from measurements of electrical conductivity and pH only.

185 Two complementary water samples were collected in June 2012 in Imja Lake (Y) and a rainfall  
 186 reference was taken in the settlement of Pheriche (P). In addition, several measurements of electrical  
 187 conductivity were carried out in different watercourses within the Imja River basin.

188 Chemical analyses were performed at the HydroSciences water chemistry laboratory in Montpellier  
 189 (France). Total alkalinity was measured by acid titration with HCl 0.01 N (Gran method). Major ions  
 190 ( $\text{Cl}^-$ ,  $\text{NO}_3^-$ ,  $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$ ,  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$ ,  $\text{Na}^+$ , and  $\text{K}^+$ ) were analyzed by ionic chromatography (Dionex ICS  
 191 1000®). The precision error was  $< \pm 5\%$ . Trace elements (Li, B, Al, Si, Ti, V, Cr, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni, Cu,  
 192 Zn, As, Rb, Sr, Mo, Cd, Cs, Ba, Pb, and U) were analyzed with Q-ICPMS (X series2 Thermo  
 193 Scientific®) on the AETE (*Analyse des Elements en Trace dans l'Environnement*) technical platform  
 194 of Montpellier University. The precision error was  $< \pm 8\%$ .

### 195 2.3.2 Stable isotopes

196 Six sampling campaigns in rivers located between 1985 m (Kharikola, label A) and 5000 m (foot of  
 197 glaciers, X, Y) were carried out (November to December 2014, November 2015, November 2016,  
 198 March 2015, May 2016, May 2017).

199 In addition, during the study interval from November 2014 to December 2016, monthly rainfall was  
 200 collected at Pangom (2890 m, E) using a homemade rain gauge with an 80-cm<sup>2</sup> cross-section in a 5-L  
 201 plastic tank inside an isotherm box, which was linked to the gauge with a flexible pipe and hermetically  
 202 sealed to avoid direct evaporation.

203 The rainfall and river samples were stored in amber glass bottles (25 mL) with conical plugs and  
 204 transported in shaded conditions to the laboratory in Montpellier.

205 Water-stable isotopes were measured with an Isoprime® mass spectrometer on the LAMA platform  
 206 of HydroSciences Montpellier (*Laboratoire Mutualisé d'Analyse des isotopes stables de l'eau*). The  
 207 oxygen isotopic composition was measured after equilibration of 200  $\mu\text{L}$  of water with  $\text{CO}_2$  via the  
 208 dual-inlet technique, with an overall precision of  $\pm 0.06\%$ . Deuterium was measured by continuous-  
 209 flow using a Eurovector Pyr-OH® elemental analyzer converting 0.5- $\mu\text{L}$  injections of water to  $\text{H}_2$  on  
 210 Cr powder at 1070°C, with an overall precision of  $\pm 0.6\%$ .

211 Water isotopic compositions are reported as  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and  $\delta^2\text{H}$  on the V-SMOW scale.

## 212 3 Results

### 213 3.1 Electrical conductivity and pH

214 **Figure 2 shows** the dynamics of the electrical conductivity and pH during the year 2011 at the five  
215 measurement points (G, H, I, J, L) of the Pangboche area.

216 Regarding electrical conductivity, the absolute values are below 60  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ . These very low values  
217 indicate the slight level of mineralization of the flows. Specifically, the five sites present two main  
218 behaviors: (i) Kisang and Teouma located on the same watercourse have an almost identical and  
219 constant extremely low conductivity during the year (approx. 20  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ ), (ii) for Tauche and Imja the  
220 values are 2–3 times higher, with a slight decrease during and shortly after the monsoon (July-  
221 October), meaning that the increasing runoff generates a dilution effect. The Chomar site fits between  
222 the two, with a decrease during the monsoon season.

223 The pH varies between 7 and 8, except for Pangboche-Chomar bottled drinking water (8.6) and for the  
224 rain sample (6.8). The different sites present a short-term variability from date to date. However, two  
225 main behaviors can be observed: (i) for the slope water courses (Tauche, Kisang, Teouma, and  
226 Chomar), the amplitude of the short-term variability reaches 0.5 and a relative dilution effect appears  
227 during the monsoon; (ii) the valley river (Imja) has an almost stable pH value ( $\approx 7.8$ ) during the course  
228 of the year, but higher than the pH of the slope water courses.

### 229 3.2 Major ions

230 **The following ranges in concentration were shown by the major cations and anions:  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  (1.1-11.1**  
231 **mg/L),  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  (0.1-0.7 mg/L),  $\text{Na}^+$  (0.4-1.8 mg/L),  $\text{K}^+$  (0.2-1.3 mg/L),  $\text{HCO}_3^-$  (5.1-32.3 mg/L),  $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$**   
232 **(0.4-14.5 mg/L),  $\text{NO}_3^-$  (0.1-1.5 mg/L),  $\text{Cl}^-$  (0.1-0.6 mg/L). Silica ranges from 1.3 to 20.8 mg/L.** Average  
233 concentrations of major ions are reported in Table 2. The Piper diagram for major cations and anions  
234 (Figure 3 and Table 2) shows variations in the chemical composition of the surface waters, which is  
235 dominated by  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  and  $\text{HCO}_3^-$ . The waters are mainly of  $\text{Ca}^+-\text{Mg}^+-\text{HCO}_3^-$  type. Waters influenced by  
236 glacier melt (Tauche and Imja sites) exhibit an enrichment in  $\text{SO}_4^{2-}$ , particularly for the Tauche site  
237 during the monsoon season.  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  is the dominant cation contributing more than 70% to the cation  
238 budget, followed by  $\text{Na}^+$  (< 20%) and  $\text{Mg}^{2+}$  (<10%). In Kisang waters and to a less extent in Teouma  
239 waters, before the monsoon season,  $\text{Na}^+$  is the dominant cation.  $\text{Cl}^-$  and  $\text{NO}_3^-$  concentrations are very  
240 low, <0.6 mg/L and <1.5 mg/L, respectively. The  $\text{HCO}_3^-$  contribution to the anion budget ranges  
241 between 60 and 90%, except for Tauche water during the monsoon season, which evolves to a  
242  $\text{Ca}^+-\text{Mg}^+-\text{SO}_4^{2-}$  type. The origin of sulfates is found in sulfide oxidation via glacier runoff, as suggested  
243 by Hodson et al. (2002), because no anhydrite or gypsum have been identified in the region. The plot  
244 of  $\text{Ca}^++\text{Mg}^++\text{Na}^+$  versus  $\text{HCO}_3^-+\text{SO}_4^{2-}$  from all the waters shows that most of the samples lie close to  
245 the 1:1 line, indicating the dissolution of calcite, dolomite, silicates, and sulfides (Figure 4) **as**  
246 **suggested by Crespo et al. (2017).**

247 For all major elements, including  $\text{SiO}_2$ , the temporal evolution of the concentrations displays a dilution  
248 effect during the monsoon season, except for the Imja site where an increase in the concentration of all the  
249 major elements occurs during the same season, especially in August 2011, which corresponds to the  
250 maximum glacier melt. This enrichment demonstrates that the glaciated catchment undergoes more intense  
251 **chemical weathering taking place beneath the glacier** than catchments that do not have a glacier **because**  
252 **the  $\text{CO}_2$  dissolved in the proglacial zone with the aerated flow conditions characteristic of the meltwater**  
253 **environments may promote chemical weathering by maintaining the acid potential of the water (Reynold**  
254 **& Johnson 1972) in Singh and Hasnain (1998).**

### 255 3.3 Trace elements

256 Average concentrations for measured trace elements are presented in Table 3. Dissolved trace elements  
 257 such as Li, B, Ni, Zn, Cu, Rb, Sr, Ba, and U show a dilution effect during the monsoon season at the  
 258 Teouma, Kisang, Tauche, and Chomar sites whereas the Imja site in the same season exhibits, except  
 259 for boron, a high concentration increase, by a factor of 10 to 100, as shown, for example, for rubidium  
 260 (Figure 5). The origin of this increase can be found in the glacier melt enriched in subglacial material  
 261 leached by the heavy rain during the monsoon. This phenomenon underlines the integrating power of  
 262 the Imja Khola River. On the other hand, Al, Ti, Fe, and Mn to a lesser extent increase in all the sites  
 263 during the monsoon season. In comparison with the Upper Mustang rivers in the western region of  
 264 Nepal Himalaya (Ghezzi et al. 2017), the concentrations are elevated, from 5 to 6600 µg/L for Al, from  
 265 0.5 to 485 µg/L for Ti, from 5 to 7130 µg/L for Fe, and from 2 to 200 µg/L for Mn. These elements  
 266 are mobilized by the surface runoff during the monsoon season and their common origin is to be found  
 267 in the weathered bedrock.

268 In regards of the WHO drinking water guidelines, no major or trace elements exceed the recommended  
 269 values, even if the concentrations for some major or trace elements of the Imja River are elevated.

### 270 3.4 Stable isotopes

271 Three complete years (2014–2016) of meteorological data (P, T) are available at the Pangom station  
 272 (2885 m, label D) (Chevallier et al. 2017), and a monthly sampling of rainfall for water isotope analysis  
 273 was carried out between November 2014 and December 2016. The comparison of all the results is only  
 274 qualitative owing to the small temporal record at the Pangom weather station.

275 The mean annual temperature measured at Pangom in 2015 was 6.7°C (7.6°C in 2014 and 8.0°C in  
 276 2016) with lower temperatures in the dry season (min. in December: -1.1°C) and higher temperatures  
 277 during the monsoon season (Figure 6) (max. in June: 12°C). In the higher part of the Khumbu valley  
 278 at the Pyramid Laboratory station, monthly temperatures follow the same pattern ranging between -12  
 279 and 4°C for the 2012–2014 interval (Balestrini et al. 2016).

#### 280 3.4.1 Precipitations

281 Annual rainfall in Pangom was 3046 mm in 2015 (3683 mm in 2014 and 3947 mm in 2016). The South  
 282 Asia monsoon (JJAS) accounts for more than 80% of the precipitation amount (Figure 6) (84.7 to  
 283 86.1% from 2014 to 2016) with no specific rainier month in this season (JAS between 888 and  
 284 1075 mm).

285 During the sampling interval (November 2014 to December 2016, with a gap in May 2016), a large  
 286 isotopic variation is observed (Figure 6): 3.25 to -15.26‰ V-SMOW for  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and 43.3 to -109.5‰  
 287 V-SMOW for  $\delta^2\text{H}$ . Figure 6 shows the isotopic composition of all precipitations giving a local water  
 288 line following the equation:

$$289 \quad \delta^2\text{H} = 8.57 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 20.5 \quad (R^2 = 0.997; n = 25)$$

290 The slope is slightly higher than the slope of the global meteoric water line (GMWL,  
 291  $\delta^2\text{H} = 8.13 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 10.13$ ) defined by Rozanski et al. (1993) and also shows an intercept  $d = 20.5$  higher,  
 292 close to the meteoric line of the precipitation in the southern Tibetan plateau (Yao et al. 2013):

$$293 \quad \delta^2\text{H} = 8.89 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 23.0 \quad (R^2 = 0.980; n = 374).$$

294 At the Pyramid Laboratory station at the weekly scale between June 2012 and December 2013,  
 295 Balestrini et al. (2016) found:

$$296 \quad \delta^2\text{H} = 8.17 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 16.6$$



297 In Pangom, if one distinguishes between the seasons, the equations are:

298	ONDJFMAM (non-monsoon)	$\delta^2\text{H} = 8.46 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 20.6$	$(R^2 = 0.997; n = 17)$
299	JJAS (monsoon),	$\delta^2\text{H} = 8.52 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 18.4$	$(R^2 = 0.999; n = 8).$

300 The more enriched monthly values above  $-1\text{‰}$  in  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  ( $n=5$ ) do not show an evaporation mark; a high  
301 deuterium excess is observed (between  $17.4$  and  $21.6\text{‰}$ ) for low to medium rainfall amount ( $21$  to  $142$   
302 mm). These values belong to the extra-monsoon season and are linked to **notable** continental recycling  
303 mainly from non-fractional processes such as transpiration or soil evaporation. In the regional study  
304 by Jeelani and Deshpande (2017), stations in Nepal and Assam also showed a high d-excess ( $> 20\text{‰}$ )  
305 associated with a high  $\delta^{18}\text{O} > -1\text{‰}$  value, suggesting a dominant influence of transpiration, increasing  
306 the  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  of vapor over the forest floor (Lai and Ehleringer 2010).

307 The isotopic values recorded during the 2 years, including monsoon and extra-monsoon seasons,  
308 display different patterns, globally more depleted in the monsoon season (2015,  $-10.05\text{‰}$ ;  
309 2016,  $-8.48\text{‰}$ , weighted mean for  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ) and more enriched in the extra-monsoon season  
310 (2015,  $-4.48\text{‰}$ ; 2016,  $-0.81\text{‰}$ , weighted mean for  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ). The much more enriched values in the extra-  
311 monsoon season in 2016 could be an effect on isotope composition and deuterium excess in the  
312 beginning of the monsoon season with a possibly late isotope re-equilibration of the air mass, perhaps  
313 due to **higher** mixing with the recycled continental vapor. Indeed, in June and July 2016, isotope values  
314 were more enriched than in June and July 2015, also with a greater d-excess. Then, it is only in August  
315 2016, in the middle of the monsoon season, that isotope values and d-excess seem to be consistent with  
316 isotope values in the monsoon season, and this continues until the beginning of the extra-monsoon  
317 season (October 2016) with a dephasing of 2 months.

318 **The relationship between isotope values and temperature (temperature effect) shows an inverse**  
319 **correlation with a low coefficient ( $R = -0.336$ ;  $n = 25$ ) as well as with rainfall (amount effect) with**  
320  **$R = -0.392$ , which are not significant using a t-distribution with  $n-2$  degrees of freedom at a**  
321 **significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; the critical values associated with  $df = 23$  are  $\pm 0.396$  (Bravais-Pearson**  
322 **table). The monsoon season corresponds to a more depleted rainfall (Dansgaard 1964). In fact, the**  
323 **main effect on isotope variability in our site is the origin of air masses, as shown in previous regional**  
324 **studies cited in this article or in the local Khumbu Valley at the Pyramid Laboratory (Balestrini et al.**  
325 **2016).**

326 The year 2015, which is complete, gives a weighted annual value ( $\Sigma(P_i \delta_i) / \Sigma P_i$ ) of  $-9.24\text{‰}$  V-SMOW  
327 for  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and  $-60.1\text{‰}$  V-SMOW for  $\delta^2\text{H}$  (2016:  $95.9\text{‰}$  of rainfall,  $-8.20\text{‰}$  and  $-50.6\text{‰}$ ), which is in  
328 good agreement with the altitude effect in the region, regarding the results obtained in Kathmandu  
329 ( $1320$  m,  $-8.7\text{‰}$ ) and Nyalang ( $3811$  m,  $-11.3\text{‰}$ ) (Wen et al. 2012; Balestrini et al. 2016); at the  
330 Pyramid Laboratory station ( $5050$  m), the isotope content during the monsoon season in 2012 and 2013  
331 does not show a large variation ( $-17.74$  to  $-17.81\text{‰}$  in  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ). The gradient is  $-0.23\text{‰} / 100$  m, in good  
332 agreement with the range of the isotope altitudinal gradient in Himalaya ( $-0.15$ ,  $-0.33\text{‰}$ ) (Wen et al.  
333 2012).

334 The d-excess is a good indicator for evaluating the contribution of different water vapor sources (Clark  
335 and Fritz 1997). In Himalaya, low d-excess values characterize moisture coming from the Indian  
336 Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, and high values continental moisture carried by the Western Disturbance  
337 (Jeelani and Deshpande 2017). At Pangom in 2015 and 2016, d-excess values during the monsoon  
338 season were between  $11.3$  and  $18.7\text{‰}$  ( $n = 8$ , mean =  $13.6\text{‰}$ ), while in the two extra-monsoon seasons  
339 (2015 and 2016) d-excess values were between  $14.3$  and  $23.9\text{‰}$  ( $n = 14$ , mean =  $19.1\text{‰}$ ).

340 At the Pyramid Laboratory, we have the same pattern for isotope content and d-excess during the  
 341 monsoon (depleted values up to -30‰ for  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and d-excess < 15‰) and the extra-monsoon seasons  
 342 (more enriched values and high d-excess until 26‰). The difference observed with the local meteoric  
 343 line (LML) in d-excess is due to the different repartition of measurements in the monsoon season  
 344 (n = 38) and the extra-monsoon season (n = 8).

345 We note in the total observed interval a good correlation between oxygen-18 and d-excess values  
 346 ( $R^2 = 0.62$ ; n=25), which reaches  $R^2 = 0.72$  if the more enriched point is removed (April 2016); this  
 347 may indicate a slight alteration in isotope air mass signal by the evaporation process.

348 To conclude, in Pangom as in other Himalayan sites, the change in air circulation patterns, marine  
 349 vapor from the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal, on the one hand, and continental vapor from the  
 350 Western Disturbances, on the other, modify the isotope composition and d-excess of precipitation.

### 351 3.4.2 Rivers

352 For the river isotope sampling, in the general spatial pattern, depleted values are observed in the  
 353 headwaters of the streams and enriched values at lower elevations of the catchments. The water isotope  
 354 variability of stream water shows a lower variability with respect to local precipitation at Pangom, in  
 355 spite of altitudinal sampling (1981–4935 m) and six campaigns between November 2014 and May  
 356 2017 (local sampling between one and six campaigns) that ranged from -10.10 to -18.39‰ for  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$   
 357 and from -64.5 to -135.8‰ for  $\delta^2\text{H}$  (Figure 7, Table 4). The sampling was carried out at the beginning  
 358 of the extra-monsoon season, with possibly the influence of the end of the monsoon season, and at the  
 359 end of the extra-monsoon season. However, the variability registered is mainly very low, lower than  
 360 0.6‰ for  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  for 89% of local stations. Two stations with at least five samplings (D – Pangom and J  
 361 – Tauche) show a large difference; both stations in March 2015 have a high depleted value (-16.65 and  
 362 -16.53‰ in  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ , respectively); not considering this result, Pangom has a mean value of -10.47‰ with  
 363 a range interval of 0.45 (n = 4) and Tauche has a mean value of -15.31‰ with a range interval of 1.22  
 364 (n = 5). Both sampling points are located in non-glaciated catchment for Pangom and small glaciated  
 365 catchment (**less than 1% of the basin area**) for Tauche. The river in this extra-monsoon season with  
 366 few precipitations (at Pangom in 2015, precipitation amounts are **19 mm in January, 19 mm in**  
 367 **February and 66 mm in March**) is supplied mainly by superficial aquifer whose main characteristic is  
 368 an isotopic composition relatively constant over the year at a local altitudinal point (Jeelani et al. 2018).  
 369 The main hypothesis to explain this important change is the presence of snow cover at higher altitude  
 370 with more depleted isotopic content during this season, which was melting and supplied by direct  
 371 runoff from the river.

372 Although there were no measurements during the monsoon season in this study, the works of  
 373 Balestrini, Polesello, and Sacchi (2014) in the high part of the Khumbu Valley (> 4200 m) have shown  
 374 a higher variability (2‰) close to glacier and morainic lake inflow and low variability (0.39‰ in  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ )  
 375 at Pheriche (label P in Figure 1) during monthly sampling between July and October 2008. The authors  
 376 suggest that the area extension of the hydrological basin buffers the isotopic signal. Another fact is the  
 377 difficulty to link directly the isotope content of monthly precipitation and isotopic content of river  
 378 water at the same time.

379 The isotopic composition of the stream water in the whole study interval is close to the local  
 380 precipitation regression line (Figure 7) following the equation:

$$381 \quad \delta^2\text{H} = 8.23 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 15.0 \quad (R^2 = 0.987; n = 58)$$

382 For each season the slope and the d-excess value can differ greatly, but the number of samples is small  
383 (except for May 2017, which is close to the global river equation) and these variations are **not**  
384 **representative** of a particular process:

385	November 2014	$\delta^2\text{H} = 8.11 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 4.1$	$(R^2 = 0.972; n = 5)$
386	March 2015	$\delta^2\text{H} = 7.56 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 22.2$	$(R^2 = 0.999; n = 9)$
387	November 2015	$\delta^2\text{H} = 6.71 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 9.3$	$(R^2 = 0.934; n = 11)$
388	May 2016	$\delta^2\text{H} = 8.24 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 16.3$	$(R^2 = 0.994; n = 10)$
389	November 2016	$\delta^2\text{H} = 8.08 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 13.3$	$(R^2 = 0.992; n = 9)$
390	May 2017	$\delta^2\text{H} = 8.47 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 19.1$	$(R^2 = 0.997; n = 17)$

391 The mean d-excess value at each sampling point is between 5.6 and 14.4‰. For the whole dataset,  
392 d-excess values vary between 3.1 and 15.6‰ with 19% of samples lower than 10‰, which are altered  
393 by an evaporation process. The samples with d-excess between 10 and 14‰ do not show a special  
394 trend, likely linked to glacier melt and aquifer discharge where the main accumulation and recharge  
395 are during monsoon season when the d-excess value of the monthly precipitation is between 11 and  
396 14‰. For d-excess values higher than 14‰, there is possibly a partial contribution of rainfall or melted  
397 snow during the extra-monsoon season where d-excess values of monthly precipitation can reach 24‰  
398 during the 2014–2016 interval.

399 Contrary to the results of another study in southern Himalaya by Wen et al. (2012), who found a very  
400 good correlation between the isotope content in the Boqu River and altitude ( $n = 39$ ,  $R^2 = 0.90$ , Sept.  
401 2011) between 1845 and 5060 m, the relationship between the altitude of the sampling sites and isotope  
402 content is not well correlated ( $R^2 = 0.399$ ;  $n=18$ ) very likely due to the heterogeneity of the catchments  
403 and their glacier cover varying between 0% and 70%. The river in catchments with glacier cover at all  
404 altitudes is mainly controlled by the ice melting and by higher depleted value with respect to no glacier  
405 catchments. This is the case of the Phakding samples, located at a low altitude (2620 m), which show  
406 an isotope content in  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  of -15.89‰, with a 20.9% glacier cover (Everest catchment). By  
407 comparison, the weighted mean annual rainfall in Pangom (2890 m) yields -9.24‰, in better  
408 accordance with the isotope values collected in the Pangom River (watershed without glacier) and  
409 reflecting the isotope composition of rainfall in the whole study area (-11.71‰).

410 By contrast, rivers in catchments without any or with small glacier cover (Kharikola, Pangom, Tauche,  
411 Chomar, Teouma), spring (Lobuche spring), or surface flow not connected to glacier melt such as wet  
412 saturated pastures (*kharka* in Nepali; e.g., Phulung Kharka) show (Figure 8) a better correlation with  
413 altitude ( $R^2 = 0.809$ ;  $n = 8$ ). Focusing only on the river sampling points that depending on glacier melt,  
414 the correlation with altitude is significantly improved ( $R^2 = 0.525$ ;  $n = 10$ ). Indirectly, the lower the  
415 altitude, the more the glacier component in the river decreases and the more the aquifer component  
416 increases.

417 The isotopic altitude gradient for river sampling in no or in a lightly glaciated catchments shows for  
418  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  a value of -0.20‰/100m; this is in the range (-0.11/- 0.36‰/100 m) of other studies referenced  
419 by Wen et al. (2012) and Ren et al. (2017) in Himalaya and is close to results found by Florea et al.  
420 (2017), in the same zone, i.e., -0.28‰/100 m. By comparison with the study of Florea et al. (2017), in  
421 the Dudh Koshi River with a sampling set located between Gorak Shek (5180 m), upstream of  
422 Lobuche, and downstream of Phakding (2550 m) in May 2011, values in  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  are between -17.9 and  
423 -9.7‰. The relationship between  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  and  $\delta^2\text{H}$  demonstrates a lower slope and d-excess value than  
424 our global study, with the equation:

$$425 \quad \delta^2\text{H} = 7.8 \delta^{18}\text{O} + 4.0 \quad (R^2 = 0.94; n = 32)$$

426 Individually, tributary streams and direct sampling in the Dudh Koshi River show a d-excess ranging  
 427 between 4.4‰ and 12.7‰ (72% of samples lower than 10‰), which is globally lower than the  
 428 d-excess measured in this study. The slope is lower than 8, but overall the low d-excess values imply  
 429 that an evaporation process during the study interval (Florea et al. 2017) may be due to the sampling  
 430 time (end of extra-monsoon season), with warmer conditions than during the sampling times of this  
 431 study.

## 432 4 Discussion

### 433 4.1 Water origins

434 Not surprisingly, the isotope properties of the precipitation highlight the double climatic influence  
 435 from the arrival of the westerlies in winter and from the Asian monsoon in summer.

436 The isotope response to ground ice melt has been investigated since the mid-1970s (Stuiver et al.,  
 437 1976; Fujino and Kato, 1978) who relies on isotope fractionation that occurs during phase changes  
 438 (i.e. freezing, condensation, adsorption) and the resulting difference in the slope of the regression of  
 439  $\delta D$  on  $\delta^{18}O$  with a slope between 3 and 7 (Jouzel and Souchez, 1982; Lacelle et al., 2011). Ala-aho et  
 440 al. (2018) show in western Siberia the possible discrimination of water origin between precipitation,  
 441 river, lakes and thawing permafrost. The slope of the regression of  $\delta D$  on  $\delta^{18}O$  was lower than the  
 442 precipitation (7.6) with soils/permafrost (4.64) < lakes (5.54) < rivers (6.08) and a strong variability  
 443 of median isotope content in precipitation (-15.6‰ in  $\delta^{18}O$ ), rivers (-15.3‰), soils/permafrost  
 444 (-13.0‰) and lakes (-11.1‰) > rivers (-15.1‰). In our study case the river points do not show an  
 445 obvious influence of thawing permafrost during the sampling period which correspond before or after  
 446 monsoon when temperatures are lower, may-be during monsoon period of higher temperature, an  
 447 important thawing permafrost could be detected in some rivers.

448 Locally, the results of the current study confirm that few chemical patterns can be used to distinguish  
 449 the waterflow origins during the different seasons. Rb, as Li, Cu, Sr, Ba and SiO<sub>2</sub>, originating from the  
 450 minerals of the bedrock, characterizes substantially the water originating from glacier melt, as shown  
 451 in Figure 5, especially during the monsoon season. Nevertheless, the isotopic results appear to be less  
 452 useful for that task, even if differences are observed: The isotopic climate signal in the water courses  
 453 is very likely mixed with the signal emitted by the storage in groundwater temporary reservoirs, which  
 454 limits a clear interpretation. Factually, it depends on the sampling location and of the ratio of  
 455 glacierized area. In the high altitudes (> 4000 m) the river reflects the isotope content mainly of the  
 456 ice and snow melt because the climatic conditions do not allow an important weathering of the rocks  
 457 and a strong development of an aquifer structure; the consequence is a reduced groundwater capacity,  
 458 and a fast groundwater circulation reflecting isotope content of ice and snow. At lower altitude, the  
 459 weathering is higher and the aquifer can develop itself with a higher storage capacity involving local  
 460 recharge by rainfall; the isotope content is enriched with respect to ice and snow melt (altitude effect):  
 461 the lower the altitude, the richer is the isotope content of total flow. It is a consequence of the higher  
 462 base flow in the dry season and of the higher contribution of the surface runoff in the monsoon season,  
 463 this last being enriched in isotope with respect to ice and snow melt more depleted.

464 However, the meltwater marking (glacier as snow cover melt) by the isotopes can be more visible than  
 465 by the chemical signature in downstream sampling sites, because it is less dissolved, with the  
 466 inconvenience of a smoothed seasonal effect. The result at the Phakding (20.9‰ glacier covered) and  
 467 Pangom (no glacier) stations, detailed in the previous section, is, therefore, significant.

468 The pH remains in a relatively narrow range in the different sampling points and does not seem useful  
 469 for characterizing the water paths or the seasons, while electrical conductivity shows slightly higher

470 values for flows originating from glaciers and lower values in the monsoon runoffs of streams not fed  
471 by glacier melt (Figure 2).

472 In addition to the previous considerations, complementary observations on electrical conductivity were  
473 made in the main rivers of this area and in the Imja Lake during a 3-day interval in the second half of  
474 June 2012, in the early monsoon season. They are summarized in Table 5, which shows that the flows  
475 arising from the Imja Lake are approximately twofold less mineralized than those of the Khumbu upper  
476 valley. Both basins have similar areas and ratios of glaciated surfaces. Because the flows are from the  
477 same geological and glaciological origin, the conductivity difference observed can only be explained  
478 by the presence of the lake. The higher value observed in the lateral Imja River, which does not flow  
479 from the lake, confirms this hypothesis. This phenomenon could be attributed to the sedimentation  
480 only within the lake of the solid load generated by the glacier abrasion, due to quieter hydraulic  
481 conditions. This hypothesis is reinforced by the visual observations at the confluence between the Imja  
482 and the Khumbu rivers, which showed that the turbulence of the runoff was higher in the Khumbu  
483 branch than in the Imja branch (Figure 9).

## 484 4.2 Water uses

485 Before commenting, it must be stressed that in the framework of this study no analysis was performed  
486 regarding the bacterial quality of the water used by the inhabitants and by the visitors. The reason is  
487 that, at the time of the study, the only laboratory for analyzing samples, poorly equipped and without  
488 dedicated manpower, was located in the Khumjung Hospital, close to the village of Namche Bazar,  
489 several hours' walking distance from the sampling points. This is unfortunate, because the sources of  
490 bacterial pollution are numerous, especially high-altitude pastures, perfunctory toilet installations,  
491 uncontrolled waste disposal, etc. (Manfredi et al. 2010). These sources of pollution are increasing with  
492 the rapid development of tourist activities. Furthermore, inhabitants in Pangboche expressed more  
493 concerns about the future of the water quality than about water quantity since no proper sewage system  
494 exists and they are witnessing a dissemination of plastic waste in streams.

495 The quality of the natural water can be chemically considered good with a very low mineralization  
496 degree. It appears that the reticence to consider the water of the large valley river is mainly justified  
497 by the danger in accessing and harvesting it and also by its white color, due to the fine particles  
498 mentioned in the previous section. This particular property gave its name to the Dudh Koshi River,  
499 which means *Milk River* in Nepali. Nevertheless, these statements cannot conclude on the drinkability  
500 of the river water, since, as written above, organic and microbiological analysis have not been done in  
501 the current study framework.

502 The sampling points L (Pangboche-Teouma) and I (Pangboche-Kisang) were chosen for their location,  
503 upstream and downstream of the village, respectively, in order to examine an eventual degradation due  
504 to the human activities. No notable differences can be observed in terms of the major ions (Table 2).  
505 Nevertheless, in Figure 4, the trace elements collected throughout the year in Teouma (upstream)  
506 appear grouped, when a dispersion is noted for those collected downstream in Kisang. This dispersion  
507 is very likely due to the limited pollution of the water used in the village. Shortly after Kisang, the  
508 slope torrent is intercepted by the large Dudh Koshi River, where the low chemical pollution is  
509 dissolved.

510 Finally, the issue of bottled water consumption by tourists is of some importance to the local economy,  
511 because it is a non-negligible income for the communities (Puschiasis 2015; Jacquemet 2018). Several  
512 small companies have been established in the region to exploit this niche. One of them collected water  
513 at the Pangboche-Chomar point (labeled H in Figure 1) and, after a basic filtration process, bottled it.  
514 The bottled water was also analyzed with the same procedure as the other samples, except that it was

515 transported to France after several months in the original PET bottle and not in a standard analysis  
 516 recipient (see Section 2.3.1). As shown in Figure 4, no difference is observed between the bottle and  
 517 the other samples from the Chomar site. In Table 2, a few differences are notable, especially regarding  
 518 pH, Cl<sup>-</sup>, NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>, and Na<sup>+</sup>. They can be explained by the very long storage in a bad-quality recipient, but  
 519 this is the reality for most of the water bottles available in the study zone. Nevertheless, in terms of  
 520 chemical quality, the bottled water and the river water are similar. It seems that for some reason the  
 521 water company did not pursue the exploitation of the Chomar site, which no longer functioned after  
 522 2013. However, water bottles from other places, particularly those collected in the surroundings of  
 523 Namche Bazar, were sold in the Pangboche shops and lodges.

## 524 **5 Conclusion**

525 **Between many studies, the recent IPCC special report on the cryosphere future (Pörtner et al. 2019)**  
 526 **confirms the loss of cryospheric mass and the rapid permafrost thaw. It is also verified in the Central**  
 527 **Himalaya, which presents threats on physical entities (water resources, flood, landslide, avalanche)**  
 528 **and on ecosystems (forest, tundra). The Khumbu inhabitants are strongly preoccupied by this situation,**  
 529 **which directly impacts their livelihood. In addition, they** face difficulties in terms of inequalities in the  
 530 social water management system, failing to regulate proper access of water in villages (Puschiasis  
 531 2015; Faulon and Sacareau 2020). More than climatic variations, changes in water use over the past  
 532 decades are due to a growing need for tourism and for domestic purposes. Regarding the future of  
 533 accessible water resources, this does not seem to be threatened in terms of quantity, even if seasonal  
 534 pressures should lead to a better water management, especially during the high season of tourism  
 535 activities (Aubriot et al. 2019). However, water quality could evolve in a worrisome direction.

536 Apart from the bacteriological issue, which is not considered here, the points addressed could change  
 537 as follows:

- 538 • The isotopic signature of precipitation and rivers is a good indicator of climate change and flow  
 539 paths. It should be periodically analyzed. On the one hand, it could follow changes observed  
 540 in the seasonal precipitation patterns in the study region (Shea et al. 2015). On the other hand,  
 541 it facilitates the recognition of the transitory storage of surface water (glacier, snow cover, or  
 542 underground reservoirs).
- 543 • In this study the chemical properties of the water used for domestic activities do not seem to  
 544 be hazardous to human and animal health at present. However, with changes in precipitation  
 545 and river regimes, in land use and land cover due to economic income, in cropping strategies,  
 546 in the very low level of waste and toilet water management, the current fragile balance could  
 547 be seriously jeopardized. The project of road construction in the valley, for instance, validated  
 548 until Surkhe, close to Lukla (“The Rising Nepal: Everest Region Closer with Bridge over  
 549 Sunkoshi” 2020), will lead to the importation of chemical products and molecules that have  
 550 been thus far unknown.

## 551 **6 Conflict of Interest**

552 The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial  
 553 relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## 554 **7 Author Contributions**

555 Pierre Chevallier coordinated the whole study, including the field collection, wrote the introduction,  
 556 discussion, and conclusion sections, and assembled the different parts of the paper. Jean-Luc Seidel  
 557 contributed to the geochemistry analysis of the major ions and trace elements and Jean-Denis Taupin  
 558 of the stable isotopes. Ornella Puschiasis lived in Pangboche during the whole year in 2011 at an

559 elevation of 4000 m, collecting the water samples and she wrote the parts regarding water use by the  
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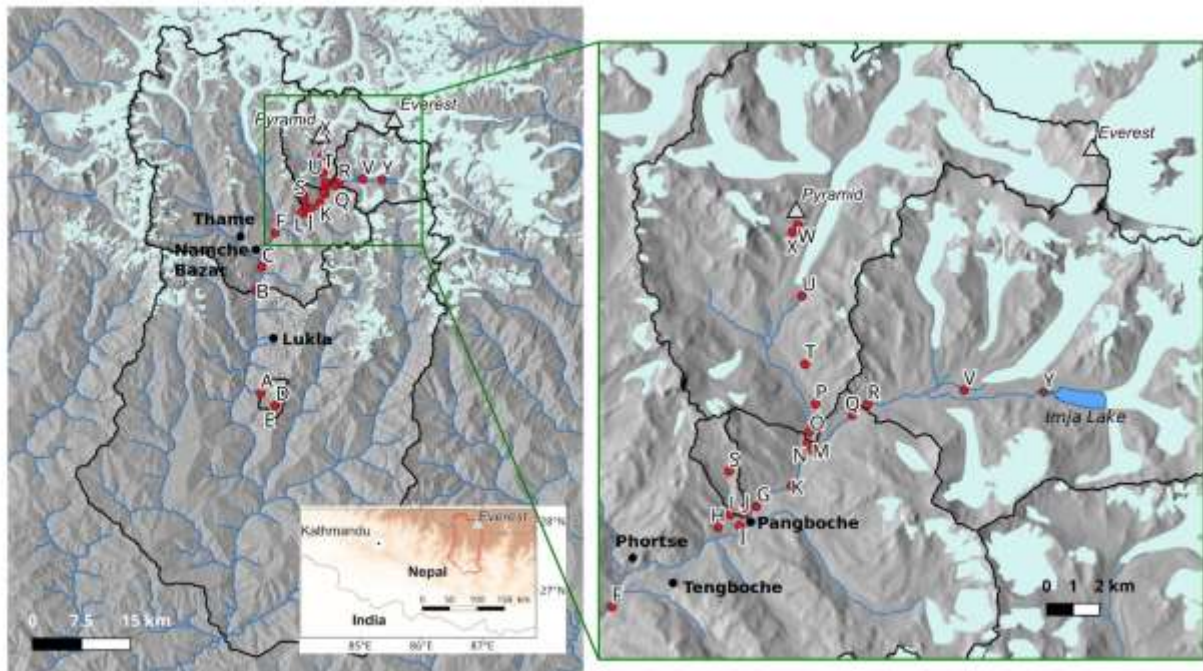
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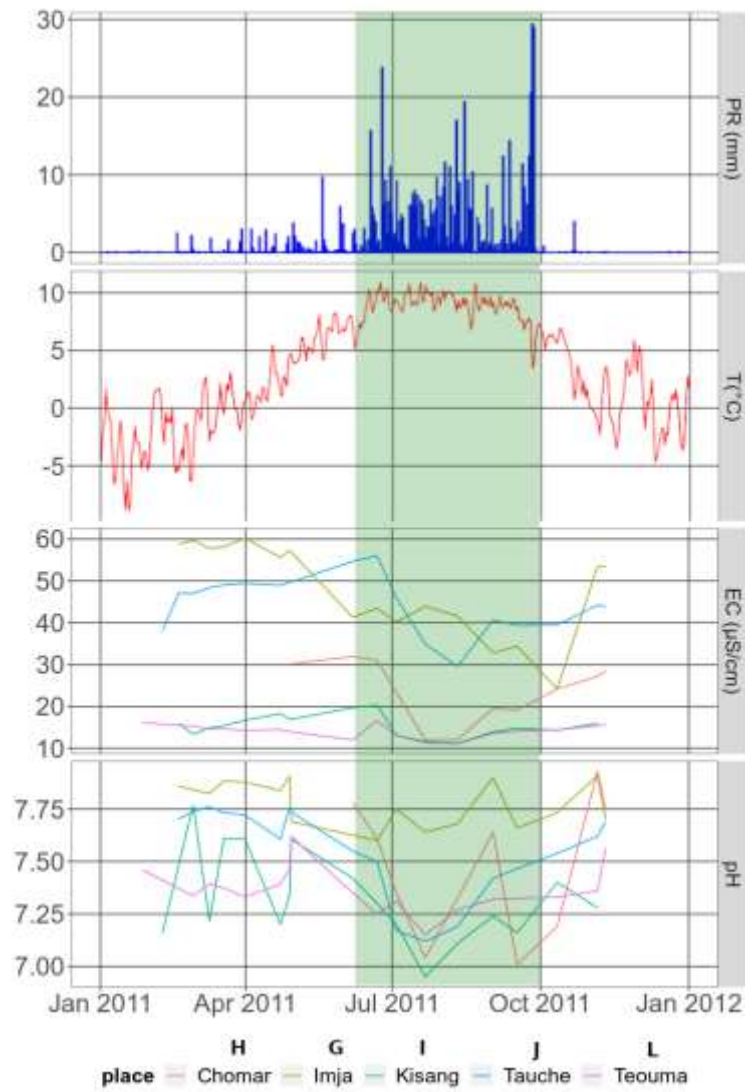
809 **11 Figures and tables**

810 **11.1 Figures**



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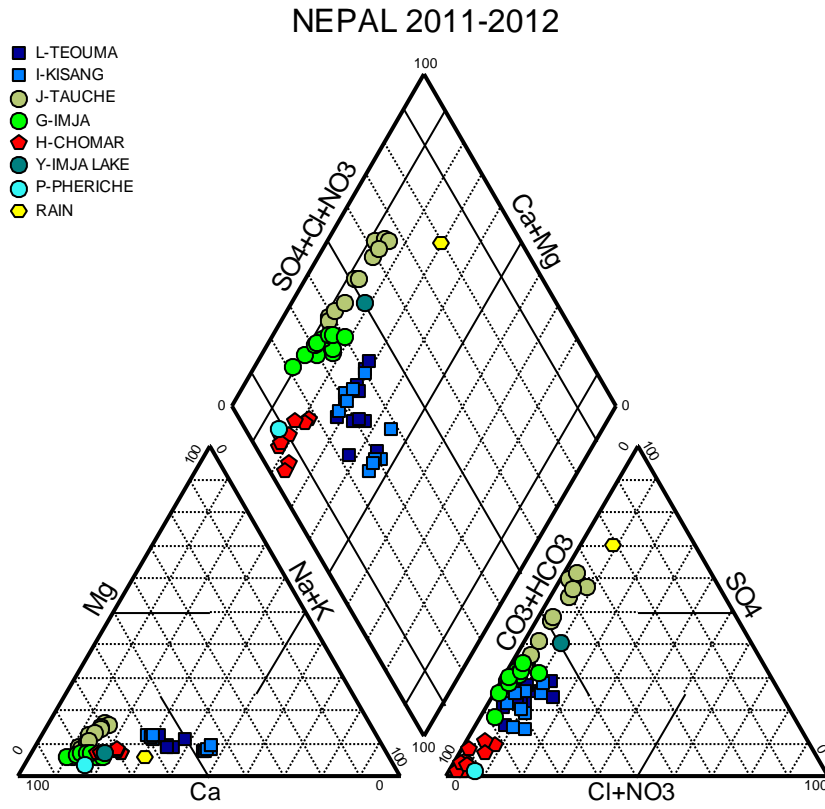
812 **Figure 1.** Bottom left: location of the Dudh Koshi River basin (red line). Left: Dudh Koshi River basin and sub-  
813 basins, southern Mount Everest. Right: details of the Upper Khumbu and Imja area. The red dots represent  
814 the sampling points. The labels refer to Table 1. Sources: for relief, digital elevation model based on Spot-  
815 HRS images with a 40-m resolution (Gardelle et al. 2013); for glacier extension, Randolph Glacier Inventory  
816 (RGI Consortium 2017).



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818 **Figure 2.** Year 2011: Daily precipitation (PR) and temperature (T) data at Pangboche weather station vs.  
 819 electrical conductivity (EC) and pH at the five sampling points around Pangboche (~4000 m). The monsoon  
 820 season (JJAS) is highlighted in green.

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Figure 3. Piper diagram of the major ions in the collected samples.

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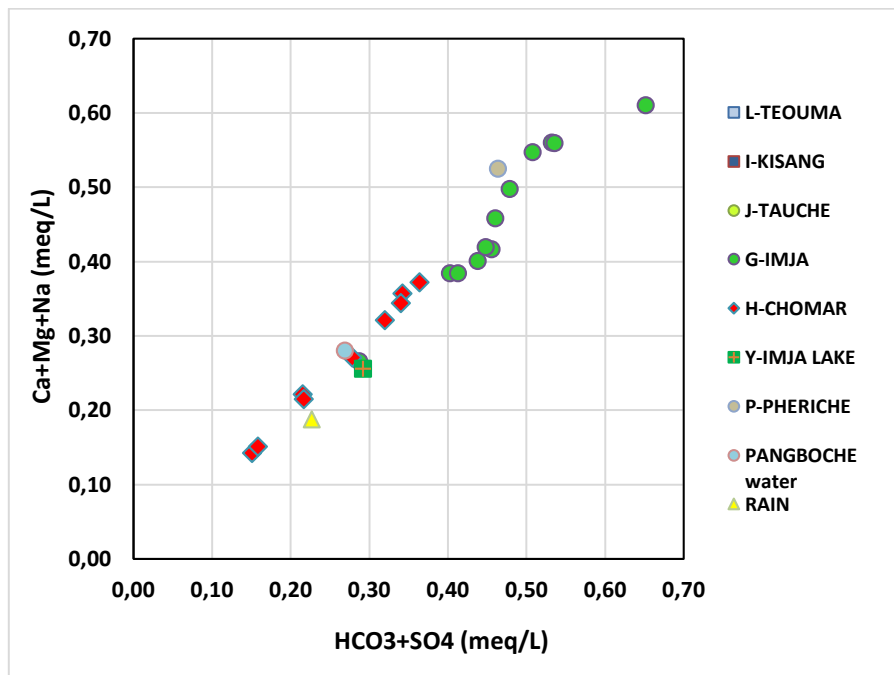


Figure 4. Ca+Mg+Na versus HCO<sub>3</sub>+SO<sub>4</sub> (meq/L)

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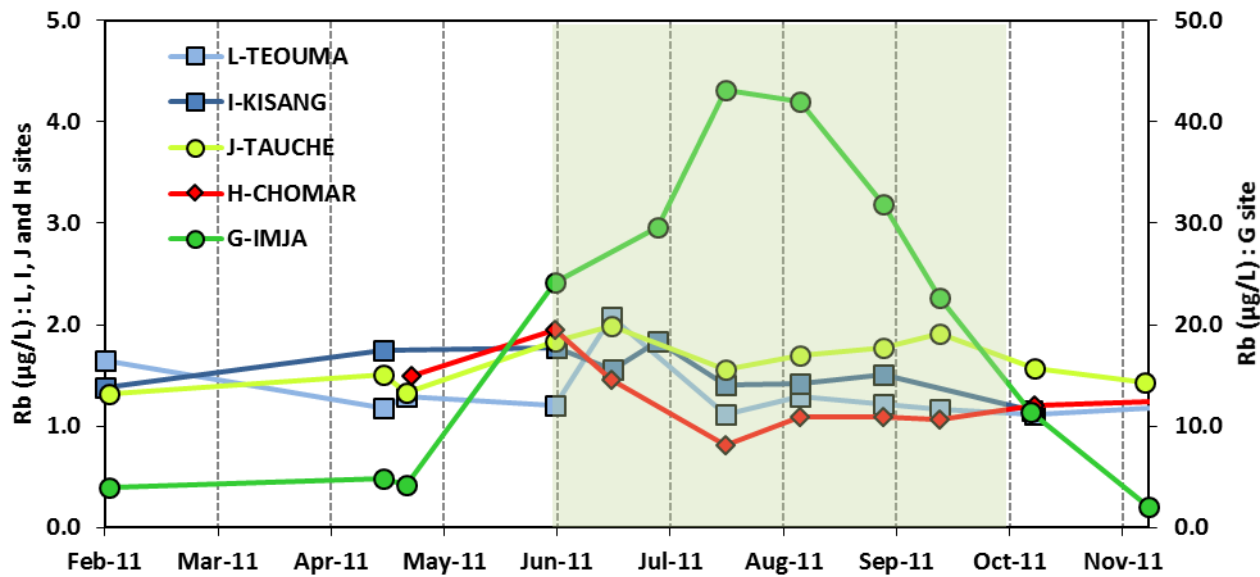


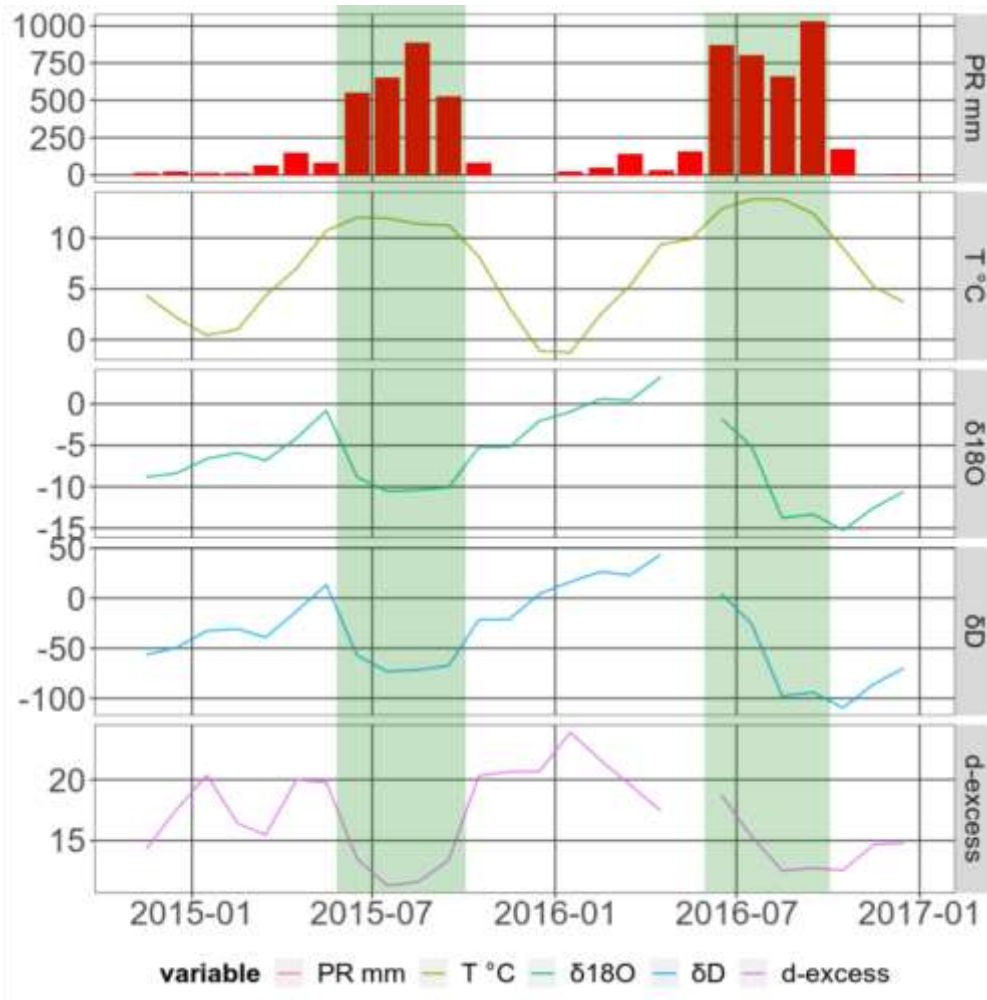
Figure 5. Temporal variation of Rb concentration. The monsoon season is highlighted in green.

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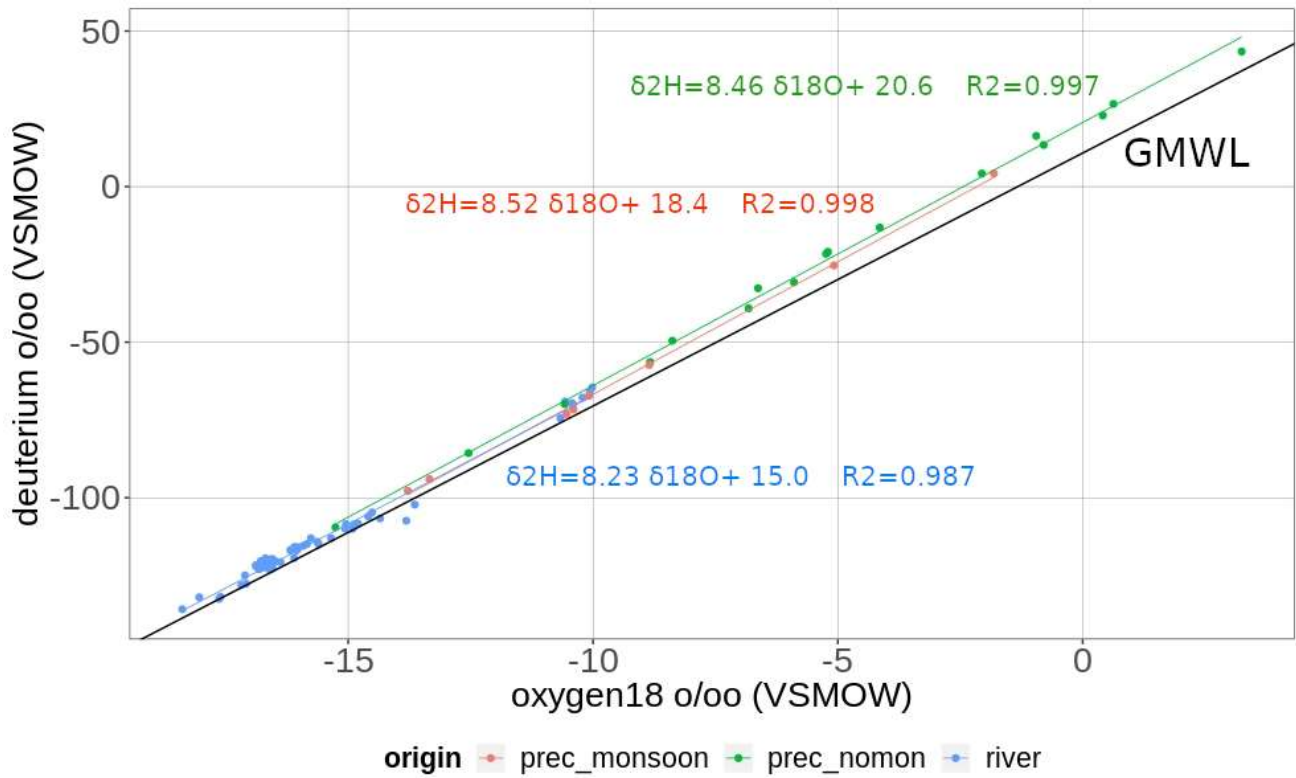
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834 Figure 6: Monthly precipitation data in Pangom (E): precipitation (PR), air temperature (T), and stable isotopes  
 835 ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ,  $\delta\text{D}$ , D-excess, ‰ VSMOW). The monsoon seasons (JJAS) are highlighted in green.

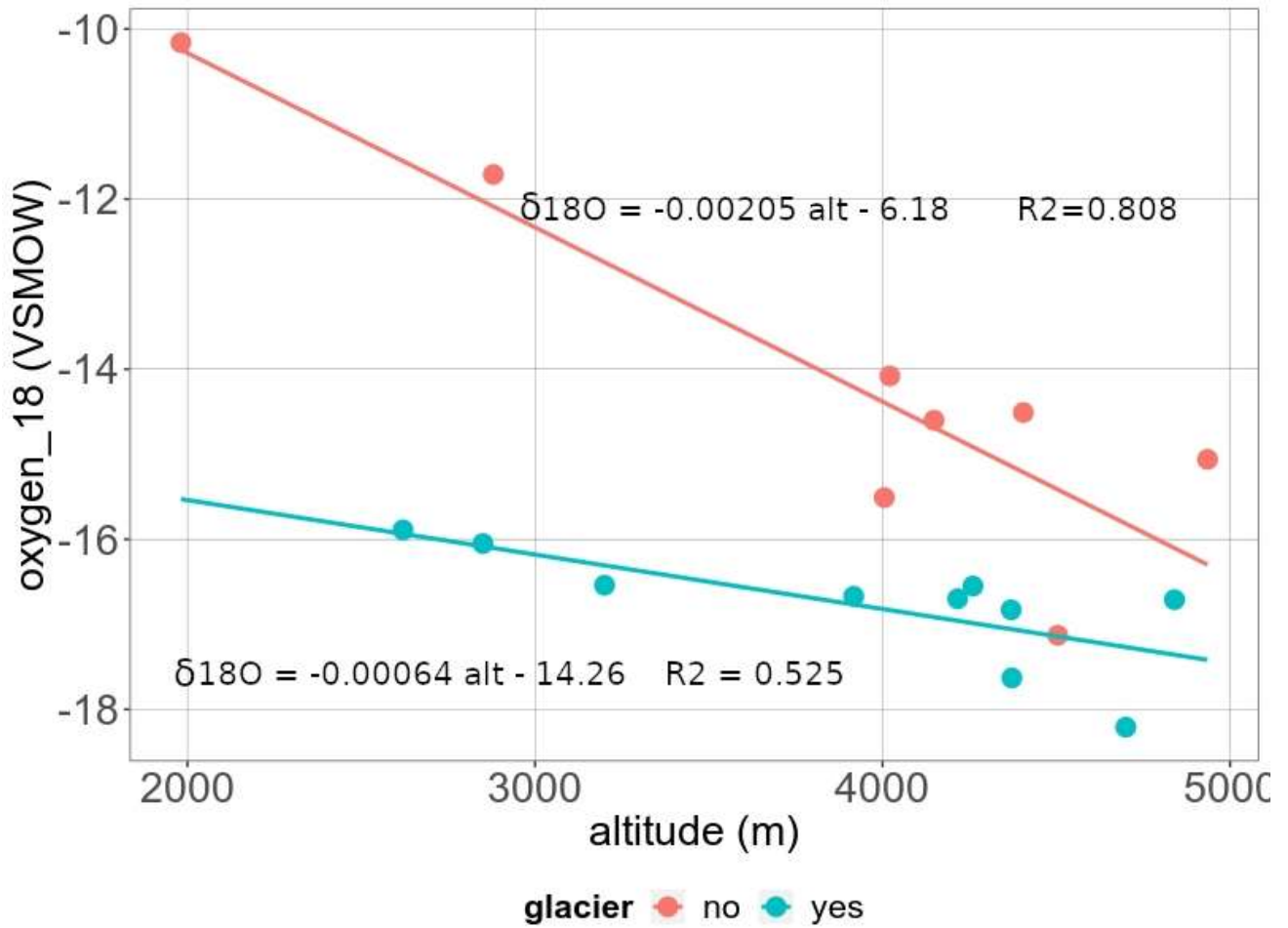
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838 Figure 7:  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  vs  $\delta^2\text{H}$  for precipitation samples in Pangom (monsoon and extra-monsoon seasons in red and  
 839 green, respectively) and for river samples in blue, compared with the Global Meteoric Water Line (GMWL)

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841

842 Figure 8: Isotope altitude gradient from sampling in no glacier watershed (isotope value determined by local  
 843 rainfall and aquifer isotope value), and sampling in partial glacier watershed (isotope value determined by  
 844 mixing between melt from high altitude and local rainfall and aquifer isotope value).

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846



847 Figure 9: Confluence of the Khumbu River (down left) and the Imja River branch (upper right). The image has  
848 been saturated for a better depiction of the difference in turbidity between both branches. Picture by  
849 P. Chevallier, 19 June 2012.

850

851 **11.2 Tables**

852 Table 1: Main characteristics of the sampling points (ordered by altitude)

Name (+)	Label (++)	Coordinates			Data type (*)	Sample (**)	Glaciers (***)
		Longitude	Latitude	Altitude (m)			
Kharikhola	A	86°43'16"	27°36'22"	1981	R	IS	N
Phakding	B	86°42'47"	27°44'53"	2620	R	IS	Y
Jorsalle	C	86°43'19"	27°46'48"	2850	R	IS	Y
Pangom river	D	86°44'38"	27°35'24"	2880	R	IS	N
Pangom village	E	86°44'35"	27°35'17"	2890	P	IS	-
Phuki Tenga	F	86°44'35"	27°49'37"	3200	R	IS	Y
Pangboche-Imja	G	86°47'53"	27°51'40"	3917	R	MT IS	Y
Pangboche-Chomar	H	86°46'59"	27°51'14"	3930	R & bottle	MT	N
Pangboche-Kisang	I	86°47'31"	27°51'18"	3971	R	MT	N
Pangboche-Tauche	J	86°47'35"	27°51'32"	4005	R	MT	S
Shomare	K	86°48'40"	27°52'5"	4021	R	IS	N
Pangboche-Teouma	L	86°47'17"	27°51'32"	4148	R	MT IS	N
Imja confluence	M	86°49'08"	27°52'52"	4172	R	CP	Y
Khumbu confluence	N	86°49'05"	27°52'59"	4172	R	CP	Y
Pheriche hydro	O	86°49'08"	27°53'13"	4216	R	IS	Y
Pheriche village	P	86°49'16"	27°53'46"	4260	P R	MT IS	Y
Dingboche village	Q	86°50'06"	27°53'35"	4370	R	IS	Y
Dingboche hydro	R	86°50'28"	27°53'46"	4372	R	IS	Y
Tauche Kharka	S	86°47'17"	27°52'23"	4405	R	IS	S
Phulung Kharka	T	86°49'01"	27°54'36"	4504	R	IS	S
Tukla	U	86°48'54"	27°55'59"	4700	R	IS	Y
Chukung	V	86°52'41"	27°54'04"	4752	R	CP	Y
Lobuche river	W	86°48'50"	27°57'25"	4840	R	IS	Y
Lobuche spring	X	86°48'43"	27°57'18"	4935	R	IS	S
Imja Lake	Y	86°54'29"	27°54'00"	5001	R	MT	Y

(+) precipitation samples are in gray; the others are river samples.  
 (++) see location in [Figure 1](#)  
 (\*) Data type: P=precipitation; R=river  
 (\*\*) Sample: MT=major/trace + conductivity/pH; IS=isotopes; CP= only conductivity/pH  
 (\*\*\*) Glacier: N=no; Y=yes; S=not significant

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854 Table 2. Main characteristics of the geochemical samples: water temperature, pH, electrical conductivity, and major ions.

Name (+)	Label (++)	Var (*)	WT °C	pH	EC µS/cm	HCO <sub>3</sub> <sup>-</sup> mg/L	Cl <sup>-</sup>	NO <sub>3</sub> <sup>-</sup>	SO <sub>4</sub> <sup>-</sup>	CA <sup>++</sup>	Mg <sup>++</sup>	Na <sup>+</sup>	K <sup>+</sup>	SiO <sub>2</sub>
Pang.-Teouma	L	M	7.2	7.3	13.7	6.37	0.13	0.62	1.85	1.46	0.17	0.80	0.29	4.86
		sd	3.4	0.2	1.7	0.64	0.05	0.30	0.32	0.18	0.04	0.16	0.11	0.82
Pang.-Kisang	I	M	9.7	7.3	15.4	7.46	0.30	0.46	1.85	1.56	0.19	1.11	0.36	4.93
		sd	3.6	0.2	3.2	1.58	0.23	0.26	0.26	0.18	0.04	0.49	0.12	1.17
Pang.-Tauche	J	M	9.0	7.5	42.5	12.27	0.12	0.82	9.41	5.99	0.57	0.96	0.39	4.46
		sd	3.9	0.2	7.8	4.35	0.03	0.23	2.17	1.44	0.09	0.14	0.05	0.63
Pang.-Imja	G	M	7.5	7.7	45.0	20.16	0.20	0.53	6.73	7.50	0.37	1.02	0.85	10.56
		sd	3.0	0.1	9.1	4.49	0.12	0.54	1.24	1.45	0.06	0.43	0.13	6.12
Pang.-Chomar	H	M	8.7	7.4	22.4	15.31	0.12	0.34	0.68	3.68	0.23	0.97	0.28	5.93
		sd	2.3	0.3	7.8	5.21	0.03	0.22	0.20	1.13	0.06	0.37	0.07	1.93
Pang.-Chomar bottled water	H			8.6	29.3	15.75	0.44	1.38	0.54	4.87	0.16	0.43	0.19	8.19
Imja Lake	Y			7.0	30.0	9.86	0.37	1.52	6.28	3.90	0.24	0.71	0.73	1.61
Pheriche hydro	O			7.4	62.6	27.70	1.02	0.24	0.47	8.60	0.22	1.10	1.31	2.04
Pheriche village	P			6.2		14.16	0.29	0.79	8.38	2.77	0.17	0.57	1.53	0.07

(+) precipitation sample is in gray; the others are river samples.

(++) see location in [Figure 1](#)

(\*) M = mean; sd = standard deviation

WT = water temperature EC = electrical conductivity

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## Water Geochemistry of Mount Everest

856 Table 3. Average concentrations of trace elements.

Name (+)	Label (++)	Var (*)	Li	B	Al	Ti	Cr	Mn	Fe	Ni µg/L	Cu	Zn	Rb	Sr	Cs	Ba	Pb	U
Pang.- Teouma	L	M	0.34	0.60	36.6	1.36	0.16	0.64	20.4	0.93	0.26	1.57	1.32	3.42	0.21	1.05	0.02	0.81
		sd	0.06	0.15	23.0	1.44	0.11	0.69	19.0	1.31	0.07	1.92	0.29	0.45	0.05	0.50	0.02	0.26
Pang.- Kisang	I	M	0.41	0.77	68.0	3.09	0.18	1.07	50.6	0.95	0.41	2.60	1.53	3.74	0.19	1.25	0.14	0.81
		sd	0.10	0.18	33.0	2.70	0.06	0.71	36.7	1.57	0.11	1.60	0.22	0.51	0.06	0.25	0.08	0.23
Pang.- Tauche	J	M	0.80	1.21	34.9	2.35	0.14	0.52	29.2	1.18	0.31	1.51	1.63	8.89	0.59	0.82	0.03	5.75
		sd	0.12	0.19	23.6	1.96	0.15	0.34	23.8	1.44	0.10	1.42	0.23	2.02	0.11	0.21	0.02	2.36
Pang.- Imja	G	M	18.88	4.19	2365.6	205.79	4.28	56.86	3019.4	4.27	4.16	11.15	18.46	15.78	4.74	17.07	2.40	10.96
		sd	13.25	1.47	2325.6	173.57	3.83	61.78	2616.1	2.58	4.58	9.14	15.72	3.26	4.28	17.24	2.35	3.78
Pang.- Chomar	H	M	0.35	0.59	35.9	1.57	0.54	0.60	23.2	0.47	0.26	2.00	1.25	6.73	0.28	0.74	0.04	1.11
		sd	0.07	0.13	20.4	1.51	0.67	0.45	17.8	0.73	0.07	1.12	0.34	2.30	0.10	0.16	0.03	0.20
Imja Lake	Y		4.76	1.92	9.7	na	0.03	1.19	7.4	0.06	0.09	1.81	1.33	3.86	0.14	0.53	0.04	0.11
Pheriche hydro	O		9.40	2.69	8.6	na	0.04	6.32	3.1	0.05	0.10	3.08	2.62	28.96	0.34	0.69	0.03	0.20
Pang.-Chomar bottled water	G		0.49	LOD	11.2	na	0.03	0.09	1.2	0.03	0.05	19.61	0.09	6.36	0.01	0.74	0.07	0.82
Pheriche village	P		0.10	0.76	5.5	na	0.10	1.46	1.5	0.10	0.20	5.85	1.97	5.30	0.02	1.63	0.10	0.02

(+) precipitation sample in grey; the others are river samples  
 (++) see location in Figure 1  
 (\*) M= mean; sd = standard deviation; LOD = limit of detection; na = not available

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858 Table 4: Main characteristics of the stable isotope river samples

Name	Label (+)	Alt. (m)	Sampling seasons (*)						Isotope data				
			N14	MH15	N15	MY16	N16	MY17	mean <sup>18</sup> O	mean D	max dif. <sup>18</sup> O	max dif. D	mean d-excess
Kharikhola	A	1981				X	X	X	-10,16	-66,9	0,40	5,4	14,4
Phakding	B	2620		X	X	X	X	X	-15,89	-114,87	0,47	2,9	12,2
Jorsalle	C	2850		X	X 2		X	X	-16,05	-116,3	0,34	2,1	12,1
Pangom river	D	2880	X	X		X		X	-11,71	-80,5	5,98	53,6	13,2
Phunki Tenga	F	3200		X	X	X	X	X 2	-16,54	-120,5	0,20	0,1	11,8
Pangboche-Imja	G	3917			X	X	X	X	-16,67	-120,7	0,22	2,5	12,6
Pangboche-Tauche	J	4005	X	X	X	X	X	X	-15,51	-113,7	1,65	10,9	10,3
Shomare	K	4021	X		X				-14,08	-107,2	0,53	0,7	5,6
Pangboche-Teouma	L	4148			X	X	X		-14,6	-107,8	1,70	10,8	8,9
Pheriche hydro	O	4216			X	X	X	X	-16,7	-121,7	0,39	2,29	11,9
Pheriche village	P	4260	X						-16,55	-122,8			9,6
Dingboche village	Q	4370	X		X	X		X	-16,83	-121,7	0,57	5,2	12,9
Dingboche hydro	R	4372	X 2						-17,63	-132,2	0,03	0,7	8,8
Tauche Kharka	S	4405				X			-14,51	-104,7			11,4
Phulung Kharka	T	4504	X 2						-17,13	-127,9	0,10	0,47	9,2
Tukla	U	4700	X		X				-18,21	-133,93	0,35	3,84	11,8
Lobuche river	W	4840	X 2						-16,71	-123,03	0,21	0,1	10,7
Lobuche spring	X	4935			X				-15,06	-109,9			10,5

(+) see location in [Figure 1](#)  
 (\*) Axx: A=M (monsoon) or (extra-monsoon); xx is the year (e.g., 14 = 2014)  
 N14, November 2014; MH15, March 2015; N15, November 2015; My16, May 2016, N16, November 2016  
 My17, May 2017.

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860 Table 5: Additional observations of electrical conductivity, performed on 19, 21, and 22 June 2012.

Name	Label (+)	Electrical conductivity ( $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ )
Pangboche-Imja	G	53.0
Khumbu confluence	N	67.6
Pheriche hydro	O	62,6
Imja confluence	M	35.4
Dingboche hydro	R	32,9
Chukung	V	41.5
Imja Lake (*)	Y	29,7
		30,7
		29,6

(+) see location in [Figure 1](#)  
 (\*) 3 different sampling points in the outlet narrows.

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