

The Travels of Ippolito Desideri

BY
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SIR CHARLES BELL has given in this JOURNAL (July, p. 710) a detailed account of this important book¹ on Tibet, which, though already edited in Italian by Puini, has remained for many years insufficiently known. It is not, therefore, my purpose to write a new review of the book.

I only want to point out some mistakes which are to be found in the notes of the editor, and this I do not with the intention to criticize the diligent work of Dr. De Filippi, but to correct some wrong statements which could easily be accepted without further investigation by readers imperfectly acquainted with things Tibetan.

p. 379, n. 20. It would have been better to state that the information of Strachey is wrong. Ngari (*mna' ris*) is usually called in Tibetan writings Ngari khorsum (*-bskor gsum*). It comprehends Purang (*spu rans*), Guge, also called Žaň žuň (including Gartok, Toling, etc.), and Maryul. In the old inscriptions of Ladākh, Mar yul is the general name for the westernmost portion of Ngari. See for instance the inscription of bDe legs rnam rgyal at Skyurbuchan (*c'os rgyal po mar yul dbus gžuň rnams ađir rgyal sras bDe legs rnam rgyal stod*). The question will be fully discussed in my *Collection of Tibetan Inscriptions*. In more recent times the usual form is Maňyul, though Maňyul was originally the name of a district near Kirong (*skyid groň*) on the Nepalese frontier.

p. 379, n. 24. Gartok is but a summer camp, while Gar gunsa is the winter residence. After the big fair of October, Gartok is practically deserted.

p. 381, n. 31. This note is very defective and ought to

¹ *An Account of Tibet*. The travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, S.J., 1712–1727, edited by Filippo de Filippi (The Broadway Travellers).

be rewritten. Tibetan studies have so progressed during the last years that we may expect a more accurate exposition of Tibetan literature than that contained in this note. The bKa' agyur is not translated from the Chinese (except a few treatises), but from Sanscrit. The Bum is not an edition of the same "reduced to twelve volumes". Bum is the usual name for the Prajñā-pāramitā in 100,000 verses just as Gya-stonpa (*brgyad ston pa*) designates the other redaction of the same book in 8,000 verses. These treatises are not condensed editions of the bKa' agyur, but separate works included in it. But, since they are supposed to contain the very essence of Buddhism, they are very often separately printed and deposited in small temples or in private chapels (*lha k'an*, *c'os k'an*) instead of the complete set of the bKa' agyur, which is generally so expensive that only big monasteries or rich people can afford to have it printed. Nartand is, of course, for Narthang (*sNar t'an*). It is impossible to state that "the total result (of the Tangyur) is very inferior to the reconstruction of the Buddhist Lamaist religion made by Desideri." The Tangyur (*bsTan agyur*) contains, in fact, the only key for understanding the mystic doctrines upon which Tibetan religious experiences are based and it throws a great sidelight upon Indian culture.

p. 386, n. 5. That Thi-song De-tsen went, with his conquests, as far as the Bay of Bengal is quite unknown to me.

p. 392, n. 22. The sect of the Sakya pa (*sa skya pa*, called after the monastery of *Sa skya*) has nothing to do with the Dukpa (*aBrug pa*), nor is this an offshoot of the Nying-mapa (*rÑin ma pa*). The Sakya sect was, as known, founded by the great Saskya Paṅ-c'en, while the aBrug pa is a subsect of the bKa' rgyud pa, the founder of which, in Tibet, was Marpa, the master of Milaraspa. Even Waddell—whose information must always be used with caution—has settled the relation of the various sects fairly exactly. Why Teshu lama and not Tashi lama?

p. 394, n. 25. Sron-tsan Gam-po is, of course, the same

as Song tsen Gam-po of n. 7 at p. 387 ; his name is really spelt Sron btsan sgam po.

p. 395, n. 28. "Kings of Ladak" is evidently a misprint for Kings of Tibet.

p. 397, n. 36. De c'og is for bDe mc'og that is Samvara. The bsTan agyur contains a large literature concerning the mystic experiences connected with his cult.

p. 402, n. 54. The question of the origin of the Tibetan alphabet is more complex than the author supposes. The researches of Francke (not Franke as it is written in the note) and those of Hoernle did not exactly clear up many of the obscure points, as he says. The prototype of the Tibetan alphabet is to be found in India and not in Khotan as Francke stated. The article by Laufer printed in the *Journal of American Oriental Society*, 1918, pp. 34-46, dealing with this subject should be consulted. Devanagiri and Devanagri are, of course, for Devanagari.

p. 403, n. 55. It is not true that "most of the medical notions of the Tibetans seem originally to have come from China".

The founder of the Tibetan medicine, and at the same time the writer of many treatises on medicine which still enjoy a great authority in Tibet, I mean *gYu t'og yon tan mgon po*, studied medicine at Nalandā. This statement, contained in his biography, is supported by the very many treatises translated from Sanscrit and preserved in the bsTan agyur, and by the perusal of the most famous manual of medicine, the *Vaidūrya sñon po*, by the sDe srid Sañs rgyas rgya mts'o.

p. 404, n. 63. Whatever might be the original connection between the two words, *rus pa* "bones" is quite different from *rus pa = rgyud pa* "lineage, family".

p. 408, n. 65. The ceremony alluded to is the *p'o ba*, which consists in the projection of the consciousness of the dead into a new form of existence, as a rule a paradise. A good description of this rite may be found in Madame David Neel's *Mystiques et Magiciens du Tibet*, p. 14.

p. 414, n. 12. The Kadampa has nothing to do with the red sect. Kadampa (*bKa' gdams pa* or *snags gsar ma*) is called the school started by Atīśa aBrom ston and Rin c'en bzañ po. The sect was, after Tsoñ k'a pa, absorbed into the Gelugpas.

p. 415, n 14. Atīśa, or better Dīpamkara Atīśa, though for some time the abbot of Nalandā, was not a monk of Magadha, but of Bengal. He was born in fact in the village of Vajrayoginī in the Vikrampūr district, which still exists. The place was visited by me in December, 1926. There are still heaps of ruins; Buddhist images, now worshipped by the villagers as Hindu gods, can still be seen in the place. Of course, as stated above, the Kadampa has nothing to do with the Sakya pa; they are two quite distinct and independent sects.

Tsong Khapa did not codify the Tantras in his Lam rim.

This book is nothing else but an exposition of the mystical realization of the supreme truth according to the method of the school of Maitreya and Asaṅga, and it is chiefly based upon the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* of Maitreya.

p. 417, n. 16. The "doctrine of Metempsychosis and Karma" cannot be called Vedāntic, but it is pan-Indian.

p. 417, n. 17. As stated by Sir Charles Bell, Dorjedan (*rdo rje gdan*) is Bodhgayā, the place which, even now, Tibetan pilgrims do not fail to visit in their travels to India.

p. 418, n. 25. Padmasambhava has not been neglected by writers on Tibetan subjects; it will suffice to mention the names of Laufer and Grünwedel. He did not accept the cult of Avalokiteśvara, but on the contrary the school of the Gelugpas, when firmly established in Tibet, revised the literature dealing with Padmasambhava and introduced into it the mention of Avalokiteśvara. The Padma Than-yig, which the author mentions, shows clear traces of such a revision and of many an interpolation. The chief god of the school of Padmasambhava is Kun tu bzañ po, that is Samantabhadra. Urgyen is not derived from Udyāna, but

from Utṭiyāna. Laufer did not translate the Padma Than-yig, but a chapter of the Pad ma bka' t'añ.

The index of Tibetan words must also be revised. First of all there is some inconsistency in the transcription of the Tibetan terms; we find, for instance, 'Bras spunḡ and Bras ljonḡs for 'Bras spunḡ and 'Bras ljonḡs or spunḡ and ljonḡ. 'Bras ma ljonḡs is for 'Bras mo ljonḡ.

p. 458 s.v. Calongscia; in Tibetan there is no plural termination like gzhags. bKa' blon śag indicates the council-house of the four bKa' blon; it is therefore equivalent to bKa' śag.

p. 458 s.v. Ce-Thang is not rTser-thang but rTse T'añ.

p. 460 s.v. Dorje cannot be said to be the thunderbolt of Śiva. The weapon or the symbol of Śiva is the trident trisūla and the Dorje is the symbol of Vajrapāṇi.

p. 461 s.v. Gnākpà; according to the system of transcription, adopted in the book, the Tibetan spelling would be ngags pa and not Gnags pa.

p. 461 s.v. Gnèn drò; it must be ñan agro instead of ñañ-'gro, or according to the transcription adopted: ngan 'gro.

p. 463 s.v. Ka-scioa; instead of bKa shō ba should be bKa' shog pa.

Ibid. s.v. Kien; instead of rKyan it must be rKyen.

Ibid. s.v. Kiepū-cciung-Ki rimba; cciung is not 'byung "to be born", but c'un small, inferior, as opposed to c'en po "superior" and to bring (viz. aبریڻ) "middle" to be found in the same page.

p. 465 s.v. lee n-bree; for Las-bras read las 'bras.

p. 466 s.v. Longh-kù; for loñs-sku it should be Loṅḡ (Loñ) sku. This expression cannot be translated "the Lha of riches". It is a well-known technical term corresponding to Sambhogakāya, viz. to the second of the three bodies of Buddha. It is the aspect of Buddha which appears during the meditation.

Ibid. s.v. lungh-tèn; it must be lung bstan not luñ bstan pa.

Ibid. s.v. Mani Kambum; it cannot be translated "the

hundred thousand precepts of Mani” but of the “*maṇi*”, viz. concerning the meaning and the value of the famous *mantra* in six syllables : “*oṃ maṇi-padme hūṃ.*”

p. 467 s.v. *Ngnáa* ; not *sñags* but *ngags*, the *mantra*-section of the Tantras.

p. 468 s.v. *Pruù-kù* ; it cannot be translated “a Lha assuming various shapes”, but it denotes the third body of the Buddhas, viz. the *nirmāṇa-kāya*, that is the apparitional body.

p. 470 s.v. *so-soi Kieu rimbà* ; it is not *so soi skye gnas rim pa*, but *so soi skye bu rim pa*, and cannot be translated as “the grade or condition of every kind of birth”, but it corresponds to Sanscrit *prthagjana*, *prophanus*.

p. 471 s.v. *Těn-cing-brėeväre-n-gyunvà* ; it is not “unconnected” but just the contrary, and corresponds to “*pratītyasamutpāda*”, the law of causal connection which represents the very essence of Buddhist doctrine.

p. 471 s.v. *Thamce-Khiengbà* ; it is neither *mThā-med* nor *Thans chod*, but the very common *thams cad* “all”.

The book is so important and contains so much valuable information about Tibet and Tibetan religion and customs that it is likely to have a wide circulation among geographers, ethnologists, and scholars interested in the history of religion. It is therefore necessary that in a second edition these mistakes should be corrected.