

7. The Kingdom of gNya khri btsanpo, the first King of Tibet.

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At present I am engaged in making a collection of Tibetan geographical names, as I find them in Tibetan works on History and Geography. These original names I try to trace on Tibetan maps compiled by Europeans, the Royal Geographical Society's map, Sven Hedin's map, or Indian Government maps. I must confess that these maps are still very incomplete. Although covered with hundreds of names, many places which are of the greatest importance from a Tibetan point of view, are entirely omitted.

When I studied the Tibetan text of Schlagintweit's 'Die Könige von Tibet,' which badly wants re-translating, I tried to trace all the places mentioned in the account of *gNya khri btsanpo*. I, however, found the maps of very little use, but my personal local knowledge of the ancient Ladakhi Kingdom, which is now embodied in the Kashmir State, made it plain to me that *gNya khri btsanpo's* Kingdom, as we find it described in the *rGyal rabs*, must be looked for in Ladakh. All the place names, with the exception of *dBus* and *Yarlung*, can be traced there.

Let me first say a few words about these two names, *dBus* and *Yarlung*. *dBus* means 'the middle.' It is used of a place which is of importance, the residence of some important person. Thus in the first part of the Ladakhi *rGyal rabs*, the word *dBus* is used to signify *Gāyā* in Magadha, for this town was of the greatest importance in the ancient Buddhist times on account of its connection with the founder of this religion. In the later portions of the *rGyal rabs*, *dBus* is the name of the Lhasa district, because Lhasa had become the capital of Tibet. But I can well imagine that before Lhasa was made the capital of Tibet by *Srong btsan sgampo*, the surroundings of the previous capital *Phyi dbang stag rtse* were called *dBus*, the centre. The Tibetan inscriptions of Kunawar speak of Sarahan, the old capital of the Bashahr State, as the *dBus* of that country.

As regards *Yarlung*, this name does not fit in in any case, whether we place the kingdom of the first king near Lhasa or near Leh; for the Yarlung is a river or a river valley of the Eastern Tibetan province of Khams, and even if the first king entered the country by way of the *Yartha shambu*, as the

Lhasa accounts have it, it is difficult to see why he should have taken up his abode in the remotest part of the country. *Yarlung* means 'the upper valley.' It is a name which might well have been given in contrast to *Maryul*, 'the lower land,' the actual name of Ladakh from the remotest times. Now the Tibetans are very fond of exchanging synonyms, thus, *Maryul* is also called *Marsa* (Hiuen Tsang's Moloso) and *Markhams*; king *bkrashis rnam rgyal* is also called *bkrashis mgon* (the Tashikun of the Tarikh-i-Rashidi), lama *Mipham dbangpo* is also called *Mipham mgon*, etc. And thus the word *Yarlung* may have become exchanged in course of time for another word of the same meaning. Now we actually find that the plain below the place which is in my opinion the ancient capital of the first king, is called *Ladvags gongkhai thang*, 'the upper plain of Ladakh'; this may have been exchanged for *Yarthang* 'the upper plain,' and a valley branching off from this plain could very well be called *Yarlung*. But it is evident that *Yarlung* as a place name may occur in various parts of Tibet, and therefore I do not attach great importance to this point.

The king's original name was *Spu rgyal*, which means 'king of *Spu*.' *Spu* is a large village on the Sutelj in Upper Kuna-war with vast ruins around, and may very well have been the seat of a petty king. In the most ancient version of this tale, brought to light by Waddell in his inscription of king *Khri srong lde btsan*, the king is called '*Od lde spu rgyal*.' '*Od lde*, 'beautiful light,' is his personal name; *Spu rgyal* means king of *Spu*. The spelling *Spu* of this village is testified to by many stone inscriptions in the vicinity, the oldest being apparently written by the orders of the royal priest *Yeshe 'od* (c. 1025 A.D.) On the maps, the place is spelt *Spooch*. The name *Spurgyal* was also given to a mountain in the neighbourhood, which is now generally called *Purgyul*. This is a case of assimilation of the vowel of the second syllable to the first. As I have shown previously, the Tibetan law of assimilation is different, according to which the first syllable is modified to assimilate with the vowel of the second. However, the people of *Spu*, who have accepted only recently the Tibetan language, have a law of assimilation of their own, as appears to me. I found two inscriptions with names of modern Bashahr kings, in which the vowel of the second syllable had been assimilated to the vowel of the first. Instead of Rudar (Rudra) Singh, these inscriptions spell *Lu rdur* Singh, and instead of *Ugra* Singh they spell *Ukur* Singh. In the same way the name *Spurgyal* could be changed to *Purgyul*.

The place where the first king was found by the hunters is called *Lhari*. The name *Lhari* occurs in various parts of Tibet. It means 'mountain of the gods.' And to suit their case, the Central Tibetan historians who wanted by all means to land the first king near Lhasa, added the word *Lhari* to the

name *Yarlha-shambu* and called the mountain *Yarlha sham-bu lhari*. (See *dPag bsam Ijon bzang*.)

The classical country of *Lhari* is, however, in the west. A river which for some distance forms the frontier of Spiti, and a village on it, are called *Lhari*. A mountain near Leh is called *Lharimo*.

The capital of *gNya khri btsanpo* which was already in existence when he arrived in the country, is called *Phyi dbang stag rtse*. As a place of this name has not yet been discovered in Central Tibet, the Central Tibetan historians (S. Ch. Das, J.A.S.B., 1881) simply said that Lhasa was built on the top of it and that it therefore disappeared. But there is a place, spelt *Phyi dbang*, only eight miles from Leh, situated in a valley which opens out on the plain *Ladvags gongkhai thang*. On the maps, the place is spelt Phayang. This, in my opinion, was the capital of the ancient king. It must be a place different from Lhasa, for we find that one branch of the descendants of *Khri bkrashis tsegs dpal*, in c. 1000 A.D., went from Lhasa to *Phyi dbang stag rtse* to reside there. *Phyi dbang* is the name of the town, and *Stag rtse* is the name of the royal palace in it. Whether the name *Stagrtse* still exists at *Phyi dbang* or not, I cannot say. The castle of *Stagrtse* in Purig was evidently called after this old royal castle of *Phyi dbang*. There are very extensive ruins in the *Phyi dbang* valley which have never been examined. When I asked the people of this place, who had once resided there, they said: "The king"! And yet, there is not a single passage in the Ladakhi portion of the *rGyal rabs* which says that any of the Ladakhi kings ever resided there. The site of this village in a warm valley opening to the south, is superb. From the lower part of it, the view up the Indus valley over a large portion of Maryul is glorious. More even than Leh, *Phyi dbang* was a suitable site as a residence of kings.

After a time, the king built the palace of *Ubu bla sgang*. There is evidently a mistake here. The nasal sign over the *U* was forgotten by the man who copied Schlagintweit's MS. From a comparison with the names in the Bodhimör and Ssanang Ssetsen it becomes evident that *Umbu bla sgang* (or *lha sgang*) is meant. *Umbu* is the Ladakhi pronunciation of *Ombu*, the tamarisk. In the form *Um* or *Om* it is found in many local names of Ladakh. The name *Umbu bla sgang* means 'the hill of the priests (or *lha* 'gods') with the tamarisks.' This name can be abbreviated in the same way as are many compound words. (See my Ladakhi Grammar.) Then only one syllable each of the two component parts is taken, and these are put together. Thus the abridged form of *Umbu blasgang* would be *Um bla* or *Umsgang*. Now a place called *Umla* actually exists at the other end of the plain on which *Phyi dbang* is situated. It is perhaps eight or ten miles distant from the

latter, and also contains ruins of a castle, as I am told. I have not yet had an opportunity to visit the place. On the maps it is called Umleh. Two other place names of *gNya khri btsanpo's* kingdom which are mentioned together are *rGod ldod* and *gYur ldod*. The word *ldod* I cannot find in the dictionaries, but it seems to mean 'district.' *rGod ldod* is the *rGod* district. Now there is a *rGod yul* (*rGod* country) within the present limits of Ladakh. It is mentioned in K. Marx's version of the *rGyal rabs*, in connection with *Sengge rnam rgyal's* reign. The *rGodyul* is the eastern part of Ladakh, or the territory of Hanle, as stated by K. Marx. All these eastern parts of Ladakh, *Shagti*, *Nyoma*, etc., were once strongly fortified against the invasions of the Turks, as their grand ruins show. Therefore it is quite in the nature of things that the first king of Tibet should have posted there a guard against outside foes.

gYur ldod means the district of *gYuru*. The name *gYuru* is the abbreviated form of ancient *gYung drung* (the Lama Yuru of the maps). When the *Ladvags rGyal rabs* was written, the ancient spelling *gYung drung* had already been replaced by the modern *gYuru*. The place *gYur ldod* was the centre of the first king's inner administration. This is quite in accordance with the central situation of the place. *gYuru* (Lama yuru is a modern invention) seems to have been a foremost place in ancient times. It is still called the ancient centre of the Bon religion, and I was so fortunate as to discover the ruined Bonpo temple in the place.

Another important place in *gNya khri btsanpo's* empire was *Rongdo* where his granaries were. There are two places called *Rongdo* within the limits of Kashmir Tibet. The western province of Baltistan is called *Rongdo*, and a village in the Nubra valley is called by the same name. I am convinced that the latter is meant. There is a convenient pass from *Phyi dbang* into Nubra, and the Nubra village of *Rongdo* is found almost on the northern opening of the *Phyi dbang* pass. On the maps it is called *Rongdu*.

The five names of chiefs given in the account, we cannot expect to find anywhere on maps. *gTso* means simply 'Lord,' *bTsan khyung* is a personal name of the Bon religion, *sNums* is a house name still extant at Khalatse, *Khustegs* is a family name, and *gNyara rtse* may be another house name.

As regards the general state of civilisation of the country, the description suits Ladakh very well, whilst it does not suit Lhasa. The art of writing is stated to have been known. In Ladakh it has actually been known since c. 250 B. C. going by rock-inscriptions. Agriculture has existed in the country since those remote times when the Gilgit Dards founded their colonies in Ladakh.

Now it may be said that there is nothing extraordinary

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about all this. The *Ladvags rGyal rabs* was written in Ladakh, and its writer naturally contrived to make his home the kingdom of the first king of Tibet. In the same way, the Central Tibetan historians placed his kingdom near Lhasa. Quite so, and yet, the Ladakhi account strikes me as being more original. The *Lhari* was evidently added to the name *Yarlha shambu*, to make the mountain fit in the story. The name *Umbu bla sgang* was misunderstood and changed to *Yumbu gla sgang* which cannot be traced anywhere. The only other local name in the central Tibetan version is *bTsan thang* (plain of the *btsanpo* or king) which can be given to any plain near the royal residence.

Although *gNya khri btsanpo's* empire was apparently very small, it seems to have grown in extent towards the east, until *Srong btsan sgampo* made Lhasa his capital. Before he went there, he resided in Ladakh, at least according to my explanation of Tibetan history. Thus, the message to the Chinese emperor in which he asked the hand of Kongjo in marriage was sent from Ladakh, and a Ladakhi, the minister *Riggacan*, a native of *Shargolha* in Purig, was the ambassador in this matter. The name of *Riggacan* actually occurs in the *rGyalrabs*, but Schlagintweit in his translation mistook it for an adjective and translated it accordingly. At *Shargolha*, the house of this very same minister is still shown to travellers. Also the embassy of *Thonmi sambhota* started from Ladakh. As the *Ladvags rGyal rabs* says, it was sent to Kashmir, and to no other part of India. This was very natural, for the Ladakhi form of Buddhism which then prevailed among the *Dards* of Ladakh, was closely related to the Buddhism of Kashmir, it used the same kind of characters, a form of the Gupta character, but it had become stagnated. As the Ladakhi inscriptions of these times (700-900 A.D.) show us, the characters were used for nothing, but the *summum bonum* of Buddhism of those times, the *Ye dharma* formula.

In Kashmir, the motherland of Ladakhi Dard Buddhism, *Thonmi* received instructions from a Brahman called *Libyin*. This name has always been wrongly translated. It has to be translated 'Glory' (or blessing) of the land 'Li.' It is a name parallel to another name mentioned under King *Gung srong 'adu rje*. Under the latter king a priest called *Khri bdun yul byin* is mentioned. This name can only be translated by 'Glory of the land *Khri bdun*.' *Li byin* had apparently received his name, because the land *Li* had reason to be proud of him. The land *Li* is either a country near Nepal or Turkistan. I am convinced that it here signifies Turkistan; for there is some probability that it was in the Turkistan monasteries that Tibetan was first reduced to writing, and *Thonmi sambhota* simply reaped the fruit of such learning. The theory of the first origin of the Tibetan script in Turkistan was first propounded by Dr.

Barnett. I readily accepted his view. Dr. Waddell has recently repudiated it stating that it was founded on nothing better than the occasional occurrence of the *drag* in ancient documents. (J.R.A.S. October, 1909) No, it was never based on so poor a foundation.

What induced Dr. Barnett to believe in a possibly earlier introduction of the Tibetan script, was the fact that in Turkestan at Endere, on the very confines of the Tibetan empire, were found specimens of Tibetan writing in not one but two forms of script, one of which exhibited already traces of great simplification, which can be explained only with the acceptance of the theory of a long period of use of the same. And the latest date which can be assigned to these documents is c. 780 A.D., about 120 years after the asserted invention of the script by Thonmi. But the Endere relics are not all of the same type, some exhibit a more archaic type of orthography than the others, and have to be dated considerably earlier than 780.

Turkestan is exactly the country where a new kind of script and literature could most probably have originated. The Buddhists of Turkestan were more eager than any other to provide people of various tongues with Buddhist literature in their own language. Proof of this are the various MSS. in unknown languages which have come to light there. Turkestan was in possession of a form of the Gupta alphabet (the Bower MSS., etc.), and this alphabet impressed its type on the Kashgar Brāhmī as well as on the Tibetan script. When I wrote my article on "The Similarity between the Tibetan and Kashgar Brāhmī alphabets," published by this Society, I might have added a column showing the Gupta characters! The Gupta alphabet has variants, but its descendants here in the West are all sprung from one and the same type of Gupta. These descendants are the Kashgar Brāhmī and Tibetan characters, and the Indian characters used in Ladakh between 700 and 900 for writing the Sanskrit formula *Ye dharma*, etc. This formula was written in Tibetan characters as well, and at first sight, the Indian and the Tibetan variety of this formula can hardly be distinguished; for most of the characters look the same. The difference rests in this, that in the Tibetan version the aspirated mediae are written with an ordinary media furnished with a subjoined "h," whilst in the Indian version *qh*, *dh* and *bh* are written with simple characters. Besides, the Tibetan version has the Tripartite *y*, whilst the Indian version has a later form of the *y*. The west (Kashmir, Ladakh, Turkestan) is the country where the Gupta form of characters remained stationary for a longer period than elsewhere. Here is the probable home of the Tibetan script. It was invented not many centuries before *Srong btsan sgampo*, possibly one or two centuries before him. The Brahman

Libyin was apparently a native of Turkestan, and it was he who initiated the Ladakhi minister into the art already practised there.

Before the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet (*i.e.*, to the Tibetan, not *Dard*, inhabitants of the country) a number of Buddhist symbols came down from heaven in the time of *Lhatho thori* when this king was at the palace of *Umbu bla sgang*, in Ladakh. One of the symbols was a *Pangkong*, a 'pātra of the lap.' The West Tibetan lake *Pangkong* was called after this symbol. This speaks again in favour of my view that *Umbu bla sgang* was situated in Ladakh, and not near Lhasa. For had it been situated there, one of the numerous lakes near Lhasa would probably have been called *Pangkong*.

As is stated in the *rGyalrabs*, *Srong btsan sgampo* conquered *rTsami* and *Shingmi* in the east. *rTsami* is pronounced *Sami* according to a Tibetan law of sound. A place *Sami* is found on the map south-west of the Manasarowar lake. In the vicinity is the *Shing lab cha* pass, probably the old *Shingmi*. If these places were conquered 'in the east,' the chronicler must have looked towards them from Ladakh. If *Srong btsan sgampo* had then resided at Lhasa, he would have said 'in the west.'