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NOTE

IN VINDICATION OF KINTHUP

BY

CAPTAIN G. F. T. OAKES, R. E.

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Kimthup, the explorer, who first explored the course of the Tsan-po through the Great Himalayan Range, 1880—1883.

From photographs by Lieutenant G. Burrard, R.F.A., May 1914

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IN VINDICATION OF KINTHUP

by

CAPTAIN G. F. T. OAKES, R. E.

For many years the explorations of Kinthup, more particularly his report of the existence of large falls on the Tsangpo in Eastern Tibet have been the cause of considerable interest and have been received with scepticism by many, owing to the romantic nature of his experiences.

Interest in the matter has been revived by the recent explorations on the N. E. Frontier. Though the Survey of India authorities of that time had "no doubt that his account was a bonâfide story of his travels" and two other reliable Indian explorers both "placed complete reliance in Kinthup's statements", prominence has of late been given to the opinion of certain amateur geographers that the geographical information supplied by him was unreliable and merely collected in Tibet, the remainder of his narrative being fiction. It would therefore appear of much interest to make a brief examination of his work in the light of the recent explorations carried out by Captains Bailey and Morshead in 1913, and by the Abor Exploration Party in 1911-12-13.

Translation.

While proceeding with this examination it must be borne in mind that Kinthup delivered his narrative to Lama Ugyen Gyatsho (later Rai Bahadur) who is responsible for the translation: also that though familiar with the language of the people of Pemakö, he probably knew very little or nothing of the Abor language. In the Abor villages visited by him, judging from existing conditions, the Pemakö language (a dialect of Tibetan) would only have been known by a few of the men. This fact would account for the inferiority of the transliteration of his Abor names compared with those of Pemakö.

The nature of his work.

Until 1912 Kinthup was the sole authority for our geographical knowledge of the country bordering the Tsangpo from the neighbourhood of Gyäla down to Damro (or Padam), with the exception of Lama Serap Gyatsho who supplied a certain amount of information concerning the sacred places and administration of Pome. No one but he had succeeded in penetrating the hill country occupied by the savage tribes, known to us as Abors, with the exception

of the military expedition of 1894 against the Padam Abors, which succeeded in penetrating to within sight of Damro and one or two expeditions which reached the neighbourhood of Kebang and Komsing, the last being that on which Mr. Williamson and Dr. Gregorson were murdered. After many months daily experience of the Abors, of their distrust and hate of foreigners and their treacherous nature, one can only consider Kinthup fortunate to have returned alive.

Most of the country traversed by him, and not previously traversed by trained and reliable explorers has now been either surveyed in detail by the Abor Exploration Party or traversed by Captain Morshead R. E. of the Survey of India. Kinthup's work has proved distinctly satisfactory, in fact, considering that he carried the whole in his memory until his return more than 4 years after his departure, it is remarkable. It must be remembered he was not a trained explorer.

All his names east of Tsetang, nearly 150 in number, have now been identified, with the exception of about 20 which include many caves and camps and also villages probably since abandoned. The descriptions of parts of his route are often most accurate and sometimes could not have been given more accurately in as few words. In the neighbourhood of Puparong "Kinthup noted that here the Tsangpo flows south". It was interesting to find that not only was this so, but that it did not flow due south again until in the neighbourhood of Komkar and Geku some 18 marches further south, a part not visited by him, thus indicating the care with which he endeavoured to determine the course of the river.

On the other hand for a few stages southward from Tongkyuk Dzong, where he escaped from slavery, his route report was not good. Captain Morshead writes—"At this stage, Kinthup's first care was evidently to make good his escape from captivity, and certain portions of the road appear to have escaped his memory."

The Tsangpo Falls.

With regard to the Falls of the Tsangpo I cannot do better than quote Captain Morshead. He writes—"Referring, however, to Pemaköchung, he (Kinthup) makes the following erroneous statement: "The Tsangpo is two chains distant from the monastery and about two miles off it falls over a cliff called Sinji-Chogyal from a height of about 150 feet. There is a big lake at the foot of the falls where rainbows are always observable." Actually, the falls near Pemaköchung, to which the Tibetans have not given a name, are only some 30 feet in height, though it is true that a rainbow is visible on sunny days in the spray which is thrown up in immense clouds. On the other hand, falls called Sinji-Chogyal (Shingche Chögye) of approximately 150 feet do actually exist on the small side stream which, rising below the Tra La, joins the Tsangpo opposite Gyala. It would seem that in the course of dictation and

translation of Kinthup's narrative, the accounts of the two separate falls have been confused."

Subsequent to their return Captain Bailey has interviewed Kinthup, who said he remembered the place and thought that the fall (by comparing it to a house they were in) was about 50 feet high. This lends further support to the opinion that the error occurred in the dictation and translation.

Mr. Bentinck, Political Officer with the Abor Expedition in 1911-12, stated in his lecture before the Royal Geographical Society * with reference to Kinthup, "The first identifiable Abor village reached by him is Angging; going southwards he gets four village names correct out of eleven, two of them being misplaced and the others more or less correct." This gives an entirely false idea of the work of the explorer as will be seen from the following table which shows all the Abor villages from Angi(ng) to Damro as now surveyed and as given by Kinthup.

Surveyed 1911-12.		Kinthup 1883-84.
Angi(ng)	...	Angi
Singging	...	Shinging
Paling	...	Hanging
		Shobang
Rikor	...	Puging
Puging	...	Rikar
Gette	...	Keti
Simong	...	Shimong
Mobuk or Gobuk		Mobuk
Dalbuing	...	Tarpin
Olon or Milang	...	Onlow or Onlet
Damro or Padam	...	Miri Padam

His Travels in the Abor Country.

Kinthup states that he reached Onlow or Onlet (now transliterated Olon), but not being allowed to proceed further towards the plains of India had to retrace his steps. Enquiry was made about him by Mr. W. C. M. Dundas, C. I. E., the Political Officer, and myself when at Olon (or Milang) in February 1913. Gams Tadang and Yubang gave the following information. When they were small children (*i. e.* some 30 years ago) a Mönba (man from Pemakö) came down through Simong, Gobuk and Dalbuing (Kinthup's Tarpin) to Olon. They did not see him, but had heard of it and remembered it because Mönbas are never allowed to come past Dalbuing (a village under Simong) and seldom come past Simong. Further this man was prevented from proceeding to Damro, and returned *via* Simong.

* See *Geographical Journal* Volume XLI, No. 2, February 1913, page 106.

In the Abor country he only appears to have made two geographical mistakes worth consideration viz:—

(i) between Mobuk (or Gobuk) and Olon he mistook the Yamne valley for that of the Dihang or Tsangpo.

(ii) he stated that "the river issuing from Sangacho Dzong joins the Tsangpo about 3 miles from Miri Padam".

As regards the first anyone who has experienced days of continuous mist and rain among the often very deceptive hill features in the Abor country, will realize how easy it is even for trained topographers to make such mistakes. As regards the second it is evident he was relying on hearsay or piecing information together wrongly, as he did not visit that part. He was also probably labouring under difficulty in not understanding the language of his informants.

Another error of his was in naming Damro, Miri Padam. The place is called Padam as often as Damro, and no doubt they told him that the next stage on the way to the plains after Padam was a Midi (i. e. Mishmi) village, because the trade route on leaving Damro first crosses the Baisha Pass and then continues through Mishmi villages to Sadiya. Relating his story some months after and not having even visited Damro, he was quite liable to mix up the names Midi (or Miri) and Padam.

The position of Damro as given by Kinthup's rough sketch carried down from Tibet and as given by the Political Officer at Sadiya at that time from local information disagreed considerably. Again later another position for it was obtained from rough route sketches made on the Abor Expedition of 1894, when the village was sighted but not reached. It now proves that Kinthup's position was 19 miles S. W. of the true position; Mr. Needham's position 53 miles N. N. E., and the 1894 Expedition's position 14 miles N. This comparison is remarkable, when it is considered that Kinthup's work was carried down over 200 miles from Tibet, while the 1894 Expedition only penetrated into the hills some 25 miles from the plains. Mr. Needham obtained his information from Padam Abors at Sadiya.

Exception seems to have been taken to his report that he saw cows, pines, mangoes, and apples in the Abor country, but these are all to be seen at the present day, provided he meant coniferous trees and not necessarily pines. Surprise was caused by his omitting the somewhat important Abor village of Jido. It was found though, that this was built some years after his return to India. The opinion held by some, that he went up a high hill in Tibet, was pointed out the villages down the Tsangpo with their names, and then remembered them with all the details of the route, is ludicrous to say the least. An illustration of the unreliability of this type of information is the fact, that in the former season (1911-12) information had been obtained at Singging by Mr. Bentinck's party that Jido was six marches further up the river. It eventually proved to be only two.

Conclusion.

Kinthup started on his journey as assistant to a Chinese *lama*, who sold him as a slave and decamped to his own country. After the chief explorer had absconded and he had with difficulty escaped from slavery, that he should have continued the exploration shows the greatest pluck and perseverance and very rightly have his experiences been described as "a romance of the Survey of India." Since he is at present in poor circumstances earning a livelihood as a tailor, it is gratifying to know that steps are being taken to obtain him sufficient monetary reward to enable him to end his days in some slight degree of comfort.
