

ORIGIN OF TIBETAN WRITING

BERTHOLD LAUFER

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, CHICAGO

Reprinted from the
JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ORIENTAL SOCIETY
Vol. 38, pages 34-46

1918

ORIGIN OF TIBETAN WRITING

BERTHOLD LAUFER

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, CHICAGO

THE CHINESE ANNALS of the T'ang Dynasty (A. D. 618-906) report that the ancient Tibetans (*T'u-fan*) possessed no writing, but that they availed themselves of notched tallies and knotted strings (quippus) in concluding treaties.¹ This account evidently refers to the people at large, but not to the government of Lhasa; for continuing our reading of the annals we notice sufficient evidence for the existence of some form of actual writing as a means of official communication. We are informed that in A. D. 634 the king (*btsan-p'o*) K'i-tsun lun-tsan or K'i-su-nun (corresponding to Tibetan Sron-btsan sgam-po) sent envoys with tribute to the Chinese emperor, and subsequently despatched to him a respectful letter petitioning for a matrimonial alliance. In A. D. 641 he received in marriage the Chinese princess (*kung chu*) Wen-ch'eng, and gradually adopted Chinese customs and manners. He invited scholars from China to compose his official reports to the emperor. After his successful participation in Wang Hsuan-ts'e's campaign in central India (A. D. 648)² he applied to the emperor for work-

¹ *Kiu T'ang shu*, ch. 196 A, p. 1; *Sin T'ang shu*, ch. 216 A, p. 1b; *T'ang hui yao*, ch. 97, p. 2b. The correctness of this tradition was called into doubt by Abel-Rémusat (*Recherches sur les langues tartares*, p. 67-68), who gathered his information from the compiler Ma Tuan-lin of the thirteenth century, and was led to the belief that this one referred the quippu tradition of the *Yi king* to a people little known to him. Ma Tuan-lin, of course, excerpted the T'ang Annals, and the latter were based on contemporaneous state documents of the T'ang dynasty. Tallies and mnemotechnic knots were universally known in ancient times, and still survive to a great extent. There is no reason to doubt their occurrence in ancient Tibet. Tallies and quippus are ascribed also to another Tibetan tribe, the Ta-yang-t'ung (*T'ang hui yao*, ch. 99, p. 13b). The Annals of the Sui Dynasty (*Sui shu*, ch. 81, p. 10b) state in regard to the ancient Japanese that 'they have no script, but only carve notches in wood and tie knots in cords.'

² Regarding the missions of Wang Hsuan-ts'e see S. Levi, *JA* 1900, 1. 297-341, 401-468; *T'oung Pao*, 1912. 307-309; Pelliot, *T'oung Pao*, 1912. 351-380.

men to manufacture paper and ink,³ and the request was granted—a sure symptom of the fact that writing then existed and was practised. Under the successors of Luñ-tsan, who died in A. D. 650, the official correspondence between Tibet and China increased in volume, and a chancery for the transaction of such business was established in the capital Lhasa. Several Sino-Tibetan documents, notably the celebrated treaty solemnized in A. D. 822, are still preserved on stone tablets in Lhasa.

While there is thus no doubt of the existence of writing under the first powerful king, the Chinese annals are reticent as to the character and origin of this writing. This is by no means striking, since the Chinese historians were chiefly interested in the political relations of the country to their own, and not in its inner cultural development; they do not tell us either of that great religious movement which swept Tibet in those days—the introduction of Buddhism from India.⁴

According to the tradition of the Tibetans, King Sron-btsan sgam-po in A. D. 632⁵ sent T'on-mi or T'ou-mi, the son of A-nu, subsequently honored by the cognomen Sambhoṭa, to India to study Sanskrit and Buddhist literature and to gather materials for the formation of an alphabet adapted to the Tibetan language. On his return to Lhasa he formed two Tibetan alphabets, one 'with heads' (*bdu-čan*) out of the Lāñcā script, and another 'headless' (*dbu-med*) out of the Wartula characters. The details of this tradition, to which there will be occasion to revert, vary to some extent in different accounts, but the principal elements of it are identical both in historical and grammatical works. It somewhat lacks in precision and detail, and we must not forget that it comes down to us from a comparatively late period, and that the contemporaneous, original form of the tradition is lost.

As regards the time of the introduction of writing, it follows from the Chinese annals that it indeed existed under the reign

³ According to the *T'ang hui yao*: paper and writing-brushes.

⁴ Only the New History of the T'ang Dynasty says that the Tibetans are fond of the doctrine of Buddha, and that the Buddhist clergy was consulted on all important state affairs.

⁵ According to the chronology adopted by the Mongol prince and annalist Sanai Setsen. The History of the Tibetan Kings sets no exact date for the event, except that it is recorded in the beginning of the king's reign.

of King Sron-btsan sgam-po. It is clear from both the Chinese and Tibetan annals (the latter stating the fact implicitly) that prior to his era there was no writing. The Chinese annals do not impart the date of his accession to the throne: they give us the year 634 as that of his first mission sent to China and 650 as the year of his death. Sanañ Setsen states that he was born in 617 and assumed the reign in 629 in his thirteenth year⁶; this would agree with the Chinese statement that he was a minor at the time of his succession. The foundation of the national system of writing, accordingly, must have taken place between the years 630 and 648; for the latter date must be regarded as the *terminus ad quem*, since in that year the request for paper and ink manufacturers was submitted to China. As this event followed immediately the punitive expedition of Wang Hüants'e against Magadha, who was then assisted by a Tibetan army, suspicion is ripe that this enterprise may have had a causal connection with the inauguration of writing in Tibet. At any rate, the case illustrates the fact that the road from Lhasa to Magadha was known to the Tibetans, and that there is nothing surprising or incredible in regard to T'on-mi's mission.

The time spent by T'on-mi in India is variously given. According to Chandra Das⁷ he should have resided in Magadha from A. D. 630 to 650—doubtless an exaggeration and contradictory to Chinese chronology, according to which King Sron-btsan died in A. D. 650; and according to the Tibetan accounts he profited from his emissary's instructions and himself composed several books.

The substance of the Tibetan tradition was clearly known as early as the eighteenth century: it was recorded by the Augustinian Pater A. Georgi,⁸ who gave the name of the founder of writing in the corrupted form Samtan-Pontra, and who styles his Indian instructor the Brahman Lecin (that is Le-čin, according to the Tibetan pronunciation Li-j'in). P. S. Pallas already set forth rather sensible views on the Tibetan alphabet, recog-

⁶ According to the chronological table published by Csoma (*Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, p. 183) he should have been born in that year (the European dates of Csoma are wrongly calculated and have to be increased by two); this is evidently an inadvertence of the Tibetan author.

⁷ 'The Sacred and Ornamental Characters of Tibet,' *JASB* 57 (1888). 41.

⁸ *Alphabetum Tibetanum*, p. 290 (Rome, 1762).

nizing its similarity with the Devanāgarī, and opposing Georgi's speculation that it should have sprung from the Syrian Nestorians.⁹ With respect to the Tibetan tradition, Abel-Rémusat remarked:¹⁰ 'Cette tradition n'a rien d'in vraisemblable en elle-même.' He emphasized the connection of Tibetan script with the Devanāgarī and other Indian alphabets in Farther India and the Archipelago. Klaproth, an orientalist and historian of great critical acumen, likewise accepted the Tibetan tradition, and so did Koeppen and Lassen.¹¹

In 1829 I. J. Schmidt devoted a thorough investigation to the origin of Tibetan writing.¹² This was in the same year when Schmidt published his edition and translation of the Mongol chronicle of Sanan Setsen, which for the first time disclosed the native tradition relative to the introduction of writing into Tibet.¹³ Schmidt compared the Tibetan alphabet with that utilized in an Indian inscription found in a rock-cave of Gayā and on a pillar of Allahabad.¹⁴ The combination of these alphabets reproduced by him on a plate is in all ways convincing. Schmidt further held that Tibetan writing was not modeled after the Lāñcā, but owed its origin to an older and obsolete form of script.

The best summary of the problem is given by T. de Lacouperie.¹⁵ He treats the Tibetan tradition with sound and sensible criticism and arrives at this conclusion: 'As to the Tibetan

⁹ *Samlungen historischer Nachrichten über die mongolischen Völkerschaften*, 2. 359 (St. Petersburg, 1801).

¹⁰ *Recherches sur les langues tartares*, p. 343 (Paris, 1820).

¹¹ J. Klaproth, *Tableaux historiques de l'Asie*, p. 158 (Paris, 1826), cf. also some observations on the Tibetan alphabet in *JA* 10 (1827). 132; C. F. Koeppen, *Lamaische Hierarchie und Kirche*, p. 56 (Berlin, 1859); C. Lassen, *Indische Alterthumskunde*, 4. 714.

¹² 'Über den Ursprung der tibetischen Schrift,' *Mémoires de l'Acad. Imp. de St.-Pétersbourg*, 6th series, 1 (1829). 41-52. This treatise has not been consulted by the recent theorists on Tibetan writing, A. H. Francke and A. F. R. Hoernle.

¹³ *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen und ihres Fürstenhauses*, p. 29-31, 325-328 (St. Petersburg, 1829).

¹⁴ A similar observation is made by Csoma, *Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, p. 204 (Calcutta, 1834).

¹⁵ *Beginnings of Writing in Central and Western Asia*, p. 56-67 (London, 1894).

expedition, there is no apparent reason to doubt it, with the exception of the additions and embellishments which have been added by the historians. Let us remember that we have no contemporary records nor annals of the time, and that all the knowledge we have from the Tibetan history is derived from native compilation, if not of a late date, at least made many centuries after the events they purpose to record.'

The discoveries made in Turkistan have also enriched Tibetan philology; and ancient Tibetan inscriptions, manuscripts, and business documents will contribute a large quota to our knowledge of Tibetan palaeography, language, and literature. Under the influence of these finds the theory has been advanced by A. H. Francke that the Tibetan tradition relative to the introduction of writing from India is unfounded, and that writing was introduced into Tibet from Turkistan, more particularly from Khotan. A. H. Francke is somewhat handicapped by lack of scientific training and unfortunately more endowed with imagination than with sound and cautious scholarship. My opinion on his theory I have briefly set forth in the *T'oung Pao* (1914, p. 67), where I declared myself wholly in accord with Lieut.-Colonel Waddell, who vigorously and successfully opposed this alleged discovery.¹⁶ Even now I would not deem it worth while to submit Francke's hypothesis to a detailed discussion, were it not that recently it has been officially indorsed by a serious scholar of the type of A. F. R. Hoernle.¹⁷ In his last work¹⁸ Hoernle even elaborates a complex theory based on the fancies and figments of A. H. Francke. It is deplorable that a scholar to whom we all look with respect, and to whom we owe so many great things could be led astray by such vague and unfounded speculations, and that the pages of a work which is essentially devoted to the presentation of new and important documentary material are thus marred.

The notions of A. H. Francke center around two points, a new etymology of the name Li-byin and real or alleged coincidences between the Tibetan and Khotan alphabets. According to the Tibetan tradition the Brāhmaṇa consulted by T'on-mi

¹⁶ *JRAS* 1909. 945-947.

¹⁷ *JRAS* 1915. 493.

¹⁸ *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature found in Eastern Turkestan*, p. xvi-xxxii (Oxford, 1916).

in India was styled Li-byin.¹⁹ E. Schlagintweit²⁰ observed that this name seems to allude to the art of writing and to be a Tibetanized form of Sanskrit *lipi* 'writing.' W. W. Rockhill²¹ conceived the name as a corruption of *lipikara* 'scribe'; this explanation was accepted by de Lacouperie, Waddell, and Huth.²² I hold the same opinion save that I do not accept the restitution *Lipikāra* or *Livikāra*,²³ but take Tibetan *Libyin* (properly *Lib-yin*) as the transcription of a Prākṛit or vernacular form *Lipyin* or *Livyin*. As shown in my forthcoming study 'Loan-Words in Tibetan,' a large number of these is derived, not from Sanskrit, but from the Prākṛits, more particularly from the Apabhraṃśas.

Now A. H. Francke, without taking account of this reasonable interpretation, dogmatically proclaims: 'This name (*Li-byin*) has always been wrongly translated. It has to be translated "Glory" (or blessing) of the land "Li." 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 T'on-mi simply reaped the fruit of such learning.'²⁴ All very simple indeed: a magic word of Francke is sufficient to upset any tradition and all history. Historical conclusions cannot be based on any subjective etymologies, however ingenious they

¹⁹ According to I. J. Schmidt (*Forschungen*, p. 221) also the form *Lha-byin* occurs. This, if correct, would render Sanskrit *Devadatta*.

²⁰ *Könige von Tibet*, p. 839, note 4.

²¹ *Life of the Buddha*, p. 212.

²² T. de Lacouperie, *Beginnings of Writing*, p. 63; L. A. Waddell, *Buddhism of Tibet*, p. 22; G. Huth, *Geschichte des Buddhismus in der Mongolei*, 2. 8. Moreover, in the grammatical work *Si-tui sum-rtags* (p. 3, ed. of Chandra Das) the name of the Brahman appears in Tibetan transcription as *Li-bi-ka-ra*, i. e. Skt. *Lipikara*. Cf. also E. J. Thomas, *JEAS* 1916. 857.

²³ Tibetan *byin* in Sanskrit words is always the perfect of the verb *sbyin-pa* 'to give' and corresponds to Sanskrit *datta*, not, however, to *kara* or *kāra*. A restoration *Lipidatta* would, of course, be impossible. In fact, the element *byin* does not represent a Tibetan word, but forms part of the transcription.

²⁴ *JASB* 6 (1910). 97; repeated in *Epigraphia Indica*, 11 (1912). 269, and adopted by Hoernle.

may be. Francke's explanation of Li-byin is solely invented to suit his case and his own conveniences; it is not borne out or upheld by any Tibetan tradition, it is even impossible in the spirit of the Tibetan language. The word *li*, it is true, designates 'Khotan,' but it has other meanings also: it signifies 'bell-metal' and 'apple'; with the suffix *-ka* it denotes a certain tree and with the suffix *-ba* it means 'squinting'; it appears in a number of compounds, and further transcribes several Chinese characters reading *li*. The word *byin* never has the meaning 'glory'; it means 'blessing' only in certain fixed combinations, as *byin-gyis rlob-pa*, *byin brlabs*, etc. ('to bless'). It is never used, however, in the absolute or purely abstract sense of 'blessing,' as Francke would have us believe. As previously stated, the element *byin* in proper names either represents a translation of Sanskrit *datta*, as, for instance, *gSañ-ba byin = Guhya-datta* (Tāranātha, 147), *Ye-šes byin = Jñānadatta* (*ibid.* 212), *Ts'añs byin = Brahmadata*, *Mya-ñan med-kyis byin-pa = Açokadata*, *gSer byin = Hemadata*, etc.; but it is never the noun *byin* visualized by Francke. A name of such a type as 'Blessing of Khotan' has no analogy in Tibetan literature, and is a plain absurdity on the very face of it. It is merely a personal fancy, but Francke and Hoernle are so enraptured with it that they accept as a well substantiated fact what at the best might be regarded as a bold hypothesis. Says Dr. Hoernle literally: 'He (T'on-mi) had come into contact with a Brāhman from Khotan, whom the Tibetan tradition calls Li-byin or 'Blessing of Khotan,' and that Brahman taught him the alphabet of his own country. This, in effect, means that the alphabet, as introduced into Tibet, is the alphabet of Khotan, Li being the well-known Tibetan name of Khotan. It is not the alphabet of India . . . To judge by the Tibetan tradition he (T'on-mi) was saved the completion of his journey through the lucky accident of meeting, on his way in Kashmir, with a learned Brāhman from Khotan, who could supply him with the information he was in search of.' Again, he speaks of the Khotanese Brahman Li-byin from whom the Tibetan scholar T'on-mi is said to have learned his alphabet. Further he hazards the assertion: 'It has been stated already that Tibetan tradition distinctly refers to Li-yul, the land of Li, i. e. Khotan, as the country of origin of its alphabet.' This statement is

downright fiction: Tibetan tradition has nothing whatever about Li-yul in the history of writing. This manner of argumentation is baffling and beyond my comprehension: Dr. Hoernle fearlessly advances as historical facts what is merely inferred from the imaginary and arbitrary dissection of a name—a singular instance of history-making!

The only documentary evidence on which Francke's conclusions are based is presented by the Tibetan chronicle of the Kings of Ladākh in the edition of E. Schlagintweit. This work is widely different from the older and more complete *rGyal rabs gsal-bai me-loñ*²⁵ of Central Tibet, and as far as the history of the Central-Tibetan kings is concerned, gives merely a much abridged and corrupted version of the older standard book, written in A. D. 1328.²⁶ Now we have known for a long time

²⁵ This title does not mean, as translated by Francke and Hoernle 'Bright mirror of the line of kings,' but 'Mirror clearly setting forth the genealogy of kings.'

²⁶ Francke, for the benefit of his speculations, argues that the West-Tibetan record strikes him, as being the more original of the two. He pleads also that 'the West-Tibetan account makes mention of the Indian Nāgarī alphabet, it is true, but this passage looks like a later interpolation' (*Epigraphia Indica*, 11. 267). This argumentation is inadmissible: it is a sound principle of historical criticism that the older source is the purer source, and that the original merits preference over the later work copied after it. It is a comfortable method to brand as interpolation what does not suit one's preconceived idea.—A strange assertion occurs on p. 269 of the same article. Here Francke states that 'we have a single testimony of history for the early use of Indian characters in Western Tibet, in the Chinese *Sui shu*, where it is stated that such characters were used in the empire [*sic*] of the Eastern Women (Guge), etc.' The source is not quoted; the *Sui shu* contains nothing of the kind, and in fact maintains silence as to any writing in the Women's Kingdom, as every one may convince himself from reading this chapter in Rockhill's translation (*Land of the Lamas*, p. 339). In the *T'ang shu* it is said that the written characters of the Women's Kingdom are the same as those of India (see, for instance, Bushell, *Early History of Tibet*, p. 98); but this is merely due to the well-known confusion of the two Women's Kingdoms and the information of Hüan Tsang misplaced and smuggled into the New History of the T'ang, as has been shown particularly by Pelliot (*T'oung Pao*, 1912. 358). This reference to writing in fact has nothing to do with the Eastern Women's Kingdom. Moreover Francke is wrong in placing it in Western Tibet; on the contrary, it embraced parts of Eastern Tibet, bordering in the east on Mao-chou in Se-ch'uan and the Tan-hian, in the south-east on Ya-chou in Se-ch'uan.

how the matter about Schlagintweit's text stands. K. Marx, a Moravian missionary than whom no one was more intimately familiar with the history of Ladākh, has shown with able criticism that this copy was specially prepared for his brother H. Schlagintweit by three Lamas, and that from folio 30 on 'the text is merely a meaningless jumble of words, culled at random from the original and put together in such a way that only a careful examination of the text by one who knows the language could reveal the fraud.'²⁷ Not only in that portion pointed out by Marx, but also in the preceding portions, the Schlagintweit text is so hopelessly faulty, mutilated, and corrupt that it forfeits any claim to historical value. It must be positively denied that any such far-reaching conclusions to which Francke and his champion Hoernle are inclined can be deduced from it. Without being aware of the criticism of Marx, Francke even thought it a useful task to publish a new translation of Schlagintweit's text, for which no other editions were consulted.²⁸ Such lack of critical faculty can only lead to error and disaster. It is solely Schlagintweit's text in which it is stated that T'on-mi on his mission betook himself to Kashmir (*K'a-č'e*), while all texts of the large and real edition of the *rGyal-rabs*, inclusive of its Mongol and Kalmuk translations, agree on the reading that he traveled to India (*rGya-gar*). If the Schlagintweit text be correct, this is merely the local Ladākh, not the general Tibetan, tradition. Marx justly observed: 'Any MS, specially prepared by a native of Ladākh for a foreigner, is apt to be less reliable than others of independent origin, for the reason, which would especially be true regarding historical documents, that the copyist will have a tendency to slightly alter the text, in the interest of his master, religion, or country, suppressing such facts as may seem derogatory to their fame, and substituting for phrases liable to be misunderstood others of a less equivocal character.' It is not difficult to see how the Ladākh tradition may have arisen. Sum-pa mk'an-po, in his remarkable work *dPag bsam ljon bzai*,²⁹ has T'on-mi go to India, and says that on his return to Tibet he prepared the alphabet *dbu-čan* in the

²⁷ *JASB* 60, pt. 1 (1891). 97-98.

²⁸ *JASB* 6 (1910). 393.

²⁹ Ed. by Sarat Chandra Das, p. 167.

royal castle Ma-ru of Lhasa by taking as model the forms of the letters of Kashmir, and instituted the *dbu-med* writing in harmony with the Warty script. It is plausible to a high degree that T'on-mi concluded his work in Lhasa, after submitting his scheme to the approval of his royal master. Certainly it was not necessary for him to make a trip to Kashmir in order to get hold of Kashmir writing; that was procurable as well in Magadha.

The sentence from the Schlagintweit text to which Hoernle³⁰ attributes so much importance meets with no exact parallel in the large *rGyal-rabs*: it is simply corrupt, and the word *riñs* is meaningless; probably we have to read *rañ* (*drug rañ bčos-nas* 'he himself made six new letters,' for this is required in accordance with the text of the large *rGyal-rabs*).³¹ Francke's translation 'they formed 24 *gsal-byed* [consonants] and 6 *riñs*'³² demonstrates that he is ignorant of the elementary rules of Tibetan grammar: for the numeral is always placed behind the noun (as we have in this very sentence *gsal-byed ñi šu rtsa bži*), or, if the numeral precedes the noun, which rarely occurs, it must be followed by the suffix of the genitive.³³ What Hoernle distils from this sentence is purely fantastic.

In 1905 A. H. Francke pointed out certain similarities between the Tibetan alphabet and the Brāhmī of Kashgar.³⁴ A sensible French critic³⁵ remarked with reference to these surface comparisons: 'This proves nothing for the origin of one or the other; the resemblance disclosed by Dr. P. Cordier between the Tibetan alphabet and that of the Gupta of the seventh century A. D. are interesting otherwise.' In the same manner Dr. L. A. Waddell³⁶ justly remarks that the forms of the Tibetan letters themselves declare their origin from the developing Indian Devanāgarī characters at the stage to which they had attained

³⁰ *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Lit.* p. xxxii.

³¹ The chapter concerning the introduction of writing is reprinted in Si-tui Sum-rtags' *Tibetan Grammar*, 139 *et seq.* (Bengal Secretariat Press, 1895). See also I. J. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen*, 327.

³² *Epigraphia Indica*, 11 (1912). 267.

³³ Foucaux, *Grammaire de la langue tibétaine*, § 49.

³⁴ *Memoirs As. Soc. of Bengal*, 1. 43-45.

³⁵ *Bull. de l'École française*, 6. 446.

³⁶ *JRAS* 1909. 946.

in mid-India in the seventh century A. D., and, it would appear, not any earlier, as a reference to the fine photographic illustrations of Indian inscriptions of that period in Fleet's *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 3, will show. These help to make it clear that the so-called Tibetan letters bear a strong family resemblance to those of the somewhat florid style which Fleet has called 'the Kuṭila variety of the Magadha alphabet of the seventh century A. D.' Many of the letters are identical in shape. Sten Konow³⁷ rightly observes, in a note to Francke's article: 'The correspondence between Central Asian Gupta and Tibetan is not so great that it is necessary to assume that they have been developed in the same locality. They have both been developed from the same source, and that explains the similarity.' And Dr. Vogel, after careful study, presents the conclusion that the Tibetan alphabet is derived from the Northern Indian script which was used in the seventh century. This evidence has not been discussed or even antagonized by Dr. Hoernle.³⁸ On the other hand, his juxtaposition of the Khotanese and Tibetan alphabets is by no means convincing in proving a close relationship between the two. A glance at plate IV of Bühler's *Indische Palaeographie* and the work cited by Dr. Waddell is sufficient to show that the Tibetan alphabet stands much closer to those of mid-India than of Khotan, and that the Tibetan tradition in its general features is perfectly correct. In all his theoretical speculations and his eagerness to prove his unfortunate theory, Dr. Hoernle entirely loses sight of the fact that the Khotanese alphabet itself hails from India. His investigation, moreover, is vitiated by a methodological error. The writing of Khotan is throughout compared with the Tibetan alphabet in its modern printed form instead of with the oldest accessible forms of the inscriptions and the manuscripts of the ninth century. No regard, for instance, is taken of the fact that in the beginning the plain consonant did not imply the letter *a*, but that *a* was written alongside it,³⁹ and that there were two graphic forms of the vowel *i*. Further, we have to be mindful of the

³⁷ *Epigraphia Indica*, 11. 269.

³⁸ *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Lit.* p. XIX.

³⁹ Csoma, *Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, p. 5, who says that this was the case also with the other vowels; Laufer, *T'oung Pao*, 1914. 52.

fact that we do not yet possess a single specimen of Tibetan writing of the seventh century, so that it is premature to render a positive verdict on what this writing was.

The historical proof on which the Khotanese theory is founded is likewise a failure. Hoernle asserts that according to Tibetan tradition Khotan fell under the domination of Tibet in the seventh century under Sron-btsan sgam-po, invoking as his authority Rockhill's *Life of the Buddha* (p. 211). True it is, Rockhill writes in this passage: 'Sron-btsan ascended the throne of Tibet in his thirteenth year, and the neighboring states recognized him as their sovereign, so that his rule extended over the whole of Tibet, to the north as far as Khotan, which during his reign became subject to China, and to the east to China.'⁴⁰ This statement, however, is at the best merely an illogical combination of Chinese accounts with the erroneous Tibetan chronology, which makes Sron-btsan live up to A. D. 698, while in fact, according to the Chinese annals, he died in A. D. 650. Neither Sanan Setsen nor the Bodhimör, the Kalmuk translation of the Tibetan *rGyal rabs*, the only native sources which, in the translation of I. J. Schmidt, Rockhill utilized for his sketch of Tibetan history, make any mention of Khotan with reference to Sron-btsan's reign, nor does the Tibetan *rGyal-rabs*. The Chinese annals likewise are perfectly silent as to Khotan in the report of the life and deeds of Lun-tsan (= Sron-btsan). In reality, the relations of Tibet with Khotan begin only from A. D. 670 when the Tibetans conquered the Four Garrisons (Kucha, Khotan, Tokmak, and Kashgar), which they lost again to the Chinese in A. D. 692.⁴¹ Thus Khotan was entirely beyond the reach of the Tibetans during the lifetime of King Sron-btsan, and Hoernle's theory is a fallacy.

Finally we may raise the question: if the theory of Francke and Hoernle is true, why does a tradition to this effect not crop out in the literature of the Tibetans? Or, in other words, why should such a tradition, if it ever existed, have been suppressed? As is well known, there are Tibetan works on Khotan embodied

⁴⁰ For the rest Rockhill follows an utterly impossible chronology as to the life of the king, placing his birth in A. D. 600 and T'on-mi's missions to India in A. D. 616.

⁴¹ Chavannes, *Documents sur les Tou-kiue (Turcs) occidentaux*, p. 114, 281.

in the Kanjur and Tanjur⁴²; the *Gośṛṅgavyākaraṇa* in the Kanjur was translated from the language of Khotan, and Śīladharma, a Bhikshu from Khotan, collaborated in the translation of the Kanjur work no. 242.⁴³ Architects were summoned from Khotan by King K'ri-lde sron-btsan for the building of a monastery.⁴⁴ The Tibetans do not shy at admitting their debt to Khotan whenever occasion arises; but they are persistent in pointing to India as the cradle of their writing and literature. It was from India that Sanskrit Buddhist literature was transmitted to Tibet, it was from India and Kashmir that Buddhist missionaries entered Tibet to preach the gospel of Buddha. The role of Khotan in this respect was reduced to a minimum. Surely, Turkistanitis is a new form of learned disease.

⁴² Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 231.

⁴³ Regarding Śīladharma see Pelliot, *Journal asiatique*, 1914, 2. 135.

⁴⁴ Laufer, *T'oung Pao*, 1908. 5.

