

ART. III.—*On the Methods of Disposing of the Dead at Llassa, Thibet, etc.* By CHARLES HORNE, late B.C.S.

In the year 1857 one of the travelling Llamas from Llassa came to Lahoul, in the Kûlû country on the Himalêh, and hearing of the mutiny was afraid to proceed. Major Hay, who was at that place in political employ, engaged this man to draw and describe for him many very interesting ceremonies in use in Llassa, amongst which was the method there employed in disposing of dead bodies. This so exactly confirms the accounts given by Strabo and Cicero, and is, moreover, of itself so curious, that I have transcribed it, with as many passages relating to the subject as readily came to hand; and as the Llama was a very fair draughtsman, I have had facsimiles made of his drawings to illustrate this paper. I will first give the extracts, and then the account of the Llama.

M. Huc, the interesting Jesuit traveller, in his *Travels*, tome ii., p. 347, when at Llassa, alluding to hydrophobia, says (free translation):—“It is only surprising that this horrible complaint does not commit greater ravages when one thinks of the numbers of famished dogs who constantly prowl about the streets of Llassa. These animals are so numerous in this town that the Chinese say, ironically, that the three chief products of the capital of Thibet are Llamas, women, and dogs (Llama-Yatêon-Keon). This astonishing multitude of dogs is caused by the great respect that the Thibetans have for these animals, and the use they make of them for the disposal of their dead. There are four manners of sepulture in Thibet: first, incremation; second, throwing into the rivers or lakes; third, exposure on the summits of mountains; and the fourth, which is the most flattering of all, consists in cutting the dead bodies

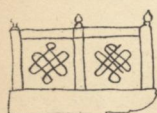
FUNERAL RITES.-LASSA.

Pl. 3.

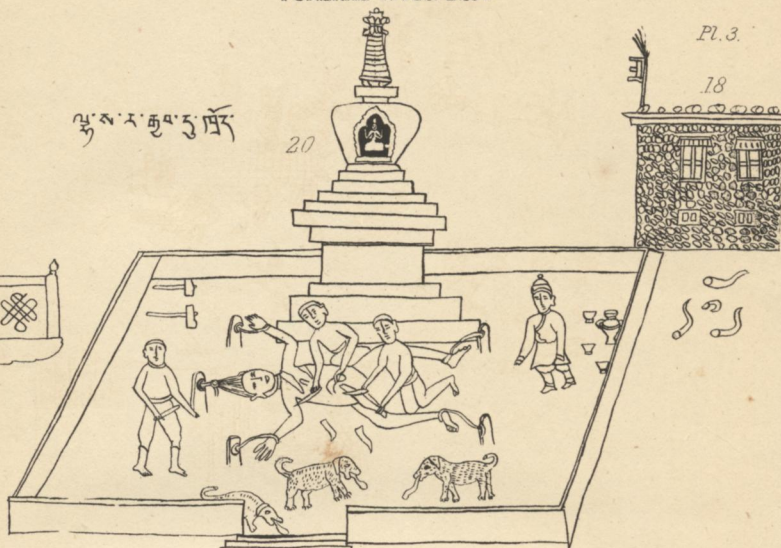
18

ལྷ་ས་སྐུ་ལྷན་པོ་

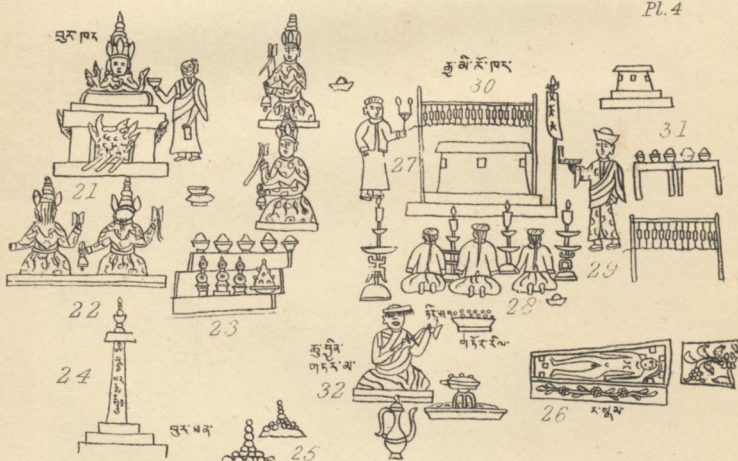
20



19



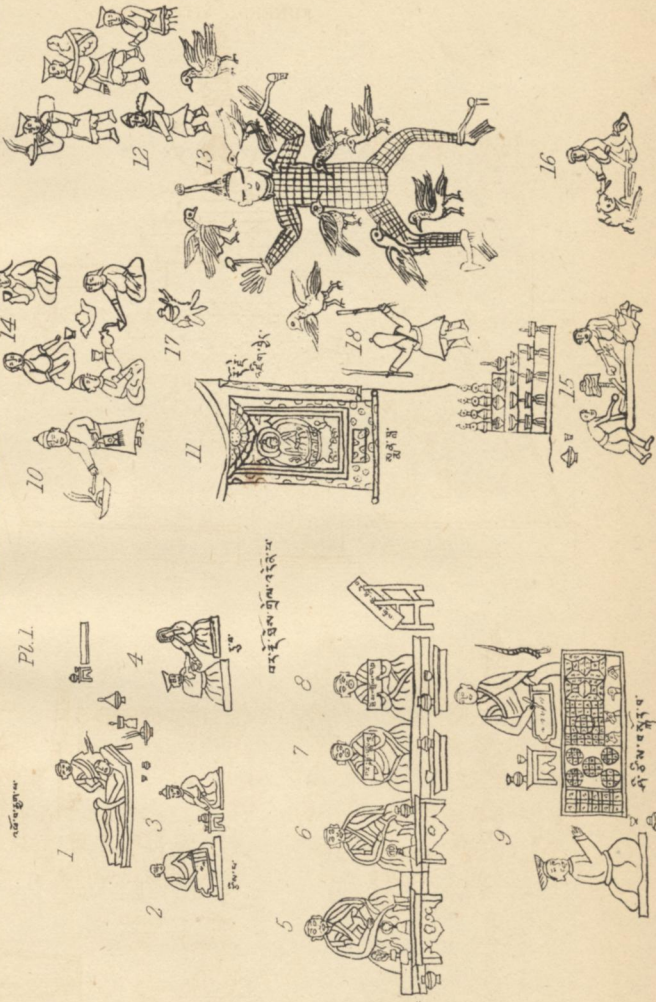
Pl. 4



FUNERAL RITES--LASSA.

Pl. 2.

Pl. 1.



in pieces and giving them to the dogs to eat." The last method is the most general. The poor have for their sepulture the dogs of the environs, but for persons of distinction they employ a little more ceremony. There are establishments where they rear and maintain dogs for this sole purpose, and it is to these places that the rich Thibetans take their dead to be disposed of. Strabo, Cicero, and Justin, allude to these practises.

1. STRABO, speaking of the customs of the nomad Scythians as preserved amongst the Soghdians and Bactrians, says:—"In the capital of the Bactrians, they bring up dogs to which they give a particular name, and this name translated into our language would be 'interrers.' These dogs have to devour all those who become feeble from age or illness. Hence it is that the environs of this capital show no tombs; but within the walls many human bones are to be seen. Alexander is said to have abolished this custom."

2. CICERO attributes the same custom to the Hyrcanians when he says: "In Hyrcania plebs publicos alit canes; optimates, domesticos. Nihile autem genus canum illud scimus esse. Sed pro sua quisque facultate parat a quibus lanietur; eamque optimam illi esse censent sepulturam." (*Tuscul. Quæst.* lib. i., p. 45.)

3. JUSTIN says also of the Parthians: "Sepultura vulgi aut avium aut canum laniatus est. Nuda demum ossa terrâ obruunt." (*Note de Klaproth.*)

Herodotus also alludes to the practice; but the above quotations may be held to be sufficient.

Now for the Llama's account, more in detail. The accompanying sketches by the same hand explain these:—

No. 1. *Phôwâ Gyâgpâ*,—*Phôwâ* is the name of the *mantra* or prayer, and *Gyâgpâ* the person repeating it. The drawing represents a man who has died, and by his prayers a Llama had restored the spirit into the belly, and is in the act of drawing out the same by the end of his hair, *Trâtenbâ*, which he is supposed to unite with his own spirit (or *mun*); and having so done, he is held, whilst sitting in meditation with his eyes closed, to cause the united spirit to

pass out at his own head: Triloknâth is supposed to be there seated whilst he (the Llama) is praying, and so the said united spirit enters the body of Triloknâth by the anus, and thus they both are imagined to have become united to, and mingled with, the essence of the Deity.

No. 2 is the *Sipá*, who comes to consult the dead man's horoscope and future destiny; and to show how the body is to be placed with reference to the point of the compass.

No. 3 is a relation of the deceased consulting the priest.

No. 4, *Gnûvâ* (or weeping), is the brother of the deceased receiving consolation from another, who administers *chang* or spirits, and bids him cheer up.

Nos. 5 and 6. These are two Getongs, called *Gyûnzhûgpá*, who are supposed to be for two days and nights meditating and praying mentally for the soul of the deceased.

Nos. 7 and 8. *Chêdûnpá* reading the *Purtó-ti-sól*. The meaning is this: for four days after death the spirit is supposed to hover near, and to preserve the power of seeing and hearing, and hence it listens to the contents of this book, in which are described the six roads by which to travel to the other world:—

1. A *White* road, or *Karpo*; 2. A *Yellow* road, or *Sirpo*; 3. A *Black* road, or *Nâgpó*; 4. A *Green* road, or *Jûnsu*; 5. A *Red* road, or *Marpo*; 6. A *Blue* road, or *Unpo*.

The readers shout out relative to these roads in substance as follows: These are the six roads. If you go by the *white* road, you will reach the Deotas; but you must not go there. If you try the *yellow* road, you will be reborn on this earth; don't go by that road, because this re-birth on earth will be eternally repeated. If you go by the *black* road, you will reach *Niruk*, or hell; don't go there, because it will involve endless pain and torment. Don't go by the *green* road, which leads through *Lamayin*, i.e. the sky below Indra's paradise, where they are always at war one with another. Don't go by the *red* road, because there you will meet with the *Idák*, or evil spirits, who have large heads, very small necks, and very empty bellies, which are never satisfied. Don't go by the *blue* road, because there are the animals

*Tímód*, who alone have power, and you will be devoured. But look up towards heaven, and you will see, as in a glass flickering, a *red and yellow* road, shining like lightning. On seeing it you will be greatly afraid, but never fear, and travel by that road, and you will be sure to reach *Llama Kánchók*, or God, and you will enter into the Deity. If you cannot by any possibility get by that road, then go by the *white* road!! You are now become like air; you can't remain in this world; so be off!!

No. 9, *Sipa*, or Llama, consulting his book to see how the corpse is to be disposed of. If burnt, how the face is to be turned. The horn is that of the *Súrú* or *Isótio*, which he takes in his hand to drive away evil spirits.

No. 10, *Súrukápá*, burns incense.

No. 11, *Ro*, or a corpse. It is tied by a rope to the top of the room in a corner, and seated on an iron frame or stool, when the impurities are supposed to empty themselves below into a pan placed for the purpose. A cloth is placed over the head to conceal the face, and a *pardah*, or screen of cloth, is placed before the body, on which is affixed a picture of *Sangyé Mulla*, or *Doojéh Zhigrit*, a deity of the *Gelukpas*.<sup>1</sup>

Before the corpse on the ground is placed a little *suttoo* (fine flour), and some water. In this plate the knees only of the corpse are shown, the rest must be supposed.

No. 12 represents a man carrying off the corpse packed up in a portable shape, as also others with necessaries. The class of men who perform this work are called *Togdun*.

No. 13. The corpse at this place, *Tútót*, is pegged out to five wooden pins. Then it is scored all over with a knife, and the men retire to a short distance and sit down and drink *chang*, or spirits, as shown in No. 14. The vultures meanwhile tear the flesh from the body, which does not take long, in consequence of the numbers always frequenting these spots. When the men return they find only the skeleton. They then take the bones to No. 15, where they pound them

<sup>1</sup> This Llama would appear to have belonged to the *Gelukpa*, or yellow sect, and his description applies more particularly to the customs of that sect of Buddhists, which is well represented at Llassa. The word means *virtuous*.

up with stones and hammers, after which they are thrown to the vultures. No dogs are allowed here, and the place is called *Chátór*, from *Chá*, "a bird."

No. 16 is a man singeing the hair off the head, a portion of the skull of which is preserved and afterwards pounded up, mixed with earth, and formed into small shapes with figures of Triloknâth or Sakya stamped upon them, or moulded into small *Chortens* or Dagobas.

No. 17 shows us the *Tógduns* drinking tea after their work is ended.

No. 18 represents a man driving off the vultures, *Chagót*, to prevent them devouring the corpse until it shall first have been properly scored all over.

Plate No. 3 represents a place in Llassa called *Râgyúp-dútód*. *Ra* means "a horn"; *Gyup*, "behind"; *Dutod*, "Golgotha."

Here are five stones fixed in the ground, to which the corpse is tied, and three men, *Tógdun*, are cutting up the body and bones, all of which are given to the dogs. This mode of disposal of the dead is called *Ki-chin* (*Ki* is a dog). Very many dogs always remain at this place. The hammers and axes are for breaking up the skeleton. The man on the right supplies the operators with *chang* or spirits.

No. 18 represents the house which is called *Râgyuptógdun*, and is built of horns and inhabited by the *Tógdun*. There are a hundred of such houses in the suburbs of Llassa, besides two hundred inhabited by the butchers (*Shéva*) constructed in a similar manner.

All these people beg and collect much money, chiefly from the relations of the dead, by whom they are well paid.

They are said to be insolent in their demands, and if anyone gives them half a *tunka* (or small piece of money), they spit upon it and throw it away, saying, "If you are not ashamed to give so little, I am ashamed to receive it."

No. 19 is the parapet of the *Râkâtechûmi* or well.

No. 20 is a *Chânochúp chorten*, with a figure of Triloknath, supposed to have appeared there miraculously without mortal assistance.

No. 21, or *Purkung* (*Pár* being applied to the corpse of a superior and *Ro* to that of an inferior; *Khung* signifies a house), shows the method in which the higher people of Llassa are burnt. A building is first erected, with a hollow in the centre, into which the body is placed in an upright position. The face is covered with red silk, and the wood used to burn the body is *Shukpa*, or pencil cedar (*Juniperus excelsa*), and frankincense. The attending Llama is shown feeding the flames with *ghee* or clarified butter.

No. 22 shows two Llamas, who are offering up prayers and the *hón* of sacrifice by fire, and are dressed the same as the deceased. They have in their hands the *dril-bu* or sacred bell.

No. 23. These *choptahs*, or vessels of green sugar, etc., are burnt with the body.

When, however, a man of high rank dies from smallpox, he is not burnt, but buried, and a tomb, as shown in No. 24 (*Púltun*), built of stone, is erected over the spot.

Should the sufferer from the same complaint have been of inferior rank, a small heap of stones only is made over his grave, as shown in No. 25.

No. 26, *Rogum* or *Rokum* (*Gum* means a coffin), represents a Chinaman's body as laid in his coffin, with silver, gold, sugar, rice, etc. This coffin is then placed in a tomb, No. 27, called *Gyamirókung*, the place assigned for the burial being *Tubchitung*, two miles outside Llassa.

No. 28 shows a chief mourner, dressed in white, which is the colour of Chinese mourning. The other relations are not always clad in mourning, but all put on a linen or cotton turban, setting their ordinary caps on one side, which, however, all except the chief mourner resume when leaving the tomb.

No. 29 is the *Washing* or Chinese priest.

No. 30 are *Shókpá*, or fireworks, which are lighted and fired three times, when the mourners prostrate themselves nine times.

After seven days have elapsed, they again visit the tomb, when the same ceremony is performed.



At No. 31 are represented dishes of sweetmeats, of which, after the fireworks and the nine prostrations, the mourners partake, and then return to their homes.

No. 32 shows *Tchúchintórma*, a ceremony in which in one basin are placed little bits of flour paste rolled up, called *torma*; and in another water (*tchú*), with which these little pieces of paste are put. *Chin*, "offering," completes the work.

The Llama is supposed to be offering these to the *Idák*, or bad spirits aforementioned as inhabiting the place mentioned in Red Road No. 5. These *Idák* have, as aforesaid, large heads, small necks, and large bellies never to be satisfied.

In Sanskrit the word *Idák* is called *Prétá*, which means a departed soul, spirit of the dead, ghost, or evil spirit.

So far the Llama describes the different methods of the disposal of dead bodies in Llassa as observed by the Thibetans and Chinese.

There is, however, one other method of preserving the dead bodies of their highest Llamas.

The first process is to cover up the body in salt, which dissolves and becomes absorbed in the flesh; this process is repeated two or three times. When a sufficient quantity has been absorbed to preserve the body, it is taken out, the limbs relaxed, and the body placed in a sitting attitude and clothed; the hands having been placed in a position called *Chín Chut*. When the muscles of the face relax and the skin shrivels, wax is put in to fill up the cheeks to the natural size, and the body is preserved in a *chorten* as a mummy which can be seen at any time.

*Note by Major Hay.*—"No man can fail to remark how similar the altar is to that shown on the reverse of many Sassanian coins. It is probable their custom of burning the bodies of their kings was the same, and the attendants seem even to have the same kind of cap. The ancient Persians, according to Herodotus and Strabo, exposed their dead to be devoured by vultures. It should, however, be remarked that the bodies of the *old* monarchs of Persia were interred, not burnt, which would have been contrary to the laws of

Zoroaster, as tending to desecrate the sacred element—fire; nor were they previously exposed to be devoured by animals, as was prescribed by the precept of the Magi, with whom the dog was a sacred animal.”

In continuation of the above, as the subject is one of interest, I subjoin a few extracts from Rollin's *Ancient History*, and other sources relative to the subject.

The ancient Persians, we are told by Herodotus, did not erect funeral piles for the dead or consume their bodies in the flames. “Accordingly we find that Cyrus,<sup>1</sup> when he was at the point of death, took care to charge his children to inter his body and to restore it to the earth; that is the expression he makes use of: by which he seems to declare, that he looked upon the earth as the original parent from whence he sprang, to which he ought to return. And when Cambyses had offered a thousand indignities to the dead body of Amasis,<sup>2</sup> king of Egypt, he thought he crowned all by causing it to be burnt, which was equally contrary to the Egyptian and Persian manner of treating their dead. It was the custom of the latter to wrap up their dead in wax, in order to keep them longer from corruption.”

Cicero says, *Tuscul. Quæst.*, lib. i., p. 108:

“Condiunt Egyptii mortuos, et eos domi servant: Persæ jam cerâ circumlitos condiunt, ut quam maxime permaneant diuturna corpora.”

Major Hay, in his report on the Spiti Valley, written in 1850, tells us that incremation is the ordinary method of disposing of the dead in Spiti. Their ashes are thrown into the nearest running stream, the spot where the body was burnt plastered over with cowdung, and an urn put up.

I have repeatedly seen these urns in Kurnawur, and always supposed them to contain the ashes, and I was informed that such was the case. Those dying of smallpox were not burned, but buried; and I have also seen the heaps of stones which had been placed over the grave, but curiously enough during the months that I was in the country I never witnessed a funeral or incremation.

<sup>1</sup> Cyrop., l. viii., p. 238.

<sup>2</sup> Herod., l. iii., c. 16.