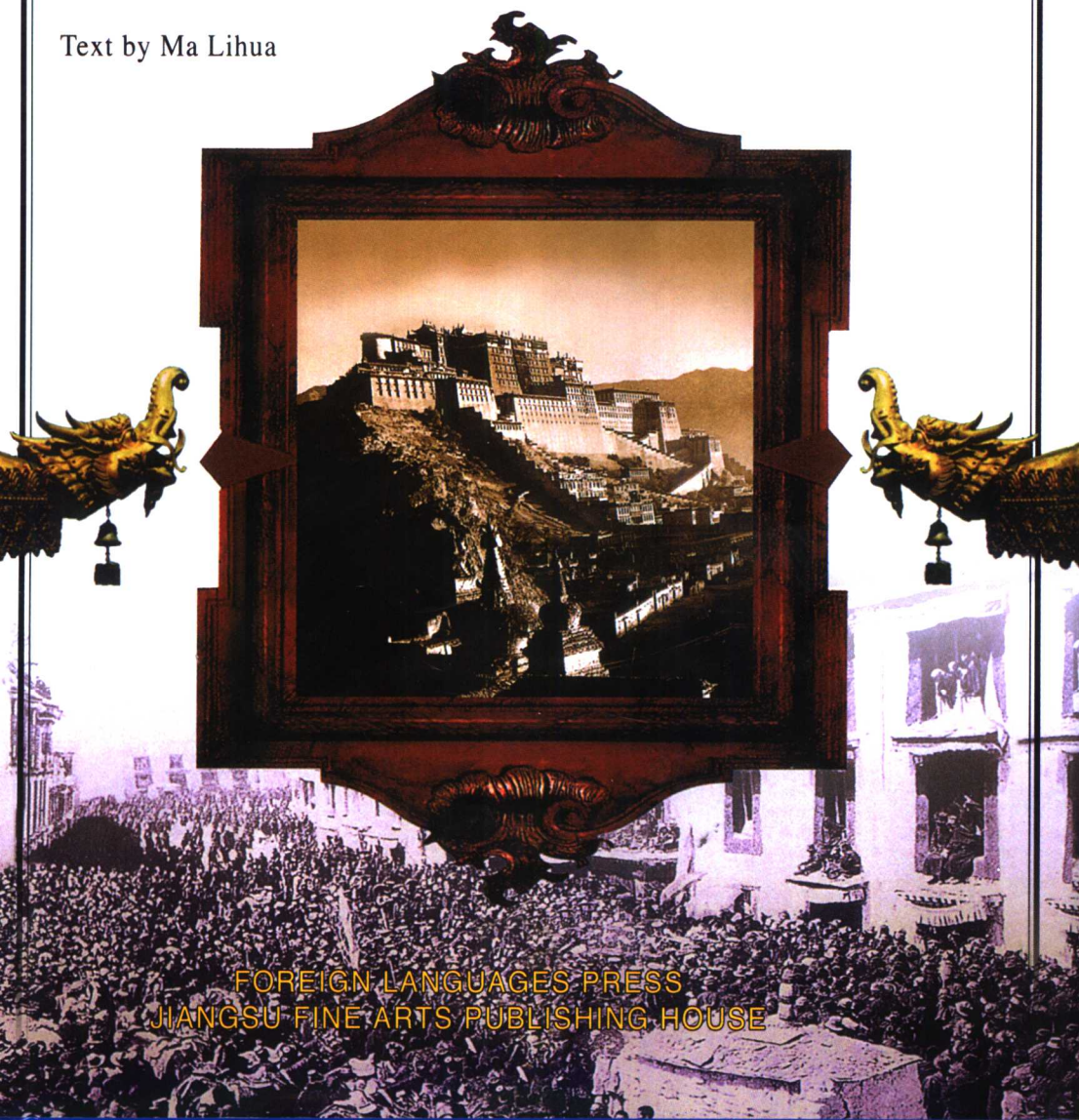


OLD LHASA

A Sacred City at Dusk

Text by Ma Lihua



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at Dusk*

Text by Ma Lihua



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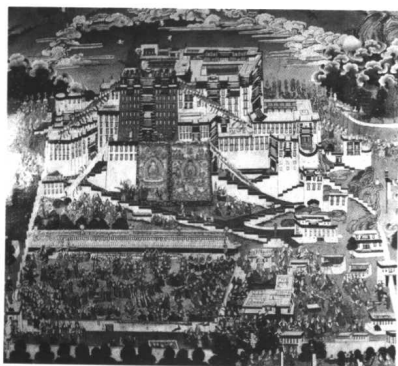


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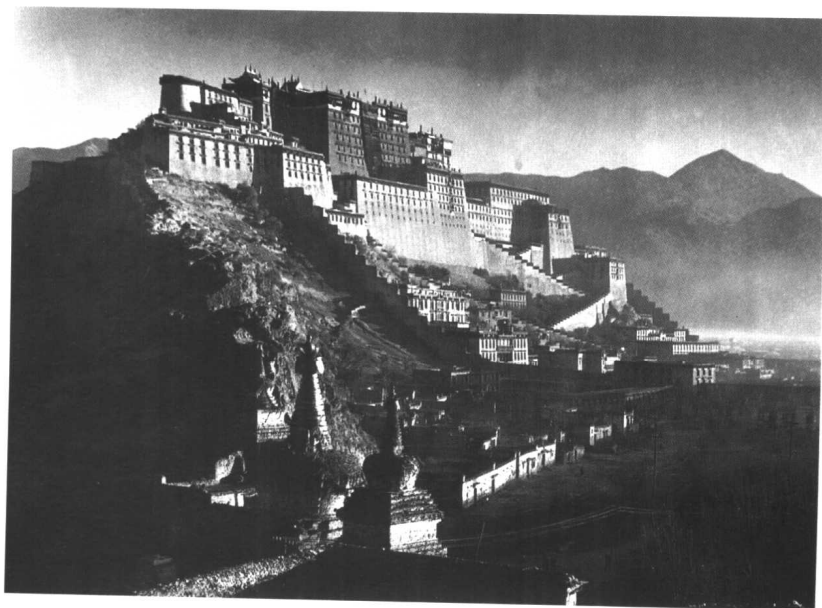
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The Potala Palace, widely regarded as the symbol of Lhasa, has been included in UNESCO'S World Cultural Heritage list. Photo* 1957.

* Photos marked with an asterisk were taken or provided by Mr. Chen Zonglie.



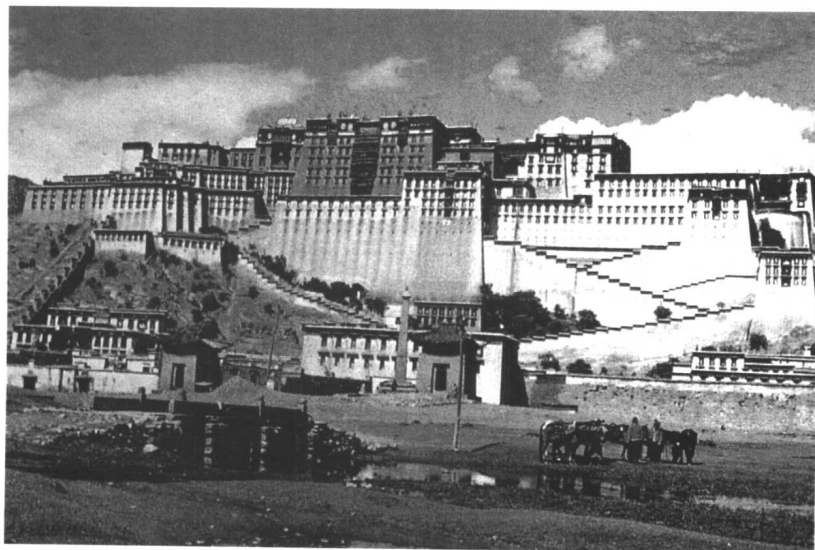
Chapter 1

Lhasa at the Turn of the 20th Century





Lhasa and the Potala Palace in 1660, a reproduction made on the basis of a sketch by the Austrian Jesuit Johannes Gruber. The city wall in the picture was demolished by Qing Dynasty soldiers in 1720.



The bridges and waterways which used to be in front of the Potala, had been replaced by a large square.* (1950s)



Statue of Songtsan Gampo (c. 617-650), enshrined in the Potala. *

Lhasa's Turbulent Past

What is it that has enticed us to look back at the past of the city of Lhasa? What can we learn from those old sepia photographs? Lhasa, representing an ancient civilization, is, to me, a long reel of negatives of various pictures. Looking at them, I seem to see flashes of a fine day with an azure sky, a stormy day with scurrying clouds, intrigue and rivalry between aristocrats, and the glitter of sabers.... I seem to feel the strong atmosphere of sanctity of this holy city of Buddhism and gaze at the receding backs of throngs of pilgrims. I even seem to hear vendors hawking their wares in Barkor Street.... Old Lhasa was a Lhasa of monks, a Lhasa of nobles, a Lhasa of merchants, beggars, pilgrims and adventurers.

Originally the capital of the Tubo Kingdom, Lhasa dates back at least 1300 to 1400 years. The history of



A map of Lhasa drawn in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

human settlement in the Lhasa area, according to archeological findings so far, is as long as 3,000 or 4,000 years, with the oldest evidence of habitation being the Neolithic Chugong Ruins on the northern bank of the Lhasa River. Towards the end of the Neolithic period, metal wares began to appear. In A.D. 633, Songtsan Gampo united all the tribes on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, and established the Tubo Kingdom as a slave society. The chiefs of the various tribes met and chose Rasa (present-day Lhasa) to be the capital. It seems to have been a well-wooded and well-watered place at that time. The land was fertile, and there was plenty of game to be hunted. The heyday of the Tubo Kingdom was during the reign of Trisong Detsen (742-797), the fifth king.

The original name of Lhasa was

A clay pot unearthed from the Chugong ruins.





This picture, preserved in the Norbu Lingka, shows metal workers in the olden days.*

A map of Lhasa made in the early 20th century. The basic layout of the city has remained unchanged since then.

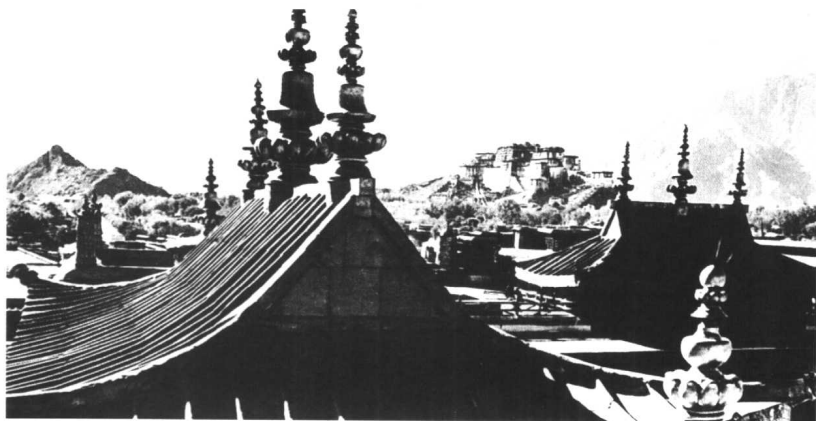


Wotang. The word Rasa, which often appears in historical records, literally means “goat” and “earth.” It probably refers to the legend that goats carried earth to build the Jokhang Monastery. The name Lhasa (literally “sacred land”) came

into being later, when Buddhism became the dominant religion in Tibet.

The establishment of Lhasa as the capital by Songtsan Gampo symbolized the end of strife between the different Tibetan tribes. People started to live a peaceful, settled life, and rules for society were drawn up. The social progress made during this period can be detected at various archeological sites: the cliff carv-

ings at Chakpori (Medicine King) Hill, the Tralhalupuk Grottoes, the ruins of Pabongka, where the Tibetan script was created by Thonmi Sambhota, and others. Such data attest to the great material and social progress made in that period, and show that early Tibetan his-



The golden pinnacle
of the Jokhang
Monastery.* (1957)

tory paralleled what was happening in the Central Plains at roughly the same time. Previous to the establishment of the Tubo Kingdom, there had been a period of strife among the Tibetans similar to that of the Central Plains before Emperor Qin Shihuang (first emperor of the Qin Dynasty) unified China and ended the chaos of the Spring and Autumn (770-476 BC) and the War-

The old town of
Lhasa, seen from the
Potala Palace.* (1957)





Chakpori (Medicine King) Hill lies to the southwest of Lhasa. On top of this hill, there is a school of traditional Tibetan medicine. * (1957)

Stone carvings of the Buddha on Chakpori Hill, under renovation. * (1957)



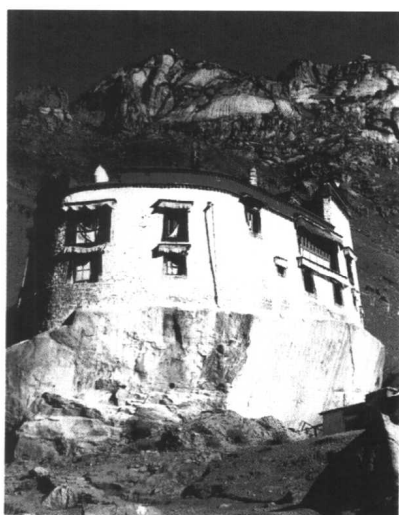
ring States (476-221 BC) periods. This was well summed up by an elderly official of the Tibet Archives whom I met during my trip there: "When the Interior Land is prosperous and powerful, Tibet is peaceful. When the Interior Land is in chaos, Tibet is in upheaval."

The Tubo Kingdom lasted for 300 to 400 years. When it collapsed, Tibet was ruled by contending chieftains from 969 to 1246. During the Song Dynasty (960-1279), which was a weak power, all that remained of connections between Tibet and the Central Plains seems to have been limited to trade in tea and horses. During the Sagya Period, in 13th century, when Tibet's political center moved westward, Tibet was officially incorporated into the territory of China's Yuan Dynasty. Some 130,000 clans in Tibet were given noble titles. Lhasa became one of the manorial estates bestowed on a man named Tshe-sbang,

who was head of 10,000 households. The manorial system was abolished during the Ming Dynasty (1358-1644), but an administrative office was set up in Lhasa, and a policy of "giving more honorific noble titles and pooling more efforts for building the town" was adopted. The

Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) court fostered and supported the Gelug Sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which was centered and rose in Lhasa more than 600 years ago, and encouraged the formation of a theocratic socio-political structure. The grand monasteries of Drepung ('Bras-spungs), Gandan (Dga'-ldan) and Sera were built in Lhasa in this period. With the backing of the Qing court,

Left: Statue of Thonmi Sambhota in the Cave of the Dharma King in the Potala Palace. It is said to have been made in the Tubo period. * (1957).



Lozang Gyatso (1617-1682), the fifth Dalai Lama, was the first autocrat under this new system, which lasted up until the mid-20th century.

The best photographs of old Lhasa were taken by Dainzin Gyatso, the 10th Living Buddha Demo, born in 1901. In addition to using this data, I made many visits to Lhasa, and did a lot of other preparations, including reading once again *The Demise of the Lamaist State*

Right: The Pabongka Monastery is located on Mount Nyangrain on the northern outskirts of Lhasa. It is said that Thonmi Sambhota created the Tibetan script in this monastery in the early Tubo period. * (1957)

by Melvyn C. Goldstein, a huge work consisting of more than 700,000 characters in the Chinese version. I limited my coverage of the subject to the first half of the 20th century. During the preparation work, sometimes I could not help laughing at myself, a resident of



Pilgrims prostrate themselves to show their devotion as they make a circuit of the Potala Palace. * (1957)

Lhasa for more than 20 years, for my ignorance of the city. Perhaps I had too often turned my eyes far beyond the city to the countryside or pastureland, and Lhasa itself had become blurred.