

A History of Western Tibet

Author's Preface

IT is now a little over fifty years since General Sir Alexander Cunningham wrote the first outline of Western Tibetan history. It is found in his *Ladak*. Since then a great mass of material which is of historical interest has accumulated, and thus the time has arrived for the compilation of another popular history of that country. I do not say, "for a scientific history." That may be written when all the historical records of whose existence we know have been edited. There are such historical records, which it is extremely difficult for a European to get hold of, although there can be no doubt about their existence. Among them are the chronicles of several lines of vassal-princes. But, as the principal historical work, the *Ladvags rgyal rabs*, the "Book of the Kings of Ladakh," has been translated in a masterly manner by Dr Karl Marx, late Moravian missionary at Leh, we may now venture on a popular history of Western Tibet, without running the risk of making gross mistakes. Still, there can be no doubt that in another fifty years it will be possible to write a still more reliable book on the same topic. I am particu-

larly glad that this history gives me an opportunity to place before a larger public the results of Dr Karl Marx's excellent historical studies, and thus to give expression to my gratitude to my beloved teacher.

As some knowledge of Buddhism is nowadays considered to form part of one's general education, I have not thought it necessary to explain every one of the many Buddhist mythological names occurring in the book. Only those which are of a purely local interest to Ladakh have been explained.

My thanks are due to Dr F. E. Shawe, of Leh, for kindly reading the first rough copy of my MS., and for many suggestions, additions, and corrections, with regard to the subject-matter; to Major F. M. Peacock, the well-known military novelist, for many suggestions with regard to improving the style; and to the Rev. C. J. Klesel, Secretary of Moravian Missions, for kindly attending to the final revision.

The Tibetan names are spelt in a way to make them pronounceable for English readers. All the vowels should be pronounced as in German or Italian.

A. H. FRANCKE.

Preface

I AM grateful to Mr Francke and the Moravian Mission Office in London for the opportunity of prefixing a word of introduction to this valuable little book. Sir Alexander Cunningham's remarkable faculty of eliciting information enabled him to include in his general account of Ladakh (London, 1854, pp. 318, *sqq.*) an abstract of its history from about A.D. 1580, based upon a native chronicle. He questioned, mistakenly, as now appears, the statement of Csoma Körösi regarding the existence of a continuous narrative from earlier times. In 1866 the late Dr Emil Schlagintweit published at Munich a text and translation of a Tibetan history in three chapters, of which the last relates to Ladakh; and an analogous work had already been mentioned by Schiefner, and was known to exist in a Kalmuck version entitled *Bodhimur*. Nearly all later researches bearing upon the history of Western Tibet—they will be found recorded in Mr Francke's bibliography (pp. 6, *sqq.*)—are due to the Moravian Mission.

Dr Marx's "Three Documents" include the chapter mentioned above and two other originals which he

himself brought to light. Of the former he provided a revised rendering. He did not live to publish his work, which, however, fell into competent hands. Babu Sarat Chandra Das saw through the press the Tibetan portion of the first article, and the translation of the third was supplied by Mrs Theodora Francke, sister-in-law to Dr Marx, and wife of our present author. To Mrs Francke also we are indebted for the publication and translation of an account of the more recent history taken down from the lips of an aged native of Kalatse.

Mr Francke's own pioneer researches into the dialects, customs, folk-lore, ethnology, and archæology of Western Tibet are becoming widely known. The Moravian Mission is to be congratulated upon finding so prolific and versatile a scholar to take up the work of Jäschke and Marx. To him we owe the first Grammar of Ladakhi. He has published several interesting studies concerning the neighbouring Dards, and close to the Tibetan frontier he has revealed traces of ancient settlements of that race. We have already from him a language map of the wide territory within his purview, and—not to mention minor poetry and proverbial lore—a local version of the national epos of Kesar, celebrated throughout Central and Eastern Asia. Last, but in our present connection most important of all, we should mention two fasciculi of Tibetan inscriptions, discovered and copied by him. A future *Corpus Inscriptionum Tibeticarum* will look back to this beginning; and in the meanwhile the published inscriptions supply, by

checking the statements of the monkish chroniclers, a valuable element in this History. The reader who is also a traveller will not fail to profit furthermore by the archæological guidance which Mr Francke has thoughtfully supplied (pp. 9-11).

Can we spare a word to that remarkable example of journalistic enterprise, the *La-dwags-kyi-Ag-bār*, or *Ladakhi News*, which each month conveys to those high and remote valleys, in native script and language, the news of India and the world? *The Story of Jesus Christ in Ladakhi* (second edition, 1906) belongs to the more special work of the Mission. I do not think that the Moravian Society has reason to regret the labours of its representatives in the field of scholarship: that such labours are far from alien to its objects might be known from the practice of kindred Societies, which have contributed eminent names to the study of, one might almost say, every Indian language and literature. And the English reader may repose every confidence in this interestingly written *History of Western Tibet*, as the outcome, not only of scholarly enterprise and research, but also of familiarity with the country and the people.

F. W. THOMAS.

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INTRODUCTION

THE reader of the history of Western Tibet will probably like to know from what sources the information regarding this topic has been drawn. The sources are of two kinds: some are foreign, and some Western Tibetan. The latter are of the greatest interest to us, and are of a two-fold character: we possess records on stone as well as on paper. Of the former, which cover the time from 200 B.C.—1900 A.D., only comparatively little has become known up to the present, the reason being that systematic and thorough researches in that domain have not yet been made. Also, regarding the records on paper, although what is probably the most important work, the chronicles of the kings of Leh (or Ladakh), has been edited, much remains to be done. I have heard of the existence of the following historical works which have never yet been examined by a European: the chronicles of the vassal-chiefs of Chigtan;¹ the

¹ The present ex-chief of Chigtan tells me, however, that the only existing MS. of this historical work was lost during his lifetime.

chronicles of the village of Sakti ; and the "history of the monasteries," as it is found, I am told, in the *Bidur* (Vaidurya) *gserpo*. It is very probable that there are many more historical works in existence in the country, the names of which will be discovered in course of time. Besides these books, some villages are in possession of shorter documents on paper, in particular edicts of several kings, to collect and edit which will be a necessary preliminary to a scientific study of our history. One of these documents, an edict by King Nyima namgyal, will be found translated in these pages.

Let us now examine the general character of Ladakh historiography, especially the chronicles of Ladakh on which the following history is chiefly based. The chronicles, so far as they are made use of here, cover the time from 900-1842 A.D. But as the historiography did not stop with the loss of independence of the kingdom, but has been continued down to the present, the Ladakhi chronicles comprise a full millennium by this time. The character of the work is not the same during the different periods it describes. Its most ancient part can hardly be called a history ; nor was it apparently meant to be such. It was begun as a pedigree of the kings of Leh, whose chief intention it was to prove their descent from the famous line of the ancient kings of Lhasa. Thus the first portion of the work, covering roughly the period of 900-1400 A.D., does not contain much besides mere names. About the year 1400 the account begins to become fuller. This may be due

to the fact that the second dynasty branched off at about that time, and this new line of kings may have had a stronger instinct for history. At any rate, the accounts grow in fulness after 1400 A.D. Still, they leave much to be desired from a European point of view. The writers were Lamas, and to them the greatest events during the reign of a king were his presents to Lamas and monasteries, or his building of chortens and mani walls. Much ink has been expended on these events, which are of very little interest to the average European. On the other hand, the campaigns of the kings are treated with extraordinary brevity, and of their economical work we hear nothing at all. Only in the case of the last few kings are we able to form an idea of their characters, and of tactics employed during the campaigns we hear nothing. The historian is quite satisfied with telling us the final result of the campaign. Thus we see that all those points which go to make a history of a country serviceable are missing in these Western Tibetan records; and yet, the naïve tone of the historians has often a charm of its own.

An important question is this: Do the Ladakhi historians tell the truth, or is their history entirely or partially fabricated matter? The best test of the veracity of an historical account is its comparison with other entirely independent documents. Only in a very few cases are we able to compare a Western Tibetan account of an event with that of a foreign country. Of greater importance in that respect are the many inscriptions on rock and stone which are

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scattered all over the country. I have made a special study of these records, and have come to the following conclusion. From the inscriptions it becomes evident that at any rate the kings of the Namgyal dynasty are historical realities, and their order of succession is the same on the records on stone as in the chronicles. Records containing the names of all of them have been found, from Lhawang namgyal down to Tsepaldorje namgyal. As far as contemporary history of other countries can be adduced by way of comparison, the chronicles do not contain anything that conflicts with them. The test of the veracity of the account of the first dynasty is of a more insufficient nature. Records on stone, relating to the time from 900-1400, are rarer than those of later times, and several of them do not contain the proper name of the sovereign. This much has so far come to light. King *Bum Lde's* name is found on the rock at Mulbe which contains an edict by him. An inscription at Kalatse, which tells of the construction of a bridge across the Indus, can with great certainty be attributed to King *Lhachen naglug*, although it only speaks of "the great king," for the date given on the boulder and the date given in the chronicles for the founding of Kalatse coincide. Again, on a rock near Daru, we read the name of a king *Lhachen kun ga namgyal* which cannot be found in the chronicles as we have them now. However, it is quite possible that only part of his name, *Lha gyal*, has been preserved to us in the chronicles. Thus the testimony of the inscriptions which have become known up to the present

does not go very far with regard to the accuracy of the first part of the chronicles. Here folklore comes to our aid. It has preserved the names of two more kings of the first dynasty in two songs, the drift of which is not in opposition to what the chronicles say about them; these are the kings *Nyima gon* and *Jopal*. And the name of yet another king, or, at least, prince, of Western Tibet, Prince *Rinchen*, is attested by the chronicles of Kashmir. Certainly, we should be glad to be able to adduce more arguments to prove the accuracy of the first half of our chronicles. However, what can be adduced is in accordance with its statements, even with regard to chronology, and I think we have a right to accept also the first part of the history as on the whole true and reliable.

In no case do the Western Tibetan chronicles enable us to fix the time of the reign of a king exactly. As, however, several kings were contemporaries of other historical personalities, whose dates can be fixed, we are in a position to furnish all the Ladakhi kings with approximate dates. With regard to the second dynasty, eventual mistakes can hardly amount to more than a decade. From the outset it must be understood that the reign of a certain king may have been longer or shorter than the period given in this history; but it is probable that some years of his actual reign coincide with some of the years given here. The fixed dates on which hinges the whole chronology given in this book are the following: Langdarma, 900-921 A.D.; Tsongkapa,

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the contemporary of King Bum Lde, 1378-1441 (or 1355-1418) A.D.; the Balti war, under Jamyang namgyal, 1580-1600 A.D., according to Cunningham, probably from Mohammedan sources; the siege of Basgo, 1646-47 A.D., under Delegs namgyal; and the Dogra wars, 1834-1842 A.D. The longest period without a fixed date is 900 to about 1400 A.D. It is filled up by assigning to each of the kings twenty-five years. According to European conceptions, the average duration of a generation is thirty years. But as the Tibetans marry rather early, the duration of a generation may be shorter here.

The most important foreign documents which are of particular value for a history of Western Tibet are: (1) The *Rājataranginī* (chronicles of Kashmir) by Kalhana, for the Chinese and Kashmiri expeditions to Western Tibet, in the beginning of the eighth century; (2) the annals of the Chinese Tang dynasty, for the same period; (3) the *Rājataranginī* (chronicles of Kashmir) by Jonarāja, for the career of Rinchana Bhoti, in the beginning of the fourteenth century; (4) the account of the Mogul historian, Mir Izzet Ullah, for details about the siege of Basgo, 1646-1647; (5) the account of the Dogra war, 1834-1839, by Basti Ram, a Dogra officer, communicated by Cunningham; (6) Central Tibetan historical works in several instances.

In the following, the literature which has been made use of for the individual chapters is enumerated:—

Chapter I. *Ladak*, by General Sir Alexander