

CHAPTER I.

SOUTH-WESTERN TIBET IN INDIAN ANTIQUITY.

To the Hindus and their ancestors South-Western Tibet has been known since thousands of years, and indeed we are here moving on ground which was classic when the foundation stone of Rome was laid. Their knowledge has, however, been very superficial, and the few glimpses of actual geography we obtain from their ancient books almost disappear in interminable epic songs, in legends and in tales. But there is at any rate a certain foundation of reality, which proves that the peoples of India knew the existence of the very high and extensive mountains to the north, as well as Mount Kailas, the lakes Manasarovar and Rakas-tal, and the regions in which the great Indian rivers have their sources. As an introduction to the geographical investigation of South-Western Tibet I will therefore use some quotations from old Indian books.

In the Buddhist world-system Mount Meru or Sumeru, the Ri-rab of the Tibetans, the great venerable Olympus, rises from the axis of the earth, and forms the centre and foundation of the universe. Its four sides consist of gold, crystal, silver and sapphire. In concentric circles Mount Meru is surrounded by seven seas and seven rings of golden mountains. In the ocean around this King of Mountains are the four great continents or world-islands with their satellites. Three of these continents are fabulous, and only the fourth, the one to the south, Jambudvīpa, has a real geographical foundation, and corresponds to the world as far as it was known to the Indians, namely, the Indian peninsula, with the Bodhi-tree of Budh Gaya in its centre. »It is shaped like the shoulder-blade of a sheep, this idea being evidently suggested by the shape of the Indian peninsula which was the prototype of Jambudvīpa, as Mount Kailas in the Himalayas and N.E. of India was that of Mount Meru.»¹

¹ Waddell: *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*. London 1895, p. 78 et seq. Of Jambudvīpa Köppen says: »in ihm erstreckt sich der Himavant mit dem See Anavatapta (im Pāli Anotatta, der buddhistische Name des Mānasa-Sees), aus welchem die vier grossen Ströme nach den vier Himmels-gegenden fliessen, der Ganges nach Osten, der Indus nach Süden, der Vatsch (Oxus) nach Westen,