

Some 15 years later Sir Henry Rawlinson fixed his view in a most surprising way. He believed he had found a new key to the problem from NEY ELIAS' journey across the *Pamir Plateau*, from the vicinity of Yangi-hisar to Shignān. Rawlinson had identified Trotter's »Central Pamir track» with the famous trade-route of antiquity . . . , »but I had not then sufficient evidence to prove that Huang-Tsang, the Chinese traveller of the seventh century, had followed the same track, or that the famous *Dragon Lake*, the central point of Jambu-dwipa, and the holiest spot in the whole Buddhist cosmogony, which he had assigned to this region, was really to be identified on the line between Kashgar and Shignān. Mr. Ney Elias' journey has thrown an unexpected light on this subject. We now find that the *Rang-Kul*, which occurs at the seventh stage from the eastern border of the Pámir Plateau, and which, with the exception of the great Kara-Kul Lake, lying far away to the north-ward, is the largest expanse of water throughout this mountain region answers very closely to the description of the Buddhist pilgrim.»¹ Rawlinson relates the parallellism of Hsüan-chuang's and Ney Elias' descriptions, which indeed proves very little.² »But the most curious proof of identity is to be found in the Dragon myth which attaches to the lake.» In the cave in the upper part of a little rock near the lake treasures were said to be stored, and, as Ney Elias says, »guarded by a dragon with a large diamond set in his forehead» Rawlinson has forgotten one very important thing: *Rang-köl* does not in the least answer to Hsüan-chuang's hydrographical description. The twin-lakes *Rang-köl* and *Shor-köl* are typical of the kind of shallow lakes which use to form in self-contained basins in Tibet. Lord CURZON says of them:

Rangkul is 4 miles, and Shorkul 6 miles. A remarkable feature of these lakes is that neither does any river discharge into them, nor is there any river-exit.³

After relating the original texts of Hsüan-chuang and his biographers, Lord Curzon finds the most serious inaccuracies in just the hydrography, which I have regarded as the most important means of fixing the itinerary. If *Sor-köl*, WOOD's lake, is supposed to be meant, it has no easterly outflow, and if Chakmakden-köl is intended, it has no westerly effluent. His account stands out as an unmistakable picture of the Pamirs, and we are only left in doubt regarding the particular valley by which Hsüan-chuang travelled. Curzon mentions Klaproth, Landresse, St. Julien, St. Martin, Paquier and Beal amongst those who identify the pilgrim's route with Wood's, *i. e.* up the main valley of the *Panja* to *Sor-köl*.⁴ He mentions RAWLINSON in his earlier writings, and YULE, amongst those who accept the southern track, through *Little Pamir* and along *Chakmakden-köl*. Lord Curzon himself entertains »very little doubt of the correctness of the former hypothesis».⁵ *Sor-köl* is more than double the size of Chakmakden-köl, and may once have been much larger

¹ The Dragon Lake of Pámir. Proc. Roy. Geogr. Soc., Vol. IX, 1887, p. 69 et seq.

² NEY ELIAS, in 1885, said that the Rang-kul was considered to be fresh, just as the Dragon Lake of Hsüan-chuang. But Younghusband, in 1890, said: »The water of Rang-kul is salt, and the colour is a beautiful clear blue». — Journeys in the Pamirs and adjacent Countries. Proc. Roy. Geogr. Soc., Vol. XIV., 1892, p. 227. Hsüan-chuang says: »the water is pure and clear as a mirror; it cannot be fathomed; the colour of the lake is a dark blue; the taste of the water sweet and soft . . .» (Beal). — I found early in 1894 that the lake was »extraordinarily shallow, the two measurements giving 5 feet and 6½ feet respectively». The neighbour, Shor-köl, was, as the name betrays, salt, the Rang-köl nearly fresh and therefore covered with over three feet of ice. — Through Asia, Vol. I, London 1898, p. 206.

³ The Pamirs, p. 49.

⁴ Klaproth, as we have seen, believed that the Dragon Lake was identical with Kara-köl. The Sor-köl (Victoria Lake) was discovered three years after his death in 1835.

⁵ The Pamirs and the Source of the Oxus, London 1896, p. 70.