

boy. He said that then the graves were quite accessible ; that he went down a staircase and came to rooms furnished with boards of pinewood, on which were placed numbers of skulls. A native of Rong whom we met, also asserted that the graves were very deep and furnished with masonry walls. As regards pinewood, I must say that it is a very rare article at rGya, which place is nowadays 150 miles away from the nearest pine tree. When we looked at the graves, we saw only pits in the ground for the superstitious people of Rong had closed them up with earth. As my observations later on in Leh showed me, it is very probable that these ancient graves of Rong belong to the same period as those of Leh, which I have much reason to attribute to the period of the " Empire of the Eastern Women." This State bordered on Ladakh, if it did not include parts of Eastern Ladakh. The Leh graves as well as those of Rong are furnished with masonry walls. Both contained numbers of skulls, a circumstance which points to the custom prevalent in that empire of burying all the higher officials along with the chief. The fact that the skulls were placed on boards in Rong, seems to show that the corpses were cut to pieces. Also at Leh the skulls as well as the vases containing the bones were originally placed on boards which became rotten when irrigation water entered the graves. Most of the larger pots at Leh had holes in the bottom, which shows that they probably had fallen down from a higher position. As excavations in Rong would have been possible only at a considerable sacrifice of time and money, I abandoned the idea for the present.

The next village on the road along the narrow valley from rGya to the Indus is Meru, pronounced Miru. It has a monastery in ruins which was famous in olden days (Plate XXVII, b). It is situated on a hill above the trade road. Its temple occupies the uppermost position on the top of a little conical hill, and the now ruined cells of the monks surround it below. It used to be one of the important monasteries of Ladakh, but its founder is not known. It lost much of its glory, when King Seng-ge-rnam-rgyal made it the " mother " of the Hemis monastery which he built in the Shang valley. On that occasion, not only the " spirit " of the Meru monastery was carried off in a bundle of twigs, but also most of the images were transferred to Hemis. But Meru had to suffer a still greater injury during the Dōgrā wars, when it was plundered, and the monks expelled. At present, there is not much remaining in the temple hall ; one of the frescoes is, however, of unusual interest as it represents Gog-bzang-lha-mo, the mother of Kesar and one of the great pre-Buddhist deities of the Ladakhis. This picture is probably of ancient origin, although it had apparently been renovated from time to time. It was painted at a time when Bon-po art was largely influenced by Buddhist art. The complexion of the goddess is a beautiful white, whilst her hair is black. The hair is raised over the forehead and furnished with a ribbon and a diadem of pearls. Her ear ornaments (probably shells) are white and spiral-shaped, and her dress is white with blue and red seams. In her hand she carries a white cup.

Opposite the monastery, there is a hill with cave dwellings, probably the most ancient inhabited locality at Meru. It is called *Baho* ('Caves').