

be the messenger of the king in the Saga. And indeed, Shargola is believed to be the home of a legendary messenger *par excellence*. Here, the house of bLon-po Rig-pa-can is still shown to travellers. bLon-po Rig-pa-can is said to have acted as the messenger of King Srong-btsan-sgam-po who sent him to China to fetch a bride for the king. The tale of Rig-pa-can's journey to China is apparently identical with the Prime minister Gar's journey to the same country. I obtained a popular Ladakhi version of the former story, which also contains the tale of the passage of an ant through a spiral labyrinth, as told by Sarat Chandra Das,¹ but the other parts of the Ladakhi tale differ from the Lhasa version. This tale of the minister's embassy is very similar to such episodes of the Kesar Saga as "Kesar's journey to China." The tale of the minister Rig-pa-can's embassy is full of nature-mythology, and may have only a very slight historical foundation. The house in which the minister Rig-pa-can is believed to have been born, is situated near the bridge of Shargola. It is very well built and looks like a nobleman's house; but only a small portion of it has preserved its original beauty. Here also, a Moslem family have taken up their abode and spoilt the old architecture.

The ancient *gdung-rten* (*stūpas*) of Shargola are painted in red, blue and yellow. They are adorned with stucco figures round the base—a feature which is quite unusual in Ladakh. The figures are very time-worn, but seem to represent Garuḍas, or similar fabulous creatures. They are, however, popularly known as Gyad-pa, "heroes," and as the word *Agu* is also used to indicate the heroes of the Kesar Saga, there may be some sort of connection between these figures and Agu Drumba, mentioned above.

The idea that the messenger *par excellence* has his home at Shargola, seems to have been accepted also by Buddhism, when it entered the village. I found here a stone with a rock carving representing Vajra-pāṇi (Phyag-rdor), the constant companion of Buddha on Gandhāra sculptures. This carving is well drenched in oil or ghee, and includes an inscription running from top to bottom which gives the name of the donor, She-rab-zang-po. It looks as if it dates from about the 15th century, to judge by the form of its characters. Vajra-pāṇi is easily confused with Vajra-sattva; in fact, Jäschke asserts that both are generally taken for the same divinity, and thus we find an inscription *Om Badzrastva* on one of the ancient *gdung-rten*. This inscription is raised in stucco and appears to be older than the Vajra-pāṇi inscription.

The convent of Shargola is a genuine cave monastery and is probably very old. Its former name was apparently *Ma-khang*, "Mother house." This name is found in the above-mentioned song of the *gdung-rten*. It may refer to Śrī-Dēvī (dPal-ldan-lha-mo) or her pre-Buddhist equivalent to whom the monastery was evidently dedicated. As it was recently renovated, no ancient wall-paintings or images were found in it; but the present frescoes were possibly painted in imitation of more ancient ones. I noticed the two following pictures: dPal-ldan-lha-mo (Śrī-Dēvī) riding on a male; and Chos-skyong Satra-pa ("Satrapa, the protector of religion"). Can this be a reminiscence of the

¹ *J. A. S. B.*, Vol. L (1881), Part I, p. 220.