

a remarkable course of historical events, for a short period about the middle of the eighth century A. D., invested this barren mountain-land at the extreme north-west confines of India with considerable political and strategical importance to the Chinese Empire. The record preserved of those events in the official Annals of the Chinese T'ang dynasty gives us a glimpse of Gilgit history at that interesting phase, and strikingly illustrates the value which has always attached to the route connecting Gilgit with Kashmīr.

It is only quite recently, and solely through the brilliant researches of Professor Édouard Chavannes, that the Chinese records containing these curious references to Gilgit and the neighbouring mountain-territories have been rendered accessible to the Western student. They have been translated and also elucidated with rare critical acumen in M. Chavannes' *Documents sur les Tou-kiue occidentaux*. In the ninth chapter of the last and purely historical part of his work M. Chavannes has given a lucid exposition of the main events which occurred in the territories between the Oxus and the Indus during the period that witnessed the furthest extension of Chinese power westwards, from the middle of the seventh to the middle of the eighth century of our era¹. A few facts gleaned from this account will suffice to make clear how such a remote region as Gilgit and the adjoining valleys, even as far as Kashmīr, was brought within the sphere of Chinese activity.

Gilgit in the Chinese Annals.

After the destruction of the empire of the Western Turks (658-659 A. D.) China secured suzerainty over a vast region, which comprised both Eastern and Western Turkestan and extended across the Oxus Valley and to territories south of the Hindukush and within the ancient confines of India². The rising power of the Tibetans, who from 670 to 692 A. D. occupied Kāshgar and the Tārīm Basin, combined with dynastic troubles in China itself, reduced Chinese dominion over those distant territories in the West to a more or less nominal condition by the end of the eighth century. But the victorious advance of the Arabs, resumed with fresh vigour during 705-715, under the leadership of Qutayba ibn Muslim, obliged the small states along the Oxus and in Sogdiana to turn to the Imperial Court for protection.

Gilgit between Chinese and Tibetans.

The danger threatening from Muslim conquest was increased by the Tibetans, who, after having been driven back from the Tārīm Basin, were now endeavouring to join hands with the Arabs, their allies, across the Pāmīr region. Against these aggressions from west and south, China during the reign of the energetic Emperor Hsüan-tsung (713-755 A. D.) directed a long series of well-sustained efforts, both diplomatic and military. In the course of the struggle with the Tibetans Gilgit acquired strategic importance; for through it led, then as now, the nearest and most practicable route giving access from the Upper Indus, via Yasīn and the Barōghil Pass, to the central Pāmīrs and the Oxus Valley. It thus became an object of constant and special care for the Imperial Government to keep this gate of invasion firmly closed against the Tibetans, who probably from very early times were in possession of Ladāk, and had thence pushed down along the Indus into Baltistān or Skardo, the immediate neighbour of Gilgit on the south-west.

On examining the notice 'on the Great and the Little P'o-lü' as now presented by M. Chavannes from the T'ang Annals, we cannot fail to recognize, with the learned translator, that it is this territory of Baltistān which is meant by the term 'Great P'o-lü'³. It is correctly

'Great P'o-lü' of T'ang Annals.

¹ See Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, pp. 287 sqq.

² Compare the detailed analysis of the Chinese administrative divisions established between the Oxus and Indus, *Turcs occid.*, pp. 277 sqq., 280; also S. Lévi, *Journal asiat.*, 1900, xv. pp. 305, 315.

³ See Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, pp. 149 sq. The iden-

tification of 'Great P'o-lü (Po-liu)' with Ladāk, suggested by Sir H. Yule, *Cathay*, p. lxx, and previously also accepted by me (*Rājat.*, II. p. 435), was based on an imperfect extract of this notice from the T'ang Annals, given by Rémusat, *Nouveaux mélanges asiat.*, i. p. 194; it cannot any longer be maintained.