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THE SQUARE VIEW AND THE OUTSTRETCHED DEMONESS

To attempt to reach the complexity of visitors' experience, we must return to the Tibetans themselves. They too have highly moral ideas about their country, but these are expressed in a shape and style more complex and more capable of variety than the ideas of foreigners or the translated recollections of exiles. Tibetans' views include, for example, the square, the demoness, the concentric, and the multilayered.

R. A. Stein, one of the most distinguished Western Tibetologists, suggested that Tibetans in early medieval times conceived their *locus mundi* not only as a place encircled but also as a place *encadré*. That is, they imagined themselves as surrounded by other lands, all in some way more powerful than theirs. This conception of a four-sided arrangement around their country suggests a square, although they themselves did not use that term. In classical Tibetan chronicles and writings, the arrangement was described in terms of the four kings of the four directions, each possessing a different form of knowledge and capacity:

To the east, in China, is the king of divination;
In the south, in India, is the king of religion;

To the west, in Persia, is the king of wealth;
In the north is Gesar, the king of soldiers and war.

There was a peculiar aspect to this notion: one of self-displacement. Tibetans seem to have come to regard the moral heart of the square view as lying not in its geographic center but in the south, in India. This configuration, Stein says, was ordered according to moral or religious principles, with the northern part of the square constituting the least moral and most irreligious area. In this respect it seems that Tibetans saw their nation as having moved within this arrangement at certain times, so that it was at one time in the center and later at its periphery.

The arrangement reflected the physical realities of Tibet: the *chang-thang*—literally, the northern plain, stretching across the upper areas of northern and western Tibet—is a vast expanse that is largely uninhabitable, even by nomads and certainly by farmers or city dwellers. The south (and more especially the southeast), being at a lower elevation, is cultivable, more densely populated, and often lush in vegetation and edible produce; it includes the Yarlung valley, the reputed source of the Tibetan kingdom, as well as Samye, the earliest seat of what became the state religion. Lhasa lies in a valley at about 12,000 feet between the higher plateau and the river-fed areas to its south. A similar construction can be formed in miniature out of the geography of Lhasa, as was done in Tibetan and Chinese geomancy: to the south is the "wriggling turquoise dragon" that is the Kyichu River, and to the north are the marshlands behind Lhalu, to this day still for the most part uninhabited, and beyond them the "crawling tortoise" and the "tiger" mountains. The roads to Lhasa run east and west, but little more than mule tracks run to the north. All around the city, mountains tower, reaching to the sky.

*At the point where the pilgrim leaves the Barkor Square to enter the north side of the circuit, the alley narrows and the crowd of hawkers, devotees, pilgrims from the east, and shopkeepers is thrust more closely one upon the other. At that point, just past the shops owned by the Panchen Lama and near the yogurt sellers' lane, I heard a voice whisper behind my left shoulder. "*Amchi, amchi.*" The Tibetan word for doctor. Someone needed medicine. I stopped and turned around.*

I felt the people around me stiffen as I became an obstruction to the wave of human traffic. Ancient mothers with their prayer wheels skirted me as

they hobbled past. Khampas with braided hair strode by, looking for some new trade in turquoise of suspect origin. Among the faces of the crowd there was no expression of recognition or appeal. All eyes looked down or forward, and everyone continued past me; no one stopped or gestured. A middle-aged man, rather lean and tired in his stance, who might have been closest at my shoulder, pushed past me on his way around the temple, hurrying slightly, not looking back. I never saw his face.

I stood in the crowd and cursed. The movement of my head would have signaled to any watcher that I had been spoken to, and by whom. The whisperer must have thought I would know to follow him or her until we were out of sight of any observer before turning my head. I had misread the message.

The thin man, if it was he who had spoken, had already turned the next curve of the Barkor, past the corner where the carpets are laid out, beside the lane that leads to the Tromsikhang. If anyone had been watching, they would not have had time to follow him: he was safe. But someone who needed medicine was not.

It was the second time. Two days earlier, someone else had spoken to me as I was standing in front of the Jokhang, in the square itself. He had said to bring a doctor at three that afternoon, and gestured toward a small door set within the temple porch. I had found an American in the Banakshöl Hotel who had just finished medical school, who said he was a doctor. He was six feet tall and so dangerously conspicuous, but he would know how to treat the wounded. The two of us had waited an hour or more that afternoon, watching the doorway from across the square. No one came. The door stayed locked. Perhaps someone in the crowd was watching, but we were too conspicuous. We couldn't be approached.

At the dawn of the kingdom, Tibetans apparently saw themselves as situated in the center of their country's quadrangular arrangement. In the old documents from the imperial or dynastic era when Tibet was a military power, from the seventh to the ninth centuries, an oft-quoted poem had described Tibet as "the heart of the continent, the source of all rivers," and the area around Lhasa had been known as *Ü*, or the center. That term has never ceased to be used by Tibetans. But, perhaps around the end of the eleventh century, as Buddhism became prevalent for a second time, their perception of themselves was reordered according to a notion of morality within which they saw themselves as belonging to the northern, barren region—"as savages living in the north of the world," as Stein puts it.

It was a piece of self-deprecation that shows the Tibetans as very different in their modeling of space from their Chinese neighbors, who placed themselves in the *Zhongguo*, the Central Kingdom, residing unequivocally at the center of their world, representing the height of culture and power within their moral scheme. The Chinese view may seem arrogant to others, but it is perhaps only a variation of the nineteenth-century image of the British empire as a roseate suffusion on a map, as if nature itself intended pink ink to fill up available spaces in atlases.

Tibetan writers in the fourteenth century accentuated their peripherality in the eyes of others. "Not one single person is fond of the Tibetans, they say that Tibet is the kingdom of the hungry ghosts," records one chronicle, citing the words of a Chinese courtesan to a Tibetan minister who visited the Tang court in about 640. It goes on to describe the reaction of the Emperor Taizong and his court to the message delivered by the minister, mGar Tongtsen:

> The emperor looked at mGar with piercing eyes, [and then] the emperor and retinue burst into a roaring and unbecoming laughter. The emperor then proclaimed: "This impossible story is most wondrous! I am a descendant in unbroken line, up until the present, of the emperor of all China. The Tibetan king of yours cannot cope with my prowess and might. Go and ask whether your king is capable of enacting a secular law based upon the ten virtues!... Your Tibetan king is a great swaggerer. Does he or does he not hold the power to erect temples in that Tibetan country of yours?... In your country do you possess the riches that will enable you to take comfort in the five sensual pleasures?"

The texts revel in these insults to the Tibetan nation, because in response to each of the emperor's questions, mGar hands over a letter already written by the Tibetan king, answering each in turn. The emperor responds to the letter with yet more demands, and twice more is given prewritten replies that mGar has brought from Lhasa. For this feat mGar is permitted to enter a competition with the ministers of four other realms, whom he outwits, thus winning a Chinese princess for his king. The prejudices of power, this seems to say, are predictable to those who are less powerful but more insightful. The Tibetan view, at least in the eleventh century and probably much earlier, thus appears not to have been Tibetocentric or imperial, since it had come to regard power

and high culture as emanating from elsewhere. This was not necessarily a result of modesty or lack of pride, for it had a function: it gave later rulers the grounds to claim not only a kind of inverted pride in their intellectual resourcefulness and skill but also a moral authority that stemmed from somewhere more civilized than their local competitors. The Tibetan rulers who wished to portray themselves as Buddhist thus asserted that the source of their standing and their claim to moral dominance was India, since it supplied the Buddhist teaching.

This explanation meant that Tibetan history was rewritten to present the arrival of Buddhism and the ascendancy of its protector-kings as a second point of transition, when the northern, barbaric Tibet imported the qualities of a central, civilized land. Tibetan historians writing within this scheme identify that point first with the ascendancy of the monarch Srongtsen Gampo in the seventh century—he would be revered subsequently as a *chögyal* or *dharmaraja*, a "religious king," not necessarily entirely accurately—and second after a 200-year "dark" period during which Buddhism was largely absent, with the arrival in Tibet of Indian scholar-monks such as Atisha around the year 1042. It is not a view wholly supported by historical detail, since some scholars argue that a thriving, earlier Tibetan culture had existed before either of these points of transition, and since many of Tibet's influences came from other parts of the square—from the Arabs, the Persians, the Uighurs, the Chinese, and the Mongolians. Medieval writing recalled the divinatory abilities introduced from China while emphasizing the religious inspiration coming from the south, but increasingly the latter came to be the prevalent way of recalling history in Tibet.

In resorting to this strategy of Buddhist legitimation, Tibetans have therefore not drawn much upon the earlier history of Tibet, when it was a great and expanding empire of its own in the seventh and eighth centuries. That achievement of conquest and expansiveness does not seem to have been seen as a source of authority and legitimacy, even though the Tibetans had conquered much of western China, even entering the great Chinese city of Xi'an in 763 and briefly appointing a puppet emperor there. In the later Tibetan, specifically Buddhist, view of the state, authority was to be derived from the excellence of one's cultural and religious inheritance or, literally, the *import*ance of foreign knowledge rather than military supremacy.

The modern Chinese state too seeks to avoid claiming authority by the act of conquest. As a communist regime, it hinges its self-image on

notions of egalitarianism and social improvement and so, not unlike Tibet, has preferred to define a moral source for its legitimacy rather than rely on rights acquired through force or empire-building. In this respect the difference between the Chinese and the Tibetans is that in practice the Chinese Communists have not been able to dispense with visible reliance on force to sustain their claim, while the Tibetans before 1959 had successfully presented religion as the fount and practical expression of their legitimacy. That is at least how Tibetan politicians and some of their historians present it.

So the notion of the square was in fact more complex than at first appears. It was a shifting idea in which one seems to denigrate oneself, only to acquire the prestige of imported foreign attributes. Thus the square migrated to wherever the current moral heartland could be claimed to have arisen. As we shall see, part of what made Tibetan rulers feel that they had inherited moral or religious worth from the southern lands was architectural: the construction of temples and the creation of a city were key indicators that a morally valid civilization could be relocated in Tibet, and that Tibet could gradually become a center in its world.

The third time it happened, I was in the Barkor. I was on the north side, by the entrance to Murunyingpa, when someone nudged me again. They touched me gently as they passed, and I knew this time that I should just follow. He was shorter, older than the man I had seen before. From behind he seemed more confident, relaxed.

He took the alley that leads from the northeast darchen, *the prayer-flag pole, toward the Kirey, and then turned down another passage toward the mosque. There he stopped and turned around, waiting for me to reach him. The street seemed deserted, but we were clearly visible; it was no place to talk. I had an idea: I would lead him to the Shatra mansion, where my friend B. stayed, and there we would be safe.*

I passed him without speaking, motioning slightly, and he began to follow. I made my way back to the Barkor and rejoined it at the southeast corner, mingling with the crowd until the turning by the primary school. There I turned left, just before the site where workers were clearing the remains of the burned police station so that rebuilding could begin. I passed the long building that said it was a cinema but was probably only a damp room with half a dozen wooden benches, and turned the corner that led toward the Shatra.

There were fewer people in the back streets; I had to be careful to look relaxed. At the corner a young man was tied, hands behind his back, to a

telegraph pole. I stopped for a few moments. He had that blank expression of despondency mixed with total hatred that I had sometimes seen on the face of a Tibetan who was deeply humiliated or insulted. A small group of onlookers read a sign that denounced him for some petty crime. They did nothing to add to his indignity other than stare. I couldn't tell what they thought of the methods of late revolutionary justice; I imagined it in this case not very different from prerevolutionary justice.

The great, ornamented porch of the former aristocratic mansion of Shatra was only a few yards away. Thirty years before, the doorway must have marked it as the house of a great family. I stopped briefly in front of it to check that my companion could see me enter, then turned into the courtyard. Around it on two sides ran a wooden balcony, and before me were the great south-facing dormer windows that marked the former day rooms of the nobles, designed to catch as much as possible of the Himalayan sun. Those rooms would have been handed to servants after the owners fled at the time of the uprising; now each room or pair of rooms was rented to a different family, and the place, like everywhere in the Old City, had fallen into disrepair.

I lingered in the courtyard, where a woman was washing clothes at the single pump, long enough so the man could see me take the staircase to the right. I waited at its top until he joined me.

There was, in fact, a more multivalent scheme in Tibetan historiography, which Stein himself noted was related to the view of the surrounding world as four-sided: the perception of nesting or concentric squares, embedded within the notion of the supine demoness. This famous image is a form of geomantic modeling of space, a technology the highest forms of which the Tibetans, as we have seen, associated with China. In particular, Tibetan history attributes a geomantic contribution made to their nation-building project by Wencheng, the Chinese princess given in 641 by the Emperor Taizong to the Tibetan king Srongtsen Gampo: it was this lady whose hand the minister mGar had requested at the imperial court, eliciting such mockery. To Chinese historians, the marriage came to be part of a process that we might call the continuous back-writing of history, which seeks ever older evidence that Tibet had in one or another sense long been part of the Chinese domain. But the marriage of Wencheng represented more than that: for the Chinese it symbolized the acquisition of civilization by the Tibetans, and not from the south, but from the east.

> Elsewhere in the vast Tang domain, civilisation was reaching its apex, with the economy expanding and flourishing and the arts and all fields of culture attaining resplendent heights. An admirer of Tang civilisation, Songcain Gambo [Srongtsen Gampo] made several matrimonial approaches and finally brought himself to ask the emperor for the hand of one of the imperial daughters.

Thus a current Chinese handbook on Tibet, published in Beijing under the title *Tibet Today and Yesterday*. The book presents Wencheng as the person who introduced technology, music, and Chinese influence into Tibet. Protagonists of this view like to praise her, in particular, for having persuaded Tibetans to stop painting their faces red, which they supposedly had done until then to make themselves look more frightening in battle.

The perception of Wencheng as a civilizer is directly relevant to our study of Lhasa, for it shows that the idea of civilization was linked, in Chinese as in Roman thinking, to the idea of the city: she is seen as having made people into *civitates*, inhabitants of a city. For it was at the time of Srongtsen Gampo that the capital of Tibet moved from Yarlung to the banks of the Kyichu. He was the founder of Lhasa, and Wencheng was, in some presentations of this history, the source of his inspiration. Whether these accounts are accurate or not, she is seen as the main diviner siting the temples that would give the new city its prestige and its name—*Lha sa*, the place of the gods.

Tibetan writers do not generally credit her with the city's founding as such. The legend of its origin is picturesquely described by the contemporary Tibetan folklorist Tiley Chodag:

> On one auspicious day, at the height of summer, the ambitious prince happened to be bathing in the limpid waters of the Kyichu river [which ran past his birthplace in Gyama Trikhang, some 40 miles upstream of Lhasa]. As he raised his head and looked into the distance, his attention was aroused by the abundance of water and grass and the beauty of the valley in the centre of which rose the prominent features of the Red Hill (Marpori) and Chagpori Hill. Geographically the place was of great strategic importance. Moreover, the spot was traditionally held to be a holy place, as Srongtsen Gampo's ancestor Lhato Thori Nyantsen, who was an

> incarnation of a heavenly god, had gone into meditation in seclusion on the high and solitary Red Hill as an example to later generations. Srongtsen Gampo resolved forthwith to shift the capital.

Chodag goes on to present the move as also the result of pragmatic logic—it provided, he says, the strategic base for Srongtsen Gampo's epic military expansion to the south and west, and for his expeditions east into western China. It was the early success of these expeditions that led to the requests sent to both the Nepalese king and the Chinese emperor for a princess as a bride; both, after some persuasion, complied. Srongtsen Gampo is thus always shown by earlier Tibetan artists, as the four-sided view would prefer, with one wife from the south and one from the east; his four or five Tibetan wives do not appear in the picture. Some of these accounts say that Srongtsen Gampo had moved his capital to the banks of the Kyichu in 633, eight years before Wencheng reached his country. If these are correct, it could be said that it was the move to Lhasa that brought Wencheng to Tibet rather than the other way around.

Shortly after the seat of the future Tibetan emperor was moved to the site that became known as Lhasa, the first step was taken, we are told, in constructing the great symbol of Tibetan urbanity that was later to become the Potala. We do not know if this was inspired by the Chinese princess—Tiley Chodag, writing from within Tibet, says ambiguously that her arrival at Lhasa "marked its transformation from a deserted swamp into a prosperous, thriving city," a form of words that suggests that she was able to bring assistance or funding for the work of draining marshlands and restraining floods, a modern interpretation of the many texts concerning temple construction in her time that dealt primarily with the challenges posed by *nāga*s or water demons and other forces. In these accounts Wencheng is always credited by Tibetan writers as the source of Srongtsen Gampo's magical success in outwitting the *nāga*s in the project of building the temples that were to be the heart of the new city.

Before we consider that magical dimension, we should first look more closely at the official Chinese view of Wencheng. Chinese records say that she and her escort introduced not only wine making, flour milling, paper making, and silk and ink making, but also the practice of agriculture. This echoes the Roman analogy, where the getting of civilization involves the suppression of nature and the building of cities: agriculture

is, of course, putting the earth to the plow, and so is often seen as the most thorough form of the vanquishing of nature; the sexual implications of this view have been pursued by Michel Tournier in his writings. We will see later an analogy to this erotic conception of the conquering of natural forces in the perception of Lhasa credited to Wencheng.

If we accept the view that the Tang princess brought plowing as well as ink making to Tibet, her mission would seem a rational, pragmatic endeavor, rather than the mystical version preferred by the Tibetans. So it is for Chinese economists and dialecticians, for whom the arrival of Wencheng marked the moment when Tibetan society evolved from the level of pastoralists to that of cultivators. This meshes with the official view of China's "minority nationalities," which sees all peoples as occupying various levels in the predetermined process of social evolution—that is, the progression from the barbarism of hunting and gathering to the higher levels of industrialization, commerce, maximal exploitation of natural resources, and eventually socialism, or, in other words, modern Chinese society. Thus, if Wencheng marks this crucial stage in the civilizing of Tibetans, it can be argued that China, not India, played the crucial role in Tibetans' early evolution. By an unclear logic of inference, this is seen as supporting China's official view today, which is that Tibetans cannot evolve without the leadership of the Communist Party.

This depiction of Wencheng has therefore been incorporated into Chinese orthodoxy concerning Tibetan history. That agriculture is at the cloudy center of this view can be seen from the fact that it became dangerous to dispute its position in the Wencheng story: in the 1980s one Tibetan scholar, Chab-gag Dorje Tsering, is said to have been stripped of his post at the China Tibetology Institute in Beijing for having written that it was not Wencheng who had introduced farming to Tibet, although it is clear that the arrival of agriculture long preceded her, apart from, according to medieval histories, "the cultivation of radishes and turnips." The official view has anyway become since 1980 an industry of its own, with a stream of films, books, plays, and television series presenting the tale of the "wise and pretty princess" and her journey to Lhasa, used to depict the bringing of civilization from China to Tibet as a feminine form of state beneficence rather than a masculine resort to force.

That this involves some liberties with Tibetan history can be detected from the fact that some Tibetan sources (which also claim that the Chinese emperor was forced or tricked rather than begged by Srongtsen

Gampo to yield up a princess for marriage) say she was anything but pretty—one account claims that the Tibetan minister mGar was able to recognize her from among 300 women in the court by her lack of beauty, since he reasoned that an unattractive woman other than a princess would not have been presented to him. This account seems not to have deterred the same minister from getting her with child on the long journey to Lhasa, according to some later histories, which also imply that it was some years before Srongtsen got around even to meeting her once she had arrived. These versions are not found in all accounts, which may be why they have not affected the judgment of casting directors for the various state-sponsored films and television dramas that have been made in China about the princess, who always appears as ravishingly attractive.

Until the mid–1980s it had been argued that Wencheng's marriage was legal justification for China's invasion or reclamation of Tibet in 1950. This claim is nowadays replaced by a more sustainable argument, according to which China's formal right to ownership stems from a voluntary submission by the leaders of the Sakya clan—the predecessors of the squabbling lamas described by Jamyang Sakya in her autobiography—to the Yuan or Mongol leaders of China in the thirteenth century. Thus Wencheng's marriage to the Tibetan emperor has been described by official writers since the 1980s as having brought the two peoples into something "more than close friendship." But it represents far more than that: this marriage is a battle site in the struggle between Tibetan and Chinese writers over linear and square-based views of history, and an illustration of the perilous ambiguity of the latter, in which Tibetans had taken pride in denying their centrality and crediting the outside as the source of their legitimacy, thus making themselves vulnerable to the imposition of alternate histories and authority.

The enduring Tibetan perception of Wencheng's contribution does not center on the introduction of agriculture or other material benefits to Tibet, despite the acknowledgment of the turnips. It focuses not on economic inputs but on the mystical insight and sacred architecture that she contributed: she is seen as a visionary whose geomantic expertise enabled the great temples of Lhasa to be constructed on the most auspicious sites. She was thus either the source or a beneficiary of the Tibetan vision of the four-sided configuration, which attributed to the East exceptional ability in divination. For it is clear that in Tibetan tradition

religious and divinatory ability were two different forms of cultural and intellectual excellence, to be found in and imported from different corners of the world. Western scholarship and history of Tibet has focused almost entirely on the first form and marginalized the second, just as Chinese historians have focused on what they see as civilizational attributes. But the ability to read the physical shape of the present for signs of the future is a form of knowledge highly valued in Tibetan culture and experience and central to the story of the founding of Lhasa.

B. was effusive, hospitable as ever. She showed scarcely a moment's surprise to see me arrive with a stranger even in such tense times, though ordinary Tibetans rarely dared to enter a foreign teacher's apartment or a tourist's hotel room. Her instinct anyway was to be open and convivial. Even if she had warned me then, it was too late.

She made tea and talked about nothing to put our visitor at ease; he sat in the kitchen beside the door. He would not enter the second, larger room. Some form of etiquette, I presumed. Someone was knocking repeatedly at the door. He shouted from the corridor that he needed to talk to B. about her keys. The caretaker. I unbolted the door and saw again one of those Tibetan expressions that lacks the smile or joviality or serenity of which foreign photographers are enamored. His face was nervous, intent, determined. Whatever the issue was, it had nothing to do with a key or with B.: once the door was open, he spoke a few brief words to my visitor, then left. B. never even saw him.

The visitor said little while we pressed tea upon him. He made his excuses and left soon afterward. Whatever had made him stop me in the Barkor now seemed less urgent. He had said something about his brother being ill, but had not asked for any medicine. His English was good—he had been educated in Nepal—and he said he would find us in a few days if he needed anything.

There must have been some kind of appointment, because I remember thinking it strange that two weeks later, neither of us had heard from him again. When Nick, another Western tourist, came to me and said he had met him in the street, I was not totally surprised to hear that he'd said he had been delayed for a week. He had been coming back from Shigatse, he said, and had been held up by all the police checks on the road. Everything had become tense in those days, and traveling was difficult again.

Nick was more concerned with something else. Our friend had asked to know my name. No one asked names in those times. Nick said it meant he was an informer. I said it couldn't be.

A few days later, I came across him myself. This time he said I had to meet him two days hence in a certain shop in the Barkor Square. I knew the place: it was just behind the new police station, the one opened two weeks before, which had previously been unmarked. It didn't seem the safest place to meet.

He said I must bring my friend Nick as well. The two of us had to be there.

My mouth felt dry. I felt the skin across my neck stretch with tension. There could be only one reason he wanted us both there. It was a chapter that had to be closed; I had read it wrong again.

I never saw him after that. I knew it was time to go.

By the time the buses were running to the border again and all of us could leave, another Tibetan quietly explained to me. The brother had not been ill; he was in prison. The police had visited my friend a few days after our meeting in the Shatra, and told him to get the names of the Westerners who had given medicine to those who had been shot. He now worked for them. There hadn't been a week-long trip to Shigatse. There had just been a week-long process of reminding him what might happen to his brother if he failed to cooperate.

Later I realized how he had been trapped. All Tibetan houses are built around a courtyard to which there is only one entrance. To see who comes and goes for each of the fifty or more families living within, you only need one person watching that one entrance. I had led my friend from the alleyway in Kirey to the great porch of the Shatra, across the courtyard, past the caretaker, and up the wooden staircase on the right. I had even opened the door so the caretaker would have a full view of him.

It was time to leave Tibet.

Even as she entered for the first time the valley that would become known as Lhasa, Wencheng is said in the Tibetan histories to have encountered problems that indicated the presence of antagonistic *nāga*s in the area: the cart carrying her gift of a Buddhist statue to the Tibetan king became stuck in the sand and could not be moved. At the same time, the Tibetans and the Nepalese, already concerned by the local spirits' thwarting of their efforts to construct a temple, rushed to the Chinese princess for advice about how to deal with these forces. Wencheng is then said to have performed a divination that enabled her to identify the geomantic character of the mountains and the river surrounding the Lhasa valley:

The eastern mountain peaks rise in waves,
Like angry tigers about to leap;
The two mountains to the west press into the gorge,
Like the outstretched wings of an eagle;
In the south the Kyichu River winds by,
Like a wriggling turquoise dragon;
The northern peaks rise in gentle folds,
Like a tortoise crawling on all fours.

This recognition of the qualities of the terrain completed only part of the process. She also had to identify the *sa dra* or "land enemies," the points of antagonism in the landscape that had to be ritually subdued. This became the source of the Tibetan view of the nested or concentric squares. The divination for which she is most famously remembered is her recognition of an outstretched *srinmo* or demoness lying on her back, with her head toward the northeast and her arms and legs spread-eagled across the country. The limbs of the demoness covered several hundred miles, reaching present-day Bhutan in the south and Kongpo, near the Indian border, in the east. At her center, though, the *srinmo* was much smaller: her breasts were marked by the two low hills that sit on the western side of the Lhasa valley—the Marpori, or Red Hill, on which the Potala now stands, and, immediately beside it, the Chagpori, the Iron Hill, on which the Tibetan Medical College would later be established. A few hundred yards to the west of Chagpori, the hill of Bemari, which now has on its peak the temple of King Gesar, marked the *mons veneris* of the demoness. Midway between these hills lay the Kyishöd Ö-tso, the Lake of Milk, which was her heart, or, some would say, her belly.

The technology of landscape divination required that each of the nodal points of the demoness who lay across the country be capped. The Tibetans, thus advised, set out to pin her to the ground by constructing temples on the key junctures of her anatomy, apparently to protect their emerging state from the threat that she might turn over or stand up. These temple stakes were laid out, at least in theory, in a series of nesting squares: an inner square of four temples, called the *Ru-nön* or "Suppression of the Horns," each between 60 and 200 miles from Lhasa, marked her hips and her shoulders; a middle square, called the *Thandul* or "Border Subduing" temples, held down

the elbows and the knees. An outer square, formed by the four *Yangdul* or "Subduing Beyond the Borders" temples, pinned down her hands and feet. Above all, in order for the she-demon to be stilled, her belly, the Lake of Milk, had to be drained and filled in, and a temple constructed on that spot.

The notion of the three nested squares of the Ru-nön, the Thandul, and the Yangdul may have had in its time more than a merely spiritual function, as it was related to the organizing principle of the four *ru* or "horns," used to describe the areas under the administration of the Tibetan kings and to organize the raising of military forces. But what they tell us about the idea of Lhasa is our main interest here. However we interpret these explanations, they suggest that the city of Lhasa, and the state of Tibet as then depicted, was seen as taming and overcoming elemental forces. In addition, the model of concentric squares has a clearly defined center—it constructs Tibet as a physical and spiritual entity of which Lhasa is the hub. The model also defines the center of Lhasa: it is the temple that was built on the Lake of Milk, the Jokhang, the most sacred of all Tibetan religious monuments. Originally the name Lhasa, the place of the gods, referred to it alone. It is still the religious heart of Tibet and of the Tibetan cultural world.

The demoness view of Tibet indicates other concerns as well. First, it reflects the persistent problem of water in the history of Lhasa: throughout the centuries, the Kyichu River has had to be constantly contained by dikes, and construction has always been restricted by the difficulty of draining the Plain of Milk (the flat land north of the Kyichu), much of which was marshland. "The plain around the capital is almost without exception a water-sodden morass on which it is nearly impossible to travel for a hundred yards without encountering a quagmire," wrote Perceval Landon of the British march on Lhasa some 1,200 years after Wencheng had tried to staunch the Lake of Milk. "The road by which one approaches the capital is a causeway built four or five feet up from the surface of the marsh...the waving rushes of the plain conceal a treacherous depth of slime," he noted. It had long been prophesied that flooding would one day destroy the Lhasa temples, and every spring from 1562 until the 1940s the monks of Drepung renewed the city dikes. The water-sodden pastureland to the northeast of the Potala has resisted the encroachment of the city, and today remains largely free of buildings.

The use of temples simultaneously to contain the demoness and to define the nation's territory also suggests that the idea of the nation is linked to the belief that architecture and construction should triumph over nature. In that sense the idea of the nation is, in this system, similar to the idea of the city, which is the most complex expression of architectural achievement. This is, at least, the view implicitly ascribed to Wencheng and her Chinese astrologers since the eleventh century. The pre-nation state is perceived as a female with her sexuality dominant, and the construction of both the city and the state are achieved by the suppression of these sexual energies. On such a basis is Lhasa built.

In essence this is the standard, Roman model of expanding societies. But the Tibetan description of city and nation building was transformed over the centuries, partly because much of the population remained nomadic and partly because it chose to incorporate a monastic paradigm within its social organization. We have little knowledge of the physical structure of the city between its founding and the seventeenth century, other than that its main buildings were the temple of the Jokhang, sited according to Wencheng's divinations, and the temple of Ramoche, constructed by Wencheng herself in the sand where her cart had been stuck. During much of this time Lhasa was not the political capital or administrative center of the country, as it had been from the seventh to the ninth centuries, but a famous center of pilgrimage and devotion focused on the Jokhang. But by the time the Buddhist scholar and reformer Tsongkhapa died there in 1419, having established the great monasteries that surround the city and having founded what came to be the *Gelugpa*, the ruling school of Tibetan Buddhism, Lhasa had been reinvented: it now housed monasteries that attracted thousands of men committed to a life of celibacy, from whose ranks the future leaders of Tibet would be drawn.

Somehow, Lhasa had redefined itself. Instead of being dedicated to vanquishing nature, many of its people were now involved in the pursuit of higher goals through the restraint of their own natures. When the British arrived 500 years after the great monasteries of Ganden, Drepung, and Sera had been founded, they considered the city to be almost totally devoid of men: they accepted the Nepalese consul's calculation that of the 7,000 Tibetans living there, 5,500 were women and the remainder either Chinese or living in the monasteries. Chinese and later British sources say that there were 40,000 monks in Lhasa at the time.

From this description one could believe that the demoness had extracted her revenge for having been pinned down by Srongtsen Gampo and his second wife more than a millennium before.

The Thandul and the Yangdul temples have long since disappeared as major sites, overshadowed by the great institutional monasteries and their subsidiary houses that emerged largely at the inspiration of Tsongkhapa and that still form one of several vast networks of monasteries stretching from Ladakh to Mongolia, defining the physical space within which Tibetan culture and political life is practiced. The area contained within the modern, post-fourteenth-century network of monasteries stretches twice as far as the Yangdul did, yet it was linked to a worldview that in theory avoided external contact, exploitation of resources, and industrialization. The demoness divined by imported eastern technology, the nested squares of temple stakes, the religious resources brought from the south, the use of architectural exuberance to stand for civilized progress, the network of nature-subduing monasteries: these are the conceptual foundations on which the city of Lhasa has been built.


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