



On the river Bautisos, the Baitai, and the Bod

(a contribution to Old Tibetan history & geography)

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Old Tibetan Studies in Honour of Rolf Alfred Stein

1. Divertimento:

Geographical or ethnical names, like ethnical identities, are not stable, at all.

The 'Germans', for example, are called so only by English speakers. The name may have belonged to a tribe in Belgium, but was then applied by the Romans to various tribes of Northern Europe. As a tribal or linguistic label, 'German(ic)' also applies to the English or to the Dutch, the latter bearing in English the same designation that the Germans claim for themselves 'deutsch'. This by the way, originally meant nothing but 'being part of the people'. The French call them 'Allemands', just because one of the many Germanic – and in that case, German – tribes, the 'Allemannen' settled in their neighbourhood. The French, on the other hand, are called so, because a Germanic/German tribe, the 'Franken' (i.e. the 'Free People') moved into France, and became the ruling elite.

The situation is similar or even worse in other parts of the world. Personal names may become ethnic names as in the case of the Tuyuhun (Molè 1970: xiii). Names of neighbouring tribes might be projected onto their overlords, as in the case of the Ḥaža, who were conquered by the Tuyuhun, the latter then being called Ḥaža by the Tibetans. Ethnic names may become geographical names, but the place names may travel along with the ethnic groups. If sticking to the place, ethnic names may attach to new incoming groups, as in the case of the Sogdians, whose name became attached to some Mongolian people, called Sog.po by the Tibetans.

This is not a new insight, but it is often forgotten when dealing with the Tibetans. There is a strong tendency to perceive them as having been all the time the same people at the same place, that is, all over the Tibetan plateau, and as always having been called, or even always having referred to themselves, with the same name.

Accordingly, hardly anybody doubts that the Greek designation *Βαῖται* (*Baítai*), as found in Ptolemaios' 2nd c. description of Central Asia, and the 12th c. designation *Bhauṭṭa* of the Kashmirian *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, are foreign renderings of the Tibetan ethnonym *Bod*, even though this assumption has never been proven.

Two exemplary citations, one from the beginnings of serious Tibetan studies and a more contemporary one, may suffice:

The Tibetans designate themselves Bod (Sanskrit Bhota), and Ptolemy knows them by the name Βαϋται inhabiting [!] the river Bautisos, identified with the Upper Yellow River. The present territory of Western Kansu and Szechuan was the cradle of the Tibetan branch which moved from there westward into the present territory of Tibet, probably during the first centuries of our era (Laufer 1914).

There is evidence that the name *Βαῦται* is derived from the Indian *Bhota*, the latter word stemming from *bod*, the proper name of Tibetans from antiquity. The river Bautisos might be the Tsangpo, the main river of Central Tibet. Ptolemy seems to have been familiar with Tibetan customs, although we are yet to determine what cultures and languages mediated such knowledge (Kaschewski 2001).

According to Kashewski then, the name *Bhota* must have been around already for some time before Ptolemaios heard about it, and this would also mean that the name *Bod* should have been around in Tibet for at least that much time or even longer!

From a geographically point of view, it is more than surprising how the Baútidos – located by Ptolemaios, as we will see, in the Tarim Basin – could have ever been associated with the Brahmaputra or *Yar.kluᅅs Rtsaᅅs.po* of Central Tibet.

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From a linguistic point of view, one may wonder how the Greek and particularly the Indian forms could have been derived from a Tibetan word – or how the Tibetan word should have looked like initially:

an original initial *b* would hardly turn into a *bh*

(this could have happened a comparative recent time, when voiced initials not ‘protected’ by a prefix developed into low tone, semi-aspirated, unvoiced initials),

a plain *o* would not necessarily turn into an *au* and certainly not into an *ai*

a final dental *t* or *d* would most probably not turn into a (double) retroflex *ṭ(ṭ)* as in *Bhauṭṭa* or *Bhoṭa/ Bhoṭia*.

If there is an identity, at all, then the Tibetan word *bod* should be the derived one, because

If there is an identity, at all, then the Tibetan word *bod* should be the derived one, because
an initial original *bh* might be interpreted as *b*,
au (though not *ai*) would easily become *o*,
final retroflex *ṭ* would automatically have turned into a dental *t*, written as *d*.

Nevertheless, as the apparent similarity of these names makes it difficult to believe in mere coincidence, I shall suggest that the Tibetans acquired the name *bod* from some of their neighbours for whatever reason.

A further name, that of the Bhaṭa Hor, an apparently Uyghur tribe in Gansu, seems to belong to the same set.

I shall thus talk about

- The Baítai and the river Baútidos
- The Bhauṭṭa (var. Bhāṭṭa, Bhaṭṭa, Bhuṭṭa), a Non-Tibetan tribe, and the possibly related Turkic Bhatta(varyân), who settled in the Gilgit/Bolor area
- Entities called *bod* in Old Tibetan sources
- (Unfortunately not: the Bhaṭa Hor – although this would have more connection with my favourite authority: Rolf Alfred Stein)
- and then try to make sense of it.

2. Baítai and Baútidos

The land Serike described by Ptolemaios can be identified with the Tarim Basin.

On the southern rim, one finds the Emodus and/ or Seric range (the Kunlun) and **after a certain gap** the Ottorokorra range (the Altyn Tāgh and the Qilianshan).

In the northern half, flows a large river with two confluents: the **Oichardes** (identifiable with the **Tarim**).

In the southern half, starting somewhat west of the 'gap' flows a second river, again with two confluents. This is the river **Baútidos**, the identity of which is in debate.

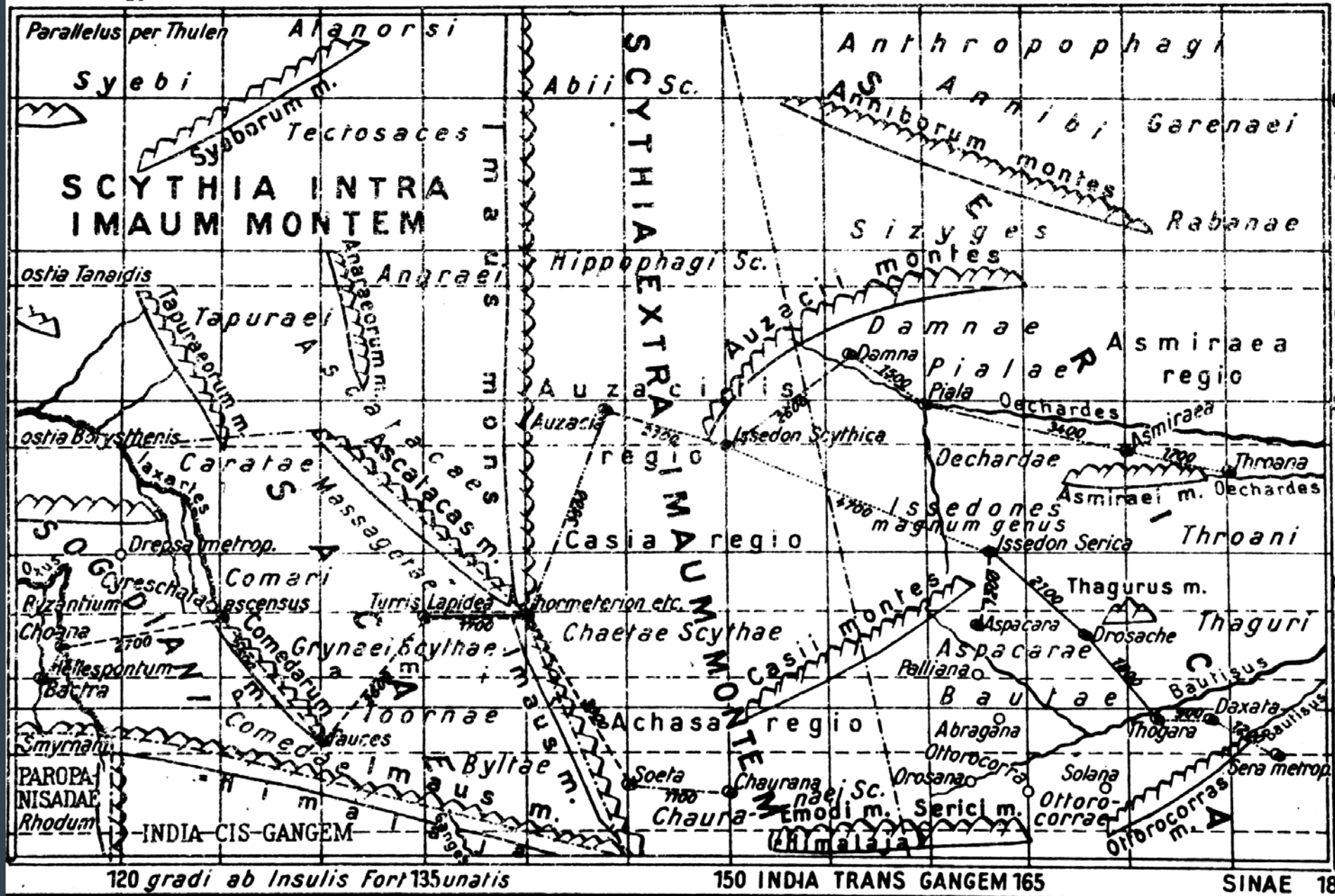


Fig. 1 Ptolemaios' map as represented in Herrmann (1938, Tafel IX)

For the geographer Herrmann (1938) it is beyond doubt that the Bautisos is related to the 'Bautae' (not Baitai!), and these can only be the Tibetans, which he assumes to have been sitting in Central Tibet since at least the 1st century BCE.

Therefore, the name Bautisos can only refer to the *Rtsanjs.po*, i.e., the Brahmaputra, and Ptolemaios has committed a severe fraud, which is best ignored. Herrmann, accordingly, does not waste a single word on the position of the Baitai.

This view on Ptolemaios' work has not changed much ever since!

Ptolemaios' geographical coordinates for the Tarim Basin *are* problematic, as he manipulated those of his predecessor Marinus in a – by modern standards – not very scientific way.

But it is certainly not true that he messed up everything and either **invented** the Bautisos or **copied** the river system of the Oichardes southward due to different itineraries, which he couldn't match, as suggested by Richthofen (1877), Herrmann (1938); or more recently: La Vaissière (2009) and Tupikova et al. (2014) .

There is enough reason to postulate a second river in the Tarim basin. According to the maps, drawn by Herrmann (1938), Ronca (1967), and Lindegger (1993), the river arises roughly 1000 km east of Chau-rana, which is either Khotan or the area south of Kho-tan. The river flows in an east-north-east direction, along the Ottorokorra range.

We thus clearly deal with a river system of Eastern Turkestan, the western part of which matches the Qarqan (Cherchen) river quite well. The Qarqan arises just where the Altyn Tāgh branches off from the Kunlun in a north-eastern direction, flowing along its northern rim, ending up in the marshes of the – now completely dried up – Lop Nor, where it met the Tarim.

Due to the flatness of the Tarim Basin, tectonic changes, and an increasingly dry climate, the rivers have changed their courses, and some of them disappeared, so that we cannot match Ptolemaios' coordinates exactly against the present courses. Among the lost rivers is a more southern parallel of the Tarim, met by a more northern course of the Qarqan ("Dshu-bin" in Herrmann 1931). These two ancient courses are attested in Chinese sources for the mid 3rd c. CE, and may thus be relevant for the interpretation of Ptolemaios' coordinates. Herrmann (1910: 69) further points to the fact that the Lop Nor extended at some time much further to the East, almost up to Dunhuang. One may also have to take into account that the rivers of the Tarim Basin form a complicated net that was most probably not fully understood by the travellers of the day.



Fig. 2 Tarim River drainage basin. Created by Karl Musser, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tarimrivermap.png> under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

For travellers along the southern route, the Qarqan was certainly an important land mark, and it is thus no accident that a river appears in Ptolemaios' description, roughly where the Qarqan flows. The river name and the name of the people living in its vicinity must have been indigenous, transmitted with the typical deformations of the time.

La Vaissière (2009) suggests that the name *Bautisos* actually represents the Chinese name of the Lop Nor: Puchang hai (蒲昌海, B'uo-t'ś'iang 'Sea of Abundant Reed'). This is very convincing, but the reeds also continued quite a bit along the Qarqan.

Herrmann (1910) actually knew the river well!

And so did even Richthofen!

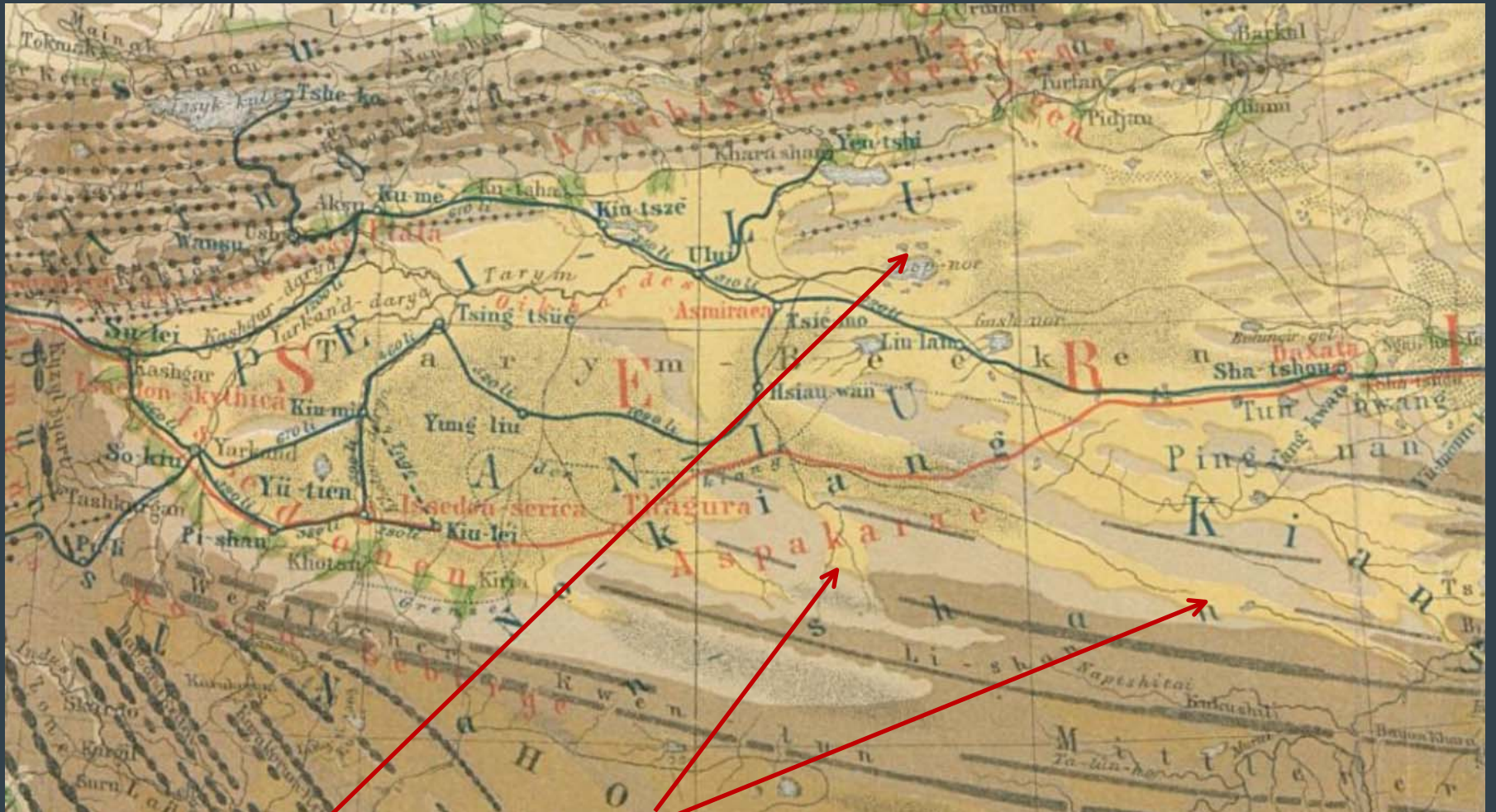


Fig. 4 Cutout of v. Richthofen's map: misplaced Lop nor and Qarqan

The mere association of the name Bautisos with the name *bod* seems to have had a blinding effect; otherwise, it is not intelligible how the identity of the Bautisos with the Qarqan river and the identity of the Ottorokorra range with the Altyn Tāgh and the Qilian-shan could remain unnoticed.

My favorite authority Rolf Alfred Stein (1922) justly comments:

It has even been suggested that this name is to be found in Ptolemy and the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, a first-century Greek narrative, where the river Bautisos and a people called the Bautai are mentioned in connexion with a region of Central Asia. But we have no knowledge of the existence of Tibetans at that time.

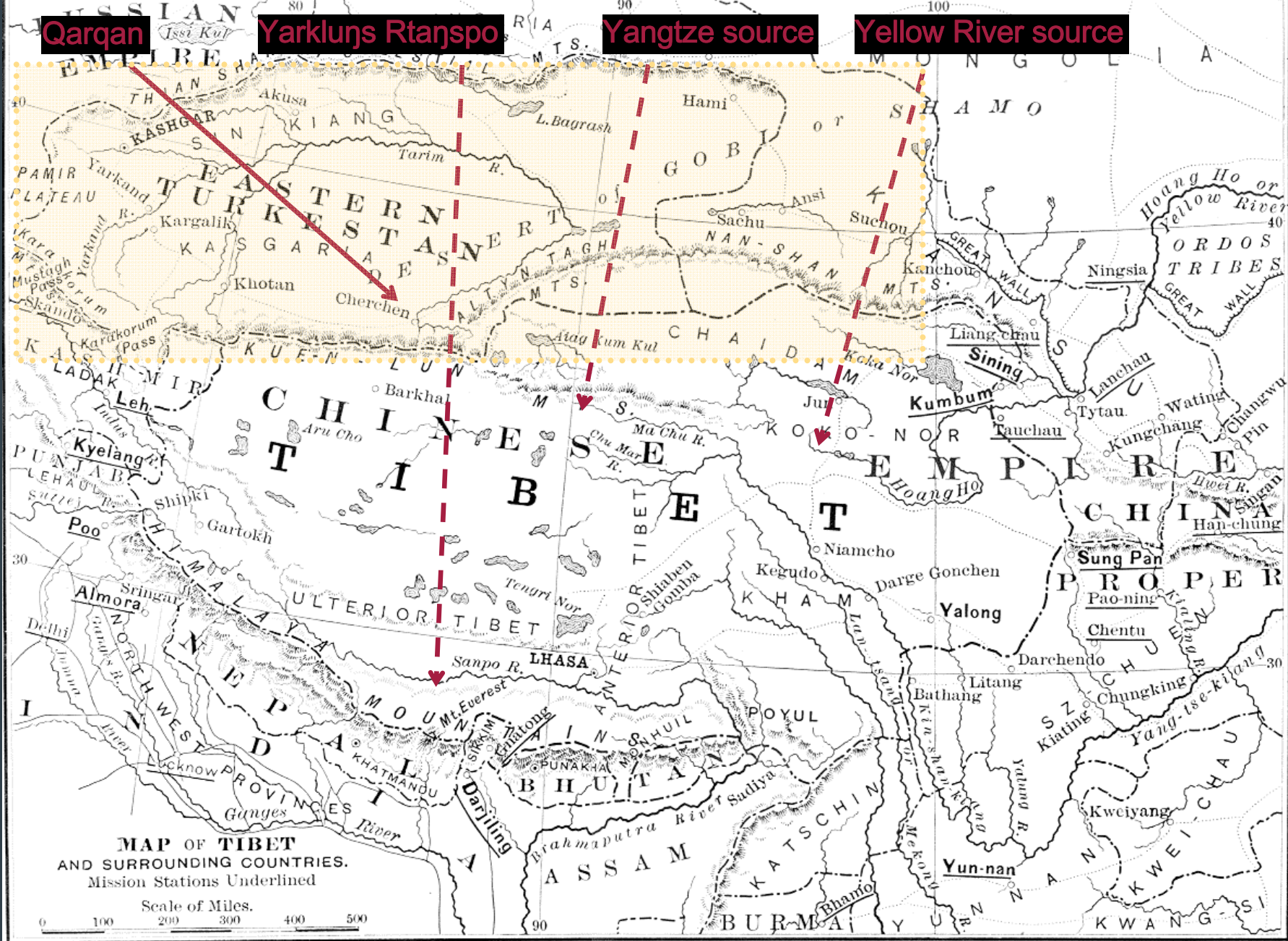
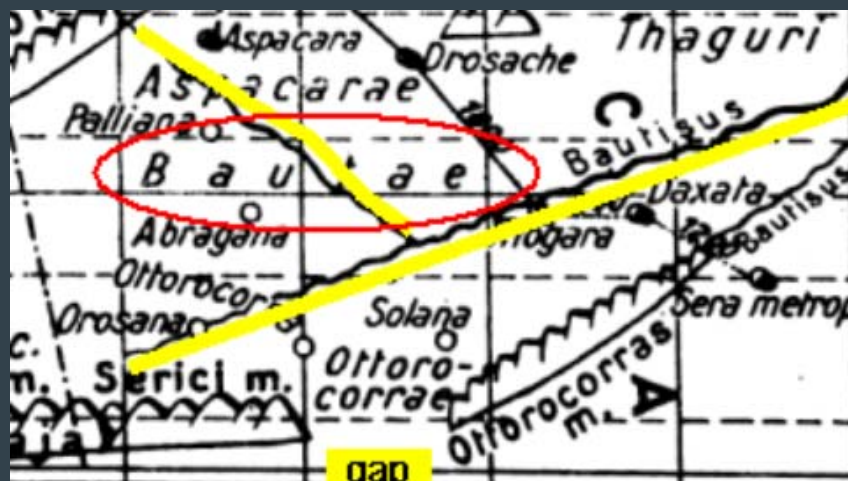


Fig. 5 Shaw, F. Becker. "The Siege of Tibet," *The Missionary Review of the World*, vol. X (n.s), 1897. Various internet sources. <http://www.ciolek.com/www/vpages/tibpages/tibet-map-1897.html>

The Baítai are located between the two confluents of the Baútisos.



Later variants of their name are attested as *Βαεται*, *Βᾶται*, an Arabic translation of Ptolemaios also has the form *Bâtis*, (Beckwith). (There is possibly only one manuscript that has *Βαῦται*, but most probably this is a – wrong – emendation, based on the river name.)

The position of the Baitai, according to Ptolemaios' coordinates, clearly north of the Kunlun and Altyn Tāgh and north of the upper course of the Bautisos should not leave any doubt: they are the people of Shanshan and/ or Kroraina (located approximately on the same latitude as Thogara, Daxata, and Sera).

They might well have belonged to the population that left the famous mummies at Qiemo, dating from 1800 BCE to 200 CE. These people, however, were, in all likelihood, Indo-Europeans.

According to Roman sources the Bætæ settled mainly along the northern rim of the Qilianshan, but had also access to the Kokonor region and to Gansu.

This location corresponds well to the settlements of the Lesser Yuezhi in almost the same period, that is, from about the mid 1st c. BCE to the early 3rd c. CE, in the Altyn Tāgh, the northern Tsaidam, at the north-eastern shore of the Kokonor, and near Lanzhou and Kanzhou, that is, in the territory of the later Šara/ Sari (Yellow) Uyghur (Haloun 1937).

Incidentally (?), the settlements south of the Altyn Tāgh correspond also to the settlements of the 17th c. Bhaṭa Hor (Uyghurs at that time), who may or may not have been there already in the late 8th century (and perhaps under a different ethnic identity).

The *Βαῖται* are the southern neighbours of the Aspakarai (Ἄσπακάραι). The latter were, as it seems, a horse-breeding people (cf. Skr. *aśva*, Avest. *aspa* ‘horse’).

The two names thus remind of the Indian (Purāṇic) designation of the ‘eastern continent’ as *Bhadrāśva-dvīpa* or the ‘continent of the (one having) excellent horses’.

3. Bhauṭṭa, Bhāṭṭa, Bhaṭṭa, Bhatta, Bhuṭṭa

There is no doubt that in the Indian world the designations Bhauṭṭa, Bhoṭia, or similar forms came into use for the Tibetans in general, though it is not known from when onwards.

In the 11th century, Albērūnī mentions a peak or mountain range Bhôteshar between Nepal and Tibet, which functions as the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural border (Sachau 1910). Thapar (2003) speaks of “increasing references [...] made of the bhauttas or Tibetans along the Himalaya” after 700 CE, but unfortunately she does not mention in which sources these references would appear, and in which form.

A bilingual glossary, the Tangfan liangyu shuangdui ji gives the Sanskrit equivalent for Chinese Tufan (吐蕃) as 僕吒 with the reconstructed pronunciation /bəwk trai/ or /bəwk trɛ/ for a possible Bhuṭṭa. This glossary may perhaps be dated into the 7th century as it refers to the Turks and to Persia, but does not mention yet the Uyghur or the Arabs and their religion (Ishikawa 2010). Unfortunately, the earliest copy of this glossary dates to the 11th century, it is found in a Song Buddhist Canon collection (Ishikawa, p.c.). As with most Sanskrit sources there would be much room for retrospect corrections or adaptations to a later-on firmly established convention.)

The Indian name forms cannot have been derived from any known Tibeto-Burman language, and particularly not from Old Tibetan, as they would have lacked both the *media aspirata* and the final retroflex.

There is no apparent reason for adding aspiration or a retroflex in a foreign name. Since the name referred to what the Kashmiris or Indians perceived as barbarians, there was particularly no incentive on the Indian side to make it look more Sanskritic.

The possibly earliest documented mentioning of the Bhauṭṭa in the Indian context occurs in the 12th century *Rājataranṅinī* of Kalhaṇa (cf. also Róna-Tas 1985), but with retrospect reference to the reign of the Hūṇa king Mihirakula. The latter is to be dated roughly into the first half of the 6th century. The Bhauṭṭa in question are merely listed as intruders along with the Darada and Mleccha. Nothing is said about their settlements or points of intrusion.

At that very time, the political entity 'Tibet' did not yet exist, and the western regions belonging to Ṣaṇ.ṣuṇ had yet to be conquered. Either the reference to the Bhauṭṭa as 'Tibetans' is anachronistic or the name refers to an unknown Non-Tibetan people.

The Bhauṭṭa re-appear, together with the Darada, as victims of Lalitāditya-Muktāpīḍa's (reg. c. 733–769) raids in the north. In this case, the Bhauṭṭa could at least theoretically be 'Tibetans'.

While the Old Tibetan documents remain silent about a conflict with Kashmir, the Tang annals report a message by Lalitāditya in 744 "that he and the king of Central Hindustan had defeated the Tibetans and had blocked the five Tibetan roads" (Beckwith 1987).

This probably means that border posts were set up in the border areas – which could be as far south-west as Kabul – and that Kashmir troops fought some battles there, but it is rather unlikely that they reached Ladakh or Baltistan (not to speak of Tibet).

The *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* might refer to this event in the course of a *cacravartin's* campaign in the north. Lalitāditya first raided Khamboja (in Afghanistan), then Tuhkhāra (Tocharistan of Badakhshan? or Baktria?), and an unidentifiable king (or tribe) named Mummuni, then the Bhauṭṭa and the Darada. And so on.

Such all-round campaigns were already part of Indian literary traditions. Most notable is Kalidasa's *Raghuvamśa* (5th c. CE) about the mythical ruler Raghu, ancestor of Rama, who conquers the four quarters of India (including possible parts of Afghanistan), going clock-wise east, south, west, north, and back east. This was possibly meant as an eulogy of Chandragupta Vikramaditya's (r. c.380 – c.415 CE) conquests – almost all of India, but not in this order.

The *Raghuvamśa* was well known in Kashmir as the existence of a sub-commentary by the Kashmirian scholar Vallabhadeva (10th c.) shows.

As the *Rājataranḡiṇī* is a literary text, one can expect that the places were listed more or less in geographical coherence. Accordingly, the Bhauṭṭa would have been situated between Badakhshan and the Darada. This would indicate, that the Bhauṭṭa were, in fact, not Tibetans, but rather related to the Bhatta(varyān) of Pakistan, mentioned by Albērūnī:

The river Sindh rises in the mountains Unang in the territory of the Turks [...] [T]hen you have [...] on your left the mountains of Bolor and Shamîlân, Turkish tribes who are called Bhattavaryân. Their king has the title Bhatta-Shâh. Their towns are Gilgit, Aswira [Astor] and Shiltâs [Chilâs], and their language is the Turkish. Kashmir suffers much of their inroads. (Sachau 1910).

The river Sindh, in this case, is the Gilgit river as the source river of the Indus, the Unang mountains must be the Pamirs. The Bhatta-Shâh-s are thus most probably identical with the Turki Shahi, which are known from coins of the area. In the 7th century, the Western Turks had moved into the areas west of the Altai and north of the Tianshan and then further west into Western Turkestan and into Afghanistan, where they replaced the Hephthalites.

Alternatively, the mentioning of the Bhauṭṭa before the Darada could mean that the Bhauṭṭa settled **between Kashmir and the Dards**, in which case the original homeland of the Bhauṭṭa lay in an area around Sonamarg and Dras. This area would give access to Ladakh, and then further on to Tibet. There seems to be some evidence for this solution:

For the events from the 12th century onwards, Kalhaṇa uses the name form *Bhuṭṭa*. At some time during the 12th c., the Darada, who are camping at the Madhumatī river in the Baramulla district, propose to lead a rebellious Kashmiri noble through the land of the Bhuṭṭa to another warring lord.

Daraddeśa, their main seat, was located along the upper part of the Kishanganga river, which flows behind a mountain range around the Valley of Kashmir in a long northward bent curve from near Sonamarg to Muzzafarabad.

The Darada could thus have led the rebels to Sonamarg, from where they could have reached Srinagar or could have continued to Jammu.

The Bhuṭṭa in question must thus have been a tribe settling in the upper-most part of the Kishanganga valley and in the adjoining areas, possibly around Dras, perhaps also in other areas of Purik. Whether there was already a name transfer and/ or an identification with the Tibetans must remain an open question.



Fig 6 Cutout of Map No. 3953 Rev. 3 UNITED NATIONS October 2005. Department of Peacekeeping Operations Cartographic Section.

In the 15th century, then, the name form *Bhuṭṭa* in Śrīvara's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* did, in fact, with the additional qualifications 'Little' and 'Great', refer to Baltistan and Ladakh, respectively. Unfortunately, no particular place is mentioned, so it remains unclear how far to the east (or to the west and north-west) the application of the name Bhuṭṭa extended.

BUT: the term did NOT apply to Tibet proper.

4. Rtsaṅ bod and Spu.rgyal bod

The name element *bod* appears in Old Tibetan sources for two or three regions. This might indicate that there were several (possibly Non-Tibeto-Burman) Bhauṭṭa tribes in Western and Central Tibet or that the element *bod* was a technical administrative term, derived from a verb of speaking, meaning ‘command, rule, dominion’, and had no ethnical implication.

Four regions are mentioned:

yul Bod.ka.g'yag drug (Pt 1038, Pt 1286)

Spu bod (Pt 1038) or *Spu.rgyal bod* (ITJ 0731)

Skyi.rgyal Bod (ITJ 0732)

Rtsan Bod (Pt 1287)

The first one, used for the place to which the first legendary ruler descends, is the most problematical one. I guess it might refer to south-east Tibet. The element *bod.ka* seems to contain a collective suffix *ka*, and may thus refer to a ‘collective of speakers’

It seems quite unlikely that in this context the element *g'yag* means ‘(male) yak’ in its literal meaning. In some documents, the yak is always mentioned together with the ‘enemies’ *dgra*, being thus associated with great danger. If this is the relevant association here, the phrase might be translated ‘to the land/ region [called] the six dangerous/ inimical parts of Bod’.

However, given the possibility of a sound alternation between nasal and oral stop consonant, one may perhaps read *g'yaŋ* ‘abyss, precipice’ and hence the ‘six gorges’. Cf. the traditional designation *chu.bži sgaŋ.drug* ‘four rivers, six spurs’ for the Kham region.

Skyi.rgyal bod ‘the dominion of the Skyi king’ and *Spu.rgyal bod* ‘the dominion of the Spu king’ may be actually the same (the former focusing on the location: Skyi.yul, the latter on the lineage or clan identity: Spu).

Only the last entity has a certain historical reality. But the rulers of Rtsaṅ seem to have been of Scythian descent, at least the Tibetans associated them with the Tocharians (=Scythians): the ruler of *Rtsaṅ.pho phyed.kar* [=Pehar?] (Pt 1285), or [*Rtsaṅ*]*.ro phyed.kar (Pt 1286) is defined as

*OTDO has [*Myaṅ.*], but cf. Pt 1285: again *Rtsang.ro dbyes kar*

rje Rtsaṅ.rjeḥi Thod.kar

‘as for the ruler, [he] is Thodkar [=Toḡar], [of the lineage] of the rulers of Rtsaṅ’

Rtsaṅ or parts of Rtsaṅ seem to have been vassals of their western and/ or northern neighbour Ṣaṅ.ṣuṅ, before both were annexed by the Tibetans. Rtsaṅ Bod was conquered for the Tibetans by a Ṣaṅ.ṣuṅ noble, Khyuṅ.po Spuṅ.sad Zu.tse (who seems to have been a collaborating war profiteer) under the reign of Gnamri Slonmtshan in the late 6th or early 7th c. (OTC, II. 75, 199, 200, 319).

The phrase *Spu.rgyal bod* might have been used, perhaps only retrospectively, to discriminate the Spu.-rgyal dominions from the (almost) historical *Rtsan bod*.

I think that the element *bod* could be derived from a verb of speech (as has been suggested for the noun *bon*). In this context, the verb might rather be related to the act of commanding and thus ruling. One might thus translate the phrases here as the ‘command’ (or ‘rule’ or ‘sway’ or ‘dominion’) ‘of Rtsan’ and the ‘command of the Spu.rgyal (lineage)’.

In any case, there seems to be some evidence that the name element *bod* did not originally refer to *THE* ‘Tibetan’ ethnicity or ‘nation’ but to two or three different entities.

6. Some hypotheses

The following conclusions are possible:

1. All five names or name groups are **unrelated** and the similarity in form is just **accidental** and a **contraption of the *Sirene des Gleichklangs***. In particular, the Tibetan word *bod* only designates a group of ‘**speakers**’ of the same language or alternatively a ‘**command**’, that is, a dominion – in which case it would need a qualification, such as Rtsan and Spu.rgyal.

2. There might be 3 name groups of different origin:
- a) the **Central Asian** names of unknown origin, with the names of the Baitai of Ptolemaios and the BhaṭṭaHor and perhaps even the Bhadra-Aśva being related to each other;
 - b) the **Pamirian** group: the Bhauṭṭa/ Bhāṭṭa of the Rājataranṅiṇī and the Bhatta of Albērūnī being related to each other and the designation being independently derived from the Sanskrit word *bhadra* ‘blessed, fortunate, excellent’;
 - c) the **Tibetan** word *bod*, just designating a group of ‘Speakers’ of the same language or a dominion.

3. All names, except the Tibetan designation, are related, going back to the Sanskrit word *bhadra* ‘blessed, fortunate, excellent’: the Baitai of Ptolemaios, the Bhauṭṭa/ Bhāṭṭa of the Rājataranṅinī, the Bhatta of Albērūnī, and the Bhaṭa Hor. The Tibetan word *bod*, just designating a group of ‘speakers’ of the same language or a ‘dominion’, is unrelated.

4. The Tibetan word *bod* derives from a group of non-Tibetan Baitai or Bhadra, who emigrated from the Tarim Basin into Tibet.

5. The Tibetan word *bod* is derived from the name of the non-Tibetan **Bhauṭṭa/ Bhāṭṭa** of the Rājataranṅiṇī. The name was transferred on the Tibetans, most probably because the Bhauṭṭa/ Bhāṭṭa were sitting in an area through which Tibet could be accessed.

6. The word *bod* is Tibetan, but it merged with the perhaps more prestigious name of the non-Tibetan **Baitai**, who emigrated from the Tarim Basin into Tibet and particularly into Rtsaṅ.

7. A combination of 5 and 6, that is, **all three name forms merged**. This could have been more likely, if the names of the Baitai and the Bhauṭṭa or Bhāṭṭa were, in fact, related, and if the people living between this two groups were still aware of the relation in the 6th or 7th century.

The time frame and the regional distribution of the names do not really speak in favour of an ethnic identity, but the similarity in shape speaks against mere coincidence. The most likely solution is that one of the non-Tibetan names wandered *and* got transferred, when the Tibetan empire took shape.