Ippolito Desideri, *Notizie Istoriche del Thibet*

**Note:** This translation is based on *An Account of Tibet*, trans. Filippo de Filippi (Routledge, 1932), pp. 49-50, 146-72. An electronic copy of de Filippi’s translation is available through the UBC library. In the course of revision, I have consulted the new translation by Michael Sweet, *Mission to Tibet: The Extraordinary Eighteenth-Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010), pp. 11-15, 242-60. There are huge discrepancies between these editions, and occasionally I insert in parentheses a passage from Filippi that is not in Sweet.

To reduce confusion, I have changed some of Desideri’s terms. “Grand Lama” I have rendered as “Dalai Lama,” “Genghis Khan” as “Lazang Khan,” “Viceroy” as “Prime Minister,” “Lower Tartary” as “Mongolia,” and “Independent Upper Tartary” as “Zungharia” (meaning the realm of the Zunghars). “Tartar” generally means Mongol, but I have otherwise left it as Desideri used it.

**Foreword by Desideri**

I had not intended to publish these historical notices of Tibet or of my travels and mission to that country, which were written only for my own pleasure and kept as a memorial of my laborious journeys. Also I must add that having seen more than one description of the countries and customs of the Indies, I found them to be so improbable and exaggerated, and so utterly unlike all I had seen and experienced during fifteen years, that I feared gaining a reputation for the same lack of truth should I publish my own. For the manners, customs, laws, swellings, foods, and lands of Europe and those of the East are dissimilar in so many ways that, to the imagination of those accustomed only to their own, those of the other must sound so discordant that one always runs the risk of not being believed, however fairly or unfairly.

Nevertheless, when I returned through France and Italy to Tuscany and Rome, I was strongly urged by many men of letters, gentlemen and eminent personages to write down in proper order and chronology all I had told each of them. To satisfy their curiosity, I therefore resolved to publish these notes. I was also induced to do so because all accounts of Tibet heretofore have been very meager and inexact. The other lands of India and the East have described often and extensively, to the extent that they have almost become familiar to us, but so far as I know, Tibet is unknown to most people except as a name, yet it is as worthy of notice as any other. To mention but one thing, its religion, which is founded on the Pythagorean system, is entirely different from any other, and so deserves to be known so that it may more easily refuted. I flatter myself that these pages, besides satisfying the curious, may induce the learned to confute this novel mixture of superstitious errors, and move some to go to the assistance of that benighted nation.

Whether I succeed or not, the reader need not fear a lack of truth. He will read only what I myself have seen and examined, so that unless my senses have deceived me, I shall not deceive him. I ask only that he not read these pages with the baneful prejudice that what is out of the ordinary must necessarily be false for that reason. Even our ancestors would not recognize us, so different is style of dress, the manners, and the customs, just as we should not know them. If the reader divests himself of this prejudice, I have no doubt that he will realize that the truthfulness of these pages.

I shall divide this record into four books. In the first I will describe my journey of three and a half years from Rome to Lhasa, capital of the third Tibet, and my mission work there. The second will treat of the nature, character, customs, and civil government of Tibet. In the third I will explain the peculiar sect of Tibetan religion, and their hierarchy, which roughly corresponds to our ecclesiastics and monks. In the fourth I will tell of my return to Europe by a different route,
and of other missions in which I worked for some time. But I shall not enlarge upon these, nor shall I, for fear of being tedious and repeating what has been said by others, say much about the most celebrated places in India, Hindustan, and various other ports of call through which I passed.

I shall not attempt to excuse the unadorned and even rugged style of these pages. Anyone who brings new and rare fruits from a foreign land need not make excuses if their flavour is not perfect, or they are presented in a little rustic basket. Their quality and rarity must be their excuse. My account has no other value than to convey new and honest information about matters worthy of notice; this is the sum total of their beauty. Too much eloquence and too polished a style might arouse suspicion that eloquent diction has been employed to hide some deceit or falsehood. It remains to you, dear reader, to make good the style in which it is written, to add the value of your enjoyment and kindness. I pray heaven grant you every blessing.

Chapter 9  How the Rulership of Tibet fell into the Hands of the Tartars

Nowadays Tibet is one large kingdom, but in former days it was divided into several small and independent states governed by absolute and petty kings. One of these kingdoms was called Ü, of which the capital was Lhasa, comprising some provinces in the centre and to the northeast toward China. Another was called Tsang: its capital was the city of Shigatse, and it consisted of the provinces lying to the west and bordering on the kingdom of Nepal and the desert of Ngari Zungar, which I have already described.

At that time [early 18th century] the [6th] Dalai Lama was a dissolute youth, thoroughly give over to insatiable lust, and dominated by gluttony and drunkenness. The Tartars [Khoshot Mongols] bribed with splendid gifts and still more splendid promises his favourite and trusted minister. This minister wrote a long and cunning kashok, or edict, in the Dalai Lama’s name, to the king of Tibet, inviting him to leave his fortress and accept the peace offered by the Tartars, trusting to his authority to settle everything. After the edict was written, he got the Dalai Lama quite intoxicated, and so was able to take the great seal off his neck and affix a seal to the edict. He gave it to the Khoshot Mongols, who sent it to the king. The great veneration the king had for the Dalai Lama deluded him into leaving the fortress. As soon as he did, the Khoshot prince [Lazang] and his minister Targum Tashi seized and killed him. Lazang took possession of all Tibet, taking the title of Genghis Khan, and Targum Tashi became his viceroy and prime minister. This was confirmed by the entire kingdom and as well by the Emperor [Kangxi] of China, who then and many times afterwards sent ambassadors to salute Lazang Khan as the absolute ruler of all Tibet. Through this alliance with the emperor he more firmly secured his rule.

The nobility of his lineage, his relationship with the emperor of China, and his own valour caused Lazang Khan to be feared and respected by his subjects as well as foreigners. His good qualities and moral excellence caused him to be esteemed and loved, not only by his subjects but by foreigners, of whom there were many in the kingdom. By nature he was affable and friendly, courteous to all, easily approached, and a comforted those to whom he granted an audience, and he was very generous with money. He had a great liking for foreigners; the more distant their countries, the greater was his kindness to them. His intellect was keen and prompt; such that when I propounded some points in religious doctrine entirely opposed to their errors, he debated me with suitable reasons and was avid to have every point elucidated in private as well as public disputations. Though intellectually acute, he was docile, not clinging obstinately to the errors of his sect but admitting the truth of some points when he discovered them through reason. He assured me that if he should absolutely become convinced of the falsity of his religion and the truth of our Holy Faith, he would not only himself conform to the laws of Jesus Christ but insist that his court and kingdom do likewise. He was admired for the prudence with which he managed affairs, and looked into every detail himself instead of leaving it to others. He administered justice incorruptibly, adapting the punishment to the crime and sentencing so justly in civil controversies that he was praised by all as being extraordinarily wise in such matters. Owing to
Chapter 10  The Revolution in Tibet, before It Passed from the Tartars to the Chinese

As I have said, the Dalai Lama of Tibet at the time when Lazang Khan ruled the kingdom was a dissolute and wild youth, his vices made all the more worse by being exhibited by someone blindly venerated the Tibetans. As Lazang Khan could not remedy the evil caused to his kingdom by the licentiousness of the Dalai Lama, either by wise counsel or by threats, he determined to take the extreme measure of stamping out the evil that was contaminating the whole kingdom. After first informing the emperor of China, Lazang Khan used various pretexts to send the Grand Lama to China escorted by Khoshots and some of his trusted ministers. En route they beheaded him. Before the sentence was carried out, the Dalai Lama told some of his followers to tell his beloved Tibetans not to weep, as he would return to see them again. He would be born again on the border with China, and if they searched for him there they would find him.

The sorrowful news of the death of the Dalai Lama and the manner in which he had died aroused intense grief among the Tibetans and implacable hatred against the new king among all the classes of people, especially the clergy. It was even more disastrous for the monk whom Lazang Khan himself chose to replace the Dalai Lama. The people attempted to refuse to recognize the new [7th] Dalai Lama but were prevented by the king’s strict orders and by fear of the emperor of China who sent imperial relatives to support Lazang Khan in this matter and insisted under pain of death that all should recognize him. Thus began the sedition that grew by stages and would end with the death of Lazang.

Seditious Tibetans, partly by letter and partly by envoys, appealed to the king of Upper Independent Tartary [Zungharia], offering him the crown of Tibet as his reward if he would take their side. Although the said king was a friend and distant relative of Lazang Khan, he was enticed into agreeing to betray him, and was even willing to use those very ties of friendship and relationship to advance his treason. He sent an embassy to Lazang Khan begging him to make their relationship yet closer by accepting his daughter as the bride of his eldest son, and this was easily obtained. After the young prince had arrived, the king asked Lazang Khan, now that they were relatives, to send a good number of cavalry soldiers along with funds and experienced officials along with a quantity of gold and silver to support him in his war with Russia, as well as to suppress rebels in the kingdom of Yarkand. Lazang Khan, by nature kindly and unsuspecting, especially when the appeal came from a friend and relation, immediately sent all that had been asked for.

Meanwhile a report had been spread in Tibet that a young boy born near Xining on the frontier between Mongolia and China had declared that he was the [7th] Dalai Lama of Lhasa who had been killed by Lazang Khan and had now been re-born according to the promise made before he died. He claimed the office of the Dalai Lama of Lhasa for himself, and stated that his only desire was to see his beloved Tibetans and help them out of their present condition. / This report created incredible excitement among the Tibetans, especially among the monks, and all they craved for was to see their Dalai Lama, whose return they had so anxiously expected, again seated on his throne. They thought that the king, who was of the same sect and believed in transmigration, would receive with veneration this new-born child as the same being he had caused to be killed. But they were wrong. The king sent some trustworthy lamas and doctors to the place where they boy lived in order that they should most carefully examine whether the said child relay was the late Dalai Lama now born again. These lamas and doctors after strict investigation returned and informed the king they had been able to recognize sufficient signs in this child to prove that he was the Dalai Lama. Therefore the king not only forbade the child to be brought to Tibet but arranged with the Emperor of China that he should be put into a fortress surrounded by trustworthy guards. For some years the Tibetans tried in various ways in vain to
persuade the Emperor of China to set their Dalai Lama free, and at last determined not to delay any longer in carrying out the plot arranged with the king of Zungharia against Lazang Khan and the Dalai Lama installed by him against their will.

The chief and most violent instigators of the revolution were several lamas and nearly all the monks of the three principal monasteries and universities of Tibet, Drepung, Sera and Shigatse, the capital of the province of Tsang. They bribed many of the nobles of Tibet and some of the king’s ministers in order that they might receive and help the enemy. The Lamas then secretly sent separate batches of the youngest and most robust monks to Zungharia to be enrolled in the army commanded by Tsering Döndrup, the commander-in-chief, and three other generals, two of whom were monks and had studied and taken their degrees in the monasteries of Drepung and Sera near Lhasa. Tsering Döndrup, who had studied as a monk in the famous monastery of Shigatse, was a close relation [younger brother] of the Zunghar king [Tsewang Rapten (1643-1727)]. He was celebrated among the best captains of that barbarous nation for his experience in combat and his unflagging valour.

While this army, summoned by the blinded and foolish Tibetans, was forming to leave Zungharia, another large force was prepared to march against China in order to prevent the emperor from sending help to his friend and relative Lazang Khan, and if the opportunity arose, to try to set free the boy who pretended to be the legitimate Dalai Lama who had been killed and was now reborn. The plan was well imagined, as once the child was in their hands all Tibet would rise and greet them with celebration and then turn against the king.

At the time these two armies set forth a false report was spread about that the firstborn son of Lazang Khan with his wife, daughter of the Zunghar king, was returning to Tibet with a large retinue. Now Lazang Khan had been in the habit of leaving Lhasa early in June with his Tartars for a place called Dam, lying to the north of the capital, where he remained until the end of October for hunting. When therefore on the first of June 1717 he heard that his son, the prince, was on the way, he willingly awaited him at Dam. His second-born together son with a few followers suddenly arrived from his estates in Mongolia and, weeping in great agitation, told his father that this was a plot laid by the Zunghar king. He had come with all speed to warn and aid the king as the enemy was close at hand. The king, furious, summoned his Tartars and the ministers who had accompanied him to Dam, told them the news his son had brought and encouraged them to repel the enemy, who were already preparing to attack him. This battle would have completely annihilated Lazang Khan and his family were it not for the vigilance and intelligence of his son, whose shrewdness in observing the movements of both his own and the enemy’s troops won them a victory. The traitors were seized and the plan of battle altered, thereby frustrating their secret agreement with the Tartars. Thus Lazang Khan with his small force gained a complete victory and was able to occupy a position commanding the road to Lhasa, and cutting the enemy’s communication with any rebels inside the city. This position he held until the end of October. Meanwhile militias were summoned from all the outlying provinces to Lhasa, where the fortifications were being strengthened under the direction of certain Chinese emissaries who had been there for some months. The whole city including the Potala was surrounded with new wall and gates. [Filippi trans.: The city would have been impregnable had not treachery been rife among the inhabitants.]

Dam being swept by cold winds in winter, so towards the end of October Lazang Khan, his son, and all his people retired into Lhasa, well fortified, as I have said, and well provisioned with troops. In spite of the terrible cold the enemy remained inactive for another month, expecting the arrival of the army they had left on the confines of China and always hoping to see them appear with the boy who pretended to be the Dalai Lama of Tibet. But they hoped in vain, because the army sent against China had been utterly defeated, and the boy had been more rigorously imprisoned.

When the news reached general Tsering Döndrup that his plans, founded on a junction with this second army, were entirely upset, his anxiety was great. To attack a well fortified city
and fight against a whole kingdom with only six thousand men would be too hazardous. To retreat meant exposing the lives of his men and his own to the furious onslaughts of the justly irritated Chinese. What did he do? Keeping the news of the defeat a profound secret, he announced to his soldiers and to the anxious Tibetans that the army sent against China had gained a glorious victory and was advancing in triumph, bringing the new Dalai Lama, who had been delivered from prison, to his beloved and faithful Tibetans. All that was now necessary, he added, was to arm and march to Lhasa, where the inhabitants, out of love and veneration would not only make no resistance but open wide the gates of the city to those who brought the long wished for Dalai Lama back to his throne. His soldiers at once seized their arms and started towards the city of Lhasa, fully persuaded that they were not going to fight but would be received with great joy and acclamations.

At daybreak on the twenty-first of November they drew near Lhasa, halted just out of reach of the cannon, and separated into four divisions. General Tsering Döndrup remained on the northern side of the city, near the great monastery of Sera, the second division went to the west, not far from the monastery of Drepung, the third to the east, close to the monastery of Ganden, and the fourth took a position above the banks of the great river that flows near Lhasa. No sooner did the Tartars appear than the monks of the above mentioned monasteries rushed out with shouts of joy to welcome them and bring food, arms and ammunition; and what was of more importance to the general, a number of young men, equipped as soldiers, joined his army, thus considerably increasing the number of his troops. To avoid prolixity the result shall be told in a few sentences. After midnight on the thirtieth of November Lhasa was attacked on all sides, and, in accordance with a secret conspiracy, ladders were let down to enable the enemy to scale the walls; at the same time the Northern and Eastern gates were thrown open and a bloody fight ensued. At daylight the Tartars were masters of the unhappy city, and general Tsering Döndrup was conducted with great rejoicing to the Royal Palace, which they found quite empty, the king with his refuge in the Palace of Potala, residence of the Dalai Lama. This stood on the summit of a wide but not very high rock, like a strong and secure fortress.

As soon as Tsering Döndrup set foot in the Royal Palace he gave orders to sack the city, and the monks who had joined his soldiers were the most greedy and cruel robbers. They rushed with arms in their hands into the houses, not sparing even their confederates, and invaded and stripped the monasteries, robbing the treasures which had been deposited and hidden in the temples. Not satisfied they returned again and again to the houses, sparing neither age nor sex, wounding and savagely beating some, tying arms of others behind their backs and suspending them to beams and scourging them to make them reveal where their riches were concealed. For two days and nights these scenes continued until everything of value had been taken. It was pitiful to see those who once were rich and lived in comfort reduced to so sad a state, nearly naked, with no other consolation than to know that everyone was in the same condition. Also the reverend Capuchin fathers lost nearly all their possessions and were badly treated.

The fathers were ill treated, and one was beaten so severely that his wounds took long to heal. As for myself, I was then at Sera Monastery, studying their books and listening to their disputations. I was advised to go back to the city as a safer place, but I thought it more prudent to remain where I was. No harm came to me. The little money I had was not taken, nor my bed or the furniture of my chapel. Everything in the house at Lhasa which belonged to the Capuchin fathers and to me was robbed. All that was left to the fathers was 500 scudi they had fortunately buried in the room where the firewood was kept.

Chapter 11 The Tragic End of King Lazang Khan and his Family

On the third day, which was the third of December 1717, the barbarians made a supreme effort and attacked the Palace of Potala, the Dalai Lama’s magnificent residence. With machines and ladders they succeeded in climbing the walls on the southern side, but finding it would be
extremely difficult to enter the palace and the fortress, they called fire to their aid. When the main
doors yielded they rushed in, inflamed by their hatred of the royal family and their greed for
spoils. But the king [Lazang Khan] together with his second son, Prime Minister Targun Tashi,
and the general Döndrup Tsering [note that this is not the Zunghar general Tsering Döndrup; he
was probably a Mongol general named Oröpa] had already escaped by a secret door on the
northern side, where good horses awaited them, leaving the queen with her young son in the care
of the two lamas, one from Lhasa and the other from Shigatse. Their flight was soon known and
the enemy dashed furiously after them. The fugitives reached a deep ditch with a double palisade
at which the king’s horse took fright, and in lieu of jumping the ditch fell with the unfortunate
king. The inhuman Tartars came up and attacked Lazang Khan, who defended himself valiantly,
cutting off the arm of one of his assailants. But he was overcome by sheer numbers and by his
inability to climb out of the ditch into which he had fallen, and in the end his corpse was left there
in the ditch. Because of his strong inclination toward the Holy Faith, he was a prince truly worthy
of a longer life, for the sake of his conversion and the conversion of his whole family.

An even worse fate awaited the three fugitives, the prince, the prime minister Targum
Tashi, and general Döndrup Tsering. They got safely away under cover of night and reached the
house of the governor of one of the principal northeastern provinces of Tibet called Taktsé, where
they took refuge in the house of the governor, called the Depa Taktsé. This high born official, a
near relation of the former king of Tibet whom Lazang Khan killed, had long looked on Lazang
Khan with hatred. His ambition was now inflamed more than ever by the present disturbances,
which he sought to use to make his own way to the throne, which he claimed for himself. As soon
as his guests were asleep, he sent word to Tsering Döndrup that the fugitives were in his power. A
strong body of Tartars at once left Lhasa, seized the unfortunate men and dragged them to the feet
of the victorious general who ordered the Prince and Prime Minister to be imprisoned in small
dark cells with the pavement for their bed, and only enough food to keep them alive for future
tortures. Turning to Döndrup Tsering, with soft words he reminded him that he was a native of
Zungharia, and offered him an important post at his Court with great riches and a high salary. The
young general refused every offer, even that of decent clothes in lieu of the torn and squalid rags
he had on, declaring that all he cared for was the unhappy condition of the royal family and that
he would never forget the kindness and beneficence of the late king Lazang Khan.

As I have already said, the Tartars, insatiable plunderers, had invaded the Palace of
Potala and found the Dalai Lama appointed by Lazang Khan. He gladly relinquished the throne,
and begged to be allowed to pass the remainder of his days in his old monastery as a simple monk.
The Dalai Lama of Shigatse, considered the second oracle of Tibet, possessing authority by
reason of his riches, his great age, knowledge and sagacity, was also at Potala. He was greatly
esteemed by king Lazang Khan, by the emperor of China and by general Tsering Döndrup, whose
superior tutor and Lama he had been when the general studied as a monk for some years in the
monastery and university of Shigatse. Relying on his position and the respect always paid to him,
he addressed the audacious enemy, reproaching them severely for their perfidy, treachery, the
infamous murder of an innocent king which would be condemned by all nations, the massacre of
so many persons, and the violent plunder of the city. Life, he added, was too painful after such
tragic scenes; all the demanded was to be killed with the sword that had killed the innocent king,
and to mingle his blood with that of a king and a people he loved and mourned. Then presenting
to them the sorrowing Queen with the little Prince, Lazang Khan’s son of three or four years old,
with many tears he implored them not to maltreat the unfortunate Queen and the little Prince
whose tender years and innocence pleaded in his favour.

This moving scene inside the palace of Potala was followed by a public and not less
affecting scene in the streets. From Potala a strong force of Tartars conducted the old [Panchen]
Lama of Shigatse, mourning over the woes of others and therefore more to be pitied; the Dalai
Lama, no longer escorted (as before) by a brilliant retinue; and the weeping Queen secured by
bonds of white silk, with her little boy, who excited the compassion of all beholders, to the Royal
Palace. The victorious general Tsering Döndrup did not venture to insult his old superior, the Panchen Lama of Shigatse, or kill the others, but he placed them in strict confinement in the palace of Potala. The Tartars plundered the palace of incredible booty, especially in the Dalai Lama’s private apartments, in the temple of their idols in the principal wing of the palace, and the thrones. Only one who has seen with his own eyes can realize the value of the booty. The barbarous conqueror of Tibet knew that Lazang Khan’s treasures and those of the Dalai Lama, a great part of which he had been unable to discover, had been confided to the care of Prime Minister Targum Tashi. He therefore subjected the said Viceroy to such torments and tortures that all he longed for was death. Knowing the deplorable state he was in I ardently wished to help him, but all I could do was secretly to send him my bed, as he suffered much from lying on the cold pavement. Also I gave some money to a friend who was able to send daily cha for him to drink, prepared according to the custom of that country, which I shall later describe. Tired of the resistance of the faithful Viceroy and seeing their efforts useless, it was decided to send him, with the queen and the little prince her son and the other prince, Lazang Khan’s second son, to the king of Zungharia in order that he might kill them and thus satisfy his detestable cruelty, or that they might die on the long journey of three months’ suffering and want.

Fearing some opposition the Tartars made their preparations in secret and sent off the unhappy prisoners in secret and sent off the unhappy prisoners like victims to execution. They had already reached the desert of the northeast boundary, where the road from China leads to Zungharia, before general Döndrup Tsering heard of their departure. The liberty granted to him, which had seemed so odious when compared to the sufferings of the royal captives, he now welcomed, hoping to be able to set them free or die in the attempt. Leaving a letter to be given to the barbarous conqueror, general Tsering Döndrup, he started alone, overtook and furiously attacked the escort of the four unhappy victims, and fighting valiantly one against many, succeeded in delivering the half-dead Viceroy and inducing him to seek safety in flight, thus exposing himself to grave peril for the liberty of his friend. The heroic general was on the point of again attacking the astonished enemy when news came that the cruel general Tsering Döndrup had revenged himself for his flight from Lhasa by torturing and then cutting into small pieces his much loved wife. The tears he shed only served to inflame his valour, he threw himself into the very midst of the enemy, where he saw the unhappy queen and the two princes, miserable survivors of the royal family. Like lightning he fell on their escort, his flashing eyes inspired terror as he trod over the corpses of so many adversaries, when unmindful of the severe wounds he had received, and within an arm’s length of the wretched prisoners, he suddenly lost consciousness and fell. With loud shouts of inhuman joy the Tartars seized him, cut off his hands, feet, ears, and nose, and set him on a horse. But death was soon to put an end to his sufferings; with eyes turned toward the royal prisoners, the brave young general expired, whose memory will long live in Tibet, China and other adjacent kingdoms. The fate of the unfortunate queen, of her innocent child, and of the prince ought now to be told, but I prefer not to afflict the reader by describing their lamentable end. Also I perceive that I have already been induced by my profound and heartfelt gratitude for the affection shown me by king Lazang Khan, his ministers and family to exceed the limits of a plain and unvarnished recital such as I had promised.

Prime Minister Targum Tashi, unable at once to avenge his sufferings and the death of his beloved friend on the savage enemy, left the desert which leads towards the east to Zungharia, and went to the North, crossing the province of Gang and other provinces, until he reached the Great Desert. I have already described, which from the west extends as far as Gartok from thence to Yarkand, and from Yarkand to Zungharia. When Prime Minister reached Gartok he sought out, encouraged, and organized the survivors of the troops sent by Lazang Khan to defend that extreme frontier of Tibet from any possible foe. Prime Minister’s intention was to close the pass between Gartok and High Tartary, thus cutting all communication between the conqueror of Tibet and his native country.
His design succeeded. The Chinese had occupied the Eastern road, so the Zunghar king [Tsewang Rapten] being unaware of the snare laid by Targum Tashi, sent envoys and then troops to reinforce the army in Tibet by the road passing through Gartok. None of the messengers sent from Lhasa to Zungharia, or any troops sent from there to Tibet ever reached their destination.

After long waiting, the Zunghar general Tsering Döndrup, the barbarous conqueror of Tibet, getting no answer from Upper Tartary was angry and perplexed, not knowing whether some unforeseen accident had happened or whether he had lost the favour of his king, that execrable traitor. At last, after mature deliberation, knowing the insatiate greed of his king and his countrymen, he decided to send the rich treasures taken, not only from the city of Lhasa, but from all Tibet with a strong force of his Zunghars by the Western road across the Great Desert to Gartok, and on to Zungharia. Thus he hoped to induce the king to confirm him in possession of Tibet and to send more troops to reap a yet richer harvest.

Prime Minister Targum Tashi had meanwhile secretly drilled and instructed the Tibetans at Gartok, and when the Zunghars arrived there after a journey of four months, they were met by friendly and festive people who invited them to rest a few days from the dangers and tedium of such a journey in large tents which had been set up on purpose. After mutual compliments the Zunghars accepted and feasting began. Great quantities of chang, arrack [raki], and other kinds of beer were served. Now it is the custom among both Tibetans and Tartars that drinking must continue until the bottles are empty and no more is served. When the Tibetans saw that arrack had taken effect on the Zunghars they, by Targum Tashi’s orders, suggested to the officers that it would be well to observe the custom of laying aside all arms during a drinking bout, for mirth might easily turn into strife with lamentable results. As hosts they would set the example and lay down their weapons. The Zunghars were too drunk to be suspicious, gave up their arms and continued merrily to drink until they were either wrapped in profound slumber or too intoxicated to stand on their feet. Targum Tashi now came forward, commanded his men to kill the Zunghars with their own weapons and not to allow one to escape to bear the news to Zungharia. The immense treasure was kept at Gartok until the Chinese had, as he hoped, taken Tibet, when he would send it back to Lhasa to be presented to them as a thank-offering for revenging the deaths of king Lazang Khan and his family.

Chapter 12  How the Kingdom of Tibet Passed from the Tartars to the Chinese

The Emperor of China had grave reasons for anger. First the attempted invasion of his Empire by way of Xining, without any provocation or reason as I have said above, and secondly the treacherous seizure of the kingdom of Tibet and the murder of Lazang Khan, his friend and near relation. But wishing first to try peaceful means and if possible spare the lives of his own soldiers and of the unhappy Tibetans, he sent ambassadors to General Tsering Döndrup, inviting him to give up the throne he had so unjustly seized or to prepare to be ignominiously ousted. Made insolent by success, the general answered that by force he had seized Tibet and by force he meant not only to keep it, but eventually to conquer other kingdoms. The emperor of China at once [in 1719] sent a strong force from Xining and the adjacent provinces against Tibet, composed entirely of Chinese, partly pagans, partly Muslims, but without any of his best troops, who are all Tartars. Two roads lead from China to Lhasa, capital of Tibet. The shortest, which takes about three months, from Xining across an arid desert to the west, debouches to the north of Lhasa. The other is longer and takes more than three months. From Xining it turns to the south through the province of Dartsanto [Dajianlu] in the kingdom of Kham, which is incorporated with Tibet; from thence, bearing to the West, it traverses other provinces of Tibet and finally reaches Lhasa. Although longer, this is by far the easiest route, as the country is inhabited. The officers in command of the Chinese army, nearly all Muslims, feared to be attacked on this road, and chose the first. Owing to the number of troops, and utter solitude, and the length of the journey, provisions had begun to run short before they arrived at Dam to the North of Lhasa, but there they
were able to requisition supplies. Choosing a suitable place, they enclosed a considerable extent of land with a stone wall as protection against the enemy, and this proved to be their undoing. The Zunghars summoned soldiers from every part of Tibet and after several unimportant skirmishes drove the Chinese back into their enclosed camp and surrounded it on all sides, allowing no provisions to enter. After eating all the animals, the wretched Chinese were forced by hunger to feed upon the bodies of their companions who had died of starvation. Driven by such extreme misery they sent some Tibetan Lamas to beg the Zunghars to allow them to come out of their camp and return quietly to their own country. The Zunghars consented, on condition that the Chinese lay down their weapons. As the miserable creatures left the camp without arms and too weak to save themselves by flight, they were massacred by the treacherous enemy.

The emperor of China, exasperated by this second act of abominable cruelty, ordered an innumerable number of men to be summoned, among them many Tartars, from the outlying provinces of the empire as well as from Beijing, and commanded the various little kingdoms of Lower Tartary [Mongolia], his dependents and feudatories, to send strong reinforcements. Only he who knows the immense riches of the emperor of China can at all realize the quantity of arms, ammunition, instruments of war and animals provided for this huge army. I only will give one instance; to every officer and soldier five years of pay was granted and immediately given. Though I fear that the reader will disbelieve me, what I relate I saw with my own eyes.

Shortly after the Chinese entered Tibet for the second time, the whole vast kingdom was flooded with silver, which so diminished in value that reiterated edicts and severe punishment were necessary to force the people to accept it as payment. I must explain that the Chinese had no coinage, but simply large or small pieces of silver. Exposed to some risk, to expense, and to the long journey, the Tibetans sent this silver from Lhasa to Nepal to change into the money of the kings who ruled that kingdom. They charged nothing, but gave an equal weight in coins for the silver and gained many millions, especially the king of Kathmandu.

The emperor of China showed his sagacity by the steps he took to gain the affections of the Tibetans and to alienate them from the Zunghars. As I have said before, news had spread all over Tibet that the Dalai Lama, killed by Lazang Khan, had been reborn near Xining in China. These credulous and superstitious people had tried in vain by supplications and every sort of intrigue to obtain the boy’s release from the fortress in which he was well guarded by the Emperor’s orders. Now he released the young impostor and sent him to Tibet with his second army. Proclamations were addressed to monks, governors, and people saying if they wished to fight him they were to join with the treacherous Zunghars, but if in this youth they recognized their venerated Dalai Lama, they must obey all the commands of the leaders of this army.

Slowly and in good order the Chinese advanced, not by the road across the desert but by the more inhabited one, and from all parts the people assembled to acclaim the Dalai Lama and hear the orders given by the representatives of the emperor of China. These orders were that all men, even the aged and infirm, from the age of twelve upwards should be armed, enrolled and employed, and they were obeyed. Against Tibetan custom, even monks were called up. At that time I was in a place called Trongné, in the province of Dakpo Khyer, and for safety had taken refuge in the Governor’s palace. Although a monk, he had been called up and was with the army a long way off, having left a vice governor. After sundown on the evening of the twenty-eighth of September, 1720, I received an order from the general in command of the troops in that province to go next day armed, and with a horse, a baggage mule, and two armed serving-men on foot to the camp, under pain of death if I disobeyed. My character as a lama was of no avail as several lamas of Tibet had been forced to obey. My surprise at so peremptory a command can easily be imagined. Seeing my dismay the good vice-governor who was old and much respected, and a distant relation of the said general, consoled me with the hope that he might be able to induce him to cancel his order. After eating he started, and next morning on reaching the general’s tent, spoke so efficaciously in my favour that a counter-order was sent to me with excuses and many compliments.
Now although all the Tibetans had been armed, only a chosen few had been incorporated in the Chinese army. The rest were dispatched to guard the frontiers of Tibet and of the different provinces and close all the roads, even over the mountains. This was done to prevent the Zunghars and their fellow conspirators from taking flight. What ardour does desperation inspire in men, and what courage the dread of failure!

One would think that abandoned by the Tibetans, threatened by a formidable army and weakened by former losses, the Zunghars, now reduced to about four thousand men and with no hope of receiving reinforcements, would have laid down their arms. On the contrary, under cover of a dark night they fell on the Chinese and killed some thousands. Made more arrogant and bloodthirsty by this success they repeated the attack on the following night with the same result. Having discovered where the Dalai Lama was, surrounded by a large force of Tartars and the principal officers, they made violent attempts to break through the ranks of the terrified Chinese, killing them without mercy. The Chinese idea in forming such enormous armies, composed in great measure of old or worn out men, who certainly appear to be a hindrance rather than a help, is that China is so densely populated that she cares little for the loss of thousands of men, while the enemy exhausts himself thoroughly by slaughtering, when the vigorous and trusted men advance and gain a victory.

And this it was that now happened. On the fourth night the Chinese did not wait for the Zunghars to attack. As evening closed in lights and fires illuminated their tents and pavilions to show they were being guarded, while in truth they were almost denuded of troops. Meanwhile the Tartars of China and of Mongolia under cover of night had been formed into three detachments. The first remained to guard the Dalai Lama; the second took up a position, after the Chinese had all been withdrawn, facing the enemy; the third marched out in silence and by a circuitous route got to their rear. At a given signal these two divisions attacked the Zunghars, who soon became aware of the difference between these troops and their former antagonists. After heavy fighting the Zunghars were defeated and the insolent usurper general Tsering Döndrup fled with but few followers towards the great western desert. He did not dare take the road leading to Cartôa, where he knew Prime Minister Targum Tashi was in command, but turning to the north he attempted to cross the arid impracticable mountains, where they say he died of hunger and despair.

The other traitors and disturbers of public order who dared open the gates of Lhasa to the Tartar usurpers, along with Depa Taksé who delivered the three heroes into the hands of the Zunghars and later took the title of desi, that is, king of the Tibetans, were all publicly put to death by order of the emperor of China. [Filippi trans.: Many were the supplications for mercy, but all were sternly refused, and even the Dalai Lama was warned not to interfere in such matters. Bare-foot and bare-headed, with hands bound, surrounded by Chinese and Tartar guards fully armed, these miserable traitors were led round the magnificent temple of the idols, called Lhabrang, then through the principal streets to the place of execution. The deposed Lama was beheaded; the Depa Taksé and the others were tied to a certain instrument of torture, tortured and then shot at with arrows until they were dead. Thus perished those iniquitous traitors.] This together with their torture allayed the discontents of the kingdom. [Filippi trans: I do not intend to write a long or minute history, and therefore shall not describe the rapturous reception by these blind pagans of the Dalai Lama, whom the Chinese installed on the throne of the Potala in Lhasa, nor the excellent discipline of the great Chinese army. I must, however, observe that the wise emperor of China really undertook the conquest of Tibet to avenge the deaths of Lazang Khan and his family.]

With this victory, after nigh on twenty years of tumult and disaster, in October 1720 Tibet passed from the Tartars to the emperor of China. It is presently governed by him, and here his descendants will probably continue to reign for many centuries.