THE NGARI CHRONICLE

INTRODUCTION

This is a general history, which includes a section on the Yarlung dynasty in Tibet and another section on the post-imperial history of Guge Purang (Gu ge sPu hrang). It was written by Ngawang Dragpa (Ngag dbang grags pa), who studied with Tsongkapa (Tsong kha pa) in Ü Tsang (dBus gtsang) and had returned to Ngari (mNga’ ris) by 1424. The chronicle indicates that it was written in 1497 and there is evidence that the author had an exceptionally long life.

Sources

Vitali, Roberto. 1996. The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang: according to mNga’ris rgyal.rabs by Gu.ge mkhan.chen Ngag.dbang grags.pa. Dharamsala: Tholing gtsug lag khang lo g cig stong ‘khor ba’i rjes dran mzdad sgo’i go sgrig tshogs chung.

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OUTLINE

The chronicle is divided into three sections:

1 The India section: creation of the world, castes and lineages.
2 The Yarlung dynasty
3 The Guge Purang section

EXTRACTS

The extracts below are drawn from the text reproduced by Vitali (1996), with page number references to both the text and translations in that edition.

The Yarlung section

This includes an account of the activities of Songtsen Gampo (Srong brtsan sgam po). After Tonmi Sambhota (Thon mi sambho Ta) has returned from India and created the Tibetan script, Songtsen
Gampo goes into a four-year retreat. When he emerges, he makes an announcement to the people concerning his status as a religious king.

[p. 104 (p.24)]

'In order to help living beings become accustomed to making offerings to the Three Jewels in perfect harmony with the true doctrine, and practise excellent worldly professions and physical bravery, and undertake intellectual training in the sciences, and in particular practise the ten virtues, and honour those with spiritual knowledge (prajñāpāramitā) and those who do not know the baser elements, and be respectful and reverential to scholars and teachers, and serve and honour the elders each day, and praise the ascetics and brahmin practitioners, and make offerings respectfully, and not drink chang; and in order to establish the traditions of the sixteen pure customs, I have set out the laws'. All Tibetans were established in the dharma and because everyone declared ‘This king is a profound person (sgam po)’, he was known as ‘Srong btsan sgam po’.

The Guge Purang section

The early part of this section is missing. The existing text begins with an account of the royal lineages, following the decline of the empire. It states that the kingdom was in turmoil and the teachings were abandoned for five generations. People were practising heretical religion.¹

¹ Vitali (1996: 108) explains that this refers to the period 841–986.
Lama Changchub Sempa Yeshe Ö (bLa ma byang chub sms ds pa’ ye shes ’od) was born to emancipate human beings in the kingdom of Ngari. Because of his great compassion he struggled to provide means to secure the peace and happiness of human beings. His minister (Gu ge blo n po zhang rung) made a declaration, referring back to the emperors and the translations made of Buddhist texts during their time, and to the subsequent decline:

[p. 107–09 (p. 51–3)]

’since for many years both chos khrims (religious laws) and rgyal khrims (royal laws) have been declining and all the black-haired people are lacking in excellent virtues and have been deteriorating, and since it is difficult to match the deeds of the ancestors, the subjects are depressed. They follow orders (bk’a’), but there are no legal orders (bk’a’ khrims) based on religious precepts (chos rtsigs). Since the Buddhist teachings have spread and flourished in stod mNga’ ris, I am issuing an order (bk’a’ stsal) concerning virtuous activities and the dissemination of related doctrine’. Many copies of the texts of the chos khrims (religious laws) and rgyal khrims (royal laws) were prepared and distributed in order that they should become well known in all the districts of the kingdom (mnga’ ris skor).

There follows an account of temple founding and the training of people to be translators. Then, in the year 996, Yeshe Ö called a great assembly.

[p. 109 (p. 54)]
More statues and religious monuments are created, scholars are invited, translations made, and monasteries founded. Bon practices are eliminated.

[p. 110–11 (p. 55–56)]

In general, [Yeshe Ö] widely diffused the Buddhist teachings and caused them to flourish. In particular, he made many texts of religious and royal laws. The law concerning the appointment of the king was that if there were many sons, all except the heir apparent were to become monks and the ruler should protect the sangha of the ordained; if the lineage of the btsan po (king) was cut, it would be restored from among the monks; all laymen and monks should firmly safeguard the doctrine.
From now on, [although] new scriptures and commentaries have arrived and are often heard, if medicine, technical knowledge (go cha), and so on, do not exist here, those who keep monastic vows must bring them from elsewhere. All monks and laymen must guard against foreigners who might diminish the realm. People must learn the nine kinds of male prowess, namely, how to fire arrows, run, jump, wrestle in various ways, swim, ride horses, write, read, and perform arithmetic. Moreover, they should be brave and agile in them all. Ordinary people are to behave virtuously and if they are ordained, no-one—lord or people—should obstruct them.

The manufacturing, casting, painting, and so on of receptacles of body, speech, and mind ought to be learned. They must not be carried out carelessly. These activities must be rewarded. The casting must not be done carelessly; and it must be rewarded appropriately. You, uncles and nephews, must behave in this way. If anyone, monk or layman, contravenes the religious precepts (chos rtsigs), the high authority of the king and ministers, whatever they possess, must not be imposed, but a reconciliation must be carried out, in all circumstances. In short, the religious law and the great law (bka’ khrims chen mo) must not be contravened.

He continues by making provisions for religious establishments and then the members of the assembly swear an oath to uphold the chos rtsigs (religious precepts) and to instruct future generations to do the same.

The text continues with the decision of Yeshe Ö to become a monk and subsequent events.

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