

The Sum-pa – nomads of the northern plateau. On the issue of the Sum-pa tribes' settlement area

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During the 7th–9th centuries, Tibet was one of the largest states in Central Asia. The emergence of the powerful Tibetan Empire was made possible by the unification of all the tribes inhabiting the Tibetan plateau under the rule of the Yarlung dynasty kings. The extant portion of the preamble to the Old Tibetan Annals – the oldest Tibetan historical chronicle – begins with a report on the Sum-pa tribes.¹ In order to understand the role played by the Sum-pa in the formation of the empire, as well as the significance of these tribes in the Tibetan history and culture, it is necessary to determine their territorial location. The article attempts to analyze the currently available data on the "geography" of the Sum-pa tribes and, by generalization, to identify the most probable boundaries of their former settlement.

Information regarding the location of the Sum-pa can be found in the following sources: 1) Old Tibetan documents from Dunhuang and the Tarim Basin; 2) the works of Tibetan historians of the 13th–18th centuries, based on earlier, often not preserved sources; 3) texts of the Bon religious tradition; 4) materials of archaeological research on the territory of the Tibetan plateau; 5) Chinese dynastic chronicles.

The only source that directly delineated the borders of the Sum-pa territory is the *New Book of Tang*, a Chinese historical chronicle. This dynastic history mentions the **Su-p'i**, who were a branch of the Western Qiang and the greatest among the tribes; after annexation by the Tibetans, they were called **Sun-po**.² The French Sinologist P. Pelliot showed that the Chinese word **Sun-po** corresponds to the Tibetan **Sum-pa**. He believed that the Chinese form **Su-p'i** implies the local word ¹**Su-bi** or ²**Su-vi**, which is not found in written sources.³ Therefore, ¹**Su-bi** or ²**Su-vi** could be the self-name of these tribes.

Regarding the habitat of the **Su-p'i**, the *New Book of Tang* reports that to the east they bordered on the To-mi, and to the west they reached Hu-mang-hsia (the Hu-mang Gorge). The territory of the To-mi (Tibetan name: Nan-ma), a tribe of Qiang origin, apparently extended from north of Lakes Skya-ring and Sngo-ring and the sources

¹ Dotson 2009: 81.

² Chavannes 1900: 169.

³ Pelliot 1920-21: 330-331.

of the Huang He to the southwest to the left bank of the 'Bri-chu – the upper reaches of the Yangtze River; to the east of the To-mi lived another Qiang tribe – Pai-lan.⁴ It follows that the **Su-p'i** occupied the area between the right bank of the 'Bri-chu River in the east and the Hu-mang Gorge in the west. H. Sato, having analyzed the route from Lake Koko-nor to the valley of the Skyid-chu River in Central Tibet, cited in the *New Book of Tang* and dated to the 8th century, came to the conclusion that the Hu-mang Gorge (where the Hu-mang station was located, where the envoys of the Tang empire were usually welcomed on behalf of the Chinese princess) corresponds to the Bayan-dkar-mo area between the Sog-chu and Shag-chu rivers.⁵ The Shag-chu River had a certain strategic significance: one of the Tibetan border outposts was located on it, which was met by the Mongolian embassy on its way to Lhasa in 1927.⁶ In 1720, the Dzungarian forces resisted the Qing army with a defence based on this area.⁷ Thus, according to the *New Book of Tang*, the Sum-pa tribes occupied the territory approximately between the 'Bri-chu River in the northeast and the Shag-chu in the southwest.

The archaeological research materials suggest somewhat different limits of the Sum-pa's settlement area. According to J.V. Bellezza, the western border of the Sum-pa tribes was in the vicinity of the 90th meridian, to the west of it was the country of Zhang-zhung.⁸ This, in particular, is evidenced by the terraced funerary structures characteristic of the eastern Byang-thang and almost never occurring west of the 90th meridian.⁹

Terraced burials are actually limited to the area north of Lake Gnam-mtsho. Large-scale tombs in Dam-gzhung County southeast of Gnam-mtsho¹⁰ bear similarities to the terraced funerary structures in more northern territories and indicate cultural contacts of the Sum-pa tribes with the local population. In ancient times, the Lake Gnam-mtsho territory was one of the most important cultural centers of the Tibetan plateau; archaic cave hermitages and rock paintings, vestiges appear all around Gnam-mtsho,¹¹ and the Tashi Do peninsula is a large rock art theatre.¹² J.V. Bellezza noted that there are many pictographs of stepped shrines at Tashi Do – the same as at rock art sites in Ruthok

⁴ Pelliot 1963: 690, 704.

⁵ Sato 1975: 11-12.

⁶ Kychanov, Melnichenko 2005: 235.

⁷ Sato 1975: 12.

⁸ Bellezza 2014c: 141.

⁹ Bellezza 2014b: sites D-74, D-75, D-77, D-79, D-80, D-81, D-82, D-97, D-98.

¹⁰ Bellezza 2014b: sites D-99, D-101.

¹¹ Bellezza 2014c: 37.

¹² Ibid: 173.

in the far west of Tibet.¹³ Ancient sanctuaries and rock paintings of Lake Gnam-mtsho are very similar to those of Zhang-zhung. Therefore, we can conclude that Zhang-zhung had a significant cultural influence on the western part of the Sum-pa tribes.

This influence was carried out primarily through the Bon religion. The Sum-pa's adherence to Bon is reflected in the writings of the Bon religious tradition. According to the *Treasury of Good Sayings*, a fundamental work on the history of Bon, Sum-pa was one of the first languages into which Bon teachings were translated; moreover, in the process of spreading the teaching, some sacred texts were translated into Tibetan from the Sum-pa language.¹⁴ According to tradition, the Sum-pa territory was among the countries from which the Bon religion spread to the south of Central Tibet. Buddhist historians also regard the Sum-pa country as a stronghold of Bon. The *Red Annals*, Bu-ston's *History of Buddhism* and the chronicle of Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag speak of a certain Bon-po from the Sum-pa country named A-yons rgyal-ba during the reign of Nyag-khri Btsan-po, the first legendary king of Tibet. Sum-pa mkhan-po in his historical treatise *Dpag-bsam Ljon-bzang* states that the Bon of Sum-pa appeared during the time of Nyag-khri Btsan-po.¹⁵ Bon, in the mind of the Tibetans, was the primordial Sum-pa religion that existed from the very beginning of Tibetan history.

Among the numerous monuments of the Byang-thang described by J.V. Bellezza, the island of Se-mo Do on Lake Gnam-mtsho is of particular interest for studying the history and culture of the Sum-pa tribes. One of the largest prehistoric residential complexes in the Sum-pa territory has been discovered on this island – almost every cave facing south has been adapted for habitation.¹⁶ The scale of the ruins gives the impression that in ancient times up to several hundred people lived on Se-mo Do. Life on the island, extremely poor in natural resources, required constant economic injections from the mainland: food, clothing, handicrafts could only be obtained from the coast. Only the social elite of the area could organize a regular supply of products in such quantities.¹⁷ It is possible that the island of Se-mo Do was once the political core of the Gnam-mtsho area: in this isolated bastion island settled the rulers of the clans surrounding the lake, as well as the Bon-po priests associated with them. The Bon Mother Tantras make it clear that the island was the divine heart of Lake Gnam-mtsho and the main center of religious rituals.¹⁸

¹³ Ibid: 190.

¹⁴ Karmay 1972: 16–17, 22.

¹⁵ Haahr 1969: 104–105.

¹⁶ Bellezza 2014c: 137

¹⁷ Bellezza 2014a: sites B-126, B-127.

¹⁸ Ibid: B-126.

Probably, it was the sacredness of the island that led to the settlement of the local elite, who attributed their successes to the magic rituals of the Bon-po priests. At present, only fragments of walls and foundations remain from the solid ancient structures of the island. Such a destruction cannot be explained solely by natural causes. J.V. Bellezza suggests two historical scenarios for the destruction of the ancient infrastructure of Se-mo Do: 1) during the annexation of this territory by the Yarlung dynasty in the 7th century; 2) during the period of internecine religious conflicts between 800 and 1000 CE.¹⁹

It seems most likely that Se-mo Do, as one of the important political centers of the Sum-pa tribes, was first destroyed during the annexation of the Gnam-mtsho area by the Tibetan state at the turn of the 7th century, then during the suppression of the Sum-pa uprising against the Yarlung dynasty in the late 620s – early 630s (however, the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* says that the subjugation of the Sum-pa passed without serious violence).²⁰ Later, after the collapse of the empire, Se-mo Do, given the importance of the island for adherents of the Bon religion, could once again become the fighting arena – this time on a religious basis.

The itinerary from China to Nepal, cited in the 7th century Chinese Buddhist gazetteer, mentions the kingdom of **Kam** north-northwest of the Tibetan state on the way to it.²¹ Most likely, this refers to the territory near Lake Gnam-mtsho, which is partly confirmed by the itinerary of the *New Book of Tang*: heading to the center of the Tibetan Empire – the Skyid-chu River valley, the Chinese envoys passed through the Gnam-mtsho area, having skirted the lake from the eastern side.²² The kingdom of **Kam** of the former route appears as an independent state formation southwest of the Sum-pa. On the other hand, the *Royal Genealogy* – a part of the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* – speaks of **Kam** as one of the ministerial clans of the ancient principality **Sum-yul gyi Ya-sum**,²³ which apparently corresponds to the Sum-pa tribes' country. This means that the clans inhabiting the vicinity of Lake Gnam-mtsho were closely related to the clans living in the main settlement area of the Sum-pa, but possessed autonomy and cultural identity.

The *List of the Administrative Chiefs* in Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag's chronicle, presumably dated to the mid-630s, reports that the administrative center of the Sum-pa tribes within the Tibetan state, at least initially, was **Nam-ra Zha-don**,²⁴ which may be associated with the sacred mountain Nam-ra northeast of Gnam-mtsho. Two ancient fortresses and very

¹⁹ Bellezza 2014a: B-126.

²⁰ Dotson 2009: 38, fn. 50.

²¹ Pelliot 1963: 709–710.

²² For the map of the Tang route, see Sato 1975.

²³ Hazod 2009: 174.

²⁴ Uray 1972: 32–33, 45.

large cemeteries have been discovered in the vicinity of Mount Nam-ra.²⁵ The wide valley of Bar-tha located here appears to be one of the ancient political centers of the eastern Byang-thang. It should be noted that the lists of possessions "Eighteen Shares of Power" in the chronicle *Chos-'byung mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston* and "Administrative Arrangement of Territory" in the historical work *Rgya bod-kyi chos-'byung rgyas-pa*, which reflect the first attempts to carry out the administrative territorial division of the Tibetan state, by securing the various clans' dominance in certain territories, indicate Nam-ra Cha-gong / Nam-ra Tshadgong (possibly identical to **Nam-ra Zha-don**) as the possession of the 'Bring / 'Bri and Chag clans.²⁶ The 'Bring clan seems to be related to 'Bring-mtshams, the "border territory of the Bring", a *stong-sde* of Central Horn directly south / southeast of Gnam-mtsho.²⁷ The population of the territories south of Gnam-mtsho, as mentioned above, maintained such intense contact with their northern neighbors that this influenced their burial traditions. Due to the geographical proximity of the territory north of Lake Gnam-mtsho to Central Tibet, stable control over it was established earlier than over the main part of the Sum-pa, and the administration of this area was carried out separately, despite the probable kinship of the local population with the tribes to the east of it. In the 730s–740s, Ngam-ru'i phag, a *stong-sde* of Central Horn, was located here.²⁸

The separate administration was carried out against the background of the cultural heterogeneity of the territories to the north and east of Gnam-mtsho. In the area north of Gnam-mtsho, most of the antiquities of the eastern Byang-thang have been discovered. Unfortunately, we have no data on the existence of significant archaeological sites east of Gnam-mtsho, however, rather scanty archaeological evidence still suggests that the far eastern Byang-thang and the adjacent Salween river valleys system had a different cultural configuration than the main part of the Byang-thang²⁹ including the Gnam-mtsho area. The difference is explained by the strong influence that the population to the north of Gnam-mtsho experienced from the neighboring Zhang-zhung with its more developed statehood and religious culture, and the lack of such an intense influence in the territories to the east. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that at a certain period of time the Sum-pa tribal union included groups living north of Gnam-mtsho, since after joining the Tibetan state, it was there that the administrative center of the Sum-pa tribes was located, and earlier – the kingdom of

²⁵ Bellezza 2014c: 107.

²⁶ Dotson 2006: 364-366.

²⁷ Hazod 2009: 195, 200, 202.

²⁸ Ibid: 204.

²⁹ Bellezza 2014c: 142.

Kam, bearing the same name as one of the Sum-pa aristocratic clans.

The question of whether Zhang-zhung exercised political power over the Sum-pa remains open. The *Treasury of Good Sayings*, referring to the text *Zhang-zhung snyan-brgyud*, states that the Sum-pa country was under the rule of Zhang-zhung and a small Zhang-zhung regiment was stationed there.³⁰ After the assassination of King Lig Myirhya and the annexation of Zhang-zhung to the Tibetan state, "the thousands of Zhang-zhung communities were separated from the thousands of Sum-pa communities".³¹ In the Bon tradition, this event is perceived as a tragedy, which confirms the close connection of the Sum-pa tribes with the Zhang-zhung state. The remnants of this connection can be traced in the toponymy of the Gnam-mtsho area: the northern continuation of the Gnyan-chen thang-lha mountain range is called the "Shang-shung ridge", the key pass on the way from Nag-chu to Lha-sa is the Shang-shung pass.³² *Dbā 'bzhed* mentions that Zhang-zhung owned the fortresses of **Rtse-mtho** and **Rgod-lting**.³³ Meanwhile, in the *stong-sde* catalogues of the chronicles *Sngon-gyi gtam me-tog phreng-ba*, *Rgya bod-kyi chos-'byung rgyas-pa* and *Chos-'byung mkhas-pa 'i dga'-ston* **Rtse-mthon** is listed as one of the Sum-pa thousand-districts within the Tibetan Empire.³⁴ The catalogue of the thousand-districts of the "Sum-pa land" in the chronicle *Sngon-gyi gtam me-tog phreng-ba*, which reflects an earlier situation than the lists of the other two named chronicles, also contains the district of **Rgod-lding**.³⁵ Perhaps, before the subjugation of the Sum-pa to the Tibetan Empire, Zhang-zhung exercised authority over the territories where the **Rtse-mthon** and **Rgod-lting** districts were later formed as part of the Tibetan state. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine that all the Sum-pa, which, according to the *New Book of Tang*, were the greatest among the tribes³⁶, were subordinate to Zhang-zhung. Rather, the matter is in the undoubted cultural and probable political impact exerted, first of all, on the western part of the Sum-pa tribes by neighboring Zhang-zhung; at the same time, it is natural that the Bon tradition strives to exalt Zhang-zhung in all respects as the cradle of the Bon religion.

Bon texts say that the "gateway to Zhang-zhung", the border of Zhang-zhung was the area of **Sum-pa glang-gi gyim-shod**. *Padma than-yig*, a Tibetan Buddhist text on the life of Padmasambhava, and

³⁰ Karmay 1972: 86.

³¹ Ibid: 97.

³² Roerich 2012: 412, 449; Uray 1972: 44, fn. 95.

³³ Gonkatsang, Willis 2021: 154-155.

³⁴ Dotson 2006: 96, 162, 169.

³⁵ Ibid: 96.

³⁶ Chavannes 1900: 169.

Srid-pa rgyud-kyi kha-byang,³⁷ a Bon manuscript, mention that this territory was inhabited by "grass-people" and "tree-people." Bu-ston's *History of Buddhism and the Ladakh Chronicles* place "grass-people" and "tree-people" in the east, and Dpa'-bo Gtsug-lag in the east or north of Tibet.³⁸ The *Treasury of Good Sayings* points to the location of **Sum-pa glang-gi gyim-shod** between Tibet in the west and China in the east.³⁹ Consequently, it can be the eastern border of the Sum-pa's settlement area, regarding which we have only the data from Chinese sources that in its northern part it ran along the southern (right) bank of the 'Bri-chu River. In the Bon tradition, **Sum-pa glang-gi gyim-shod** is considered one of the ancient centers of the Bon religion; during the persecution of Bon under Khri Srong-lde-brtsan, some of the sacred texts were hidden there⁴⁰. According to Bon sources, **Sum-pa glang-gi gyim-shod** corresponds to Khyung-po Ri-rtse-drug – "the Mountain with six peaks of the Khyung country" in Steng-chen County.⁴¹ The Khyung-po area is an ancient stronghold of the Bon religion. Drawing the eastern border of the Sum-pa along Steng-chen would be geographically justified, since this territory straddles the boundary between the northern Nag-chu highlands and the meridional alpine mountain ranges and valleys of Kham.⁴² In this case, the area of **Sum-pa glang-gi gyim-shod** would be the border of the Upper Tibet civilization, the undisputed cultural leader of which was Zhang-zhung.

There are other data on the eastern border of the Sum-pa's settlement area: at least one of the Sum-pa clans – **Rlangs (Sum-pa Glang)** – is associated with Glang-thang in 'Dan-ma,⁴³ which is far northeast of Steng-chen in predominantly nomadic Gser-shul County southeast of Yushu.

To clarify the issue of the geographical location of the Sum-pa, it is necessary to consider the location of **Sum-ru** – the Horn of Sum-pa, a large administrative territorial unit within imperial Tibet, which included at least a part of the territory occupied by the Sum-pa tribes. The *Old Tibetan Annals* inform that the great administration of **Sum-ru** was carried out at the council of the **Mdo-smad** region in the winter of 702-703.⁴⁴ At **Mdo-smad** council in 759, "many from **Sum-ru**" were awarded the insignia of rank.⁴⁵ Thus, the **Sum-ru** territory was

³⁷ Ms. Bibl. Nat. No. 493.

³⁸ Stein 1961: 72, fn. 206; Uray 1972: 60.

³⁹ Karmay 1972: 96.

⁴⁰ Karmay 1972: 41, 95-96.

⁴¹ Thar 2009: 27.

⁴² Bellezza 2014c: 141.

⁴³ Stein 1961: 79.

⁴⁴ Dotson 2009: 101-102.

⁴⁵ Ibid: 131.

associated with the **Mdo-smad** region. The great administration of the **Mdo-smad** region took place later than that of **Sum-ru**, in 715-716,⁴⁶ which does not allow us to speak about the complete identity of **Sum-ru** and **Mdo-smad**. In 730-731 in Gtse-nam-yor (the place where the Mdo-smad council was convened seven times from 709 to 727) the Chief minister of Tibet 'Bro Cung-bzang 'Or-mang carried out the administration of Mtong-sod.⁴⁷ The only thing known about the location of Mtong-sod is that in 755, the serfs of the rebel ministers Lang and 'Bal were sent into exile there as punishment,⁴⁸ which means that this area was located far from Central Tibet, perhaps even on the borders of the empire. The possible connection between Mtong-sod and the Mthong-khyab tribes inhabiting the area of Mount Amnye Machen and the upper reaches of the Yellow River⁴⁹ cannot be ruled out. Apparently, **Sum-ru**, like Mtong-sod, was considered by the Tibetans to be within the large **Mdo-smad** region. The entry in the *Annals* for 756-757 states that there were many new subjects in Mdo-smad.⁵⁰ Consequently, the Mdo-smad region was changing its borders during the territorial expansion of the Tibetan Empire, gradually including various tribes. The places of the Mdo-smad council are recorded in the *Annals* since 692-693, with the first council being associated with the Sum-pa;⁵¹ no other regional councils are mentioned in the *Annals*, demonstrating the importance of the region for the central Tibetan government.

When considering the location of Mdo-smad, the following facts should be taken into account. In 708-709 at the Mdo-smad council, many gold taxes were collected from the subjects.⁵² While the Sum-pa are associated with iron,⁵³ Chinese sources note the presence of large gold deposits in the land of the To-mi, their eastern neighbors.⁵⁴ The upper reaches of the Yangtze were called by the Chinese the "River of Golden Sands".⁵⁵ Perhaps the To-mi tribes, who lived on the lands from the headwaters of the Yellow River to the left bank of the 'Bri-chu, were part of the Mdo-smad region of the Tibetan Empire and paid taxes in gold. In 710-711 the Mdo-smad council was convened by Zhang Rgya-sto, probably corresponding to 'Bro zhang Brtan-sgra Ya-sto – the great

⁴⁶ Ibid: 109.

⁴⁷ Ibid: 118.

⁴⁸ Ibid: 128.

⁴⁹ For Mthong-khyab location, see Rong 1990-91: 255-256.

⁵⁰ Dotson 2009: 129.

⁵¹ Ibid: 97-98.

⁵² Dotson 2009: 105-106.

⁵³ Sato 1975: 8.

⁵⁴ Chavannes 1900: 169.

⁵⁵ Sato 1975: 8.

Mdo minister mentioned in the *Annals of 'A-zha Principality*, which suggests a connection between the Mdo-smad region and the 'A-zha,⁵⁶ Xianbei tribes who occupied the territory near Lake Koko-nor within the Tibetan Empire. At the beginning of the 8th century, the 'A-zha khagan became related to the Cog-ro clan of Tibet;⁵⁷ according to the *List of the Administrative Chiefs*, as early as the 7th century a representative of this clan – Cog-ro Rgyal-mtshan G.yang-gong – was appointed the head of the Mthong-khyab, the tribes of the upper Yellow River.⁵⁸ Apparently, the Cog-ro clan was actively involved in the administration of northeastern Tibet. From 711 to 728 Cog-ro Khri-gzigs Gngang-khong has convened the Mdo-smad council six times.⁵⁹ The fact that a person from the Cog-ro clan has repeatedly held the Mdo-smad council suggests that the Mdo-smad region included territories of northeastern Tibet. In 755-756, ministers who had previously convened the Mdo-smad council earlier that year led a military campaign to the Tao He River, a tributary of the Yellow River, bordering northeastern Tibet. Among them was Minister Mdo-bzher, who appears to be the same person as Zhang Mdo-bzher, that was proclaimed as general of the military government of the upper Yellow River. Subsequently, Minister Mdo-bzher convened at least two more Mdo-smad councils.⁶⁰ In 756-757 after the campaign against China, undertaken jointly with the state of Nanzhao southeast of Tibet, Minister Mgos Khri-bzang Yab-lag convened the Mdo-smad council.⁶¹ This minister, along with Zhang Stong-rtzan, who held the Mdo-smad council in 757-758 and 758-759, led military operations along the entire Tibetan-Chinese border, including the campaigns to Tsong-kha and Liangzhou.

Thus, the Mdo-smad region reveals connections with both northeastern and southeastern Tibet. It definitely included the upper reaches of the Yangtze and Huang He rivers. The position of "the great Mdo minister" (Mdo-lon chen-po) and the regular fixation of the places of the Mdo-smad council in the *Old Tibetan Annals*, without mentioning any other councils except the central one, testify to the extremely great importance of the region for the government of the empire. The above facts allow us to conclude that in the second half of the 7th – first half of the 8th centuries (the period covered by the *Annals*) the word **Mdo-smad** denoted all of eastern Tibet. The immediate neighbors of the Mdo-smad region were the 'A-zha, who enjoyed some autonomy within the Tibetan state and lived near and west of Lake Koko-nor.

⁵⁶ Dotson 2009: 104, fn.226, 106-107.

⁵⁷ Rong 1990-91: 254.

⁵⁸ Uray 1972: 33.

⁵⁹ Dotson 2009: 107-116.

⁶⁰ Ibid: 128, 130, 131.

⁶¹ Ibid: 129.

Confirmation that the word **Mdo-smad** in the *Annals* meant the whole of eastern Tibet controlled by the government of the empire can be found in the *Section on Law and State* in the chronicle *Chos-'byung chen-po bstan-pa'i rgyal-mtshan* of the 13th century. This chronicle, in its description of Tibet, placed before the catalogues of the *stong-sde* of the four Horns, calls entire eastern ("lower") Tibet **Mdo-smad Khams-gsum**,⁶² i.e. "The three territories of Mdo-smad", by analogy with western ("upper") Tibet, which is called **Mnga'-ris Skor-gsum** – "The three divisions of Mnga'-ris." The same source places Sum-pa Ru'i yan-lag ("The additional Horn of Sum-pa") in the middle of Tibet, along with the four Horns of Central Tibet and the Gnam territory north of Lake Gnam-mtsho.⁶³

Summarizing the above, we can conclude that **Sum-ru** was located in the western part of the **Mdo-smad** region; as the imperial power strengthened its position in eastern Tibet, it gradually carried out administrative transformations there, moving from west to east, therefore Sum-ru was first formed, and then, as new territories in the east were incorporated into the empire, administrative arrangement spread to new areas.

Sum-ru, like the other Horns in the empire, was made up of military administrative units *stong-sde* – thousand-districts, each comprised of approximately one thousand households. Analysis of the Sum-ru boundaries and the names of its *stong-sde* in Tibetan historical chronicles with the use of the Old Tibetan documents from the Tarim Basin shows that the central part of the Horn was located in modern 'Bri-ru County of Nag-chu Prefecture.⁶⁴ It was here that the sub-thousand-district Nags-shod (one of the Sum-ru *stong-sde*) was located, which was the chief of the twelve districts on the lands, from where the famous "Middle Regiment of Heroes" of the Tibetan army was recruited⁶⁵, apparently consisting of soldiers from the Sum-pa tribes. So far, a number of the Sum-ru thousand-districts have not yet been determined, but there is no doubt that the southern border of the Horn was in Lhari County, while a part of the *stong-sde* was located far to the north – in the Nob region⁶⁶. On the territory of the ancient kingdom of Shanshan on the southern route of the Silk Road, the Sum-pa soldiers performed the function of guarding the borders of the empire. Inscriptions on woodslips from the fort of Miran show that the watchmen in the area were entirely recruited from the Sum-pa.⁶⁷ According to *The Chronicle*

⁶² Dotson 2006: 90, 93.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Hazod 2009: 169.

⁶⁵ For the narrative of the middle regiment of heroes, see Dotson 2006: 378-379.

⁶⁶ For the brief outline of the Sum-ru thousand-districts, see Hazod 2009: 169.

⁶⁷ Takeuchi 2004: 53.

of the Kings (*Rgyal-po bka'i thang-yig*), the Sum-pa tribes were responsible for guarding the borders with China in northeastern Tibet.⁶⁸ As can be seen from the document PT 1089, Mkharr-tsan military district, corresponding to modern Liangzhou in Gansu Province and located at the eastern end of the Hexi corridor at a distance of about 1200 km from Miran, also included Sum-pa *stong-sde*.⁶⁹

The consequence of the Sum-pa's stay in the extreme northeast of Tibet may be one of the main incarnation lineages in Dgon-lung byams-pa gling monastery in Huzhu Tu Autonomous County of Qinghai Province, its representative was Sum-pa mkhan-po, an outstanding scholar of the 18th century. The name of the tulku lineage – "Sum-pa" – is associated with the influential local clan of the same name, which played a key role in the foundation of the monastery. Sumpa mkhan-po noted that the Sum-pa clan was called **Be'i kya** in Chinese. In the modern list of Tibetan clan names in Huzhu Tu Autonomous County and neighboring Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County of Gansu Province, one can find a **Baizha'er / Beizha'er** clan, which may be closely related to **Be'i kya**.⁷⁰

Most probably, the clan name "Sum-pa" reflected the presence in these places of the Sum-pa units sent to guard the borders in Mkharr-tsan military district. T. Takeuchi assumes that Tibetan soldiers in Central Asia were accompanied by their families; in their off-duty time, the soldiers lived with their families – this is how settlements arose where people were engaged in cattle breeding and farming,⁷¹ thereby facilitating the food supply of the army. The border Sum-ru *stong-sde* were, in fact, military settlements in the recently conquered strategically important territories, since in the 7th–9th centuries the Tibetan Empire actively participated in the struggle between the main forces of Central Asia to control the movement of caravans along the Silk Road and to collect tribute from the city-states of the oases of the Tarim Basin. It is no coincidence that the chronicles *Rgya bod-kyi chos-'byung rgyas-pa* and *Chos-'byung mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston*, listing the thousand-districts of Sum-ru, state: "These are eleven *stong-sde* of Sum-pa'i-ru, which include the Ltong-khyab (Stong-khyab) and the Chinese"⁷². The Sum-pa carried out military service on the borders alongside other nomads of the Tibetan plateau – the Mthong-khyab – and in the occupied territories they coexisted with the Chinese population.

As can be seen, the borders of Sum-ru and the boundaries of the Sum-pa tribes' settlement area didn't coincide, because Sum-pa's Horn

⁶⁸ Dotson 2006: 82.

⁶⁹ Dotson 2009: 71–73.

⁷⁰ Kim 2020: 250–251.

⁷¹ Takeuchi 2004: 53.

⁷² For the Tibetan text, see Dotson 2006: 162, 169.

was the result of the administrative activities of the imperial government and reflected the government-imposed population resettlement to the borders of the growing state. It is possible that some of the tribal groups of the Sum-pa were not included in Sum-ru and were part of other administrative units of the Mdo-smad region and the four Horns of Central Tibet. At the same time, Sum-pa's Horn must have included the residence area of the main part of the Sum-pa tribes – apparently, modern 'Bri-ru County of Nag-chu Prefecture and the surrounding territories.

In the vast territory between the upper reaches of the Yangtze and the Salween, where the Su-p'i tribes of the *New Book of Tang* lived and the core of Sum-ru was located, during the reign of the Dalai Lamas stretched the pastures of Nub-Hor and Nang-chen nomads, the largest pastoralist regions of Tibet. The eastern edge of the Nub-Hor region in the first half of the 20th century was the area of Steng-chen, which could have been the eastern limit of the Sum-pa tribes' settlement; in the south, Nub-Hor, as well as Sum-ru did in its time, reached Lha-ri.⁷³ From the north, the nomadic state of Nang-chen adjoined Nub-Hor, occupying the upper reaches of the Rdza-Chu (Mekong) and 'Bri-chu rivers.⁷⁴ The harsh climatic conditions and high-mountain terrain definitely indicate that most of the Sum-pa, like the Hor-pa and Nang-chen-mi of the 20th century, were engaged in nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralism. The proof is the attribute of the Sum-pa in the *Old Tibetan Chronicle* – **mdzo**,⁷⁵ i.e., yak hybrid. According to a Nepalese text entitled *Pha-rabs mthong-ba kun-gsal*, which represents an ancient tradition, the Sum-pa's totemic animal was a female dzo (**mdzo-mo**) with long iron horns,⁷⁶ which is not surprising if cattle played a key role in these tribes' way of life.

Societies conducting the same economic activities often have a similar political structure. The thirty-nine tribes of Hor in the early 20th century were a federation of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, headed by the symbolic figure of the king; each tribe had its own leader, whose power was hereditary as well as the power of the king.⁷⁷ Something similar took place in Nang-chen, where the power was distributed among a network of hereditary leaders, in which the king was a *primus inter pares*,⁷⁸ being an important symbol of local unity. The extant part of the preamble to the *Old Tibetan Annals* begins with the

⁷³ See Tawa 2011: 35, 39.

⁷⁴ Turek 2019: 459-460.

⁷⁵ Dotson 2006: 60.

⁷⁶ Bellezza 2005: 204, 206.

⁷⁷ Karmay 2014 [2005]: 182.

⁷⁸ Turek 2019: 454, 469.

message that "all the Sum-pa" were brought to submission.⁷⁹ The words "all the Sum-pa" probably refer to various groups of nomads. Most likely, the Sum-pa tribes were organized on the same principle as the nomadic communities "Thirty-nine tribes of Hor" and "Twenty-five tribes of Yushu", forming something like a federation under the leadership of a king. From the *New Book of Tang*, we learn that the reforms carried out by the central government to integrate the Sum-pa into the Tibetan Empire, including the establishment of Sum-ru, did not eliminate the institution of the king: in 742-755 Mo-ling-tsan, the king of the Su-p'i, wanted to join the Tang empire, but was killed by the Tibetans.⁸⁰ In 755, during the turmoil in Tibet, his son Hsi-no-lo fled to China, where he was received with great honor, which, however, did not cause a mass defection of the Sum-pa to the Tang empire.⁸¹

Despite the active resettlement of the Sum-pa to the military districts on the outskirts of the Tibetan state, part of the population of the historical and cultural regions of Nub-Hor and Nang-chen, coinciding with the settlement area of the Sum-pa tribes of the 7th-9th centuries, must be the Sum-pa's direct descendants and cultural heirs. Of great interest is the fact that the majority of the Hor-pa are adherents of the Bon religion, like their territorial predecessors, the Sum-pa. The nine Nag-shod tribes of the Hor tribal federation⁸² lived in what was once the center of Sum-ru territory.

In a number of sources, the word **Hor** is used in the context of the Sum-pa: for example, in the already mentioned Bon text *Srid-pa rgyud-kyi kha-byang*⁸³ it is said that the "grass people" and the "tree people" of **Hor** live in the country Sum-pa glin-gi gyim-shod.⁸⁴ The *List of the Administrative Chiefs* reports that Srong-btsan Sgam-po appointed **Hor Bya-zhu ring-po** to the administrative head of the Sum-pa.⁸⁵ The question arises about the nature of connection between the concepts of **Hor** and the **Sum-pa**: what kind of Hor people inhabited the same territories as the Sum-pa, and why did one of them become the head of the Sum-pa within the Tibetan state? Bu-ston's *History of Buddhism*, listing the conquests of Srong-btsan Sgam-po, states: "in the north **Hor** people ... were gathered under the rule of the king".⁸⁶

V.P. Vasiliev in his translation of the geographical work written by

⁷⁹ Dotson 2009: 81.

⁸⁰ Chavannes 1900: 169.

⁸¹ Ibid; Pelliot 1963: 704-705.

⁸² Karmay 2014 [2005]: 209.

⁸³ Ms. Bibl. Nat. No. 493

⁸⁴ Stein 1961: 72.

⁸⁵ Uray 1972: 32-33.

⁸⁶ Ibid: 60.

Minchzhul-Khutuktu makes an important remark that there are two words in the Tibetan language: **Hor** and Sog, both the Mongols and the Turks are constantly called by these names, "but these are not specific designations".⁸⁷ A review of the meanings of the word **Hor**, carried out by Tunzhi, H. Suzuki and D. Roche, with reference to Japanese researcher T. Moriyasu,⁸⁸ shows that in the past this word meant non-Tibetan ethnic groups that lived in the north (this principle is still valid in our time, taking into consideration that in Ladakh the word **Hor** denotes the Uighurs and Uzbeks and in Amdo it refers to the Monguors). In different historical periods, these were groups of different ethnic origins. During the Tibetan Empire, the word **Hor** was used in relation to the Turkic tribes, mainly the ancient Uighurs, as can be seen from the document PT 1283, describing the events of the 8th century.⁸⁹ The narrative of the "Upper regiment of heroes" in the chronicles *Rgya bod-kyi chos-'byung rgyas-pa* and *Chos-'byung mkhas-pa'i dga'-ston*, dated to the end of the 7th century, uses the ethnonym **Hor**, referring to the wife of the Turkic leader⁹⁰.

G. Uray believes that **Hor Bya-zhu ring-po** is a Tibetan folk-etymological form of a similar-sounding Sum-pa name;⁹¹ this version is supported by the meaning of the word ring-po – "tall, long." On the one hand, the indication of the clan or tribal affiliation of a representative of the Sum-pa as **Hor** is quite logical, since the Sum-pa for the Tibetans of Central Tibet were foreigners living in the north, which corresponds to the semantics of the word **Hor**. On the other hand, there is evidence that the concepts of "**Hor**" and "**Sum-pa**" were differentiated during the imperial period: for example, in the sutra *The Prophecy of Goshringa*, created in Khotan during the Tibetan Empire, the Western Turks (Drug-gu / Grug-gu), the **Sum-pa** and the **Hor** (apparently, this is how the ancient Uighurs are denoted in this case) are listed among the military forces that threatened Khotan.⁹² *The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies*, a historical work of the 14th century, referring to the source of the imperial period *Thang-yig chen-mo*, names a man from **Hor** – Zhang-po Rgyal gyi khram-bzang among the ministers of the interior under Srong-btsan Sgam-po;⁹³ his relation to the aforementioned Hor Bya-zhu ring-po, the *khos-dpon* of the Sum-pa province, is unknown, but it can be unequivocally stated that neither the Turks nor the Mongols are meant here. According to the *Illuminating Mirror*, the

⁸⁷ Geografiya Tibeta 1895: 5.

⁸⁸ Tunzhi et al. 2019: 24–27.

⁸⁹ Venturi 2008: 4.

⁹⁰ For the narrative of the upper regiment of heroes, see Dotson 2006: 375–377.

⁹¹ Uray 1972: 42.

⁹² Thomas 1935: 24, 28.

⁹³ Sorensen 1994: 178.

construction of the Tshangs-pa Rlung-gnon temple in the northern direction was supervised by Sba Dpal-dbyangs from **Hor**.⁹⁴ This means that the Sba / Dba's clan, the leading clan of the Tibetan ministerial aristocracy, may have been associated with the Hor region. Interestingly, the Sba were a branch of the Rlangs, one of the Sum-pa ministerial clans.⁹⁵

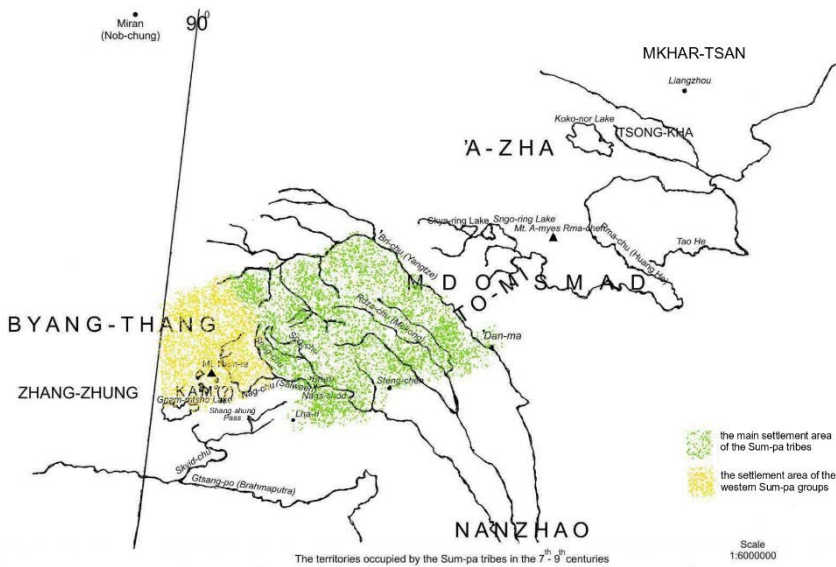
The origin of the word **Hor** requires further study. Probably, already during the empire, **Hor** was somewhat synonymous with the word **north**, and already then, the Tibetans called the northern inhabitants of the Byang-thang **Hor**. Later, during the reign of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in the 13th–14th centuries the ethnonym **Hor**, obviously, became widespread in Tibet, denoting the Mongols. The Hor-pa people of Nub-Hor associate their self-name with the statement that in the 14th century they were ruled by a Mongol prince, a brother of the Yuan dynasty emperor Tugh Temur.⁹⁶

Summarizing the data regarding the Sum-pa tribes' settlement area, the following conclusions can be drawn. The Sum-pa inhabited a vast area of highland pastures between the upper Salween and upper Yangtze in northern and western Kham, including the entire territory of the historical and cultural region of Nub-Hor and part of the former kingdom of Nang-chen. The Sum-pa led a nomadic and semi-nomadic life, only cattle breeding as livelihood organically fits into the harsh natural conditions of the eastern Byang-thang and Nang-chen, and it is difficult to talk about any exact boundaries of the settlement area of these tribes. In the west, some groups of the nomads reached the 90th meridian, attracted by sacred Lake Gnam-mtsho: in this area, under the significant influence of Zhang-zhung, a distinctive culture was formed, in which the Bon religion took the central place. The eastern extremity of the Sum-pa's settlement was, apparently, the Steng-chen area, where the plateau passes into the meridional mountain ranges. Certain Sum-pa groups reached the 'Dan-ma area southeast of Yushu, most probably moving downstream the 'Bri-chu River. In the 8th century, Sum-ru was formed on a part of the Sum-pa territory, on the one hand, it was connected with Central Tibet, on the other, with the eastern region of Mdo-smad. The Sum-pa, nomadic tribes of north, played an important role in the campaigns of conquest and the protection of the borders of the Tibetan Empire. During the military campaigns of the 7th–9th centuries, a significant part of the Sum-pa was relocated to serve in the recently conquered territories – in the Nob region and the Hexi corridor.

⁹⁴ Ibid: 279.

⁹⁵ Hazod 2009: 167, 174.

⁹⁶ Karmay, 2014 [2005]: 184.



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