



THE STONE

(DIARY LEAVES)

By NICHOLAS ROERICH

Champa, half-Tibetan, half-Mongol, from Kokonor, has returned to our camp from the bazaar and whispers mysteriously:

"They say, that somewhere here is hidden some stone on which is a bronze belt."

"What may this be? And where could one find out, where the stone is?"

"Who knows? Perhaps one can find out from the lamas. Only this is very difficult as they are not communicative about the stone."

We think that the matter concerns some newly discovered Hun burial mounds, or some treasure trove, or finally some legend. Firstly, the interesting point seemed to be not so much the stone, but the belt. A belt has from antiquity been the symbol of rulership. Often we find in history that the robbing or the insult of the belt led to serious consequences.

Thus we discussed around the evening bonfire the strange news about the stone and the bronze belt and thought that it will probably be difficult to discover any more details. If this concerned a treasure, then it would be still more difficult, as people are always reticent to speak of treasures.

Indeed one can hear often of treasures and legends found in sandy bakhans. Sometimes they will be connected with great names of ancient legendary warriors, and rulers. Also the name of Chingiz-Khan will repeatedly be mentioned since this glorious name is heralded at every opportunity.

Several days pass. New interesting herbs have been found. George is

busy with Buriat lama, who is a famous medicine man. Unexpectedly a high official arrives from the local Prince. The Prince sends his cordial greetings and requests that we should not touch and break the stone with the bronze belt. What a mystery—again the same stone! We make inquiries, thinking that means some special ore. We ask: where could it be and who has found it? The reply arouses certain recollections.

"The stone moves about and appears near sacred and famous places. . . Here, where your camp is, near Naran Obo, the hill is sacred. The Prince knows that you collect useful herbs and flowers. This is very good. But do not disturb the stone, which may appear here and there. You are great people, and the stone may come your way."

This reply proved that the chief significance is not so much in the bronze belt, but in the stone itself. . . And this stone turns out to be the legendary fabulous precious stone, which visits important regions at pre-ordained dates. Thus the Prince's messenger asked us in quite official tones not to disturb the miraculous stone. And we of course ask him to transmit to the Prince that he should not worry. We shall not disturb the stone, we will not break it or otherwise violate it.

One can well imagine how surprized the local Mongols would have been, if we were to tell them all the well-known legends and sagas about the wandering stone—*lapis exilis*—which is glorified throughout centuries from the Pacific coast to the mediaeval Meistersingers, to the famous Wolfram von Eschenbach. In our case

the circumstance was new that not a legend was narrated to us but we were asked not to harm the very stone itself. It means that not a folklore saga but the knowledge of the very stone was living without any doubt up to our days.

Another new detail about the belt on the stone may mean that the stone possesses power. In other variants there was no mentioning of this belt. It is true that one may find in legends indications about signs on the stone, which appear and disappear. It is said that the stone warns its temporary owner of various significant events. On special occasions the stone emits cracking sounds, it may become very heavy or on the other hand may lose weight considerably. At times the stone radiates light. The stone is usually brought to the new owner quite unexpectedly—by some strangers. Numerous are the qualities of the stone. Not without cause are so many sagas and songs dedicated to it. The stone is also mentioned in mediaeval scientific and historical chronicles. On the Himalayas, in Tibet and Mongolia one constantly comes across references to this miracle. In the same connection the name of the mysterious King—Prestor John—is also often cited and even the Holy Grail is identified with this stone.

It is strange to coordinate the remarkable sagas, which are imbued with deep symbols and signs with the arrival of the official, asking not to injure nor to take away the stone. Here is an especially sacred place. It is said that near Naran Obo the miraculous stone has already been seen. It is prohibited to kill any animals in this place. The Tashi Lama himself ascended Naran Obo and has blessed the place.

“The Tashi Lama gives passes to Shambhala.”

Of course this information is also

interpreted in many different ways. But nevertheless upto now some people come to the Tashi Lama with the request for such a permit.

Again old signs coincide with modernity in such unexpected forms.

We have also heard how certain people scolded and stopped the narrators about such signs. Ardent guardians of secrets will whisper and the bard will at once interrupt his story. And if the listeners still insist, the bard will conclude with some stereotyped joke, which in no way corresponds to the inspired beginning. This means that up to now the ancient rule about the keeping of secrets still exists. And people know how to guard these great mysteries, they know how to divert the conversation to some ordinary routine matters and they suddenly draw the attention to some insignificant outside event.

And we again remember, how once a Hindu said that he would never reveal a certain secret and that he would rather admit the assertion that nothing of the kind exists. As in ocean waves one may discern several different currents, so also the depth of human consciousness may treasure many secrets.

Some may scoff at such a steadfastness, at such a guarding of the foundations. But others will revere it, seeing how people conquering their selfishness, remain firm and adamant.

“Oh, Stone—thou precious treasure—thou art known to many people.” They preserved and kept the knowledge of the stone in the most sacred treasury. If an official arrives and requests not to harm and not to take away the stone, thereby he does not reveal the secret. He himself never said, what stone he had in view. It was but his duty to warn, that such a stone sometimes appears in the vicinity. It means that by such a warning he did not reveal the meaning of the stone.

The messenger was happy to have our assurance that we shall not harm the stone. Who knows, perhaps in the intonation of our reply he felt that we knew more of the stone than he anticipated. Anyhow, our promise not to harm the stone, was received with sincere gratitude.

To know how to guard secrets already means to prove a high quality of the spirit. Who can undertake to draw the dividing line between reality

and phantasy. Recently some scientists proved that epical heroes were actually living persons, creators of life, law-givers, whose deeds, transgressing the boundry of human consciousness, were crowned with wonderful inspiring legends.

Do you know, whether or not that Stone exists, which is glorified by so many people?

Timur Khada !

