

FUSANG

Or, The Discovery of America by Chinese
Buddhist Priests in the Fifth Century

Charles G. Leland

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CHARLES G. LELAND

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FUSANG

OR

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

BY

*CHINESE BUDDHIST PRIESTS IN THE
FIFTH CENTURY.*

BY

CHARLES G. LELAND.

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P R E F A C E.

It is now more than a century since the learned French sinologist Deguignes set forth, in a very ably-written paper in the "Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres" (vol. xxviii., 1761), the fact that he had found in the works of early Chinese historians a statement that, in the fifth century of our era, certain travellers of their race had discovered a country which they called Fusang, and which, from the direction and distance as described by them, appeared to be Western America, and in all probability Mexico. When Deguignes wrote, his resources, both as regards the knowledge of the region supposed to have been discovered and the character of the travellers, were extremely limited, so that the skill with which he conducted his investigation, and the shrewdness of his conjectures, render his memoir, even to the present day, a subject of commendation among scholars. Few men have ever done so much or as well with such scanty and doubtful material.

The original document on which the Chinese his-

torians based their account of Fusang was the report of a Buddhist monk or missionary named Hœi-shin (Schin or Shên),¹ who, in the year 499 A.D., returned from a long journey to the East. This report was regularly entered on the Year-Books or Annals of the Chinese Empire, whence it passed, not only to the pages of historians, but also to those of poets and writers of romances, by whom it was so confused with absurd inventions and marvellous tales, that even at the present day discredit is thrown by a certain class of critics on the entire narrative. In 1841 Carl Friedrich Neumann, Professor of Oriental Languages and History at the University of Munich, published the original narrative of Hœi-shin from the Annals, adding to it comments of his own elucidating its statements, and advancing somewhat beyond Deguignes. This little work I translated into English, under the supervision of Professor Neumann, and with his aid. I believe that, as he revised and corrected the English version here given, it may claim to be an accurate translation from the Chinese text of the Year-Book, and that of Hœi-shin. I have placed it first in this volume because it gives in a much more perfect form than is to be found in the memoir of Deguignes the original report on which the entire investigation is based. It of course includes Professor Neumann's comments on the monk's brief narrative; and as these embrace many remarks on the

¹ Neumann gives the name as Hœi-schin; Dr Bretschneider, as Hui-shên. When not translating Dr Neumann, I have written it *Hœi-shin*.

possibility of passing by sea from the Chinese to the American coast, I have thought it appropriate to place next in the series a letter from Colonel Barclay Kennon, who, as a prominent officer in the United States Coast Survey, passed several years in the North Pacific, during which time he surveyed and mapped, in company with two colleagues, the entire coast, both on the Asiatic and American sides. Colonel Kennon is of opinion that the voyage supposed to have been taken by the Buddhist monks is easily practicable, and might be effected even in an open boat—the vessel in which he himself passed both summer and winter, and in which he sailed more than 40,000 miles, having been simply a small pilot-boat. To this I have added, in further reference to certain remarks by Professor Neumann, a comment on the affinities between American and Asiatic languages, and other subjects mentioned in his text, *i.e.*, the Mound-Builders and the Images of Buddha. These are followed by extracts from, and remarks on, a series of articles by M. Gustave d'Eichthal, contributed to the *Revue Archæologique* in 1862-63, in which he defends Deguignes from an attack which the well-known Orientalist Julius Heinrich von Klapproth made upon the original memoir by the former. I believe that it will be admitted by all unprejudiced scholars, that in these ably-written and very temperate articles M. D'Eichthal has fully vindicated Deguignes, and has also contributed much very valuable material to the subject. I am far from claiming that it

has been absolutely proved that Hœi-shin was in Mexico, or that he was preceded thither by “five beggar-monks from the Kingdom of Kipin.” But it cannot be denied that, as further researches have been made, much which at first seemed obscure or improbable in his narrative has been cleared up. All that Hœi-shin declares he saw is not only probable, but is confirmed, almost to the minutest details, by what is now known of Old and New Mexico.

All that seems fabulous in his story, he, like Herodotus, relates from hearsay; but it is remarkable that these wonders, which Professor Neumann was unwilling to cite, all appear at the present day to be simply exaggerations of facts which recent research has brought to light. Among the objects seen and described by the monk was the maguey plant, or great cactus, which he called the Fusang, after a Chinese plant slightly resembling it, and this name (Fusang) he applied to the country. His description of this plant, and of its many uses, is very striking. Other things peculiar to Mexico, but not known to China, were remarked, as, for instance, the absence of iron, and the fact that copper, gold, and silver were not prized, and were not used for money. The manner in which marriage was contracted in Fusang, according to his description, is not at all Chinese—I doubt if it be Asiatic—but it exists in more than one North American tribe, and something very like it was observed by a recent traveller in New Mexico.

I have in Chapter IX. called attention to a fact which seems to have escaped both Neumann and Klaproth, though both were familiar with the literature on which it is based. It is simply this, that the voyage of Hwei-shin forms a portion of the somewhat extensive literature of travel of Buddhist monks, the authenticity of which has been vindicated by Stanislas Julien. Many of these have been translated, and one of them, "The Mission of Sung-yun," was recently published in English. Sung-yun travelled only nineteen years after Hwei-shin, and was in all probability a contemporary who had met him at the Chinese court, where such travellers enjoyed the highest consideration. Sung-yun had been sent to India, or the West, by the Empress Dowager Tai-Hau, of the Wei dynasty, and it is not improbable that Hwei-shin had travelled to the East, in like manner, by imperial order. It is evident that he lived at a time when men of his stamp were in request to go to the ends of the earth to spread the doctrines of Buddha.

In 1869, some one who had read or heard of Neumann's work on the Buddhist discovery of America, placed in the "Notes and Queries on China and Japan," published at Hong Kong, a request that those who possessed information on the subject would send it to that journal. The results were, however, trifling, the principal communication thus elicited being an article from Dr E. Bretschneider, in which the writer, while expressing his opinion that Hwei-shin was a

“lying Buddhist priest,” and a “consummate humbug,” brought forth nothing of consequence to prove such very positive assertions. But as the paper forms a portion of the literature of the Fusang question, I have included it in this volume.

MEMOIR

OF

PROFESSOR CARL FRIEDRICH NEUMANN.



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MEMOIR.

CARI FRIEDRICH NEUMANN, the author of the subjoined memoir on the presumed early discovery of America by Buddhist monks, was of Jewish family, and born December 22, 1798, near Bamberg, Bavaria. He was intended for commerce, but having studied history at the Universities of Heidelberg and Munich, determined to devote his life to letters. Having become a Protestant, he was appointed professor in 1822 at the Gymnasium of Speier, whence he was dismissed in 1825 for Liberal opinions in politics. He subsequently lived for several years in Venice, Paris, and London, occupied with the study of Oriental languages. Having distinguished himself as a sinologist, he went in 1829 to China, where he remained nearly two years, occupied in collecting Chinese books. In Canton he obtained a valuable library of 10,000 volumes, which, after his return, were ceded to the Bavarian Government. In 1838 he received an appointment as professor of the Chinese and Armenian languages at the University of Munich, where he also read lectures on mathematics

and modern history, which were very popular with the students. Having known him well, both in public and private, and pursued studies under his special guidance, I venture to speak with confidence and respect of his enormous learning, as well as his sound judgment in matters of scholarship.

Professor Neumann was the author of a number of works in Latin, French, and English, as well as German, two of which received prizes from the Academies of Copenhagen and Paris. His principal books are the following :—

Rerum Cretaricum Specimen. Göttingen, 1820.

Ueber die Staatsverfassung der Florentiner, von Leonardus Aretinus. Frankfurt, 1822.

Historische Versuche. Heidelberg, 1825.

Mémoires sur la Vie et les Ouvrages de David, philosophe Armenien du cinquième siècle de notre ère, et principalement sur ses traductions de quelques écrits à Aristote. Paris, 1829.

The History of Vartan, and of the Battle of the Armenians, containing an account of the religious wars between the Persians and Armenians. By Elisæus ; translated by C. F. Neumann. London, 1831.

The Catechism of the Shamans, or the Laws and Regulations of the Priesthood of Buddha in China. Translated from the Chinese, with notes and illustrations. London, 1831.

History of the Pirates who infested the Chinese Seas from 1807 to 1810. Translated from the Chinese original, with notes and illustrations. London, 1831.

Geschichte der Armenischen Literatur. Leipzig, 1833-36.

Geschichte der Uebersiedlung von 40,000 Armeniern. Leipzig, 1834.

Russland und die Tcherkessen. Stuttgart, 1840.

Geschichte des Englisch-Chinesischen Kriegs. Leipzig, 1846. In this comprehensive work, one division is entitled, "Nord Amerika und Frankreich in China," in which the present and future relations of Western America and Eastern Asia are developed with great sagacity. A few years before his death, Iskander (Alexander Herzen) wrote to me—"The Pacific will yet be the Mediterranean of the future." Those who look forward to such developments of civilisation and commerce will find this book of Professor Neumann's very interesting.

Die Völker des Südlichen Russland in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung. Leipzig, 1847. To this work was awarded the prize of the Royal Institute of Paris.

Die Reisen des Venetianers Marco Polo, Deutsch von August Bürk. Nebst Zusätzen und Verbesserungen von C. F. Neumann. Leipzig, 1845.

Beiträge zur Armenischen Literatur. Leipzig, 1849.

Geschichte des Englischen Reichs in Asien. Leipzig, 1857.

Professor Neumann was one of the directors of the German Oriental Association, and published in the first number of their magazine a biography of Dr Morrison, the celebrated Protestant missionary to China.

I sincerely trust that the additions which I have made to this work, in elucidation or in illustration of the idea advanced, will be found to the purpose. They are the result of much research,—I may honestly say, of far more than appears in this volume, as the subject, from its obscurity, yielded only the proverbial grain of wheat to the wearisome bushel of chaff. I also hope that it is free from either reckless hypothesis or easy credulity, and that nothing will be understood to be advanced as being more than probable.



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