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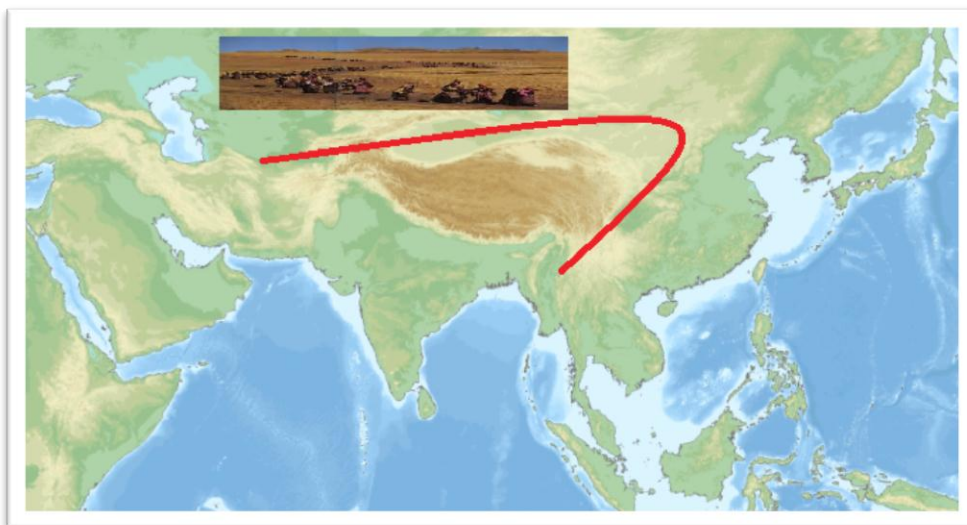


## **THE PEOPLES OF THE LOST BOOK**

**Connecting northeast India to Central Asian migration through oral history**

by

Margot Crossing



PEOPLES OF THE LOST BOOK:  
Connecting northeast India to Central Asian migration through oral history

Introduction

We have all heard about the peoples of ‘The Book’ - the ancient Hebrews and the world religions that sprang from them; but what may be even more EPIC are the collective memories of the peoples of ‘The Lost Book’. Across cultures from the east of Afghanistan in Central Asia, through the deserts of the Tarim Basin into China and the down into the borders of south-western China and northern Myanmar, and into neighbouring India there is a common motif of people who have lost a special book. The following are collective memories of these varied people; joining them together by myth and legend.

Northern Myanmar; NE India

Anthropologist, Don Richardson documented ten hill-tribe peoples in and around northern Myanmar whose stories intersect strongly, not only geographically but, culturally and orally through their collective memories of a “Lost Book” and other related rituals which are similar to those of the people of “The Book”.

The Karen version of the Lost Book, according to Reverend Baw Ney,<sup>1</sup> goes like this;

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<sup>1</sup> Reverend Baw Ney was the founder of the village of Tee Mae Ker Lah, Thailand.

*After Y'wa created the earth he decided to go on a long journey, and so he called his sons together and gave each a book of life. To the Karen, the eldest, he gave a Golden Book of Life. To the others he gave other books of life, until finally to the white man, the youngest brother, he gave a White Book of Life. The white brother took his White Book of Life and went away to the west, and was never seen again. As long as the Karen read and followed his Golden Book of Life, his life was happy and prosperous.*

*One day the Karen brother was burning and clearing a field in the forest. He put his Golden Book of Life on a stump in the field while he was doing his work. In his carelessness, the Golden Book of Life was burned, leaving only fragments that he brought back to his house. Gradually the older brother neglected these fragments, until one day they fell through the cracks of the bamboo floor in his house, and the pigs and chickens underneath ate them up. When he no longer had his book of life, his life became more and more wretched with fears, sickness, crop failures, and persecutions from outsiders.<sup>2</sup>*

The Karen brother hoped that someday his white younger brother would come back on the wings of a great white bird floating in the water and bring his White Book of Life to share with his older Karen brother. The Karen waited for the white younger brother to restore to them the prosperity that Y'wa had intended them from the beginning.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it was the finding of the Karen with remarkable Hebrew traditions in the early 1800s that caused quite a stir in Britain and other European countries to

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stolaf.edu/people/leming/film.htm#Scene3> Accessed 14/8/2014

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.stolaf.edu/people/leming/film.htm#Scene3> Accessed 14/8/2014

contemplate had the “Lost Tribes of Israel” wandered that far? George Moore M.D. has a chapter in his 1861 book and Dr McGowan presented a paper in 1860 to the British Association referring to them, in regards to the Ch’iang in China.<sup>45</sup> The following quote clearly makes this point.

*‘Early missionaries wrote of the Karen that it is supposed by some that the Karens are part of the lost tribes of Israel. How numerous would be the members of these tribes were the sum of all who are set down as belonging to them told! It certainly is convenient when you meet with a people whom you cannot account for, to give "the lost tribes" the benefit of the doubt.*

*There is, however, this to be said for the above-mentioned theory, that Dr. and Mrs. Mason found very remarkable and accurate traditions regarding the creation, the fall, and future regeneration of man.’<sup>6</sup>*

Other ethnographers have found a startling tradition of the Karen that could date their wanderings to the first captivity of the two and a half tribes of Israel by the Assyrians in 740 B.C. Their wanderings appear to have been through the Taklamakan<sup>7</sup> Desert with its rivers of sand.

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<sup>4</sup> George Moore in his 1861 book ‘Lost Tribes: Saxons of the East and of the West....’ Has a chapter on the Karen

<sup>5</sup> The Karen are also referenced in a paper read before the British Association by Dr McGowan 1860, Modern Missions page 90.

<sup>6</sup> Project Canterbury Journey from Rangoon to Toungoo, and Six Weeks in the Toungoo Mountains of Burma By John Trew From Mission Life, Vol. V (1874), pages 564-565.

<sup>7</sup> Taklamakan according to Dr Avigdor Shachan can be translated as a Hebrew phrase, “You will be destroyed here.”

*'The Karen reckon 2010 to be their year 2749. This means that they look to BC 739 as the year of their founding. In their legends Karen speak of coming from the land of 'Thibi Kawbi' which some have thought may indicate Tibet and the Gobi desert. Some Karen oral traditions refer to crossing a river of "running sand" as an important event in their history. There are Chinese sources which refer to the Gobi Desert as the "river of sand," and it is probable that the Karen originated in an area bordering Tibet. They crossed the Gobi Desert into China, and gradually made their way into the mountainous areas of Burma'.*<sup>8</sup>

Well, the Karen are not alone in their Lost Book tradition, nine other hill tribes in this region have similar oral traditions.<sup>9</sup>

*'The Kachin, like the Karen, believe that Karai Kasang<sup>10</sup> once gave their forefathers a book which they lost.'*<sup>11</sup>

The Lahu tradition say *Gui'Sha*<sup>12</sup> had given their ancestors a written law written on rice cakes and during a famine they were forced to eat the rice cakes for their survival.<sup>13</sup>

The Wa await a white brother with their Lost Book.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.infomekong.com/peoples/karen/> Accessed 14/8/2014

<sup>9</sup> Don Richardson; *Eternity in their Hearts*, chapter two "Peoples of the Lost Book"; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Their name for a benign supernatural Being "whose shape and form exceeds man's ability to comprehend".

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, page 76

<sup>12</sup> Creator of all things

<sup>13</sup> Richardson page 77

<sup>14</sup> Ibid page 78

The Shan and Palaung peoples look to a fifth manifestation of Buddha, known as *Phra-Ariya-Metrai*, who was spoken about in their scriptures that were lost in the war in Laos.<sup>15</sup>

Kui tribesmen anticipated a messenger who would bring their Lost Book back to the special places of worship built for such an anticipated event.<sup>16</sup> The Lahu also built ‘Long Houses’ for their awaited event which can still be found in their villages today.

The Lisu in Yunnan province, China, believe a King, one of their own would one day rule over them and restore their book in their language; even though the Lisu lack any form of writing nor an alphabet.<sup>17</sup>

The Naga consist of twenty-four tribes and at least one tribe – *the Rengma* – remember “*the Supreme Being gave His words to their forefathers by writing them on animal skins. But the forefather did not take care of the skins. Dogs ate them up!*”<sup>1819</sup>

Mizo Israel identity research, Zaithanchhungi, writes “*According to the oral tradition of Mizo, the leather scrolls in which all ancestral history of the tribes and families were written, were lost due to continuous slavery. The leather Scrolls in*

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid page 79

<sup>16</sup> Ibid page 80

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Tenegfeldt, *A Century of growth*, page 46

*which they had written about their origins, family histories and narratives of their travels were said to have been left behind in their labour camps when they fled China. According to another legend of the Mizo, the leather Scrolls were eaten by a dog of the keeper of the Scrolls.”*



### Burning of the Books – China 213BC

Zaithanchhungi offers this explanation; the Emperor Shih Huang Ti in 213 BC burned all the books except those on agriculture and medicine in his bid to unify China. He also relocated people en-mass<sup>20</sup> to remove any other philosophy other than his *Legalism* as it was known. He may have received the derogative title of ‘dog’ and so over time the Emperor, Shih Huang Ti, who burned their books may also have become the ‘dog’ who destroyed their books and eventually was known as a dog who ate their scroll.<sup>21</sup>

The Britannica states regarding Shih Huang Ti;

*As emperor he initiated a series of reforms aimed at establishing a fully centralized administration, thus avoiding the rise of independent satrapies. Construction of a network of roads and canals was begun, and fortresses erected for defence against barbarian invasions from the north were linked to form the Great Wall.*<sup>22</sup>

[The Mizo remember escaping through a hole they dug in a big wall.]<sup>23</sup>

Britannica continues:

*Confucian scholars strongly condemned Shihuangdi and it is said that 460 of them were executed for their opposition. The continuous controversy between the*

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<sup>20</sup> Just like the Assyrians had a half millennium before and in a past homeland.

<sup>21</sup> Zaithanchhungi, *Israel-Mizo Identity*, pages 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shihuangdi> Accessed 24/4/2019

<sup>23</sup> Many conversations with locals and Zaithanchhungi as the author lived in Mizoram, 2009 -2019



*emperor and Confucian scholars who advocated a return to the old feudal order culminated in the famous burning of the books of 213, when, at Li Si's suggestion, all books not dealing with agriculture, medicine, or prognostication were burned, except historical records of Qin and books in the imperial library.*<sup>24</sup>

We need to ask if this book burning episode etched itself into the collective memories of the Peoples of the Lost Book and has been passed down through oral tradition.

#### Epics connect Mizo, Kuki, Chin to Israel

The Mizo Kuki Chin are sub-clans of the same people who connect the Hill Tribes of Myanmar not only back into China but back to Israel itself. Kuki ethnographer, Dr Khaplum M. Lenthang in his book documents his people as the people of Manmasi and writes;

*Themthu and Lapi* [poems and chants] *...are reliable, sources concerning our origin and genealogy.*<sup>25</sup> He spent fifty years collecting these poems and chants and publishing them in books, both in English and Kuki, so that the history would be

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<sup>24</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shihuangdi> Accessed 24/4/2019

<sup>25</sup> Dr Lenthang, *The Wonderful Genealogical Tales of Manmasi (Kuki-Chin-Mizo)* page 163

preserved – the very thing that the World Epic Festival hopes to achieve. He goes on: *‘These sources also prove that we once possessed the scroll but later lost it.’*<sup>26</sup>

Dr. Khuplam records volumes of these poems and chants this is one among many:

*During the reign of Kutpi maangpa  
the Red-Sea had gone dried  
cloud in the day and fire in the night led the people  
many days and many nights together,  
like wild animals the water had swallowed  
we fetch water that originated from rock (stone)  
to satisfy the thirst of the people and their flock.*<sup>27</sup>

No doubt these people of “The Lost Book” are also people of “The Book”. The story of the Israelites is unmistakable in the preceding Kuki poem.

Zaithanchhungi interviewed thousands of people, aged from eighty-five to one hundred and four years old, in the nineteen eighties and found contrary to her own belief that the consistent testimony of these tribal elders was that their ancestor’s name was Manasi (Menashe). Along with the documented Hebrew-like customs caused her to believe the Mizo ancestor to be Manasseh of the famous twelve tribes of Israel.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Ibid Appendix II page i

Kyrgyzstan and Altai, Siberia

West of China across the Taklamakan Desert another people have a legend that confirms the legends of the Kuki Mizo Chin clans in northeast India; they are the Kyrgyz. Richard Hewitt writes “Sure enough Ashim Jakypbek’s version *Tengiri Manas*, notes that *Kitai* leaders burned Kyrgyz scrolls:

*When the Kitai, who say, “We are the only ones in this world who have knowledge,” robbed the sacred fort and burned sacred writings from the treasury, they said, “May the darkness that has fallen on the Kyrgyz also come on their minds, so they might not know another writing.”*<sup>28</sup>

Does the Mizo oral memory of a lost book and the Karen version of a burnt book connect to the same event of the Book Burnings of 213 BC and does that connect to the Kyrgyz ‘Epic of Manas’ version of their burnt sacred writings, just previously referenced?

Does the loss of this important book point to the reason for the Epics of the Kyrgyz and the poems and the stories of the Manmasi<sup>29</sup> of northeast India? Dr Khuplam Milui Lenthang writes “*Although the scroll was lost, the people evolved*

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<sup>28</sup> Risbek, Richard Hewitt, *Manas Lost and Found* page 126

<sup>29</sup> Manmasi is the ancient name of the ancestor of the Kuki from Manipur in NE India

*some games as in the old days. To some extent this helped to maintain continuity of the customs and culture.*”<sup>30</sup>

North of the Kyrgyz, the Altai have a legend of a Golden Book just like the Karen. The Altai Golden Book is also in a Golden Chest, reminiscent of the Golden Ark of biblical fame. In their version the golden chest falls in the water whilst crossing a river. They take the golden book out to dry the pages. A cow eats the pages and it is lost.<sup>31</sup>



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<sup>30</sup> Dr Lenthang, *The Wonderful Genealogical Tales of Manmasi (Kuki-Chin-Mizo)* page 164

<sup>31</sup> BEDYUROV Brontoi Yangovich Chairman of Intl. Assoc. Of the Altaian Peoples IASAP, author and recipient of a Soviet award was bquoted saying on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019 at WEF Scientific Symposium, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

China- the migration bridge of the Manas of Kyrgyzstan to the Manmasi of NEIndia

So let's get back to China as the migration path of these People of the Lost Book. Esther Chen in her book *The Hidden Qiang, "Sons of Sheep"*, makes the claim that whilst migration after migration of tribes that came into China from Central Asia and beyond [who she considers by and large to be Israelite tribes under many different names], most of them assimilated into the wider Chinese population. But, she says, a select group of priestly families moved to the mountains in south western China, to preserve their customs so that the traditions and history would not be lost.<sup>32</sup>



## 1 Taoping Village

I believe it is in this context that Rev Thomas T Torrance, in 1925, found the Q'iang priest performing a ritual that resembled the Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement ceremony of the children of Israel from the Jewish Torah or Christian

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<sup>32</sup> Esther Chen, *The Hidden Qiang, Sons of Sheep*. Also an interview with the author November 2016

Bible. This is what his son Thomas F Torrance wrote in the foreword to the 1988, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. of his father's book<sup>33</sup>.

*“In 1925 I had the privilege of being present at the village of Oir, some ten thousand feet above sea level, situated in a lateral valley behind Weichou, when a venerable Chiang priest revealed to my father for the first time the full rite of the Day of Atonement in the Chiang liturgical year. When my father read to him the sixteenth chapter of the book of Leviticus, the priest leapt off his seat in excitement, exclaiming that these were the lost Chiang<sup>34</sup> Scriptures.”<sup>35</sup>*

This priest goes on to identify himself and his family with the People of The Book that Torrance was reading from. So are the ‘Peoples of the Lost Book’ one and the same as the people of The Book?




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<sup>33</sup> Thomas T Torrance, *China's First Missionaries; Ancient Israelites*. 1937 1st Ed London.

<sup>34</sup> Q'iang or Ch'iang used interchangeably

<sup>35</sup> Ibid page vi

### Conclusion

In conclusion, these examples of peoples with a ‘lost book’ legend, from Kyrgyzstan, through China, to north-east India raise the overwhelming need for further research. So, not only do we have these peoples remembering their Lost Book and the bookend peoples of Kyrgyzstan and northeast India carrying the similar name of their ancestor – Manas, Manasi, Manmasi - but we have remarkable timings as in the Karen dating themselves from the same year as the half the tribe of Manasseh and two other tribes of Israel were taken captive and relocated somewhere east of Persia. We also have the Kuki memory in poem form of crossing the Red Sea; the Q’iang Min of Sichuan, China, performing Yom Kippur rituals and the many references to the Biblical Patriarchs that are in ‘The Epic of Manas’ as Richard Hewitt has well documented at other times in the World Epic Festival. Surely the Peoples of the Lost Book legend must have some connection to the peoples of “The Book”. This and future events like the World Epic Festival may well be the key to unlocking some of these truths.



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