

beliefs shaped the mind of peoples of Sumpa, Asha, Minyak and the Yarlung valley from which emerged the kings and emperors who laid the foundation of the Tibetan empire.

The Emergence of the Yarlung Dynasty

The one event which had the greatest impact on the subsequent cultural development of Tibet was the emergence of the kings of Yarlung who over the centuries cemented the peoples of the plateau under one single central authority and overran regions beyond Tibet. The ability of the kings of Yarlung, headquartered in Tsethang, the cradle of Tibetan civilization, to bring the whole plateau under one administration provided not only the material base for Tibet's cultural development but also the governance that strengthened the cohesion of the Tibetan people.

According to Buddhist historians, on this scene, emerged Nyatri Tsenpo in around 127 BC. From this period to the 7th century AD, until the emergence of Songtsen Gampo, who consolidated the realm of his forefathers and then took Tibet on an expansionist mission, Yarlung was ruled by a succession of thirty-one kings. During the reign of these kings, Bon remained the dominant belief system, although tentative contacts with Buddhism were made, especially during the reign of Lhatho Thori Nyentsen, the 28th king, who in around 233 AD received two Buddhist sutras which, though treated with great reverence, remained a mystery because Tibetans at the time had not mastered other peoples' languages, including Sanskrit, the language in which the two sutras were presumably written. This piece of scriptural wisdom from Buddhist India remained as the *Nyenpo Sangwa*, A Fragile Secret.

Songtsen Gampo and the Unification of Tibet

One of the great figures in Tibetan history, Songtsen Gampo, was born in 617. His reign was characterized by an outburst of military adventures within and beyond Tibet. In 634, the Tibetans subdued the Tuyu-hun (Turco-Mongols) camped around Tso Nyonpo or Kokonor Lake. In his study of Tibetan history, *Tibet: A Political*