
George Bogle (1747-1781) and Francis Younghusband (1863-1942) are names writ large in the history of the European encounter with Tibet. They were, however, very different characters living in very different eras. In 1774 Bogle, a young Scotsman in the employ of the East India Company, was despatched by the then Governor Warren Hastings to Tibet via Bhutan. Instructed by Hastings to acquire information of both commercial and ethnographic character, he became the first British traveller to enter Tibet. Although Chinese opposition prevented him from reaching Lhasa (the Tibetan capital), the amiable Scot was able to befriend both Bhutan’s rulers and Tibet’s second highest religious figure, the Panchen Lama. Younghusband, by contrast, led a British-Indian diplomatic mission to Lhasa in 1904. His mission was effectively an invasion, for he travelled with a large military escort, whose modern weaponry overwhelmed token resistance from the antiquated Tibetan army.

Bogle and Younghusband have both been the subject of a number of works that have established their biographies, achievements and essential characters. Gordon Stewart’s *Journeys to Empire* now uses the two men to anchor an exploration of the contested relationship between Enlightenment and the Empire; with, at the risk of oversimplifying the argument, Bogle as representative of the former, and Younghusband the latter. Tibetan studies tends to attract specialists and to be rather neglected by wider academia. This work, therefore, is of particular interest to a field often assumed of arcane persuasion, for it brings the freshness of analysis by a historian whose earlier publications embrace not only a study of jute in the British Indian empire, but also studies of Canadian history. Pleasingly, the author treads knowingly through the primary and secondary source material for his subject and there are no significant errors of fact or interpretation in regard to Tibet and its culture. Peter Bishop’s *The Myth of Shangri-la: Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape* (1989), which dealt with some of these issues albeit from a different perspective, is the only significant omission from the bibliography.

If Bogle was certainly opportunistic in regard to business, that was something regarded as perfectly acceptable in the contemporary moral climate of India and the East India Company in the eighteenth century,
and he seems otherwise an almost ideal representative of the Enlighten-
ment, or perhaps more correctly the Scottish Enlightenment. He read, or
at least was familiar with many of its leading thinkers, and he entertained
no great notions of his own cultural superiority. For Bogle, all humans
were similar, with their home environment the determining factor in their
cultural expressions. His writings, which the author refers to in the title of
chapter one as ‘An Enlightenment Narrative’, reflect that background.
They are relatively objective, tinged with reason and gentle humour at
pretensions both Asiatic and European, and the ‘heroic mode’ of later gen-
erations of imperial explorers is entirely absent. Bogle’s essential reasona-
bleness makes him an attractive character to consider, and enables us to see
the imperial encounter as far more complex than the simple dominance-
resistance model favoured by nationalist narratives, as this author
concludes.

That Bogle was an attractive character is also suggested by the many
friends he made among the Himalayan peoples, and the hazy records of his
children by a Tibetan (and/or a Bengali) mother are discussed here as evi-
dence of the sexual mores of the Enlightenment representatives in the East.
Bogle’s correspondence was apparently sanitised by his heirs, which makes
conclusions in this regard more difficult, but clearly he existed in a differ-
ent moral climate to that of the Victorian era. That later era, however,
applied its moral strictures against inter-racial relationships largely or only
to the officer class. In Tibet, for example, a number of the local non-elite
British personnel, consisting of communications and clerical staff, took
local wives and mistresses. Those class differentials might have been subject
to deeper analysis here. Was there a widening class gap among the imperial
servants that coincided with the growing racial gap, or were they simply
two aspects of the same process?

The author is clearly less enamoured of Younghusband than the engag-
ing Bogle. Younghusband is also more problematic to consider as an archetypal representative of late Victorian imperial thinking. While he was the
epitome of the Orientalist in his earlier views, much of the enduring fasci-
nation with Younghusband lies in his post-mission conversion to a mysti-
cal spirituality. While it is with his earlier career as an ‘arch-imperialist’
disciple of Lord Curzon that Stewart is concerned, Younghusband’s first
recorded mystical experience came on his departure from Lhasa, suggest-
ing that Tibet influenced his conversion, and that his encounter was thus
also a multi-faceted one, perhaps more complex than the author allows
for here.