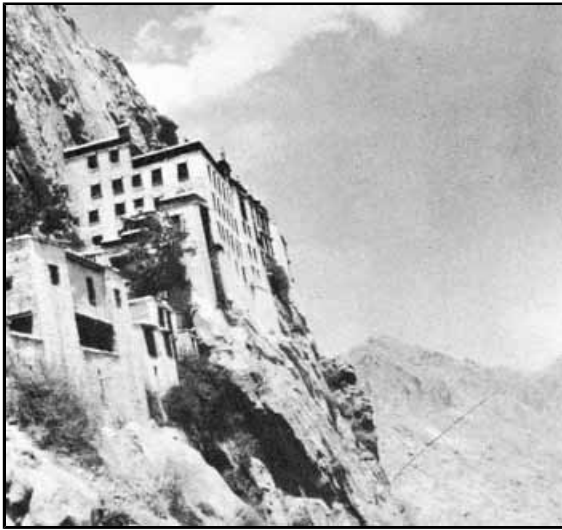




THE HERMITAGES OF SERA

སེ་འའི་རི་བློད་སྐོར།



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*A collaboration between the University of California Santa Barbara,
Tibet Academy of Social Sciences, Tibet University,
and the University of Virginia*

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In this printable PDF version of the publication, some of the interactivity is lost. The web version is fully interactive. It is accessible at

<http://www.thdl.org/collections/cultgeo/mons/sera/hermitages/> .

The web publication contains the following interactive components not available in this PDF/print version:

1. The "Sera Hermitages Interactive Map":

<http://www.thdl.org/collections/cultgeo/mons/sera/hermitages/map/> .

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Preface

A hermitage (*ri khrod*) is a small monastic residence found in an isolated mountain location. Hermitages begin as the mountain homes of monks or nuns who seek the peace and quiet of isolated sites so as to engage in intensive religious practice. Within a few generations of their founding, however, hermitages often transform, changing from the meditation retreats of individuals into communal ritual monasteries. They also usually grow, sometimes becoming large and important monasteries in their own right. In this portion of the Sera Project website, you will learn more about the hermitages related to Sera Monastery.

Among the three great seats of learning of the Dge lugs school of Tibetan Buddhism – Dga’ ldan, ’Bras spungs, and Se ra – Se ra is the one renowned for its hermitages. At least nineteen such institutions are found in the mountains behind and around Se ra. Under the auspices of the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences, José Cabezón and a group of his graduate students spent the summer of 2004 compiling information about the history, architecture, art, and religious life of the Se ra hermitages. The pages that follow are the result of this research.

The [Interactive Map](#) provides you with a visual interface for accessing different kinds of information – from the relative location of the hermitages to the topography of the landscape around them. The map also allows you to explore each of the hermitages through individual site maps that are linked to images, and it provides a database entry of important information about each institution.

The Introduction explains what hermits are, how the hermitage tradition of Se ra began, how it changed over time, and the challenges it faces today. It also gives you an idea of what the daily life of a hermitage monk was like in former times, and what it is like today.

List of Hermitages

Following the introduction, one can read detailed descriptions of the individual hermitages and learn about the history of each institution, described in the following order. In the list below, each hermitage is linked to its webpage:

- [Chupzang Nunnery \(Chu bzang dgon\)](#)
- [Drakri Hermitage \(Brag ri ri khrod\)](#)
- [Garu Nunnery \(Ga ru dgon pa\)](#)
- [Jokpo Hermitage \(’Jog po ri khrod\)](#)
- [Keutsang Hermitage \(Ke’u tshang ri khrod\)](#)
- [Keutsang East Hermitage \(Ke’u tshang shar ri khrod\)](#)
- [Keutsang West Hermitage \(Ke’u tshang nub ri khrod\)](#)
- [Kharo Hermitage \(Mkhar do ri khrod\)](#)
- [Negodong Nunnery \(Gnas sgo gdong dgon pa\)](#)
- [Nenang Nunnery \(Gnas nang ri khrod\)](#)
- [Pabongkha Hermitage \(Pha bong kha ri khrod\)](#)
- [Panglung Hermitage \(Spang lung ri khrod\)](#)
- [Purbuchok Hermitage \(Phur bu lcog ri khrod\)](#)
- [Rakhadrak Hermitage \(Ra kha brag ri khrod\)](#)
- [Sera Chöding Hermitage \(Se ra chos sdings ri khrod\)](#)
- [Sera Gönpasar Hermitage \(Se ra dgon pa gsar ri khrod\)](#)
- [Sera Utsé Hermitage \(Se ra dbu rtse ri khrod\)](#)
- [Takten Hermitage \(Rtags bstan ri khrod\)](#)
- [Trashi Chöling Hermitage \(Bkra shis chos gling ri khrod\)](#)

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An Introduction to the Hermitages of Sera



Purchok Hermitage (Phur lcog ri khrod), to the east of Se ra.

As the saying goes, “Se ra is surrounded by hermitages, Dga’ ldan is surrounded by self-arisen images, and ’Bras spungs is surrounded by dharma protectors.” Sera Mahāyāna Monastery (Se ra theg chen gling) is therefore surrounded by hermitages as numerous as the stars on the fifteenth day of the lunar month.

—*Dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug*¹

Among the three great seats of learning of the Dge lugs school, Se ra is the one renowned for its hermitages (*ri khrod*). At least nineteen such institutions are found tucked away in the mountains behind and around Se ra.² In this section of the Sera Project website, you will learn more about each of these hermitages. To go directly to the Hermitages interactive map, please [click here](#).

The Tibetan compound word *ri khrod* – the word that we translate here as “hermitage” – literally means “in the midst of” or “on the side of” (*’khrod*) “the

¹ Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos ’byung lo rgyus nor bu’i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tōsam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 35-36.

² Lists of the Se ra hermitages vary. For a list from 1820 (found in the *Extensive Explanation of the World* [*’Dzam gling rgyas bshad*]), see Turrell Wylie, *The Geography of Tibet According to the ’Dzam-gling-rgyas-bshad* (Rome: IsMEO, 1962), 82-83.

mountains” (*ri*).³ Hermitages are small monasteries found in relatively isolated mountain locations. At least in their early stages, they were the homes of individuals variously called “retreatant” (*mtshams pa*), “meditator” (*sgom chen*), “recluse” (*gcig bu pa* or *dben sa pa*), and of course “hermit” (*ri khrod pa*). A hermitage often began as the residence of a single individual,⁴ but most of them grew. When they became relatively large, they often ceased to be called hermitages and began to be called “monastery” (*dgon pa*), but the dividing line between these two terms – hermitage and monastery – is fuzzy. There are some hermitages, for example, that have more monks than many institutions that bear the name “monastery.” Many of Tibet’s greatest monasteries began as the hermitages of individual monks.

Hermitages usually begin as the retreat places of individual monks, tantric priests (*sngags pa*), pious male lay practitioners and, less frequently, nuns and laywomen.⁵ They are the places where these individuals settled for intensive, solitary practice. Originally, these sites may have had no buildings at all but only caves. When a cave did not exist, a monk might have built a simple stone and mud hut for his personal use. A monk often chose as the site of his hermitage a place that was considered holy (*gnas rtsa chen po*) – places where former saints had lived, places associated with certain deities, or places marked by certain geosacral signs such as self-arisen images or magical springs with curative powers. Holy places are said to bring blessings (*byin rlabs*) to those who reside there. Like a magnifying glass, they have the power to amplify or increase the merit derived from any religious practice performed there, and in general they are said to increase the chances of success in religious practice.

What would a monk have done in his hermitage? He would have engaged in meditation, ritual, study, writing, memorization, and a host of spiritual practices classified together under the general rubric of “accumulation and purification” (*gsag sbyang*).⁶ Or he might have engaged in a combination of all of these various activities. Even monks who were not committed to eremiticism as a permanent way of life often settled in isolated locations for limited periods of time – for

³ Other words are also used – for example, *dben sa* or *dben gnas*, literally “solitary place” or “solitary site”; see the discussion that follows.

⁴ Among the Se ra hermitages, it appears that only one (Ga ru) was not originally the meditational retreat of an individual monk but was instead founded as an institution – in this case as a nunnery – from the beginning. See, for example, Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa’i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan [A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels]* (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 30-31.

⁵ Nuns tended to be more wary about living alone in isolated locations for fear that they might be attacked or robbed; at least that is the rhetoric that we find in both the oral and written sources. Hence, when nuns retreated to the mountains, they tended to do so in groups. None of the hermitages we study here, even those that are nunneries, were founded by women.

⁶ This includes such things as prostrations, ritual offerings of the universe (*maṅḍala* offerings), recitations of the hundred-syllable mantra (*sngags*) of Vajrasattva (Rdo rje sems dpa’), water-bowl offerings, guru devotion practices, and so forth.

example, when they engaged in short or longer-term deity-focused practices like the so-called “enabling retreat” (*las rung*) or “approximation retreat” (*bsnyen pa*).⁷

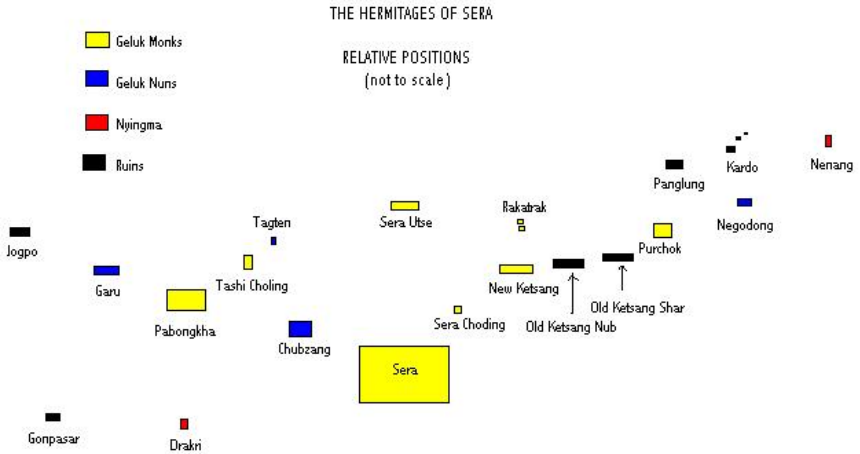
Many hermits traveled widely before settling on one spot as their permanent residence. And some, of course, never settled at all, but remained itinerant throughout their entire lives. Those monks who chose to settle usually picked a site that provided them with privacy. But the site also had to be relatively close to a populated area – close enough to allow them to obtain food and other necessities (usually in the form of donations from the laity). After remaining at a particular site for some time, the monk might gain a certain level of renown. In this case, he might attract students. If he did, an institution would begin to coalesce around him. First, students would build their own huts close to that of their master, and eventually they might build a temple where the monastic community could come together for rituals and teachings. If the community managed to attract the financial sponsorship of lay patrons, the hermitage would grow. When the original *bla ma*-founder died, the reincarnation might be identified, and in this way the succession would be maintained, and the hermitage would continue to develop as an institution. This is how private retreats evolved into more formal hermitages, and (in some instances at least) into larger monasteries. This is a well-known pattern in the history of Tibetan religious institutions. It is a model applicable not only to the evolution of Se ra’s hermitages but also to other monasteries throughout Tibet.

Location and Institutional Affiliation to Se ra

Most of the Se ra hermitages are located in the mountains to the north, east and west of the monastery along a (roughly) fifteen kilometers east-west span from ’Jog po and Dgon pa gsar hermitages in the far west to Gnas nang in the far east. The rough map that follows gives the relative location and some basic information about the hermitages of Se ra as of 2004. The map operates on a usual north-south axis, with the mountains to the north of the hermitages and the city of Lha sa to the south. The hermitages to the right (northeast) of Se ra are located in what is today a suburb of Lha sa known as Dodé.⁸ The hermitages to the left (northwest) of Se ra are located in the suburb known as Nyang bran.

⁷ These are retreats that involve mantra (*sngags*) accumulation of a specific deity and that allow one to subsequently engage in a variety of ritual actions with respect to that deity.

⁸ At least two variant spellings of the word commonly pronounced *dodé* exist: *dog bde* and *rdo gter*. The spelling *rdo gter* is also preferred by *Lha sa dgon tho*, passim. Phun tshogs rab rgyas, *Phur lcog rigs gsum byang chub gling gi byung ba mdo tsam brjod pa dad gsum ’dren pa’i lcags kyu* [A Brief History of Purchok Riksum Jangchup Ling: A Hook to Draw in the Three Types of Faith; hereafter *Phur byung*], *Bod ljongs nang bstan* [Tibetan Buddhism] 1 (2004), 55, gives the etymology: *dang po ltar na phu dog cing mda’ bde bas na dog bde dang /_ phyi ma ni yul ’dir rdo rigs sna tshogs kyi gter kha yod pa’i cha nas rdo gter zhes ’bod srol yod/*. The author prefers the first spelling and etymology. He also states that excavations have shown that this was an area of “several tens of thousands of households during the imperial period,” but cites no source for this other than oral tradition.



In 1959, all of the hermitages on this map were thriving institutions. Two of them – Gnas sgo gdong to the east, and Ga ru to the west – were nunneries. The rest were monasteries for male monks. They ranged in size from about ten to well over one-hundred monks or nuns. In the case of monks’ hermitages, it was not uncommon for there to have been a core group of six to eighteen fully-ordained monks (*dge slong*) that is what gave the institution its formal status and legitimacy as a monastery. But all of the monasteries also had many novices, non-monastic lay workers and support staff. If the hermitage was also the seat of a *bla brang* or *bla ma*’s estate/household, the support staff (including novices) could be three to four times as large as the number of fully ordained monks. For example, the Keutsang West Hermitage (Ke’u tshang nub ri khrod), the official residence of the Ke’u tshang bla mas, had a core group of twenty-five fully ordained monks, but if one includes novices and non-monastic staff the population was closer to ninety.⁹

Of the nineteen Se ra hermitages nine were the seats of *bla mas* – that is, they were the headquarters for lama’s estates. With two exceptions (noted below) the name of the *bla ma* lineage and that of the hermitage were identical. The lama’s estate hermitages were:

- ’Jog po

⁹ Dung dkar blo bzang ’phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* [*The Great Dungkar Dictionary*] (Krungrig go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 92.

- Dgon pa gsar
- Brag ri
- Bkra shis chos gling, since 1930 the seat of the Pha bong kha sprul skus
- Se ra dbu rtse, the seat of the Sgrub khang sprul skus
- Keutsang West
- Phur lcog
- Spang lung
- Mkharr do



Se ra as viewed from Chöding Hermitage (Chos sdings ri khrod)

Despite the fact that all of the hermitages are called “hermitage of Sera” (*se ra ’i ri khrod*), their relationship to Se ra is actually quite varied and often shifts over time. Some are related to Se ra only insofar as they were founded by Se ra monks, or because as they were taken over by Se ra monks at some point in their history. In several cases, hermitages were independent institutions with only nominal ties to Se ra. In other instances, hermitages were actually the property of Se ra. In between these two poles – minimal affiliation to Se ra at one extreme, and ownership by Se ra at the other – there were a variety of kinds and degrees of affiliation. If the hermitage belonged to a Se ra *bla ma*, then it was this *bla ma*, and not Se ra, who owned the hermitage. But even then there could be different degrees of affiliation between Se ra and the hermitage.

For example, in 1959 Keutsang West belonged to the Ke’u tshang bla ma. All of the monks of the hermitage belonged to the Keutsang Lama’s estate (Ke’u tshang bla brang). But all of the official monks of Ke’u tshang were also official monks of the Hamdong Regional House (Har gdong khang tshan) of Sera Jé College (Se ra byes grwa tshang), and enjoyed all of the privileges of being Se ra monks with regional house affiliations.¹⁰ Purchok Hermitage (Phur lcog ri khrod), by contrast, appears to have been much more independent, and had a weaker affiliation to Se

¹⁰ This entitled them, for example, to the money offering to monks (*gyed*) made to the college and regional-house monks.

ra. Phur lcog monks belonged principally to the Purchok Lama's estate (Phur lcog bla brang), and it appears that many (perhaps most) did not have official membership in either the Jé College or in one of its regional houses.



A painting of what Keutsang West Hermitage looked like before 1959.

To take another example, the nunneries¹¹ of Ga ru and Gnas sgo gdong belonged not to Se ra but to the lama's estates of the Brag ri and Mkhar rdo *bla mas*, respectively, and these *bla mas* served as their abbots. It is clear, then, even from these few examples, that the question of the institutional relationships of these hermitages to Se ra is a complex one. Because few elder monks from these various monasteries are still alive, it is a challenge to piece together the kinds of affiliation that the various hermitages had to Se ra before 1959. This is something that in many cases still remains to be determined.

Clearer is the present status of the hermitages today. In 2004, hermitages were either independent institutions or they belonged to – in the strong sense of being staffed and run by – Se ra. Of the twelve hermitages that are still active (i.e., that are not in ruins) and that remain Dge lugs, five belong to Se ra: 'Jog po, Pha bong kha, Se ra dbu rtse, Se ra chos sdings, and Ra kha brag. The other three male-monk hermitages (Bkra shis chos gling, Ke'u tshang and Phur lcog) and the four nunneries (Ga ru, Rtags bstan, Chu bzang, and Gnas sgo gdong) are independent institutions. The affiliation of a hermitage today is largely the result of who claimed and rebuilt it after the Lha sa municipal government began to give permits for this purpose in the 1980s. Se ra laid claim to the five hermitages it owns today. It has at least partially rebuilt four of these. One ('Jog po, located to the far west in the pasture lands of the Nyang bran Valley) is used as the base for its herds of yaks, and has been only minimally rebuilt. The other hermitages – the ones that do not belong to Se ra today – were rebuilt by individuals, albeit with community support. Bkra

¹¹ In 1959 there were only two nunneries: Ga ru and Gnas sgo gdong. Today there are four nunneries (Chu bzang and Rtags bstan were taken over by nuns after liberalization permitted the rebuilding of religious institutions in the 1980s).

shis chos gling was rebuilt by a devotee of Pha bong kha rin po che, the previous *bla ma*-owner. Ke'u tshang and Phur lcog were rebuilt by former monks of those hermitages, as were Ga ru and Gnas sgo gdong nunneries. Rtags bstan and Chu bzang were slowly taken over by nuns with no formal prior affiliations to these institutions. They therefore became nunneries simply by virtue of the fact nuns gradually moved to these sites over the years.

As one can see from the map, most of the hermitages survive to this day as Dge lugs institutions (either as monks' hermitages or as nunneries). Of the nineteen¹² original hermitages, all but two remain Dge lugs. Brag ri (mixed nuns and Tantric priests, located in the far south), and Gnas nang (a nuns' retreat center in the far northeast) are now Rnying ma practice centers (*sgrub grwa*).

Of the original nineteen hermitages, five are in ruins and have not been rebuilt. It is interesting that most of the hermitages that have *not* been rebuilt – 'Jog po and Dgon pa gсар in the far west, and Spang lung and Mkhar rdo in the far northeast – lie farthest from Se ra. New Ke'u tshang is in fact the newly rebuilt version of Keutsang West, and so one can count Keutsang West as one of the hermitages that *has* been rebuilt (albeit not in exactly the same site as the original institution). Keutsang East (Ke'u tshang shar) belongs to Purchok Hermitage and lies in ruins. The monks of Phur lcog have decided to put their energies into the main Phur lcog hermitage rather than taking on the additional burden of rebuilding Keutsang East. With this one exception, then, the rule (just mentioned) applies: the closer a hermitage was to Se ra, the greater its chances of being rebuilt.



A nun-meditator from Nenang Hermitage.

History

Several of the hermitages have a history that predates the rise of the Dge lugs school. For example, Pha bong kha, arguably the most important of all of the hermitages, is said to date to the *imperial period*. Gnas nang is said to have been a retreat site of Gu ru rin po che, and, if this is true, dates to the *ninth* century. Garu Nunnery (Ga ru dgon pa), founded by Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (b. eleventh century), dates to the *eleventh* century, and Spangs lung, originally the meditation site of

¹² There are actually twenty hermitages on this map, but what is labeled “New Keutsang” is the newly built version of “Keutsang West.” This accounts for the discrepancy.

one of Pha dam pa sangs rgyas's students, to the early *twelfth* century. Of course, each of these sites was later taken over by Dge lugs pa monks, and so even when a site has a pre-Dge lugs pa history, it also has a Dge lugs pa "founder."

Tsong kha pa (1357-1419), the founder of the Dge lugs school, is intimately connected to three hermitages – Se ra chos sdings, Se ra dbu rtse, and Ra kha brag. Each of these are places where tsong kha pa meditated, taught, and/or authored some of his most important works.¹³ So there is a sense in which Tsong kha pa "founded" these three hermitages in the



A stylized painting of Purchok Hermitage as it existed before 1959. The deity shining rainbow light from the clouds onto the monastery is byams pa.

fifteenth century, even if he himself probably had no notion of establishing formal institutions at these sites. And, indeed, there is no other founder of Chos sdings ever mentioned besides Tsong kha pa. But the tradition considers another later *bla ma*, Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho (1641-1713) to be the founder of the other two hermitages – Se ra dbu rtse and Ra kha brag – at least *qua* monastic institutions. Two other hermitages were founded in the *sixteenth* century: Negodong Hermitage (Gnas sgo gdong ri khrod), founded by an eminent Se ra scholar, Sgom sde nam mkha' rgyal mtshan; and Takten Hermitage (Rtags bstan ri khrod), founded by one of the most famous early meditators of the Dge lugs tradition, Dben sa pa blo bzang don grub (1504/5-1565/6), who is often reckoned as the Third Penchen Lama (Pañ chen sku phreng gsum pa). One hermitage, Chu bzang – founded by a monk who was a student (and regent) of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa, 1617-1682) as well as the uncle of his most famous regent, *Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho* (1653-1705) – was established in the *seventeenth* century. But the remaining hermitages, eleven in all, were founded in the *eighteenth* century.

Why this spurt of hermitage-building in the eighteenth century? Why this passion for "taking to the hills" at this particular moment in time? Socio-economic and political factors may have played some role in monks' decisions to leave Se ra and seek the relative peace and quiet of the mountains. We know, for example, that by the late seventeenth century, Se ra had a monastic population of close to 3000

¹³ There is a tradition that Tsong kha pa also meditated at Pha bong kha, and in a small cave between Keutsang West and Keutsang East (this cave no longer exists), but these sites are not as important in the Tsong kha pa biographies and oral lore as the three just mentioned.

monks.¹⁴ While an intellectually stimulating atmosphere in which to pursue one's studies, a monastery of this size is hardly the type of place that a monk with a contemplative bent would want to call home. Moreover, the eighteenth century saw a huge building boom at Se ra. All three of Se ra's largest temples – the [Sera Great Assembly Hall](#) (Se ra tshogs chen), the [Jé College Assembly Hall](#) (Byes 'du khang) as well as the [Mé College Assembly Hall](#) (Smad 'du khang) – were built between 1707 and 1761. This means that during these years monks would have had to put up with the chaos that comes from living in the midst of large-scale building projects. Nor is it inconceivable that junior monks, even if they were textualists, might have been conscripted to serve as laborers in these mammoth architectural undertakings.

Political factors also might have played a role in the exodus of monks. With the growth of the Gdan sa gsum – the three great Dge lugs seats of learning – there also came increased political power for these institutions. After the Fifth Dalai Lama's consolidation of power in the middle of the seventeenth century, the seats of learning began to play an increasingly important role in Tibetan politics. While perhaps not as influential as 'Bras spungs – the seat of the Ganden Palace (Dga' ldan pho brang), the headquarters of the Da lai bla ma's government – Se ra, as the closest of the three seats of learning to Lha sa – also played a major role in the politics of the day. Se ra monks, we know, took stances either in support of or opposition to the Qushot Mongolian chief, Lha bzang khāng (d. 1717), in his successful bid to overthrow the Fifth Dalai Lama's regent, Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, in 1705. For example, the then-abbot of the Mé College (Grwa tshang smad) of Se ra opposed Lha bzang khāng, a position that he paid for with his life once the Qushot ruler came to power.¹⁵ But Lha bzang khāng also rewarded the seats of learning financially when they supported him. At Se ra, for example, he built the [Great Assembly Hall](#), and he moved his personal ritual college into the old Se ra assembly hall – today the site of the [Sera Tantric College](#). In the same year that he had the Mé College abbot killed, he also gave to Se ra the Grong smad estates that used to belong to the regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.¹⁶

¹⁴ Sde srid sang rgyas rgya mtsho, *Dga ldan chos 'byung bai dūrya ser po* [*Yellow Lapis: A History of the Ganden (School)*], 142, states that Se ra had a population of 2850 monks at the time of writing this work.

¹⁵ See Luciano Petech, *China and Tibet in the Early 18th Century: History of the Establishment of Chinese Protectorate in Tibet*, T'oung Pao Monographie 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972, second ed.), 13.

¹⁶ Petech, *China and Tibet*, 13. See also *Lha sa 'i dgon tho*, 75, where it states that Grong smad, the birthplace of the regent, is about two miles from Se ra.



A detail of a painting of Se ra from the eighteenth century depicting the monastery before all of the major temples had been constructed. The large (light blue) building in the rear of the monastery is undoubtedly the original Se ra Assembly Hall (today the assembly hall of the Tantric College [Sngags pa grwa tshang]). The three-story white building in the lower left may be what today is called the Se ra theg chen khang gsar, a palace-like residence said to have been built by Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho. This image is a detail of Item No. 65275 in the Collection of the Rubin Museum of Art, from the www.himalayanart.org website.

But Lha bzang made some fatal political mistakes early in his rule. In the first year after assuming power he (or his wife) had the regent Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho beheaded. The following year Lha bzang khāng sent the Sixth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng drug pa, 1683-1706) into exile in Beijing (the Da lai bla ma died on the way). Lha bzang khāng also set up a puppet Da lai bla ma, declaring him to be the true sixth Da lai bla ma. Economically, opposition to Lha bzang among the Kokonor (Mtsho sngon po) faction of the Qushots caused the latter to withhold donations to the great monasteries. This was financially devastating to the seats of learning, and it caused the Paṅ chen bla ma to send a mission to Kokonor in 1716 to try and reinstate Kokonor Qushot patronage of the great monasteries.¹⁷ All of these various moves cost Lha bzang khāng the support of both the people and the seats of learning, and so when Dzungar Mongolian forces moved against him in 1717, promising to enthrone Skal bzang rgya mtsho (1708-1757), a child from Li thang, as the Seventh Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bdun pa), the seats of learning gave the Dzungars their support. They provided these rivals of the Qushots with monk soldiers and scouts who knew the

¹⁷ Petech, *China and Tibet*, 24.

terrain,¹⁸ and gave them provisions after their arrival on the outskirts of the city. Se ra monks also joined the Dzungar troops as soldiers for the final push against Lha bzang khāng.¹⁹ The Dzungars defeated the Qushots, but Dzungar rule would prove to be disastrous for Tibet. Even if the seats of learning were spared, the Dzungars sacked and looted Lha sa.²⁰ They began to intervene in internal affairs of the seats of learning, purging what they considered to be the riffraff from the great monasteries.²¹ Far more serious, they destroyed many Rnying ma monasteries, especially in southern Tibet, where they murdered scores of monks and sowed the seeds of bitter sectarian rivalries that would plague Tibet for most of its subsequent history.



Pho lha nas (right), and his son (left): detail of a mural in one of the regional houses (khang tshan) of Se ra (Tibet).

The Chinese Manchu emperor – who had managed to protect the young Seventh Dalai Lama from being captured by the Dzungars in 1717 – saw Tibetans’ disillusionment with the Dzungars as an opportunity to weaken this powerful Mongol group that they had for some time perceived as a threat. The Manchus, therefore, decided to march on Lha sa with the young Da lai bla ma (a crucial symbol of political legitimacy) in tow. Forming an alliance with several Qushot Mongol factions, and with pro-Qushot Tibetans – most notably Pho lha nas (1689-1747), one of Lha bzang’s former and most able commanders – they entered Lha sa in 1720, overthrew the Dzungars, and enthroned the young Skal bzang rgya

¹⁸ Petech, *China and Tibet*, 34. This is not the first time that Se ra monks had acted as soldiers. In 1639-1640 the Fifth Dalai Lama himself used Se ra monks in this capacity. See Zahiruddin Ahmad, *Sino-Tibetan Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, Serie Orientale Roma, XL (Rome: IsMEO, 1970), 125.

¹⁹ Petech, *China and Tibet*, 44.

²⁰ Apparently, even the monks who acted as soldiers participated in the sack of Lha sa; see Petech, *China and Tibet*, 46.

²¹ Petech, *China and Tibet*, 54.

mtsho as the Seventh Dalai Lama. They also took this opportunity to purge the seats of learning of Dzungar influence by expelling all Dzungar *bla mas* from the great monasteries.²²

A series of events initiated by the death of the Manchu Kangxi (Kang shi, 1654-1722) emperor in 1722 destabilized the delicate political balance in Lha sa yet again. However, by 1729 Pho lha nas had, with Manchu backing, managed to consolidate power. He ruled for eighteen years and, like his original Qushot mentor Lha bzang khāng, he was a great patron of the Dge lugs seats of learning. At Se ra, he is chiefly known as the individual who provided the funds for the building of the Jé College Assembly Hall.²³ His funerary *stūpa* is housed on the main altar of that very building.



The remains of one of Tibet's great kings, Pho lha nas, are said to rest inside this funerary stūpa on the main altar in the Jé College Assembly Hall.

As we can see from this brief historical overview, the first half of the eighteenth century was an exceedingly turbulent period in Tibetan history. Se ra, it is clear, was a major player in the power-politics of the day. Was Se ra's involvement in the political machinations and power struggles during the first half of the eighteenth century at all related to the establishment of the hermitages? We cannot say for sure, but it is hardly a major leap to conclude that monks with a more contemplative calling – monks who wished to remain aloof from political intrigues in order to pursue study and meditation – might have chosen to avoid an institution like Se ra. Or else they might have chosen to enter for a limited time to pursue their studies,

²² Petech, *China and Tibet*, 77.

²³ His son is credited with having built Se ra's largest regional house, the [Hamdong Regional House of the Jé College](#) (Byes har gdong khang tshan).

but then quickly to exit. And this is in fact what several of the founders of the Se ra hermitages did at this precise time.

Socio-demographic factors (such as the size of Se ra and its physical expansion), and political factors (such as Se ra's increasing involvement in the chaotic politics of the day) might have been contributing factors to the founding of the hermitages, but one cannot reduce the rise of the hermitage movement to these factors alone. Clearly, religious motivations were at work as well. If the number of hermitages founded during a given period is any indication of a generation's desire for meditation and isolated retreat, then the eighteenth century must be considered one of the most "contemplative" centuries in the history of the Dge lugs school, or at least in the history of Se ra. It seems likely that the exodus into the mountains at this time was in large part the result of the influence of one charismatic figure, the great meditator and scholar Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho. Sgrub khang pa is so important to the history of the Se ra hermitage tradition that it behooves us to say a bit more about him.²⁴

Sgrub khang pa was born in Zangskar (Zangs dkar) in 1641. His father died when he was six years old, and he spent most of his youth caring for his sick mother. His mother passed away when he was 17, and it was at this point that he began his religious career. He spent two years at the monastery of Byams pa gling, and then, at the age of nineteen, he set out for central Tibet to further his studies. On his way, he took novice monastic ordination from Drung pa brtson 'grus rgyal mtshan (fl. seventeenth century), a student of one of the most important figures in the history of Se ra, 'Khon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub (1561-1637). Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho then went to Se ra. We do not know why his stay there was so short, but he quickly left Se ra and enrolled instead at the Dakpo College (Dwags po grwa



A detail of an eighteenth-century painting in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art ([Image no. 105 on the www.himalayanart.org website](http://www.himalayanart.org)) identified as Sgrub khang pa.

tschang), where he remained for sixteen years. He returned to Drung pa rin po che to take full ordination. After Drung pa brtson 'grus rgyal mtshan's death, Sgrub khang pa continued his studies at Bkra shis lhun po with some of Drung pa rin po che's students. After a couple of years there, he returned to Se ra, where he became a student of the abbot of the Jé College, Jo ston bsod nams rgyal mtshan

²⁴ The account that follows is based on that found in *Dung dkar tshig mdzod*, 431-32, entry for Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho (Dung dkar rin po che says that he bases his account on Yongs 'dzin ye shes rgyal mtshan's *Lam rim bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar*); see the same text, 735-36, for Sgrub khang pa.

(seventeenth century). He left Se ra sometime shortly after 1692²⁵ to begin a series of pilgrimages and meditation retreats in important sites throughout central and southern Tibet.²⁶ He returned to the Se ra foothills some thirteen years later, in 1705. It was at this time, it seems, that he founded three hermitages:

1. **Phur lcog**, where he built the famous Temple of the Three Protectors (Rigs gsum mgon po lha khang). He entrusted this institution to his student, Ngag dbang byams pa (1682-1762). Tradition has it that Sgrub khang pa established Phur lcog with one-hundred monks.
2. **Ra kha brag**, established with twelve fully-ordained monks, and
3. **Se ra dbu rtse**, established with seventeen fully-ordained monks. He made this latter hermitage his home.



A statue of Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa, located in the cave in which he first meditated at Phur lcog, a hermitage that he co-founded with his teacher Sgrub khang pa.

Sgrub khang pa influenced several important young scholar-meditators of his day. Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa we have already mentioned. This influential figure gained a reputation as a brilliant scholar at a very young age. But he also had a passion for meditation, which is obviously what led him to seek out Sgrub khang pa as his teacher. It appears that they first met in 1699, but it was not until Ngag dbang byams pa had finished his studies in 1707 that he began to study intensively with Sgrub khang pa. Under Sgrub khang pa's supervision he remained at Purchok Hermitage in meditation for many years. Later in life he was called to

²⁵ *Phur byung*, 59, puts the date of his departure for 'Ol khar at the time that Sgrub khang pa was 59 – that is, in 1699.

²⁶ The biography of Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa states that he met Sgrub khang pa in 1699, so perhaps Sgrub khang pa continued to come back to Se ra even during this time of pilgrimage and retreat.

public service, most notably as the tutor to the Eighth Dalai Lama Jampel Gyatso (Da lai bla ma sku phreng brgyad pa 'jam dpal rgya mtsho, 1758-1804). Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa is credited in one source with being the founder of another hermitage, **Keutsang East**. He also influenced other figures in the hermitage tradition: for example, Klong rdol bla ma ngag dbang blo bzang (1719-1794), and Yongs 'dzin ye shes rgyal mtshan (1713-1793),²⁷ who founded Tshe mchog gling at the opposite (southern) end of the Lha sa Valley.

Another student of Sgrub khang pa, Mkhār rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho, also known as Blo bzang sgom chung, was responsible for founding the Khar do Hermitage on the mountainside across the road from Phur lcog.²⁸ Mkhār rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho was born near Lha sa in 1672. He entered the Jé College of Se ra when he was thirteen years old and studied all of the major scholastic subjects under the Byes mkhan po rgyal mtshan don grub (seventeenth century). At age twenty, Mkhār rdo ba took full ordination under this same teacher and then spent the next several years in retreat in different locations in central and southern Tibet. It was during this time that he perfected different alchemical techniques for extracting nutritive powers from water, pebbles, and flowers.²⁹ In 1706 he came back to Lha sa with the few students that he had gathered in his travels. It was perhaps at this time that he apprenticed himself to Sgrub khang pa.³⁰ In any case, we know that it was shortly after his return to Lha sa that Mkhār rdo ba settled on a bluff at the far northwestern end of the Lha sa Valley, across from Phur lcog, where he began to build a hermitage, and to teach extensively. He continued to travel intermittently even



A detail of a painting in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art (Image no. 105 in the www.himalayanart.org website) identified as Mkhār rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho (1672-1749).

²⁷ Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1713-1793) began coming to Purchok Hermitage for retreat and instruction beginning in the year *me sbrul* (1737). He spent that entire year in meditation there, living very humbly and receiving instructions from Phur lcog rin po che. He returned to Purchok Hermitage many more times over the years, and after Phur lcog rin po che's death he continued to look after Purchok Hermitage "as if it were his own"; *Phur byung*, 64.

²⁸ The account of Mkhār rdo ba's life that follows is based on *Dung dkar tshig mdzod*, 431-2. Another account of his life based on an interview with a former monk of Khar do Hermitage can be found under the description of that hermitage. (Click here to go to the [Khar do Hermitage](#) site now.) Since I have no access to a biography of this figure, I have not tried to reconcile the two sources, which vary considerably.

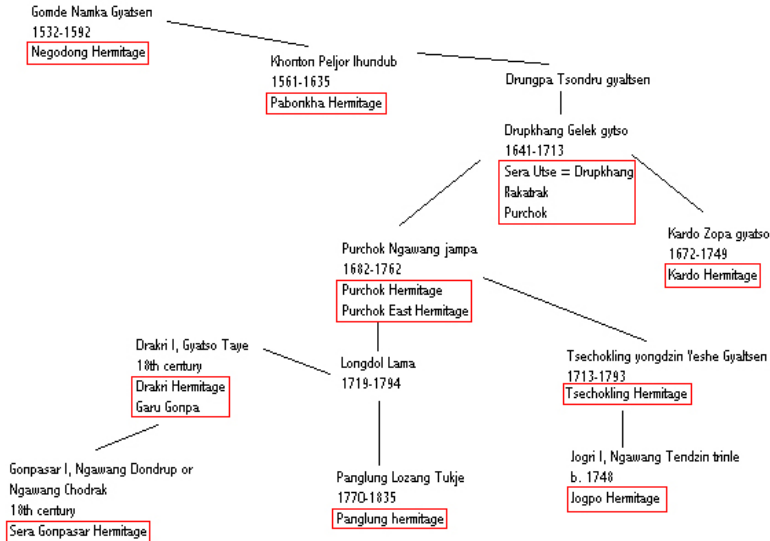
²⁹ *chu dang / rde'u dang / me tog bcud len*. A text on extracting the nutritive essence from flowers is listed among his known writings.

³⁰ It is not inconceivable that he met Sgrub khang pa while both of them were at Se ra, or even while on his travels, since both Sgrub khang pa and Mkhār rdo ba studied at Se ra at about the same time, and both were doing pilgrimage and retreat in similar places at precisely the same time: from 1692-1705/6.

after he had founded his small hermitage, gathering many students from different parts of Tibet.

Khardo Hermitage came to be the dominant force in Dodé (the area northeast of Lha sa). At some point in time, the Khardo Hermitage assumed responsibility for the small hermitage of **Gnas sgo gdong** that was located just beneath it at the foot of the mountain near the village of Dodé. And in the mid-nineteenth century, the third Mkhār rdo bla ma, Chos kyi rdo rje (b. eighteenth century?), built **Nenang Nunnery** at the far end of the Dodé Valley. These three hermitages – Gnas sgo gdong, Gnas nang, and Mkhār rdo itself – came to be known together as “the three practice centers of Khardo” (Mkhār rdo sgrub sde gsum).

To summarize, seven of the nine hermitages to the east of Se ra were founded either by Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho or by one of his direct disciples in the eighteenth century. **Panglung Hermitage**, just behind Phur lcog, was founded by one of Sgrub khang pa’s great-grand-students, Spangs lung sku phreng dang po blo bzang thugs rje (1770-ca. 1835).³¹ The chart that follows traces the teacher-student relationships between some of the figures we have mentioned so far.



The building of hermitages in the environs of Se ra comes to a halt around the end of the eighteenth century. After the beginning of the nineteenth century no

³¹ He was a student of the great scholar and meditator Klong rdol bla ma ngag dbang blo bzang, who was in turn a student of Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa, Sgrub khang pa’s chief disciple.

new hermitages were built. Why? Although we cannot answer with absolute certainty, we can speculate as to the reasons. One possibility is that a kind of saturation point had been reached. Hermitage building always required the permission of the Ganden Palace (the Tibetan government), and it usually required the endowment of these institutions with estates. It is not inconceivable that the government felt that a limit had been reached as regards its ability to provide for these institutions through estate endowments. Or perhaps the government felt that it was putting undue burden on the local populace, which was obligated (morally, if not legally) to further subsidize the hermitages with donations. It is also not inconceivable that the Se ra administration might itself have protested the building of new hermitages, since the seats of learning were institutions that competed with the hermitages both for donors and for monks. A second possibility is that, given the relative political stability of the seats of learning from the mid eighteenth century, fewer monks felt the need to leave Se ra, making the building of new hermitages unnecessary. Third, perhaps monastic life in the seats of learning became so normalized and idealized that the isolated contemplative life of the solitary *yogi* was no longer as valued (or as encouraged) as it had been in earlier days. Finally, is not inconceivable that senior monks of Se ra dissuaded their more promising students from going into isolated life-long retreat, encouraging them instead to either enter the Tantric Colleges, thereby launching them on the process of ascending through the stages of the Dge lugs hierarchy, or else to remain as teachers at Se ra, where there was always a demand for good textualists. Or perhaps it was a combination of all of these factors that brought an end to the founding of new hermitages.

Not only did hermitage-building cease, but the hermitages that already existed underwent a fairly radical transformation at the end of the eighteenth century. Within one or two generations of their founding, *all* of the hermitages became prototypical ritual monasteries – that is, monasteries where ritual (*cho ga phyag len, zhabs brtan*), rather than, say, individual meditation on the graded stages of the path (*lam rim*) and on the *tantras*, was the principal activity of the monks and nuns. True, some hermitages kept a few meditation huts for monks who wanted to do individual retreat, but even those institutions that made room for contemplatives in their ranks transformed into monasteries where the primary focus was ritual. Why did *this* happen?

The original hermitages began as meditation retreat centers. But to thrive as a meditation retreat center an institution requires the leadership of a charismatic contemplative. Almost all of the founders of the hermitages had this type of drive and charisma. Once these founding figures had passed away, however, the leadership of the hermitages passed on *not* to a senior student (who might also have had this same vision), but rather to the next incarnation of the founding *bla ma*. These later incarnations were rarely as committed to the contemplative life as were their predecessors. There were several reasons for this. The young incarnations (*sprul sku*) – or *bla mas*, as they are called in the seats of learning – were given

official status at Se ra.³² As *bla mas* they were expected to enter Se ra for their studies, where they were then enculturated from a very early age into the life of the seat of learning and into its ethos. Wherever the yearning for a contemplative life comes from, it does not generally come as the intentional product of seat of learning life. Put another way, the goal of the seats of learning was not to produce hermits and meditators, but to create scholars who were the embodiments of the Dge lugs tradition: to fashion monks who exemplified the teachings of Tsong kha pa through their learning, comportment, and ritual skills. Young *bla mas* learned this lesson well, and they almost never rejected this ideal in favor of the life of the solitary *yogi*. This is not to say that the life of the solitary meditator-*yogi* was not (and is not) an ideal among the Dge lugs pas (Tsong kha pa, after all, was precisely this for much of his life), nor is it to deny that many *bla mas* also might have had such an inclination. But even those *bla mas* who had a yearning for the hermit's life would have found it difficult to live out this calling by renouncing their position and heading to the mountains, for once a young boy had been identified as the leader of a now-institutionalized hermitage, there were a variety of forces and interests to keep him in this position. For example, the *bla ma*'s household (or lama's estate) depended on the physical presence of the *bla ma* for its fiscal survival, and the hermitage, in turn, depended on the lama's estate for its financial stability. In brief, there were many reasons – sociological, economic, and even political – that caused the subsequent incarnations of the hermitages' founders not to be as committed to the kind of contemplative lives that their predecessors had led. Lacking the contemplative charismatic leadership of the original founders, it is not surprising that the institutions headed by these individuals also changed. But change into what? There was no need for the hermitages to transform into educational institutions. The seats of learning already had a monopoly in this sphere, and the smaller monasteries near an institution like Se ra could not have competed with the seats of learning when it came to providing monks with a textual education. This left only one other option: ritual. In the absence of leaders with contemplative charisma, the only option for the hermitages was to transform into institutions whose primary focus was communal ritual. And this is in fact what happened.

Perhaps the historical lesson here is a simple one: hermitages (or, to be more specific, Dge lugs hermitages near the seats of learning) do not stay isolated, meditation-oriented institutions for long. The centripetal pressure to grow, and the centrifugal pressure to institutionalize, to become part of the Dge lugs establishment and to become affiliated to larger and more powerful institutions like the seats of learning is simply too great for these establishments to remain small, independent, and contemplatively-driven for very long. With their transformation into ritual institutions, the hermitages were, of course, no longer the classical “solitary sites” (*dben gnas*) sought out by *yogis*. And just as the founders of the hermitages had to leave Se ra for the mountains around the monastery in order to pursue their

³² In several instances they occupied the highest rank in the *bla ma* hierarchy, that of “Incarnation of the Great Assembly Hall (*tshogs chen sprul sku*).” This was the case with the Phur lcoog, Mkhar rdo and Brag ri *lamas*, for example.

contemplative vocation in the eighteenth century, latter-day *yogis* would have to leave not only Se ra but also the hermitages. At least this is what they would have to do if their goal was to meditate in relative isolation and without the responsibilities that come from being a member of a ritual monastery.

After the events of 1959, the hermitages were all forcibly shut down and fell into disrepair. Monks and nuns started rebuilding them after the liberalization of the 1980s. Most of the hermitages were rebuilt in the 1990s. Initially, the local Lha sa government was fairly generous in granting permits to rebuild these institutions. In the last few years, however, it has been close to impossible to get permission to rebuild – and, indeed, even to add new structures to already rebuilt hermitages or to make modifications to existing buildings. The attitude in the Lha sa bureaucracy today is more stringent in part because of the prevailing attitude among government bureaucrats that there are already too many monks and nuns in and around Lha sa. (This is not surprising, given that monastics have been very vocal in protesting the Chinese occupation of Tibet over the last two decades.) Hence, there are restrictions not only on rebuilding and renovation, but also on the number of monks and nuns that can live in the hermitages. As a result, those five hermitages that have not already been rebuilt will probably never be rebuilt. As the elder monks who knew the traditions of these institutions pass away, these institutions, like so much of Tibet's rich religious culture, will disappear from cultural memory just as they are physically disappearing from the landscape of Lha sa.

But let us end on a less gloomy note. It is a great irony that, in the wake of the destruction of the hermitages, some of these sites are once again becoming retreat centers for meditators. This is not to say that the newly renovated hermitages have renounced their focus on ritual. They have not. Rather, it is the ruins and caves of the hermitages that have *not* been renovated that are serving as homes for contemporary *yogis* (mainly nuns). For example, nuns have settled at Gnas nang and Mkhar rdo, transforming these ruins into meditation retreat centers – which is to say, into the types of places that their founders originally intended them to be. The phoenix rising out of the ashes of its own burnt body comes to mind as an appropriate metaphor for this phenomenon.

Life in the Se ra Hermitages

By 1959, almost all of Se ra's hermitages had been ritual institutions for close to two-hundred years. If a monk who had entered a hermitage wanted to study, he would go to Se ra. If he wanted to do life-long, isolated meditation retreat, he would seek a truly secluded place in the mountains. By the same token, if a Se ra monk *did not* want to study, and if he was content to lead the life of a ritualist, he could enter a hermitage (if permitted by his regional house and accepted by the hermitage). Of course, a monk who wanted to lead the life of a ritualist could remain at Se ra, but life in a hermitage was often much easier than life in a seat of learning, especially if the hermitage was the seat of a high *bla ma* who was wealthy. Be that as it may, those monks who entered the hermitages knew the type of life they would be living. They would either be engaged in ritual (especially if they had a good

voice or knew how to play a musical instrument), or they would serve as support staff for the hermitage: cleaning, tending altars, cooking, doing business on the hermitage's behalf, or supervising one of its estates.



Nuns perform a Medicine Buddha (Sman bla) ritual for a benefactor at Gnas sgo gdong nunnery.

To become an official monk or nun in one of the hermitages the postulant would have to submit to an examination (*rgyugs*). By the time monks and nuns were senior members of the institution, they would have memorized close to five-hundred pages of ritual texts.³³ Monks and nuns performed the rituals of the hermitage in monthly and yearly ritual cycles in accordance with the institution's liturgical calendar. If no sponsor was available, the fixed rituals would be "paid for" by the hermitage itself. That is, the monastery would provide the monks and nuns with food (often better than the day-to-day fare) for the duration of the ritual cycle. But local lay people, monks from other monasteries, and the Tibetan government often commissioned rituals – sometimes acting as sponsors for one of the monastery's own fixed ritual cycles, sometimes requesting the hermitage to perform special rituals on one of its free days. There were, of course, plenty of lay people in the Lha sa Valley and its suburbs who needed such rituals (*zhabs brtan*) to be performed on their behalf. On occasion, a small group of monks or nuns from the hermitage might also be invited to a lay person's home to do ritual there. Rituals have always been an important source of income for the hermitages and for their individual monks and nuns.

While there is some variation in the monthly and yearly liturgical cycles of the hermitages, there is also a great deal of overlap. Almost all of the hermitages, for

³³ Ngag dbang sman rgyal, *Gar dgon bsam gtan gling gi lo rgyus mun sel mthong ba don ldan* [A History of Gargön Samten Ling: Clearing Away Darkness, Meaningful to Behold; hereafter *Gar lo*] (lha sa?, 1997), 25-26: *rgyugs chen la ha lam dpe cha shog grangs lnga brgya skor yod*.

example, celebrate the new and full moon days,³⁴ as well as the tenth and twenty-fifth of the lunar month. Some of them also perform protector deity practices on an additional day every month.

There is also a great deal of similarity in the *yearly* ritual cycle. Monks and nuns perform quite extensive multiple-day ritual cycles during the New Year (Lo gsar), and during the “Sixth-Month Fourth-Day” (Drug pa tshe bzhi) celebrations. This latter holiday, also called “Festival of the Turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine” (Chos ’khor dus chen), is a major pilgrimage day for Tibetans from Lha sa and surrounding areas, as thousands of people travel along a route in the foothills above Se ra from Pabongkha Hermitage in the west to Phur lcog in the east. A good deal of the hermitages’ income for the year derives from the moneys and in-kind goods collected in the form of offerings on this day (at least if the hermitage is fortunate enough to lie on the pilgrimage circuit). At different times of the year (in the first fortnight of the fourth Tibetan month, for example) the hermitages also perform



Detail of a thangka of Nyang bran rgyal chen preserved in one of the regional houses of Se ra, India.

two-day Avalokiteśvara fasting ritual (*smyung gnas*) – often doing multiple sets of two-day rituals consecutively.³⁵ The hermitages also, of course, celebrate other major pan-sectarian holidays, like the Buddha’s birth/death date, as well as Dge lugs-specific holy days like the commemoration of Tsong kha pa’s death – the Ganden Feast of the 25th (Dga’ ldan lnga mchod) – that takes place on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth Tibetan month. All of the hermitages, it seems, also maintained the “rainy-season retreat” (*dbyar gnas*) tradition, during which monks and nuns minimize their movement for a portion of the summer so as to avoid killing insects that are more prevalent on the ground during this time.

Of course, each hermitage has its own set of tutelary deities (*yi dam*) and protector deities (*srung ma, chos skyong*), and so the rites performed by the monks and nuns may vary from one monastery to the next. But given that all of them are Dge lugs institutions, there is also a great deal of overlap in the deities propitiated, and in the actual liturgies performed. Hence, for example, many of the monasteries

³⁴ The monastic confession ritual (*gso sbyong*) takes place on the new and full moon, but monks and nuns also do additional rituals on these days.

³⁵ At Garu Nunnery, for example, they do a minimum of eight sets of two-day fasting rituals, and if there is a sponsor, they will spend the entire month engaged in the practice.

perform the self-generation (*bdag bskyed*) and self-initiation (*bdag 'jug*) rituals of Vajrabhairava, and they propitiate protector deities like Dpal Idan lha mo, Mahākāla (Mgon po), Dharmarāja (Chos rgyal), and Vaiśravaṇa (Rnam sras). In some monasteries, especially in the hermitages to the west of Se ra, the protector Nyang bran rgyal chen, the local site-protector of the Nyang bran Valley, is also propitiated. The rites written by Pha bong kha bde chen snying po (1878-1941) continue to be as popular today as they were before 1959.

As an example, here are the principal ritual practices done at one of the hermitages, Garu Nunnery, in a one-month period (the dates given are the dates in the Tibetan lunar month):

Date	Ritual Practice (Tibetan)	Ritual Practice (English)
8	<i>Drölchok (Sgrol chog)</i> <i>Tungshak (Ltung bshags)</i>	Tārā Ritual ³⁶ The Ritual of the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas
10	<i>Demchok Lachö (Bde mchog bla mchod)</i> <i>Jikjé Danjuk ('Jigs byed bdag 'jug)</i> ³⁷	Offering to the Master Based on the Deity Cakrasaṃvara Self-Initiation of Vajrabhairava
15	<i>Menla Deshek Gyé (Sman bla bde gshegs brgyad)</i> ³⁸	Ritual of the Eight Medicine Buddhas
19 ³⁹	<i>Gönpo Chögyel Lhamo Namsé dang Nyangdren Gyelchengyi Kangsol (Mgon po/ chos rgyal/ lha mo/ rnam sras dang/ nyang bran rgyal chen gyi bskang gsol)</i>	Propitiation Rituals of Mahākāla, Dharmarāja, Vaiśravaṇa, Penden Lhamo, and Nyangdren Gyelchen
25	<i>Demchok Lachö (Bde mchog bla mchod)</i> ⁴⁰ <i>Neljormé Danjuk (Rnal 'byor ma 'i bdag 'jug)</i>	Offering to the Master Based on the Deity Cakrasaṃvara Self-Initiation of Vajrayoginī
30	<i>Neten Chudruk (Gnas brtan bcu drug)</i> ⁴¹	The Sixteen Arhats Ritual

In addition to performing rituals, the monks of the male hermitages have traditionally seen it as part of their duties to keep a number of rooms open for

³⁶ See Stephen Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā: Magic and Ritual in Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

³⁷ The oral and written accounts differ here. Both of these practices were mentioned by one of the nuns in an interview, but the *Gar lo*, 25, mentions only the first of these on this particular date.

³⁸ *Gar lo*, 25, calls this Medicine Buddha [Ritual]: Yizhin Wanggyel (*smān bla yid bzhin dbang rgyal*), perhaps a reference to the title of the actual ritual text that is used.

³⁹ This is according to the oral account. *Gar lo*, 25, states that the protector deity practices take place on the twenty-ninth.

⁴⁰ *Gar lo*, 25, mentions only the second of these practices – which is there called *na ro mkha' spyod ma 'i bdag 'jug* – and it omits *bde mchog bla mchod*.

⁴¹ *Gar lo*, 25, calls this by the alternative name of *gnas brtan phyag mchod*.

visiting Se ra monks. Textualists or *dpe cha ba* from Se ra's two philosophical colleges – Byes and Smad – had a number of study breaks between the different study periods,⁴² and they would often seek the relative peace and quiet of the hermitages, usually *not* for meditation, but for intensive memorization retreats. This tradition still exists, although today the monks tend to request rooms in the hermitages owned by (and closest to) Se ra rather than seeking rooms in privately-held hermitages like Phur lcog, Se ra dbu rtse, Se ra chos sdings, and Ra kha brag have always been especially popular with Se ra monks who want to do such retreats not only because of their proximity to Se ra, but also because of the strong associations of these three hermitages with events in the life of Tsong kha pa.



A Se ra monk who in 2004 was engaged in a textual retreat (dpe mtshams) at Rakhadrak Hermitage. He is occupying a room adjacent to the cave of Tsong kha pa.

As with many monasteries in Tibet today, the population of the Se ra hermitages is quite young. The vast majority of the monks and nuns are under the age of thirty, and many are much younger. While the nunneries appear to be thriving, the fate of the male hermitages is not as clear. In pre-1959 Tibet, there were basically only two career options available to young men and women: they either became monks and nuns, or they chose a family life. If they chose the latter and they entered the workforce, they usually followed in the footsteps of their parents, who were either farmers (*zhing pa*), nomads (*'brog pa*),⁴³ or, less frequently, merchants (*tshong pa*). The life of the farmer and nomad was a difficult life. By comparison, the monastic life was more secure, and it provided opportunities for education – and

⁴² Whether or not all of these were considered official “textual retreats” (*dpe mtshams*) or “doctrine retreats” (*chos mtshams*), by my reckoning, monks had the opportunity for such kinds of memorization retreats on six separate occasions that correspond to the following dates (all according to the Tibetan calendar): 2/17-2/26, 4/8-4/15, 5/2-5/25, 8/1-8/8, 9/7-9/16, 10/17-11/15.

⁴³ Nomads raised animals – yaks (or yak hybrids), sheep, goats, and cattle – for meat, dairy products, and wool.

therefore for social and economic advancement – that were not normally available to ordinary villagers and nomads.

Today the situation is quite different. Young men and women have (at least in theory) more choices open to them. Secular education (almost exclusively in the medium of Chinese language) is now a possibility, even if it is still mostly accessible only to the middle and upper classes in urban areas. And there are a variety of career options that were not available before 1959 (mostly for those who are educated and who live in, or who relocate to, larger urban areas). How much opportunity *actually* exists for Tibetan youths – as important as this question is – is not really the issue we are concerned with here. Rather, what is most important for us as we contemplate the future of institutions like the hermitages is the *perception* that exists in the minds of young Tibetans about their possible future. In *their* minds, driven in large part by the visions they absorb from television and films, the world is filled with opportunities, life-choices and lifestyles that compete with the monastic life. But Tibetans are an extremely devout people, and monks and nuns continue to enter the monasteries and nunneries, often with a great sense of religious calling, and with an idealistic vision of what it will be like to live in such an institution. This influx of young Tibetans into small monasteries like the hermitages is not something that one sees changing anytime in the near future. What *is* changing is what happens *after* young people (and especially young men) enter monasteries. And here the pattern seems to be that most of the young monks leave the monastery before they are twenty years of age. The problem for the hermitages, then, is not one of recruitment but of retention.⁴⁴ At least this is the problem in smaller monasteries, and especially in smaller monasteries near a large cosmopolitan area like Lha sa, where, because of its physical proximity, the secular and modern life entices young monks with even greater force.⁴⁵

An elder monk from one of the hermitages complained to me, for example, that he had “lost” many young boys in their late teens, and that he was considering not accepting boys any longer, his theory being that if one holds out for more mature young men in their twenties (preferably already ordained), one is more apt to get candidates who already know what is in store for them, and who will not be so easily enticed by the lures of the world. It remains to be seen, however, how many monks there are who fit this description and are not already committed to another

⁴⁴ The situation at Se ra is somewhat different. While there is undoubtedly attrition, it does not appear to be as high as it is in the hermitages. For one thing, Se ra monks tend to enter the monastery at a slightly older age. There is also a long waiting list to become an official Se ra monk, and someone who has attained this status is not likely to give it up casually. Monks who are studying at Se ra also have a clear-cut goal (that of receiving a classical religious education), a goal that has an end-point, and that culminates in a socially prestigious degree – that of *dge bshes*.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that this is not only a problem for monasteries in Tibet. By some estimates about twenty percent of the monks of Se ra India are presently residing (mostly as illegal aliens) in the U.S. (principally in New York City), working menial jobs, and living “the American dream.” Anecdotally, I have heard that some of these monks are now beginning to return to Se ra India, and to their former lives as monks. This phenomenon deserves to be studied from a socio-ethnographic viewpoint. For an account of similar decisions faced by Tibetan Buddhist nuns in Nepal, see Alyson Prude’s forthcoming Masters thesis (UCSB).

monastic institution. Or, if such individuals do exist, it remains to be seen how many of them see themselves living out their lives in a relatively isolated, small, ritual monastery. If it is impossible to lure such monks to the hermitages, then the administrators of these institutions may have to resign themselves to the fact that their monasteries will be, for all intents and purposes, something akin to religious boarding schools for young men, the majority of whom will most likely leave once they reach their twenties. But even if they leave, perhaps these young men will return to the hermitages at the end of their life, to live out their final years in a religious setting, a pattern that we have seen in other Tibetan contexts.⁴⁶ Be that as it may, one thing is clear: life in the hermitages is different from what it was before 1959, and the problems that hermitages face today are as much due to global and market forces as they are to Chinese Communist ideology and bureaucratic regulation.

⁴⁶ In Se ra India, there are several cases of former Se ra monks returning to retire to the monastery. See also the essay on *Chu bzang*, an institution that before 1959 appears to have been a community of elderly Lha sa Tibetans engaged in intensive religious practice.

Chupzang Nunnery (Chu bzang dgon)



The main temple at Chu bzang.

Location and Layout

The phrase *chu bzang* means “good waters,” indicating that this was probably the site of a spring in former times. Chupzang Nunnery is located in the foothills of the northern section of the suburb of Nyang bran, directly north of Lha sa and northwest of Se ra. It takes about forty minutes to walk from Se ra to Chu bzang. The hermitage (*ri khrod*) faces south in the direction of Lha sa.

The site can be divided into three major areas:

- Farthest north (and uphill) one finds a [field of *stūpas*](#) and large boulders with carvings or [self-arisen images \(*rang byon*\)](#).
- Directly below (south of) the field of *stūpas* in the northernmost area of the hermitage are the [main temple complex](#), the [dharma courtyard \(*chos rwa*\)](#), and the [secondary temple](#).
- Below the temples, farther south on the hillside is the residential (and by far the largest) area of the nunnery that contains dozens of private nuns’ huts.



The interior of the main temple.

The two temple complexes are located just below the *stūpa* field. These are:

- The **upper (main) temple**,¹ where the nuns gather for communal rituals. To the left of the main temple there is a small **butter-lamp offering house** (*chos me khang*, built in 2004), and a **kiosk** where tourists and pilgrims can buy snacks and religious memorabilia. The main temple has a two-wheel **mani [wheel] temple** (*ma ṅi lha khang*) at its southwest corner (access to which is from outside the temple). The principal figures on the main altar of the **assembly hall** (*'du khang*) are Tsong kha pa (1357-1419) and his two disciples. At the northwest corner of the temple (entrance through the assembly hall) there is a **protector deity chapel** (*mgon khang*) that contains a small statue of Gnas chung, as well as statues of Lha mo, Six-Armed Mahākāla (Mgon po phyag drug), Dharmarāja (Dam chen chos rgyal), Rdo rje g.yu sgron ma, and of the two tutelary deities (*yi dam*) of the nunnery, Vajrabhairava (Rdo rje 'jigs byed) and **Vajrayoginī** (Rdo rje rnal 'byor ma).
- West of the main temple complex one finds the **dharma enclosure** (*chos rwa*), an area where nuns sit when they want to memorize texts outdoors.

¹ We have some idea of the images that existed in this temple early in its history. Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [*A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels*; hereafter *Lha sa'i dgon tho*] (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 74-75, cites Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho's (1653-1705) *Bai dūrya ser po* concerning the religious images found in the main temple at the end of the seventeenth century:

- The Buddha
- The Medicine Buddha (Sman bla)
- Avalokiteśvara
- The Fifth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa, 1617-1682)

In the Chapel of Deathlessness (*'Chi med lha khang*), there were statues of the Nine Deities [related to] Amitāyus (Tshe dpag med lha dgu). There was also a Tārā Chapel (Sgrol ma lha khang).

Inside this courtyard there is also a [small chapel](#) to the protector deity Rdo rje g.yu sgron ma.

- The [reception room](#) and the [secondary \(Stone Buddha\) temple](#) – located south (downhill) from the dharma enclosure – share a courtyard. This temple contains the [stone image \(rdo sku\) of the Buddha](#) said to have been “discovered as treasure” (*gter nas ston pa*) by the Fifth Dalai Lama.

History

Phrin las rgya mtsho (d. 1667), considered the founder of Chu bzang,² was a student of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatso (Da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho). Phrin las rgya mtsho served as regent (*sde srid*) of Tibet from 1665 until his death in 1667, and he hailed from Nyang bran, the suburb of Lha sa to the west of Se ra where the hermitage is located. Phrin las rgya mtsho is arguably best known as the uncle of the Fifth Dalai Lama’s famous student (and the next regent of Tibet), Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705), who, like his uncle, was also born in Nyang bran.³



The Fifth Dalai Lama. Detail of a thangka in the Tibet House Collection, from an image (no. 71944) on the www.himalayanart.org website.

In the latter part of his life, Phrin las rgya mtsho decided to build a hermitage in the foothills above Nyang bran. He requested permission for this, and invited the Fifth Dalai Lama to perform a “site investigation” (*sa brtag*) to determine the most auspicious location on which to build. The Da lai bla ma chose the site that is presently Chu bzang. He is also the one who provided the institution with this name. It is perhaps at this time as well that the Fifth Dalai Lama made the treasure (*gter*) discovery of the self-arisen stone image of the Buddha that still resides in Chu bzang’s lower temple.

The site was originally founded as a monks’ hermitage with eight monks. Some sources say that later there developed a tradition of maintaining a group of sixteen fully-ordained monks in residence at the hermitage – eight from each of the Byes and Mé Colleges (Grwa tshang smad) of Se ra.⁴ This served as the ritual core of the monastic community. Today the nuns can still point to a set of ruins that they say is the original residence of those eight/sixteen monks.

² Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa’i dgon tho*, 74, gives Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho as the founder, and gives the date of the founding of the monastery as “around 1696.”

³ According to one source, the Fifth Dalai Lama wanted to appoint Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho as regent at this time, but realizing that there would be a public outcry because of his very young age, he appointed his uncle, Phrin las rgya mtsho, instead. This gave Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho a few years to mature before being officially appointed regent.

⁴ See Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa’i dgon tho*, 75, where it also mentions that each of the monks sent in this way to Chu bzang was entitled to 2.5 *khal* of *rtsam pa*, presumably per year.

Seven years after its founding, the hermitage passed into the hands of Chu bzang ye shes rgya mtsho (1789-1856), who built a four-pillar temple with rear chapel and porticos at the site.⁵ After that, the hermitage came under the aegis of the sixty-ninth throne-holder of Ganden (*dga' ldan khri pa*), Byang chub chos 'phel (1756-1838). Eventually, it seems, the hermitage became the property of Khri byang sku phreng gsum pa blo bzang ye shes, the junior tutor to the present Da lai bla ma.



The stone Buddha image discovered as “treasure” by the Fifth Dalai Lama.

Among contemporary Dge lugs pas, Chu bzang is perhaps best known as the place where, in 1921, Pha bong kha bde chen snying po (1878-1941) gave the “graded stages of the path” (*lam rim*) teachings that would eventually be compiled into his most famous work, *Liberation in Our Hands* (*Rnam grol lag bcangs*).⁶

Informants tell us that in the 1950s the site began to be used as a retreat by elderly Lhasans, who constructed small huts in which they could live out the final years of their lives in intensive Buddhist practice. The area around Chu bzang thus became a kind of religious retirement community. During the Cultural Revolution, Chu bzang was simply used by lay people as residences. Nuns began repair work at the site and started moving there in 1984. Today it is one of the largest nunneries in the Lha sa Valley.

Chu bzang, however, is not a typical nunnery, but rather something more like a communal living situation for nuns. Nuns get together for rituals only on special holy days (on the new and full moon, and on the eighth, tenth and twenty-fifth of the lunar month) *or* when there is a sponsor.⁷ The houses are owned individually by the nuns and are not the property of the nunnery itself. Despite this, Chu bzang has many of the traits of a standard monastic community. It has an administrative body, a site for communal gathering, and a well-defined group of deities that are worshipped and propitiated. The tutelary deities of the nunnery are Vajrabhairava

⁵ Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 75.

⁶ The text was compiled, on the basis of his lecture notes, by his student Khri byang rin po che (1901-1981); see Artemus B. Engle, tr., *Liberation in Our Hands* (Howell, New Jersey: Mahāyāna Sūtra and Tantra Press, 1999).

⁷ For a list of the various rituals performed on different holy days (before 1959), see Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 75.

and Vajrayoginī, and the two protector deities are Dpal ldan lha mo and Rdo rje g.yu sgron ma.

Originally, the hermitage portion of the site – the part that contained the monastic residence and the temple – appears to have been the property of Sera as a whole (Se ra spyi so). Given its historical ties to Pha bong kha rin po che, however, some sources count it as one of the hermitages that belongs to Se ra smad (Pha bong kha rin po che’s home college). Today Chu bzang is an autonomous institution with minimal ties to Se ra.



A statue of Vajrayoginī in the main temple at Chu bzang.

Drakri Hermitage (*Brag ri ri khrod*)



A view of Drakri Hermitage (Brag ri ri khrod) from below.

Location and Layout

The word *brag ri* means “crag” or “gorge.” As is the case with many hermitages (*ri khrod*), it is difficult to know whether the site got its name from the *bla ma* who founded it, or whether the founding *bla ma* got his name from the site that he used for retreat. The *bla ma* incarnation lineage that owned this hermitage is also (perhaps even more commonly) known as Sba ri rather than Brag ri. And even the hermitage often goes by the name of Bari Hermitage (*sba ri ri khrod*).¹

The monastery lies about three kilometers north and slightly east of downtown Lha sa on the [side of a mountain](#) above the southernmost section of the suburb of [Nyang bran](#). Brag ri is therefore the closest to downtown Lha sa of all of Se ra’s hermitages.

As one begins to walk up the hill on the path to the hermitage from the residential portion of Nyang bran, one first encounters several large boulders with [images of Gu ru rin po che](#) (eighth century) and other Rnying ma deities painted on their surface. Since the monastery became a Rnying ma hermitage only since its renovation in the 1990s, these rock-paintings are almost certainly of recent provenance.

¹ The *Extensive Explanation of the World* (*’Dzam gling rgyas bshad*) mentions two Drakri hermitages. One it calls “new” (*gsar*), and the other “old” (*rnying*); see Turrell Wylie, *The Geography of Tibet According to the ’Dzam-gling-rgyas-bshad* (Rome: IsMEO, 1962), 83.



The courtyard of the main temple compound. The temple is on the right, and the kitchen on the left.

The hermitage itself consists of five major sections:

- The **main temple compound** contained several buildings, all around a central courtyard: the **temple**, a **kitchen**, a wing of **monks' living quarters**. It also contains a large mani wheel (*ma ni 'khor lo*). This entire compound has been renovated, although the present buildings have fewer stories than did the original ones.
- A **large complex** built in terraced fashion located just below (south of) the main temple compound. Before 1959 this tiered complex contained stables (at its lowest portion), and work/meeting rooms and the living quarters of the workers and business managers of the Drakri Lama's estate (*brag ri bla brang*) on the upper tiers. This entire complex is in ruins today.
- A **building** that before 1959 served as the living quarters for the eight fully ordained monks who formed the ritual core of the monastic community. It lies southwest of the temple complex. Today, only the foundations of this building remain.
- A **stable** for *mdzo*, a yak-cow hybrid.
- **Several huts**. Although at least two such huts exist today (inhabited by nuns), it is not clear whether these structures existed at all prior to 1959.

In 2004, the renovations in the **interior of the main temple** were not quite finished. All of the images in the temple are new. There are **statues** of the Buddha, of Gu ru rin po che in various forms, and of several tantric deities. There is also a three-dimensional model of Gu ru rin po che's celestial palace, the **Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain (Zangs mdog dpal ri)**. One entire wall is filled with **pressed-clay tablets (*tsa tsa*)** on shelves.



The interior of the main temple.

The four tantric priests (*sngags pa*) that reside at Brag ri live in the residential portion of the main temple compound. The two nuns live in huts to the southeast and southwest of the main compound.

History

One source² tells us that Brag ri was used as a meditational retreat by Klong rdol bla ma ngag dbang blo bzang (1719-1794),³ one of the most renowned and beloved scholar-*yogis* of the [Lhopa Regional House \(Lho pa khang tshan\)](#) of the Jé College (Grwa tshang byes). But the official founder is usually reckoned to be the famous abbot of Pha bong kha, Pha bong kha rgya mtsho mtha' yas (b. eighteenth century).⁴ This figure is also considered to be the first incarnation in the Brag ri or “Sba ri” incarnation lineage. The Bari Lama’s estate (Sba ri bla brang), therefore, owned the hermitage up to 1959. The hermitage had indirect ties to the Jé College of Se ra through Sba ri rin po che’s affiliation with the [Tsa Regional House \(Tsha khang tshan\)](#) of the Jé College. In the absence of any historical documentation – like a “catalogue” (*dkar chag*) of the monastery – we can say little more than this about the hermitage’s history. Drakri Hermitage became the mother monastery of [Garu Nunnery \(Ga ru dgon pa\)](#) perhaps as early as the time of its founding – that is, at the time of the first Sba ri bla ma, Rgya mtsho mtha' yas. The Sba ri bla mas

² Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu 'i phreng ba* [A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 36.

³ See TBRC [P22](#).

⁴ Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* [The Great Dungkar Dictionary] (Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 1501. See also TBRC [P1723](#). Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa 'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels] (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 73, mentions another figure in addition to Rgya mtsho mtha' yas as a possible founder, to wit, the Drakri incarnation Lozang Tekchok Wangpo (Brag ri sprul sku blo bzang theg mchog dbang po).

supervised the training of the Ga ru nuns until 1959. We know, for example, that the Sba ri bla ma would make at least one trip annually to Garu Nunnery to perform memorization exams for the nuns.

In 1959 the monks of the hermitage were evicted and the hermitage was converted into a prison. The prison had a reputation for being one of the most severe penal institutions in the Lha sa area. After other prisons in Lha sa were expanded, Sba ri was no longer needed for this purpose and it was eventually abandoned.



The Rnying ma bla ma who rebuilt the hermitage sits in the main temple, engaged in prayer.

In the 1980s a Rnying ma *bla ma* from an outlying area who had been living in Lha sa was searching for a site on which to build a temple and a “Nyingma practice center” (*rnying ma sgrub grwa*). He wanted to do this chiefly in memory of his mother, who was a renowned doctor and who had passed away not long before. He heard about Drakri Hermitage and began to explore the possibility of transforming the abandoned Dge lugs hermitage into his Nyingma practice center. The first step was to obtain permission from the relevant authorities in the Lha sa municipal government. Having acquired the requisite permits, he hired workers to begin cleaning the site, to repair broken walls, and so forth. After the work had begun, however, a former official of the Bari Lama’s estate, who lived in the neighboring Nyang bran, began to object, arguing that it was inappropriate for a Dge lugs monastery to be converted into a Nyingma practice center. The Rnying ma *bla ma* then approached the former Sba ri official directly and told him that he was willing to give him the hermitage – to turn the site over to him completely – if he was willing to take on responsibility for renovating it. The former Bari Lama’s estate official replied that he lacked the funds to assume such a responsibility. Rather than seeing the hermitage collapse, the Rnying ma *bla ma* decided to continue the work he had already begun, but he tells visitors who know about the contentious recent history of the site that it has never been his intention to simply take possession of Brag ri. Instead, he says, he conceives of himself as a kind of

steward, and he insists that if and when [the present Sba ri rin po che](#) ever comes back to Tibet (he left for India in 1983), he would be happy to return the hermitage to him. We mention this controversy simply because it gives one a small glimpse of the mechanics and politics of monastery renovation, and of the role that intersectarian rivalry can play in this regard.

Garu Nunnery (Ga ru dgon pa)¹



The front façade of Garu Nunnery (Ga ru dgon pa).

Location and Layout

Garu Nunnery (Ga ru dgon pa), one of the oldest nunneries in the Lha sa area, is located northwest of Se ra at the western end of the Nyang bran Valley. It takes about two hours to walk to Ga ru from Se ra. The [Ga ru Gorge](#) is relatively remote and quite beautiful. The area below the nunnery is [pasture land](#), and is used by the nuns to graze their one hundred-plus head of [yaks](#).¹ These [pastures](#) gradually slope upward (north) to the hermitage (*ri khrod*), which is located at the base of a very rocky portion of the northern mountains next to a stream. The nunnery faces south towards Lha sa, and it affords one of the most beautiful long-distance [views of the city and of the Po ta la](#).

¹ My treatment of this hermitage (*ri khrod*) derives in part from a short history of the nunnery published in a small booklet in Tibet: Ngag dbang sman rgyal, *Gar dgon bsam gtan gling gi lo rgyus mun sel mthong ba don ldan* [A History of Gargön Samten Ling: Clearing Away Darkness, Meaningful to Behold] (lha sa: ?, 1997) [hereafter *Gar lo*]. I have also consulted Bshes gnyen tshul khrim, *Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 30-37 [hereafter *Lha sa'i dgon tho*].

¹ According to *Gar lo*, 27, before 1959 the nuns had no formal estate lands (*chos gzhis*) or serfs (*mi ser*). They did, however, have at their disposal the products (like butter) produced by a herd of about five-hundred animals that were kept in the northern Tibetan plateau. These dairy products were brought down to the monastery on a yearly basis in the spring by the nomads who were in charge of these flocks.

The word *ga ru* derives from *gar*, which means “dance.” The famed Indian master Pha dam pa sangs rgyas (b. eleventh century) saw *dākinīs* dancing at the spot where the monastery now stands, and gave it this name.

As is the case with most religious institutions in the Lha sa Valley, the natural landscape surrounding the site is imbued with religious significance. The resident nuns associate several of the mountains near the nunnery with different deities:

- The peak northwest of the hermitage is called the [Palace of Cakrasaṃvara \(Bde mchog gi pho brang\)](#)
- Three rock outcroppings just north of the nunnery are called the Three Protectors (Rigs gsum mgon po)
- A flat cliff-face on a mountain northwest of the site is called the [Mirror of Vajrabhairava \(’Jigs byed kyi me long\)](#)
- Another peak northeast of the nunnery is identified as the [Soul-Mountain of Mañjuśrī \(’Jam dpal dbyangs kyi bla ri\)](#)

A short history of the nunnery identifies the various sites around the nunnery more extensively (though somewhat differently) than the oral account:

The mountain in back [of the nunnery] is called “the Soul-Mountain of Tārā” (Tā rā’i bla ri). Near that a [rock outcropping] that has the shape of a right-turning white conch shell is clearly visible. The western mountain is called “the Soul-Mountain of Mañjuśrī” (’Jam dpal dbyangs kyi bla ri), and it has splendid pastures and rock-faces. At the foot of that mountain there is a “storehouse of *sindhura*”² that emits *sindhura* on some holy days. On some occasions the sound made by a white conch³ can also be heard coming from the side of that mountain. To the right of that mountain is a rock-face that is considered to be a self-arisen image of Vajrabhairava because it resembles the body of the deity. To the left is an imposing mountain whose combination of meadows and rock-faces are considered to form a self-arisen image of Guhyasamāja. To the northeast is “the Soul-Mountain of the Arhats” (Gnas brtan bla ri) that has amazingly designed rock formations. To the east is a mountain known either as “the Parasol” (Gdugs pa’i bla ri) or as “Mañjuśrī Peak” (’Jam dpal bla ri).⁴

The entire area around the nunnery is said to be hospitable to a variety of wildlife. The various animals that live here, it is said, are unafraid of the human inhabitants of the site, occasionally even entering into the nuns’ rooms. The area is also filled with a variety of wild flowers and herbs. These are collected as the ingredients used in Tibetan medicine, and it is not uncommon for Lha sa physicians to bring their students to the area around Ga ru to teach them the art of identifying and collecting medicinal plants.

² A reddish powder used for ritual purposes.

³ Conches are often used as musical instruments in Tibetan rituals. A hole is made at one end of the conch, and when blown through, it emits a sound not unlike that of a trombone.

⁴ *Gar lo*, 11.

Garu Nunnery is one very large compound enclosed by a perimeter wall. This larger compound contains within it several sub-compounds or complexes of buildings. At the very center of the nunnery is the largest and most important complex that contains the [main temple](#), the [kitchen](#), and several small chapels – a Scripture Temple (Bka’ ’gyur lha khang), a [butter-lamp offering house](#) (*chos me khang*), and a [building](#) where the nuns take turns keeping watch at night. These various structures, together with [two wings of nuns’ rooms](#), form the central courtyard of the hermitage. These buildings also appear to be the oldest in the hermitage, and the nuns themselves state that most of the additional wings of living quarters located at the four corners of the larger compound were added later as the nunnery grew.



The front of the main temple.

To the north of – that is, just behind – the main temple there is a very [long wing of nuns’ rooms](#). There are also different complexes of nuns’ rooms built around central courtyards at the [northeast](#), [southeast](#), and [southwest](#) corners of the monastery. The buildings at the [northwest](#) corner of the monastery, the nuns say, were used for visiting dignitaries; some of these may have also served as residences of senior nuns.

There are other important sites and minor structures outside of the walls of the main compound:

- East. Along the eastern edge of the nunnery there is a small [park](#) that contains a public performance space. Lay people bring picnics and spend the day here when they come for worship (*mchod mjal*). On special occasions the raised concrete [dais](#) in the center of the park is used as a stage for folk opera or other performances. At the northern edge of that park are a [stūpa](#) and a [guest house](#). In 2004, the latter had just recently been built.
- West. A [stream](#) runs along the western edge of the nunnery. The sound of the rushing water is said to resemble the sound of the “Three-*Om dhāraṇī* of the Queen Rdo rje btsun mo.” Near the place along the stream where

the nuns come to collect the water, one can clearly see a self-arisen image of the letter “ba” on the side of a boulder. This is the seed syllable of Rdo rje btsun mo.⁵ **Two mani wheels** (*ma ñi 'khor lo*) have been built over the stream; they are made to turn by the power of the rushing water.

- South. Several small **shrines** are found just outside the southern perimeter wall of the nunnery. One of these, called the Dā ma la nyag, marks the spot where Pha dam pa sangs rgyas heard the word “*dā ma*.” Another is said to mark the spot where he received an offering of milk from a magical white cow that was a Buddha-emanation, and near to this is the boulder with the self-arisen letters “*a ma*” into which the cow dissolved. (See below for more detailed accounts of the narratives related to these various sites.)
- North. At the northern edge of the nunnery there is relatively little – only one **small shrine** to a *bstan ma* deity, and a few boulders with self-arisen images.



The park and performance area in the foreground, with the guest house and stūpa behind it.

About one kilometer south of the monastery, just off the main road, is a small shrine that contains a self-arisen image of **one of the eyes of Cakrasaṃvara (Bde mchog)**.⁶

Almost all of the statuary and art inside the temple is new, but Ga ru is unusual insofar as we have some idea of the images that existed inside the main temple prior to 1959. That **main temple** was a “twelve pillar” temple,⁷ and the central image on its main altar was a Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara, one-story tall. To

⁵ *Gar lo*, 12.

⁶ Cakrasaṃvara has three eyes. The other two are located at **Pha bong kha** and **Rtags brten** hermitages.

⁷ The number of pillars used to support the roof of a building was a standard way of measuring the interior size of buildings. The Ga ru temple is today an eight-pillar temple, although today it also has a two-pillar rear chapel, which is where the statuary is kept (see *Gar lo*, 33). It appears that before 1959 the temple was not subdivided in this way (into an altar portion and an assembly-hall portion) but was instead one large room with the altar being located in the northern portion where the back chapel exists today. The account of the images in the temple that follows is based on *Gar lo*, chapter 3, 20-24.

the left was a smaller Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara figure and to the right was a statue of Pha dam pa sangs rgyas when he was an eight-year-old child.⁸ On his lap was kept a manuscript text of a prayer (about ten folios in length) said to have been written by Pha dam pa sangs rgyas in his own hand.⁹ This statue and Pha dam pa's own manuscript text were together considered the "main inner image(s)" (*nang rten gtso bo*) of the nunnery. On the interior walls of the temple there hung a series of fifteen extremely well-executed *thang kas* of the "Eighty Deeds of Tsongkhapa" (*tsong kha brgyad bcu*), donated to the monastery by "a Mongolian queen."¹⁰ Apparently the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu gsum pa) asked for these to be brought to the Nor bu gling kha, the Da lai bla mas' summer palace, and told the nuns to ask for anything they wanted in return. The elder nuns, however, declined, refusing to part with the *thang kas*, and so the paintings remained in the nunnery until 1959. Their whereabouts today are unknown.

In addition, the following statues were to be found in the temple:

1. A life-size figure of Vajrayoginī (Rdo rje mal 'byor ma)
2. A series of statues of the various incarnations of the Da lai bla mas¹¹
3. Four metal-alloy statues of the Drakri incarnations (Brag ri sprul sku)¹² that were said to be simulacra (*'dra sku*) – that is, actually resembling these various figures
4. Two sets of statues of the Eight Medicine Buddhas (Sman bla bde gshegs brgyad), one made of clay (and life-size), another of metal (and smaller)
5. A life-size statue of Pha bong kha rin po che

In addition to these various statues, as representatives of the Buddha's speech there were:

- A volume of the *Eight Thousand Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (*'Phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa brgyad stong pa'i mdo*, *Āryāṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) written in gold
- A complete set of the *Bka' 'gyur*
- Complete sets of the short, middling, and extensive *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* (*Shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i mdo*, *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*).

⁸ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 32, states that it was a statue of Pha dam pa sangs rgyas when he was two years old, and claims that it was this statue that was the chief object of worship of the nunnery.

⁹ The text was been reproduced in *Gar lo*, 36-39. The author of *Gar lo*, 40, claims that Thu'u bkwan (1737-1802) believes that this short text is the basis for the biography of Pha dam pa sangs rgyas written by Chos kyi seng ge.

¹⁰ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 32, states that the *thang kas* were of the former lives of Tsong kha pa (1357-1419), and that they came from A mdo rdo rje sku 'bum.

¹¹ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 32, mentions only a statue of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa).

¹² *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 32, mentions only a statue of the first Brag ri rin po che.

As representations of the Buddha’s mind, there were replicas of the “eight *shāli stūpas* of India.”

In the altar of Brag ri rin po che’s rooms, located on top of the main temple, there used to be very fine statues of the Sixteen Arhats (Gnas brtan bcu drug), the Hwa shang, and the four direction protectors.

In the **protector deity chapel** (*mgon khang*) there were statues of:

1. Six-Armed Mahākāla (Mgon po phyag drug)
2. Hayagrīva in his “Secret Accomplishment” form (Rta mgrin gsang sgrub)¹³
3. Dharmarāja (Dam chen chos rgyal)
4. Dpal ldan lha mo
5. Vaiśravaṇa (Rnam sras)
6. Mgon po a gho. It appears that only the head of this deity survives. In 2004, the body of the image had yet to be created.
7. Rgyal chen karma ’phrin las

On the topmost floor there was a Tārā chapel (Sgrol ma lha khang) with statues of the twenty-one Tārās. There was also a statue of Maitreya (Byams pa) in this chapel.

In addition to these various images, there were also two self-arisen footprints (*zhabs rjes*) – one made by Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, and the other by the horse of the second Drakri incarnation Gyatso Chönjor (Brag ri sku phreng gnyis pa rgya mtsho chos ’byor).¹⁴ With one or two exceptions, none of the various images and religious artifacts mentioned above survived the Cultural Revolution, though many have been replaced by replicas.



The head or face-mask of Mgon po a gho in the protector deity chapel.

¹³ According to *Lha sa’i dgon tho*, 33, this deity was the chief protector deity of the monastery. This deity is not mentioned in *Gar lo*.

¹⁴ For a more detailed treatment of the “footprint collection” at Ga ru see *Lha sa’i dgon tho*, 36.

History¹⁵

Tradition has it that the famous Indian master and founder of the “Pacification” (Zhi byed) school, Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, came upon the site at one point in his peregrinations throughout Tibet.¹⁶ Stopping to rest on a boulder, he was approached by a white cow who offered him her milk. After drinking, Pha dam pa sangs rgyas continued on his way, but the cow would not stop following him, so he turned to her and said, “Mother (*a ma*), please stay here!” No sooner had he said these words than the cow dissolved into a nearby boulder, and at that moment the letters *a ma* emerged as self-arisen letters on the boulder’s surface. This boulder with the self-arisen letters – called the “*a ma* boulder” – can be seen at Ga ru to this day. Pha dam pa sangs rgyas then realized that this was a sign that a monastic institution should be founded at this site. There only remained the question of whether he should found a nunnery or a monastery for male monks there. As he



A statue of Pha dam pa sangs rgyas at Garu Nunnery.

was contemplating this, he heard the enchanted sound of goddesses from atop a nearby pass called Rta ma do nyag.¹⁷ Looking up, he saw goddesses dancing there. Because he had seen *female* deities, he took this as a sign of the fact that he was to found a nunnery at the site, and he gave it the name “Dance Gompa: Place of Meditative Equipose” (Gar dgon bsam gtan gling). Before 1959, there was a square stone throne that was reputed to be the place where Pha dam pa sat as he performed the so-called “site investigations” (*sa dpyad*) to determine the exact place on which to build the nunnery, but this throne apparently has been destroyed.

The first nuns who lived at Ga ru were of course followers of Pha dam pa sangs rgyas, and therefore practiced the various meditational techniques of the Pacification school. Over the period of several centuries, however, the oral tradition of the Pacification system “deteriorated,” and the one contemporary written account of the nunnery available to us states that the nuns, of their own volition, approached the great eighteenth-century Dge lugs pa master (and abbot of Pabongkha Hermitage

¹⁵ The account that follows is based largely on *Gar lo*, chapter 2, 17-19, although I have supplemented this with some additional information found in *Lha sa’i dgon tho*.

¹⁶ *Lha sa’i dgon tho* gives the more precise date of 1113 for the events that are about to be recounted.

¹⁷ *Lha sa’i dgon tho*, 31, calls this Mo barha nyag.

[Pha bong kha ri khrod]), Brag ri rgya mtsho mtha' yas.¹⁸ They asked him to become their *bla ma*, and to take responsibility for the nunnery.¹⁹ He agreed, and for the past two centuries the nunnery has been under the aegis of the Brag ri bla mas, who have acted as both patrons and as the spiritual leaders to the institution. It was a tradition for the Brag ri bla ma to come to the nunnery in the latter half of the fifth Tibetan month every year to conduct memorization exams, and this tradition was maintained up to 1959. Since the re-founding of the nunnery in the mid 1980s, the former administrative head (*phyag mdzod*) of the Drakri Lama's estate (Brag ri bla brang) has substituted for Brag ri rin po che, who today lives in exile in India. He comes to the nunnery at least once a year to administer these exams.



Two nuns take a break from kitchen duties to pose for a picture.

Before 1959, the nunnery was responsible for doing rituals for the Tibetan government – for example, accumulating repetitions of the “Prayer to the Twenty-One Tārās” at certain specific times throughout the year.²⁰ These ritual commissions on behalf of the Tibetan government were transacted through the intermediary of the Drakri Lama's estate. It was probably also because of its formal relationship to this lama's estate (*bla brang*) that the nunnery was considered a “state monastery” (*gzhung dgon*). Such a status brought with it not only economic but also social privilege; for example, the nuns were entitled to have an audience

¹⁸ Of course, since history is always written “by the victors” – in this case the Dge lugs pas – we do not know whether in fact the nuns *asked* to be incorporated into the Dge lugs school or whether they were *forced* to do so. Whatever the case, it should be noted that Pha bong kha is the hermitage closest to Ga ru, and that simply from a geographical viewpoint it makes sense to administratively locate the nunnery under the aegis of Pha bong kha. Eventually the Brag ri bla mas moved their base of operations from Pha bong kha to Drakri Hermitage (Brag ri ri khrod), perhaps during the life of Rgya mtsho mtha' yas himself.

¹⁹ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 31, states that this took place in 1792.

²⁰ For the complete ritual cycle of the nunnery, see *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 33-34.

with the Da lai bla ma every year in the Nor bu gling kha, the Da lai bla ma's summer palace, during the eighth Tibetan month.

Before 1959, it was the elder nuns who were responsible for the day-to-day administration of the nunnery. Nuns occupied the position of:

- “senior teacher” (*slob dpon*): responsible for overseeing all internal work and external relations, and therefore the functional equivalent of an abbot
- chant leader (*dbu mdzad*): responsible for making preparations for (as well as for leading) ritual events, and
- two “representatives” (*spyi mi*): responsible for the financial affairs of the nunnery, for external relations (e.g., to patrons), and for fundraising; they were also the main conduits to the Drakri Lama's estate.

Nuns also occupied minor posts like temple attendant (*sgo gnyer*). Even today the nuns divide the administrative work of the nunnery among themselves according to seniority, holding each of the various offices for fixed terms.

Having been deprived of all sources of income after 1959, in order to survive, the nuns turned to growing and selling bamboo for a period of time. The Cultural Revolution, however, brought an end to this. The nunnery was forcibly depopulated and much of it was destroyed. Fundraising for reconstruction began in 1980. A group of fourteen former nuns asked for permission to rebuild, and were able to gather 390,000 ¥ from the Tibetan laity, and 20,000¥ from the local government authorities. The work of rebuilding the nunnery began in 1985, and was completed in a short time.

Jokpo Hermitage ('Jog po ri khrod)



A statue of 'Jog po ngag dbang bstan 'dzin (b. 1748) in Zhungpa Regional House (Gzhung pa khang tshan), Mé College (Grwa tshang smad), Se ra, Tibet. This statue is said to contain the remains of the bla ma within it.

Location and Layout

This hermitage (*ri khrod*), located at the far western end of the Nyang bran Valley, is today mostly in ruins. It takes over two hours to walk to 'Jog po from Se ra. The hermitage is situated above pastures used for grazing. One or two huts have been rebuilt at the site to serve as the residences for the Se ra monks who tend the Se ra herds. It appears that before 1959 the hermitage was the property of the Jokpo Lama's estate ('Jog po bla brang). Today it is the property of Se ra.

The hermitage originally served as the meditation retreat of a monk of the Sera Mé College (Se ra smad) [Zhungpa Regional House \(Gzhung pa khang tshan\)](#), 'Jog

po ngag dbang bstan 'dzin.¹ This monk was renowned as a great meditator. Oral tradition has it that after he passed away his body remained in a state of perpetual meditative equipoise. It was kept in a rear chapel inside the Zhungpa Regional House temple. Monks say that his hair and nails continued to grow even after his death, and that these had to be trimmed by attendants. After 1959, the body was buried in order to protect it from destruction. This, however, caused it to start decaying. After the regional house (*khang tshan*) was rebuilt in the 1980s, 'Jog po rin po che's remains were exhumed and his bones were placed inside the clay statue that today resides on the main altar of the regional house temple.

The UCSB team was not able to make it to the Jokpo Hermitage site in 2004. At this point in time we know little about the hermitage other than what is written here. A portion of the [Jokpo Lama's residence](#) ('Jog po bla brang) still exists in Se ra, Tibet today.

¹ Also known as 'Jog ri ngag dbang bstan 'dzin.

Keutsang Hermitage (Ke'u tshang ri khrod)



A view of the Keutsang Hermitage (Ke'u tshang ri khrod)

Location and Layout

The word *ke'u tshang* means “cave,” “cavern,” or “overhang.”¹ Tsong kha pa (1357-1419) lived for a time in a very precariously situated cave over a steep gorge to the east of the original Keutsang Hermitage, and it is possible that the hermitage derives its name from this cave. While Tsong kha pa was living there, there was a serious earthquake, and he exclaimed “*a ma*”!² The letters “a” and “ma” then imprinted themselves onto a rock next to the cave, and these, we were told, can be seen to this day. The cave itself fell in a landslide, and no longer exists.

The present Keutsang Hermitage is the rebuilt version of **Keutsang West** (Ke'u tshang nub), which today lies in ruins. The rebuilt Ke'u tshang abuts the ruins of Keutsang West on the former's eastern side. Rather than rebuilding on the ruins of the old hermitage, the monks chose to start from scratch and to relocate the hermitage just to the west of Keutsang West, which they say was a site more suitable to building.

¹ An informant, a former monk of the hermitage (*ri khrod*), says that the word *ke'u tshang* means “small monastery.”

² The Tibetan word *a ma* literally means “mother,” but it is also a cry of fear.

Ke'u tshang is located to the east of Se ra on the side of a mountain above Lha sa's principal cemetery. Ke'u tshang is also located just below (about a five-minute walk from) [Rakhadrak Hermitage](#) (Ra kha brag ri khrod). It takes about fifty minutes to walk from Se ra to Ke'u tshang. The hermitage is the second-to-last stop on the Sera Mountain Circumambulation Circuit (*se ra'i ri 'khor*) route that pilgrims navigate as part of the Sixth-Month Fourth-Day (*drug pa tshe bzhi*) festivities. (To see images of the pilgrimage taken in 2002, please click [here](#).)

The hermitage is enclosed by a perimeter wall with two gates, one to the [west](#) and one to the [east](#). Outside the western gate there is a [tiny chapel](#) that houses a self-arisen rock-image of the deity Acala (Mi g.yo ba) that was originally on a boulder in the area that is presently the "Dharma courtyard" (*chos rwa*). It was moved from the Dharma courtyard to its present spot because the head of the hermitage believed that at its former site it was too close to an area where the monks urinated.

At the center of the compound is the (two-story) [main temple](#). The first floor contains the monastery's principal assembly hall (*'du khang*). The second story contains a [reception and meeting room](#). Just to the east of the temple is the [monastery kitchen](#). The monks for the most part eat communally, and all of the meals are prepared here. Flanking the temple-kitchen complex on both sides are two wings of [monks' living quarters](#). Just to the west of the western wing of monks' rooms, adjacent to the western gate, is a [new guest house](#) that was just being completed in 2004.



The monks of Ke'u tshang in a prayer-assembly inside the main temple. They wear the yellow ceremonial robe (chos gos).

Behind the main temple is the large, three-story "[secondary temple building](#)."

- The first floor of this building contains little more than the stairway to the second floor and some storage rooms.
- The second story contains, on one side, a [Scripture Temple \(Bka' 'gyur lha khang\)](#) that houses the collection of scriptures. This room also contains a small [protector deity altar](#). The main figure in the middle of the alter is

Dpal ldan lha mo; she is flanked on one side by Rdo rje g.yu sgron ma, the “site deity” (*gnas bdag*) of this location, and on the other by Nyang bran rgyal chen. These three are the chief protector deities of the hermitage. On this same level but at the other end of the building there is a **Tengyur chapel** (*Bstan 'gyur lha khang*) that houses the collection of the translated Indian treatises.

- The third floor contains the **private quarters of the Da lai bla ma**, the **rooms of the Ke'u tshang bla ma** and the Maitreya Chapel (*Byams khang*), whose main image is a famous two-story Maitreya (*Byams pa*) that overlooks the cemetery below the hermitage. Like the **stone Buddha image** at Pabongkha Hermitage (*Pha bong kha ri khrod*), this Maitreya (*Byams pa*) is said to guarantee rebirth in a pure land to any individual whose remains are brought to the cemetery beneath Ke'u tshang. According to another tradition, this Maitreya statue and the one in the Maitreya Chapel in the northern end of the **Bar skor** in Lha sa are said to constantly exchange rays of light with one another.



The two-story Maitreya image on the top floor of the secondary temple building at Ke'u tshang.

Finally, to the east of the secondary temple building (in the northeastern corner of the hermitage) there is a large “**Dharma enclosure**” or *chos rwa* that in 2004 was just being completed. Since Ke'u tshang is a ritual monastery, the younger monks principally use the Dharma enclosure as a place to sit and memorize ritual texts when their rooms become cramped and they want some fresh air.

All of the images in Ke'u tshang's various temples and chapels are new.

History

Centuries before Dge lugs pas began to use the site as a place for meditation retreat, Ke'u tshang was renowned as a retreat site used by famous *bla mas* of the past. For example, it is said that a cave at Keutsang West was a retreat site of the famous twelfth-century founder of the Tshal pa bka' brgyud school, Bla ma zhang (1123-1193).³ As has been mentioned, Tsong kha pa also lived at one of the caves here for a period of time. Keutsang West Hermitage (Ke'u tshang nub ri khrod) was formally established as a Dge lugs institution by the first Keutsang incarnation Jampa Mönlam (Ke'u tshang sku phreng dang po byams pa smon lam), the seventeenth abbot of the Jé College (Grwa tshang byes) of Se ra. He retired from the abbacy early to enter into retreat. Taking up residence in one of the caves at Ke'u tshang, he eventually built a retreat hut. Students began to come to him for instruction, and by the time of his death a small institution had coalesced around him at the site.



A statue of one of the early Ke'u tshang bla mas in the Maitreya Chapel.

His reincarnation, the second Keutsang incarnation Lozang Jamyang Mönlam (Ke'u tshang sku phreng gnyis pa blo bzang 'jam dbyangs smon lam), was born into the wealthy Rdo ring aristocratic family of Lha sa.⁴ Given the wealth of this family, one might hazard to guess that it was during the time of the second Keutsang incarnation (Ke'u tshang sku phreng gnyis pa) that some of the more important buildings at the site were constructed, but only further research will bear this out. We know little about the third Keutsang incarnation (Ke'u tshang sprul sku), but the fourth was one of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama Tupten Gyatso's (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu gsum pa thub bstan rgya mtsho) closest associates. After the Da lai bla ma's death, the fourth Keutsang incarnation (Ke'u tshang sprul sku) was one of the principal figures responsible for identifying the present (fourteenth) Da lai bla ma. One assumes that because of this the hermitage grew greatly in fame, prestige, and wealth during the time of the fourth Ke'u tshang incarnation. The present and the fifth Keutsang incarnation (Ke'u tshang sku phreng lnga pa) was

³ Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* [The Great Dungkar Dictionary] (Krunq go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 92.

⁴ An informant tells us that even the first Ke'u tshang bla ma was born into the Rdo ring family, but this has yet to be verified.

jailed and suffered greatly during the Cultural Revolution. He left Tibet and went into exile in India in the 1980s.

The hermitage had a strong relationship to Se ra throughout its entire history. Every official monk of the hermitage was also, *de facto*, a monk of the Hamdong Regional House (Har gdong khang tshan) of the Jé College. This is no longer the case, however, since today the hermitage is an independent institution (albeit one that has amicable ties to Sera Jé College [Se ra grwa tshang byes]). While on the subject of institutional affiliations, it should also be mentioned that from the early nineteenth century up to 1959 Ke'u tshang was the official owner of the famous Drapchi Temple (Grwa bzhi lha khang) located in the northern part of Lha sa. The Ke'u tshang bla ma kept rooms atop the Drapchi Temple for his personal use.

The original Keutsang West Hermitage was destroyed after the events of 1959. Using principally his own funds (and with a great deal of volunteer labor from the local community), a former monk of the hermitage began the work of reconstruction in 1991. By 1992, both the main temple and the secondary temple had been completed and one year later the monks' quarters were finished. Today the hermitage is home to about twenty-five monks.



Some of the monks gather outside the main temple for a group picture.

As is the case with all of the Se ra hermitages that have survived, Ke'u tshang today is a ritual monastery. The hermitage always celebrates the new and full moon, as well as the tenth and twenty-fifth of the lunar month. Groups of monks will also go to the homes of local villagers to do rituals when requested. This is an essential source of income for the hermitage.

In addition to the regular monthly ritual cycles, the hermitage also, of course, engage in regular *annual* ritual cycles: for example, during the Tibetan New Year, and in the fourth Tibetan month, when the monks do eight sets of two-day Avalokiteśvara fasting rituals (*smyung gnas*). The monks also observe the rainy

season precepts in the summer. In the eighth Tibetan month all of the junior monks must submit to a memorization exam on the ritual texts they have learned throughout the year. At this time, a senior scholar from Se ra is invited to the hermitage to conduct the examinations.

Keutsang East (*Ke'u tshang shar*)

Location and Layout

This small monastery, located northeast of Se ra between Keutsang West (Ke'u tshang nub) and Purchok Hermitages (Phur lcog ri khrod), today lies in ruins. It takes over an hour to walk to the site from Se ra, but only about twenty minutes from Keutsang West.



Little remains of Keutsang East (Ke'u tshang shar). The ruins can just barely be seen on the mountainside in the center of this picture.

History

Before 1959, the hermitage belonged to Purchok Hermitage. There are two conflicting reports concerning the founder of the hermitage. One contemporary Tibetan historian identifies the founder as the first Purchok incarnation Ngawang Jampa (Phur lcog sku phreng dang po ngag dbang byams pa),¹ the cofounder of Purchok Hermitage. Another Tibetan scholar identifies the founder as Ke'u tshang 'jam dbyangs blo gsal.²

¹ Dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Ser smad par khang, nd), 42.

² Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* [*The Great Dungkar Dictionary*] (Krunq go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 93. It is unclear whether this is an alternative name of one of the Ke'u tshang bla mas, or whether the figure got his name from the fact that he was a monk of the Keutsang West monastery.

Like all of Se ra's hermitages, this one had an assembly hall and monks' quarters, and was home to about ten permanent monk residents. It was renowned for having a particularly holy statue of Avalokiteśvara. Like the Maitreya (Byams pa) statue at Keutsang West, this Avalokiteśvara was supposed to emit rays of light to guide to the pure land the minds of deceased persons brought to the funeral grounds located at the base of the mountain.

Apart from these few details, we know nothing about this hermitage or its history at the present time. The monks of Phur lcog tell us that they have chosen not to rebuild Keutsang East for fear that this will siphon off resources from the rebuilding of Purchok Hermitage, the restoration of which they see as their primary responsibility.

Keutsang West Hermitage (Ke'u tshang nub ri khrod)



The ruins of Keutsang West Hermitage, taken from approximately the same angle as the original picture.

*The original Keutsang West Hermitage. Detail of a photo taken in the 1950s by Hugh Richardson. In H. E. Richardson, *A Short History of Tibet* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1962), plate before p. 116.*

Location and Layout

Keutsang West Hermitage (Ke'u tshang nub ri khrod) lies in ruins. But the monks of Keutsang West have rebuilt the hermitage just to the west of the ruins. To read about the new Keutsang Hermitage (Ke'u tshang ri khrod), go to the [Keutsang Hermitage](#) webpage.

Khardo Hermitage (Mkhar rdo ri khrod)



The ruins of Khardo Hermitage.

Location and Layout¹

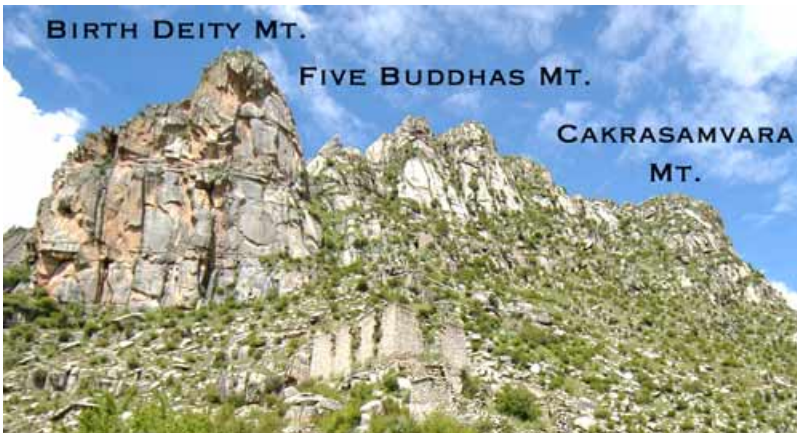
Khardo Hermitage is located northeast of Lha sa (and of Se ra) on the side of a mountain north of the [Dodé Valley](#). The hermitage is also located across the road leading from Lha sa to 'Phan po on the side of a mountain facing Purchok Hermitage (Phur lcog ri khrod). It is possible to walk directly up the mountain to Mkhar rdo from this road, but it is more common to take the footpath from the Gnas sgo gdong nunnery instead. From the nunnery it takes a little over one hour to walk to Mkhar rdo.

It may be that the hermitage derives its name from the local site deity (*gnas bdag*), whose name is Mkhar rdo srong btsan.

As is the case with most of the hermitages, certain features of the landscape – and especially of the [mountains](#) – around Mkhar rdo are seen as signs of the holiness of the site. One group of peaks behind the monastery is called the Soul Mountain of the Buddhas of the Five Families (Rgyal ba'i rigs lnga bla ri). To the left of these is a mountain called the Birth Deity Peak ('Khrungs ba'i lha ri or 'Khrungs

¹ Most of the account of Khardo Hermitage (Mkhar rdo ri khrod) is based on an extensive interview with a former monk of the monastery conducted in Lha sa in 2004. This informant states that there exists a catalogue (*dkar chag*) for the hermitage (*ri khrod*) written by its founder, Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho (1672-1749), but this text was not available to me; neither is it mentioned in the [TBRC database entry that lists Bzod pa rgya mtsho \(1672-1749\)'s texts](#).

dbu rtse).² In the middle of this mountain there used to be a ledge that housed a small chapel to the protector deities of the regions of Tibet from which the various Mkhar rdo bla mas hailed, hence the name “Birth Deity Peak.” Another prominent peak (to the east) is called the Soul Mountain of Cakrasamvara (Bde mchog bla ri). Tradition has it that various hand-implements and bone-ornaments of the deity have been discovered as treasure on this mountain by different Mkhar rdo incarnations. On one side of this mountain there is a cave called the “Offering Place Cave” (Brag mchod sa),³ in which an entire copy of the *Scriptures* (*Bka' gyur*) was discovered as treasure during the time of the third Kharo incarnation Chökyi Dorjé (Mkhar rdo sku phreng gsum pa chos kyi rdo rje).⁴ The monastery itself is said to have been built on the site of the Ha ha rgod pa'i dur khrod, one of the classical charnel grounds of the Indian *tantras*. For these various reasons, the site is considered extremely holy.



The various holy mountains behind the hermitage.

But the location was also made holy by virtue of having been the abode of saints. Above the various buildings there is a cave called Great Heap of Light ('Od zer phung po che). The site-deity, called Mkhar rdo srong btsan, is said to have shown the founder of the monastery, Bzod pa rgya mtsho, this cave and told him that he was to reside here. On one particular holy day Mkhar rdo ba, while living in this cave, found that he had nothing to offer except for a single butter-lamp. His

² Or it may be that the informant said Khrungs ba'i bla ri, in which case it would be “Birth Soul Mountain.”

³ The spelling of this name is conjectural. If it is accurate, it means The Cave That Is a Place of Worship.

⁴ When the Mkhar rdo bla ma found the texts, he asked for 100 monks to be sent from the [Lhopa Regional House \(Lho pa khang tshan\)](#) of Se ra to help carry them away, but the regional house (*khang tshan*) only sent one monk. As a result, only the volume of the *Sūtra of Good Fortune* (*Mdo skal bzang*) was recovered from the cave (the rest presumably disappeared because they were not disinterred in time). This special volume of the *Sūtra of Good Fortune* apparently still exists, being kept at Se ra Byes.

prayers were so pure, however, that when he lit the lamp the entire mountain glowed, “as if thousands of butter lamps were burning.” This is how the cave got its name. Mkhār rdo ba lived in this cave, and in another nearby one called Cave of Mila (Mi la’i brag), during his early and mid twenties, before the first buildings were erected at the site.

The hermitage had **three major compounds**, located one above the other on the side of the mountain. Lowest on the hill was the **main compound** (usually referred to simply as “the hermitage”). Above that was the so-called “**Upper Residence**” (**Gzims khang gong ma**), and above that the **Temple of the Sixteen Arhats** (**Gnas bcu lha khang**). Today all of these compounds lie in ruins. From an informant’s report, however, we have a good sense of what the hermitage looked like before 1959.

Main compound: This was by far the largest group of buildings in the monastery, housing various important temples, a library, and the residential quarters of the Mkhār rdo bla mas. At **the front** (lowest on the mountain), the compound was three stories tall; at the rear it was two stories in height. As one went in the main door (*gzhung sgo*), located at the front of the compound at the bottom-most level, one first came to a room that is said to have been built on top of the uppermost part of the Ha ha rgod pa’i dur khrod. This was a large (eight-pillar) room that was in almost total darkness. It housed many self-arisen images, but apparently was not for any specific purpose.



Inside the ruins of the main compound.

As one went up the central staircase, one came first to the (four-pillar) temple that is said to date to the time of Mkhār rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho. This small temple had seating for about 20 monks. It contained statues of the sixteen arhats as well as the large silver funerary *stūpa* of Bzod pa rgya mtsho built by his student, the Seventh Dalai Lama Kelzang Gyatso (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bdun pa skal bzang rgya mtsho). The mummified corpse (*dmār gdung*) of Mkhār rdo ba was contained within this *stūpa*. In the rear portion of the temple there was a chapel to Maitreya (Byams pa). Tradition has it that the two-story statue of Maitreya in this temple

was created by a deity. Inside the heart of this statue there was a tooth-relic of the Buddha Kaśyapa, and there was a small window on the body of the Maitreya statue where this tooth could actually be seen.

On this same level of the compound there was also a round room that contained the monastery's collection of wood-blocks and texts. This library contained many special works, such as the texts discovered as "treasure" (*gter*) by the third Khardo incarnation Rikdzin Chökyi Dorjé (Mkhar rdo sku phreng gsum pa rigs 'dzin chos kyi rdo rje): the *Cycle for Gathering Power* (*Dbang 'dus 'khor lo*), the *Cycle on Gaṇeśa* (*Tshogs bdag lag na 'khor lo*), etc. Important blockprints of artwork and of the monastery's ritual texts (*yig cha*) were also kept there. The collection included texts of all traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Most of these texts and blockprints were confiscated when the monastery came under the receivership of the government after the Rwa sgreng (d. 1947) affair (see below).

If one turned left as one exited the library, one came to the protector deity chapel (*mgon khang*). This room contained statues of the four traditional deities propitiated in most Dge lugs institutions (Mgon po, Chos rgyal, Lha mo, and Rnam sras) as well as a statue of the protector deity of the monastery, Gter bdag srong btsan. In the rear of the protector deity chapel, there was another smaller chapel that was only open for one day each year (during the New Year festivities). It contained a large self-arisen image of the deity Dbang phyug chen po.

Coming out of the protector deity chapel, one arrived at the central courtyard where the side door of the main compound was located. From that courtyard one had access to a variety of rooms which included the *rten khang*,⁵ a large (eight-pillar) storage room, the lama's estate's (*bla brang*) (two-pillar) kitchen, a (two-pillar) manager's room (*gnyer tshang*) that served as the office and living quarters for the hermitage's manager (*gnyer pa*), and a variety of other small rooms where fuel (wood, straw and dung) were kept. Around this courtyard there was also a three-pillar guest room, as well as a room for frying and storing dough cookies.

If one went up one level, to the third floor, one came first to the two-pillar quarters for the Da lai bla ma, called the Palace of Great Bliss (Bde chen pho brang). The Thirteenth Dalai Lama Tupten Gyatso (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu gsum pa thub bstan rgya mtsho) stayed here, as perhaps did other of his predecessors. The principal image in the Da lai bla ma's rooms was a very special image of Maitreya that is said to have originally belonged to a monastery in 'Phan po. It is said that the statue levitated, flew to Mkhar rdo and proclaimed that Mkhar rdo was its true home. There were also metal statues of the Twenty-One Tārās (Sgrol ma) in the Da lai bla ma's rooms. The central Tārā image was of solid silver. There were also statues of the Sixteen Arhats, and various *thang kas*. Going down the hall from the Da lai bla ma's quarters, one came to the Khardo Assembly Hall (Mkhar rdo tshoms chen), a temple that could house over 100 monks. This temple was also called the Rgya res tshoms chen, because the deity Rgya res was supposed

⁵ Both the spelling and the meaning of this term are unclear.

to have built the large Maitreya statue found here. The temple had ten “short pillar” (*ka thung*), and two “long pillar” (*ka ring*); it also had three doors. This temple contained:

- One-story tall metal statues of the Buddhas of the Three Times
- A one-story metal statue of Tsong kha pa (1357-1419)
- The throne of the Da lai bla ma
- A life-size statue of the fifth Khardo incarnation Jamyang Chökyi Wangchuk (Mkhar rdo sku phreng lnga pa jam dbyangs chos kyi dbang phyug)
- A life-size statue of Padmasambhava (Padma ’byung gnas)
- A one-story “speaking-statue” (*gsung byon ma*) of Tārā
- On one side of the temple there was a complete copy of a printed edition of the *Scriptures* (*Bka’ ’gyur*), and on the other, a manuscript version of the same. The manuscript version is apparently dated to the time of Mkhar rdo sku phreng bzhi pa padma dga’ ba’i rdo rje. This *bla ma*’s steward began a custom of having the monks do at least one yearly ritual reading of the *Bka’ ’gyur*, a tradition that was kept alive up to 1959.
- The murals on the walls of the assembly hall were of the Thousand Buddhas of the Fortunate Age.

As one exited the temple, one immediately encountered the four-pillar Palace of the Rays of the Sun (Nyi ’od pho brang). This chapel held the funerary *stūpa* of the third Khardo incarnation Rikdzin Chökyi Dorjé (Mkhar rdo sku phreng gsum pa rigs ’dzin chos kyi rdo rje). It also contained self-arisen images of the sixteen arhats, statues of the twenty-one Tārās, a statue of Thang stong rgyal po, of Dpal ldan lha mo, a statue of the fourth Khardo incarnation Pema Gawé Dorjé (Mkhar rdo sku phreng bzhi pa padma dga’ ba’i rdo rje), a statue of Padmasambhava (Padma ’byung gnas) and other lesser images.

Exiting the Palace of the Rays of the Sun, one next came to the series of rooms that constituted the lama’s estate proper – that is, the living quarters of the *bla ma* and his immediate family and steward. The first of these rooms was a two-pillar chapel called the Siddha Chapel (Grub thob lha khang) that housed clay statues of the eighty-four *mahāsiddhas* of India. They are said to have been made by the third Mkhar rdo bla ma himself. There were also images of the Five Visions of the Lord (Tsongkhapa) (*rje gzigs pa lnga ldan*). The next room was the private residence of the mothers of the Mkhar rdo bla ma incarnations. Adjacent to that was a balcony or sun room (*rab gsal*), on the other side of which were the quarters of the administrator administrative head (*phyag mdzod*) of the lama’s estate. Beyond the steward’s quarters were the private rooms of the Mkhar rdo bla ma. The *bla ma*’s reception room contained various metal statues, including statues of Padmasambhava (Padma ’byung gnas) in eight forms, a statue of Hayagrīva (Rta mgrin), statues of Tsong kha pa and the two disciples, and others as well.

If one traveled one flight of stairs up from the *bla ma*’s private rooms, one would arrive at another small (two-pillar) protector deity chapel called the Chapel

of the Four Statues (Sku bzhi khang), so called because it contained four statues of mgon po. This is the location of the famous “Khardo (Hermitage’s) Lord of Death Machine” (*mkhar rdo gshin rje ’khrul ’khor*), a mechanical device for conjuring wrathful magical powers (*drag phyogs kyi las*). This “wheel of weapons” (*mtshon cha’i ’khor lo*) had been utilized at different points in Tibetan history to magically defeat invading forces.⁶ The machine had the ability to conjure up the powers of different sets of deities (gods, *nāgas*, etc.) depending upon the direction in which it was turned. Various “trophies” from the defeated parties hung from the beams of the ceiling of this room, including the desiccated hand of the leader of the Dogra troops (defeated, it is said, chiefly as a result of using this form of magic at the time of the third Mkhar rdo bla ma in 1856). The hands of famous bandits and other criminals had, throughout the years, been added to the collection of human limbs suspended from the ceiling. Next to this chapel, there was a room called the Treasure-House of Vaiśravaṇa (Rnam sras bang mdzod). It contained eight “wealth-box” (*yang gam*) where the ritual wealth-vases for the monastery were kept. This room was opened only once a year on New Year’s day; otherwise it was kept locked.



The ruins of the Upper Residence.

Exiting from the protector chapel and going down the hall one came to the Kadam Chapel (Bka’ gdams lha khang), a four pillar temple. It contained a one-story

⁶ René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz has described this machine in his *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (Taipei: SMC Publishing, nd), 493, where he calls it “the Mill of the Shinjé” (*gshin rje’i rang thag*): “It consists of two millstones. The lower is firmly fixed, the upper one can be turned with the help of a handle. Into the surface of the upper stone has been chiseled a number of powerful *mantras*. The *gShin rje rang thag* serves as an instrument to kill the leader of a hostile party, and it may be turned only by a learned, high-ranking priest specially nominated by the authorities. In the initial stages of this action the priest has to concentrate his thoughts upon a few seeds of white mustard, into which he tries to transfer the ‘life-essence’ (*srog snying*) of the enemies. As soon as certain secret signs indicate that this process has been successfully accomplished, he has to place the seeds between the millstones and grind them under the chanting of *mantras*. Tradition alleges that turning the *gShin rje rang thag* is a process dangerous even to the person who handles the mill, and several priests who have carried out this task are said to have died soon afterwards.”

statue of the Buddha, as well as statues of the sixteen arhats, statues of 138 *blamas* of the Bka' gdams pa tradition, and the funerary *stūpa* and image of the fourth Mkhar rdo bla ma. Next to this chapel, there was the small (one-pillar) “Three Roots” Chapel (Rtsa gsum lha khang), which contained a statue of the Thirteen-Deity Vajrabhairava ('Jigs byed lha bcu gsum) as well as important statues of Tsong kha pa and of Acala (Mi g.yo ba). The name of the chapel (“three roots”) derives from the fact that the main statue of Yamāntaka in this room was made from clay over which the three root teachers of this tradition – Sgrub khang pa, Phur lcoḡ ngag dbang byams pa (1682-1762) and Mkhār rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho – had recited 100,000 repetitions of the “yamarāja” *mantra* of Yamāntaka.

The Upper Residence. Just uphill from the main compound is the so-called “Upper Residence” (Gzims khang gong ma).⁷ This compound was not, strictly speaking, under the aegis of the hermitage, but rather was administered by Tibetan government. It had two floors. On the first floor it contained a protector deity chapel. The Tibetan government would send monks from the Tantric College (Sngags pa grwa tshang) once a year (in the summer) to conduct rituals in this chapel. The second floor contained the private quarters of the Seventh Dalai Lama Kelzang Gyatso (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bdun pa bskal bzang rgya mtsho), and of Mkhār rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho. It may be that this compound was originally constructed to serve as the residence of the Seventh Dalai Lama when he visited his teacher, Bzod pa rgya mtsho. If this is the case, then this small compound predates the main compound.



The Temple of the Sixteen Arhats.

⁷ The word *gong ma* can mean “upper/higher,” but it can also refer to the emperor (in this case, the Da lai bla ma). Either interpretation makes sense, given that this building (a) is higher on the mountain than the main compound, and (b) was constructed as a residence for the Seventh Dalai Lama Kelzang Gyatso (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bdun pa bskal bzang rgya mtsho) when he came to visit his teacher Bzod pa rgya mtsho.

The Sixteen Arhat Temple. Farther north up the mountain from the Upper Residence is the Temple of the Sixteen Arhats (Gnas bcu lha khang), the first structure built by Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho at the site. It originally contained only the temple and a small room that served as the first residence that Bzod pa rgya mtsho occupied at Mkhar rdo. Later it was expanded, and at a certain point in history the compound was converted into monks' living quarters, though it is not clear when precisely this occurred.

Farther up the mountainside still are the **caves** originally used by Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho before he built the first structures at the site. Before 1959, women were not allowed inside these caves. Today, **nuns** use these as retreat places. The nuns also serve as caretakers.



One of the caves occupied by Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho when he first arrived at the site. Today it serves as a nun's meditation cell.

The one former monk from the hermitage who served as our informant in 2004 (and who, as far as we know, is the only member of this hermitage still alive today) told us that he contemplated refurbishing the monastery when liberalization took place in the 1980s. He decided not to pursue this because, on the one hand, he was unsuccessful at receiving permission from the relevant offices of the Lha sa municipal government, and, on the other, because he received a letter from the present Mkhar rdo rin po che (who lives in the United States) who discouraged him from proceeding with the renovations.



A statue of Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho preserved at Rakhadrak Hermitage (Ra kha brag ri khrod).

History

Khardo Hermitage was founded in 1706⁸ by Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho,⁹ a student of Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho (1641-1713).¹⁰ Bzod pa rgya mtsho entered the Jé College (Grwa tshang byes) of Se ra at age nine, and studied intensively for the next six years. When he was fifteen he asked permission to pursue intensive retreat. His teacher was agreeable, and he began to travel in southern Tibet, visiting various holy sites, and remaining in isolated retreat in various locations for the next five years of his life. He returned to Se ra when he was twenty, and it was at this time that he met the charismatic Sgrub khang pa,

⁸ This is the date given by Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* (Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 2002), 432. However, according to an informant, Bzod pa rgya mtsho lived at the site from the time he was 24 years old (that is, from 1796/7), and perhaps even a few years before that.

⁹ The details of the life of the various Mkhar rdo incarnations that follow are based on an informant's account. For a slightly different version of the life of Mkhar rdo ba, see the [Introduction to the Hermitages](#).

¹⁰ On this figure, see the [Introduction to the Hermitages](#).

who was giving teachings on the graded stages of the path (*lam rim*) at his hermitage above Se ra. After this cycle of teachings was over (around the time that Bzod pa rgya mtsho was twenty-four years old), he decided to go into more permanent retreat and, as the result of certain visionary signs, chose a cave at Mkhar rdo as his home.

Bzod pa rgya mtsho initially lived as a hermit in caves at Mkhar rdo. Certain events,¹¹ however, brought him to the attention of the Seventh Dalai Lama, who then requested Mkhar rdo ba to become his assistant tutor (*mtshan zhabs*). From this time forward, the Da lai bla ma acted as Mkhar rdo ba's patron and it was as a result of the Da lai bla ma's financial assistance that the first temple (Temple of the Sixteen Arhats) was built at Mkhar rdo. Shortly after this temple was completed, the Seventh Dalai Lama provided the funds for the construction of a residence at the site, which he used when he went to Mkhar rdo to visit his teacher. This building is what came to be known as the Upper Residence (see above). The Seventh Dalai Lama is also credited with having sponsored the construction of the first buildings in what later became the main compound. It was upon the completion of this latter project that he gave permission for eight fully ordained monks to live at the site. He also provided the hermitage with one small estate in the Dodé Valley for its support.

After the death of Bzod pa rgya mtsho, the Seventh Dalai Lama performed all of the necessary funerary rites for his teacher, and sponsored the construction of his funerary *stūpa* and of his statue. (This existed at Khardo Hermitage until 1959.) The Da lai bla ma also undertook the search for his teacher's reincarnation, whom he found in 'Phan po, not far from Lha sa. Just as with Bzod pa rgya mtsho and the Seventh Dalai Lama, a teacher-student relationship was established between the second Mkhar rdo bla ma and the Eighth Dalai Lama Jampel Gyatso (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bryad pa 'jam dpal rgya mtsho). The second Mkhar rdo rin po che travelled extensively in northern Tibet, and he founded at least two monasteries in Nag chu which then became satellite monasteries of Khardo Hermitage.¹² This shows us how even relatively small hermitages (Mkhar rdo) could, because of their power and connections, become the mother institutions to larger monasteries (like those in Nag chu). It may be the case that this was as much an economic as it was a religious relationship for Mkhar rdo, for the nomads of the region of Nag chu in which the two monasteries were located apparently used the lands belonging to the Khardo Hermitage in Lha sa as a base of operations in the summer when they came to barter in Lha sa. One assumes that having this type of relationship with the Nag chu nomads also meant that Khardo Hermitage hermitage had a source of meat, butter and other dairy products, which the Mkhar rdo bla mas probably received as offerings and/or as fees for services rendered.

¹¹ See above concerning the miracle associated with the Great Heap of Light Cave.

¹² One of these, Nag chu zhabs brtan dgon pa, eventually came under the aegis of the Drupkhang Lama's estate (Sgrub khang bla brang).

The third Mkhar rdo bla ma, Rigs 'dzin chos kyi rdo rje (b. 1790?) had the habits of a tantric *siddha*. Like the Sixth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng drug pa), he was renowned for enjoying the diversions Lha sa had to offer, especially its bars. He is credited with several important “treasure” discoveries. So great were his powers that when he was coming back from Lha sa on one of his outings, the statue of Dpal ldan lha mo at Drapchi Temple (Grwa bzhi lha khang) would turn its head to look at him.¹³ The footprint in stone of Rigs 'dzin chos kyi rdo rje was preserved at Mkhar rdo until 1959. After he died – sitting next to a small *tsen* chapel (*btsan khang*) at Mkhar rdo – the monks tried to cremate his body, but every time they lit the fire it would be magically extinguished, and so the monks decided instead to preserve his mummified body, which was housed in a *stūpa* in one of the chapels of the hermitage until 1959. The most important Mkhar rdo religious festival is one commemorating this *bla ma*.



Detail of a painting of the Seventh Dalai Lama in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art, from the www.himalayanart.org website, no. 212.

We know little about the next two Mkhar rdo incarnations, although it seems that each of them expanded the hermitage and its holdings. For example, the fourth Mkhar rdo bla ma, who, it seems, was born into a prominent Rnying ma pa family, is known to have built a set of residential rooms at Mkhar rdo known as the Dga' chos dbyings.¹⁴ And the fifth Mkhar rdo bla ma reestablished the relationship with one of the monasteries in Nag chu called Byang chos 'khor gling, where, in fact, he died.

The situation is quite different when we get to the sixth Khardo incarnation Jampel Tupten Nyendrak Gyatso (Mkhar rdo sku phreng drug pa 'jam dpal thub bstan nyan grags rgya mtsho). He entered the Jé College of Se ra and became renowned as a scholar. He was a close friend of the famous fifth Radreng incarnation (Rwa sgreng sku sgreng lnga pa, or “Reting”), who was regent of Tibet

¹³ From this point on, there has been an important connection between Grwa bzhi and Mkhar rdo. For example, only the Mkhar rdo rituals are performed at Grwa bzhi even though the temple itself belongs to the Purchok Lama's estate (Phur ldog bla brang).

¹⁴ The spelling of this word is uncertain. Alternatives include Dga' spyod dbyings and Mkha' spyod dbyings.

between 1934 and 1941, and who studied at Se ra around the same time as the sixth Mkhar rdo bla ma. Mkhar rdo rin po che had backed Rwa sgreng rin po che (d. 1947) during his failed attempt to recoup the regency. After Rwa sgreng rin po che was executed in 1947, the government also retaliated against the Mkhar rdo bla ma. He was imprisoned, all of his land-holdings and many of the religious artifacts inside the hermitage (for example, the library) were confiscated by the Tibetan government, and an edict was issued forbidding the search for future incarnations. After some time, the Mkhar rdo bla ma was transferred to the Nor bu gling kha prison, and there are many stories of miracles that occurred during his stay there. He was freed after a few years, but never returned to Khardo Hermitage (over which he no longer had any rights). He lived for some time on the top floor of the Drapchi Temple. He then visited Byang chos 'khor gling in Nag chu, and finished out the rest of his days at the monastery of one of his students, Thogs med rin po che (twentieth century), in Gnas mo.

All of these events were obviously catastrophic for Khardo Hermitage and its monks. Within a matter of a few years Mkhar rdo went from being one of the richest and most powerful monasteries in the Lha sa valley to being one of the poorest and most marginalized. However, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu bzhi pa) reversed the decision of his regent. He allowed for the next Mkhar rdo bla ma to be found, and restored to him his previous titles and rights. Bstan nor mkhar rdo (b. 1957),¹⁵ the seventh Khardo incarnation Jampel Tendzin Nyendrak Gyatso (Mkhar rdo sku phreng bdun pa 'jam dpal bstan 'dzin nyan grags rgya mtsho), was born in Lha sa. He left Tibet in 1984, and presently lives in the United States.



Nuns sit outside one of the Mkhar rdo caves. Nuns are the only residents of the site today.

¹⁵ This is the seventh Khardo incarnation Jampel Tendzin Nyendrak Gyatso (Mkhar rdo sku phreng bdun pa 'jam dpal bstan 'dzin nyan grags rgya mtsho).

After the events of 1959, the sixty-plus monks of Mkhar rdo were forced to leave the hermitage. Except for a few nuns who live in the caves above the hermitage, the site has remained unoccupied ever since. Today, all of the buildings lie in ruins.

Ritual Cycle

Daily. The 20 fully ordained monks who formed the ritual core of the monastery would gather for “daily tea/prayer” (*rgyun ja*), every morning in the smaller of Mkhar rdo’s two temples.

Monthly. Five days each month were always celebrated:

- First of the month: Tārā Ritual (*sgrol chog*); and bi-monthly confession ritual
- Tenth: Offering-Ritual to the Lama (*bla ma mchod pa tshog*)
- Fifteenth: Medicine Buddha (*smān bla*); and bi-monthly confession
- Twenty-fifth: Offering-Ritual to the Lama
- Twenty-ninth: propitiation ritual (*bskang gso*)

- First Tibetan month: A cycle of rituals, lasting seven days, focusing on Yamāntaka, Guhyasamāja, and Cakrasaṃvara. These began at the end of the New Year festivities.
- Second Tibetan month: For seven days either the *Scriptures* would be read, or else the Prayer to the Twenty-One Tārās would be recited.
- Fourth Tibetan month: unknown ritual
- Fifth Tibetan month: The self-initiation rituals of Sarvavid Vairocana, or else of Kālacakra.
- Sixth Tibetan month: the Sixth-Month/Fourth-Day (*drug pa tshes bzhi*) holy day is celebrated. In addition, one-hundred monks would gather to read the scriptures for seven days during a separate convocation in this same month.
- Ninth Tibetan month: 100,000 repetitions of the Tārā prayer would be accumulated during this month.
- Tenth Tibetan month: Winter Solstice Ritual (*dgun nyi ldog gi cho ga*).
- Eleventh Tibetan month: The monks split into two groups. One group would perform White Mahākāla (Mgon dkar) rituals, and the other, rituals focusing on Rta mgrin.
- Twelfth Tibetan month:
 - Fifteenth day of the month: the hermitage celebrated the famous *mkhar rdo mthun mchod*, a festival commemorating the third Mkhar rdo bla ma. During the festivities, monks from Nenang Nunnery (Gnas nang dgon pa) came to Mkhar rdo to perform various propitiation rituals (for example, to the deity Vajrakīla) in front of the *stūpa* containing the mummified body of the third Khardo incarnation Chökyi Dorjé (Mkhar rdo sku phreng gsum

pa chos kyi rdo rje). While the Gnas nang monks were performing those rituals, the monks of Mkhar rdo were simultaneously engaged in other protector deity rituals in one of the other temples. All of the local people from Dog bde who worked for the Khardo Lama's estate (Mkhar rdo bla brang) came up to the hermitage on this day. Upon leaving, they received a bit of money, some butter, meat, and fried dough cookies.

- Twenty-ninth day: A ritual involving the Throwing of the Torma as an offering to Mahākāla (*mgon po gtor rgyag*).

Negodong Hermitage (Gnas sgo gdong ri khrod)



The nunnery as viewed from the fertile Dog bde Valley

Location and Layout

Gnas sgo gdong nunnery is located in the Lha sa suburb known as Dog bde, northeast of Se ra (and also of Lha sa). The nunnery is about one kilometer from the main road – that is, from the road that leads from Lha sa to 'Phan po. It sits on a small rise overlooking the Dog bde villagers' [fields of barley](#). It is about a two hour walk from downtown Lha sa, and slightly less from Se ra. Today most people would take the bus from Lha sa to Dog bde and walk from there. The nunnery is also located at the base of the mountain below the [Khardo Hermitage \(Mkhar rdo ri khrod\)](#).

As is typical of the hermitages (*ri khrod*), the surrounding landscape is imbued with religious significance. For example, the “imposing, dark-colored, solid-rock mountain shaped like a triangle” to the east of the nunnery is believed to be the soul-mountain or *bla ri* of the protector deity of the nunnery, Lha mo nyi gzhon. It is called Jo mo si si, and is reckoned as one of the “Three Great Mountains” (Ri chen gsum) on the outskirts of Lha sa. The peak north of the monastery is called “The Soul-Mountain of Juniper Forests” (Shug pa'i nags bla ri), because it used to be covered with juniper trees (some juniper trees are still to be found close to the top of the mountain today). Two other nearby peaks¹ were sites that local

¹ The Na chung rtse mo ri and the Ri 'go sgo ma.

Lhasans would visit (to) make burnt juniper offerings and raise flags (*bsangs gsol dar 'dzugs*) on the third day of the Tibetan New Year.

There are two important springs very close to the hermitage: the Ravine Spring (Grog mo chu mig) and the Sound-Catcher (or Ear) Spring (Sgra 'dzin chu mig). Each of them is said to have clean, clear water with medicinal properties. The water, it is said, never freezes, but continues to run even during the coldest winter months. The area around the springs is used as a picnic spot by the local laity, who will often take their noontime meal here when they come to the nunnery for worship.



The front façade of the main temple.

According to its self-description, the nunnery contains the following buildings and rooms:

- A two-pillar [temple front porch](#)
- A five-pillar [temple](#) with a four-pillar [assembly room](#)
- A two-pillar [scripture chapel](#) (*Bka' 'gyur lha khang*)
- A four-pillar [kitchen](#) (just west of and sharing a wall with the main temple)
- A two-pillar [storage room](#) on the other side of the main entrance from the kitchen
- A twenty-two-pillar [dormitory](#) with three stories (located behind the main temple)

To this “self-description” we might add that the main temple has a [reception room](#) and a [protector deity chapel](#) on its [second floor](#). This is also where the present administrator – a senior nun – has her [rooms](#). Some [newer buildings](#) have recently gone up just northeast of the main temple. They contain nuns’ living quarters, and at least one of these contains a [small improvised chapel](#) that appears to have been added almost as an afterthought to attract the donations of lay visitors.

The nunnery is reckoned as one of the three practice-centers (*sgrub sde*) associated with Khardo Hermitage (Mkhar rdo ri khrod) (the other two being Khardo Hermitage itself, and Gnas nang).

History

Little is known about the early history of Gnas sgo gdong. Tradition has it that it was originally used as a retreat site by the great scholar of the Jé College's (Grwa tshang byes) [Gomdé Regional House \(Sgom sde khang tshan\)](#), [Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan](#) (1532-1592).² It was founded as a formal monastery with seventeen monks.³ We do not know precisely when the site came under the aegis of the Khardo Lama's estate (Mkhar rdo bla brang), although it obviously must have been sometime after the founding of Mkhar rdo in the eighteenth century.⁴



Nuns outside the main entrance to the nunnery.

Initially the nuns in this region lived not at Gnas sgo gdong but in the more remote [Gnas nang](#) (up-valley and east, about a one-hour walk from Gnas sgo gdong). Living so far from the village, the nuns were afraid for their safety, having been attacked, robbed and raped by brigands at least once before.⁵ They asked to move closer to Mkhar rdo, and so the Mkhar rdo bla ma had the monks residing at Gnas sgo gdong trade places with the nuns. Gnas sgo gdong thus became a nunnery, and the more remote Gnas nang (the original home of the nuns) became a hermitage for male monks. This occurred sometime around 1930.

According to a former monk of Khardo Hermitage, sometime in the 1930s or early 1940s (we do not know exactly when) there was talk that the nunnery was too close to the village. Around this same time the Tibetan government's "money printing press" (*ngul gyi par khang*), which had been located in Dog bde where

² According to an informant, Sgom sde pa (1532-1592) was given permission to build the hermitage by the Third Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng gsum pa). The monastery, by order of the Da lai bla ma himself, was to specialize in the ritual practices of the Medicine Buddha (*sman bla*). This informant claims that when Sgom sde pa decided to go back to his home region in eastern Tibet, he asked the first Mkhar rdo bla ma to take responsibility for the monastery. However, the first Mkhar rdo bla ma, Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho (1672-1749), lived almost one hundred years after Sgom sde pa, making this scenario impossible.

³ The number of monks at the time it was a male monastery is based on an oral account by a former monk of Mkhar rdo monastery.

⁴ That is, after 1706, the date of the founding of Khardo Hermitage, and before the founding of Gnas nang. (To go to the Gnas nang webpage now, [click here](#)).

⁵ This is according to an oral account by a former Mkhar rdo monk. One must be careful about claims like this, however, for they sometimes serve as justification for bringing independent nunneries into the control of a male authority figure.

Gnas sgo gdong now sits, moved, and the large complex of buildings was bought by the Khardo Lama's estate. The Khardo Lama's estate then moved the nuns into this much larger facility, and took the site that was originally the nunnery and made it into a large residence that became the headquarters of the Khardo Lama's estate in the Dog bde Valley. After all of the possessions of the Mkhar rdo rin po che were confiscated by the Tibetan government in the wake of the Rwa sgreng (d. 1947) affair,⁶ the government decided to move the nuns back into the mansion-like residence (which was, in fact, their original residence before they were sent to the printing house buildings). All of the buildings comprising the printing house complex were then destroyed by order of the Tibetan government. This took place sometime around 1949 or 1950.

The nunnery was close to being in complete ruins after the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s, one of the former nuns of Gnas sgo gdong, Phun tshogs 'phrin las (twentieth century), went on a begging tour throughout different regions of Tibet to raise money to rebuild the nunnery.

Before 1959, the principal deity inside the main (three-story) temple was a statue of Lokeśvara made of sandalwood with a figure of Padmasambhava (Padma 'byung gnas) on its crown. It is said to have been donated to the monastery by the Seventh Dalai Lama Kelzang Gyatso (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bdun pa bskal bzang rgya mtsho). The protector deity of the nunnery is Lha mo nyi ma gzhon nu. All of the statues inside the temple today appear to be new.

⁶ On this event, see the [Introduction to the Hermitages](#).

Nenang Nunnery (Gnas nang dgon pa)

Location and Layout

Nenang Nunnery (Gnas nang dgon pa) is located at the end of a valley east of Negodong Nunnery (Gnas sgo gdong dgon pa). It takes about one hour to walk there from Gnas sgo gdong. A stream runs through the valley. Workers (mostly Chinese) use the valley as a quarry from which they harvest stones that are used in the Lha sa construction industry. There is considerable environmental damage to the Gnas nang Valley as a result of the stone quarrying that takes place there.



One of the areas of ruins at Gnas nang.

The site has a long-standing association with Padmasambhava (Padma 'byung gnas). One of the mountain peaks at the site, for example, is called Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain (Zangs mdog dpal ri), the name of Padmasambhava's celestial palace. There are also two large caves at Gnas nang that are identified as Padmasambhava's meditation caves (*sgrub phug*). A series of caves on the mountainside opposite the hermitage (*ri khrod*) are identified as the *caves of the Sixteen Arhats (gnas brtan bcu drug)* .

The site is in such a state of decay that, apart from identifying the *assembly hall ('du khang)* and caves, it is impossible to say much about the original layout of the hermitage.

History

Gnas nang is, as we have mentioned, a site associated with Padmasambhava. Two large *caves* found near the main hermitage buildings are said to be meditation caves of this important ninth century Indian master, one of the legendary founders of Buddhism in Tibet. Of course, many hundreds (if not thousands) of caves throughout Tibet are associated with Padmasambhava, and we have no way of determining the accuracy of the claim that Padmasambhava (if he was a historical figure at all) lived in the caves at Gnas nang. However, there is a strong oral

tradition that maintains that this was a site at which Padmasambhava did a three-year, three-month retreat.



One of Padmasambhava's caves at Gnas nang.

An informant, a former monk of Khardo Hermitage (Mkhar rdo ri khrod), tells us that Gnas nang was founded as a nunnery by a certain Jetsün (or Khachö) Dröldor Wangmo (Rje btsun nam mkha' spyod sgröl rdor dbang mo), a nun who was considered to be a *dākinī*. During her lifetime, and during that of her next incarnation, the nunnery flourished, but then there were no further incarnations. The nunnery went into a period of decline, and it was at this time that the institution sought to affiliate with Khardo Hermitage.

Gnas nang was a site used as a retreat place by the third Khardo incarnation Rikdzin Chökyi Dorjé (Mkhar rdo sku phreng gsum pa rigs 'dzin chos kyi rdo rje). It is the place where he is said to have “practiced the special treasure teachings of Khardo.”¹ That same master is credited with later (re)founding a nunnery at the site (see [Negodong Nunnery](#)). The site has been under the control of the Khardo Lama's estate (Mkhar rdo bla brang) since this time.

Living so far from the village, the nuns, it is said, feared for their safety, and generally experienced great hardship. According to one oral account, a group of brigands actually attacked the nunnery, looting it, and raping several of the nuns. As a result, the nuns asked to move closer to Mkhar rdo, and so the monks then living at Gnas sgo gdong traded places with the nuns: Gnas sgo gdong became a nunnery, and the more remote Gnas nang became a monastery for male monks. In another version of the story, the exchange of the two institutions was ordered by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu gsum pa). In any case, this occurred sometime around 1930. From the 1930s up to 1959, therefore, Gnas nang was a monks' hermitage.

¹ *mkhar rdo gter chos thun mong ma yin pa nyams bzhes.*



A nun meditator currently living at Gnas nang.

The site was forcibly closed sometime between 1959 and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, and the buildings began to deteriorate. No one has formally taken on the responsibility of rebuilding Gnas nang. However, sometime in the last decade several Rnying ma pa nuns and one elderly man (the father of one of the nuns) have fashioned makeshift huts out of the ruins of Gnas nang's former buildings. These hermits all hail from Khams, eastern Tibet.

Pabongkha Hermitage (Pha bong kha ri khrod)



A view of Pha bong kha from the south.



A view of Pha bong kha from the rear, looking down into the Nyang bran Valley.

Introduction

Pha bong kha, one of the largest and most important of the Se ra hermitages (*ri khrod*), lies about eight kilometers northwest of downtown Lha sa on the southern (Lha sa-facing) slope of a peak known as Mount Parasol (Dbu gdugs ri), northwest of Se ra.¹ It takes a little over one hour to walk from Pha bong kha to Se ra. Pha

¹ The account that follows is based on the narrative of the monastery in Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, *Dga' ldan chos 'byung bai dūrya ser po* [*Yellow Lapis: A History of the Ganden (School)*] (Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 1991), 144; on the “Pha bong kha” entry in Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* (Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig dpe skrun khang, 2002), 1313-1316; on a *dkar chag* of the monastery made available to me by Pha bong kha monks in 2004; and on material from oral interviews with some of the resident monks conducted in August of 2004.

The title of the *dkar chag* reads *Yul nyer bzhi 'i ya rgyal/ de bi ko ſi dang ming gzhan pha bong kha byang chub shing gi nags khrod du bkod pa 'i dkar chag dad ldan padmo rgyas byed gzi sbyin 'od stong 'bar ba 'i nor bu* (hereafter *Pha bong kha 'i dkar chag*). It appears to be an edited version of a text bearing the same name published in *Three Khrid on the Nā ro mkha' spyod Practice* (Delhi: Ngawang Sopa, 1976), 454-532. (I have Gene Smith to thank for making a copy of this latter edition available to me.) References to the *dkar chag* in this work are to the edition published in Tibet. The publication of the Tibetan edition of the *dkar chag* was sponsored by a contemporary abbot (or perhaps now former abbot) of Pha bong kha, Byams pa thub bstan rin po che.

In the colophon the author of the *dkar chag* identifies himself as the reincarnation of a *bla ma* of Kong po jo rdzong, the reincarnation of the *bla ma* of Chökhang Tsewa Monastery (Chos khang rtse ba dgon pa); he also identifies himself as belonging to the Mé College (Grwa tshang smad) of Se ra, but gives his name only in Sanskrit as Wāḡiṇḡamatibhadrapaṭu bandashāsadharasagara (sic).

bong kha is the starting point for the “Sixth-Month Fourth-Day” (*drug pa tshe bzhi*) Sera Mountain Circumambulation Circuit (*se ra’i ri ’khor*) pilgrimage. To see images of the circumambulation taken in 2002, click [here](#).

The site has a long history that is said to go back to the time of the first Buddhist king (of Tibet) Songtsen Gampo (Chos rgyal srong btsan sgam po).² Although originally the site of his castle (*sku mkhar*) or fort, it appears that Pha bong kha was quickly converted into a monastery, perhaps as early as the reign of the second great Buddhist king (of Tibet) Trisong Detsen (Chos rgyal khri srong lde’u btsan). The monastery was partially destroyed as part of King Glang dar ma’s (d. 842) campaign to dismantle monastic Buddhism. During the so-called “later propagation period” (*phyi dar*), Pha bong kha was taken over by members of the Bka’ gdams pa school. Later, Tsong kha pa (1357-1419) lived at the site as a hermit, and it eventually became a Dge lugs institution. Before 1959, Pha bong kha was apparently an autonomous institution that belonged to no other monastery, although at various times it has had informal ties to Se ra through the person of the various Se ra *bla mas* that served as its abbots. The monastery suffered considerable destruction from 1960 to the mid-1980s. Se ra monks began renovating the buildings in the mid-1980s, and today the monastery belongs to Se ra. Since the mid-80s, all of Pha bong kha’s monks are Se ra monks, and the hermitage is managed by a senior

The introductory verse of the Delhi edition bears identifying marks (dots) under certain syllables. (These are missing in the Tibetan edition.) Those marks spell out “Ngag dbang blo bzang thub bstan rgya mtsho ’jigs bral dbang phyug phyogs las rnam par rgyal ba.” This resembles the name of the eighth Demo incarnation Ngawang Lozang Tupten Jikmé Gyatso (De mo sku phreng brgyad pa ngag dbang blo bzang thub bstan ’jigs med rgya mtsho, 1778-1819), tutor of the Ninth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng dgu pa, 1806-1815).

The colophon tells us that the work was written between the female-fire-pig (*me mo phag*) and male-earth-bird (*sa pho bya*) years. In the fourteenth calendrical cycle or *rab byung*, this corresponds to 1827-1828. The author of the *dkar chag* further states that he based his work on a verse text compiled by Mkhār rdo ba (*mkhan thog brgyad pa kha rdo sku thog bzod pa rgya mtsho’am/ blo bzang sgom chung pas bsgrigs pa tshig bca’d ma*), as well as on the constitution (*bca’ yig*) of the monastery written by Rta tshag ye shes bstan pa’i mgon po (1760-1810). On Mkhār rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho (1672-1749) see the [Introduction to the Hermitages](#). On Rta tshag ye shes bstan pa’i mgon po, see TBRC [P302](#).

Still unavailable, to my knowledge, are: (1) the *dkar chag* of Pha bong kha in six folios written by Mkhār rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho, and (2) another *dkar chag* by ’Khon ston dpal ’byor lhun grub (1561-1637). The latter is mentioned in A khu rin po che’s (1803-1875) list of rare texts; see Lokesh Chandra, *Materials for a History of Tibetan Literature* (Kyoto: Rinsen Book Co., 1981, repr. of the 1963 ed.), no. 11012. Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa’i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [*A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels*; hereafter *Lha sa’i dgon tho*] (Bod jongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 15, quotes ’Khon ston’s *dkar chag*, implying, perhaps, that he had the text at his disposal; he gives the date of composition of the work as 1619.

Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho’s account of Pha bong kha in the *Bai dūrya ser po*, 144, is fascinating because it links the flourishing of Tibet to the flourishing of Pha bong kha; and vice versa, it links political problems in Tibet with the decline of Pha bong kha. Mention of Pha bong kha is also found in Turrell Wylie, *The Geography of Tibet According to the ’Dzam-gling-rgyas-bshad* (Rome: IsMEO, 1962), 83 and 159 n. 400; and Alfonsa Ferrari, Luciano Petech and Hugh Richardson, *Mk’yen brtse’s Guide to the Holy Places of Central Tibet* (Rome: IsMEO, 1958), 42, 101-102 n. 86, and plates 6 and 7.

² Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa’i dgon tho*, 15, gives the date of Pha bong kha’s founding as “around 643” but cites no source for this.

Se ra monk. As was the case before 1959, and as is typical of the Se ra hermitages in general, Pha bong kha is principally a ritual institution. It maintains its own tradition of monthly and yearly ritual cycles.³ The most important of these yearly ritual events (at least for the laity) are:

- the six-day (three sets of two-day) Avalokiteśvara fasting rituals (*smying gnas*) that take place during the time of the Tibetan New Year (Lo gsar) celebrations,
- the sixteen-day (eight sets of two-day) Avalokiteśvara fasting rituals that take place during the fourth Tibetan month. This attracts many (especially elderly) people from Lha sa and the surrounding area, and
- the ritual and other events that take place during the “Sixth-Month Fourth-Day” pilgrimage.

Location and Layout

Various kinds of rhetoric have been used to portray Pha bong kha as a sacred site – metaphysical, historical, archival, and so forth. In the more metaphysical accounts, Pha bong kha is depicted as a site that is sacred *by its very nature* – that is, sacred by virtue of the fact that from among the twenty-eight sites in the world associated with the deity Cakrasaṃvara (Bde mchog), Pha bong kha is one of the Four Principal Sites (Nye ba’i gnas bzhi): “the one called Debikoṭi (De bi ko ṭi).”⁴ In these accounts, then, Pha bong kha is depicted as sacred at a deep or ontological level because it is a part of the body of a deity, Cakrasaṃvara.

But other discourses on the sacredness of the site exist alongside the metaphysical one. As is typical of many Tibetan religious institutions, various auspicious self-arisen images (*rang byon*)⁵ and rock formations are believed to exist on the mountains behind Pha bong kha. The parasol has already been mentioned in other contexts; there is also a famous rock formation that resembles a conch. These various magical properties of the landscape are considered signs of the “purity of the site” (*sa shyang*). [Click [here](#) to read a discussion of the metaphysics of sacred space at a site like Se ra.]

³ As with many monasteries, these include both exoteric and Tantric ritual practices that take place on the eighth, tenth, fifteenth, twenty-fifth, and twenty-eighth of the lunar month. Pha bong kha monks also do special rituals for important *bla mas* in the tradition every Wednesday.

⁴ *Pha bong kha’i dkar chag*, 15b-16a; the author of this text, 57b, gives the Tibetan translation of this as Lha mo khar.

⁵ For an account of other features of the surrounding landscape and various kinds self-arisen images found at or near the site, many of which are said to date to the time that Srong btsan sgam po and his two queens lived at the Pha bong kha, see *Pha bong kha’i dkar chag*, 22af and 29bf. This section of the text also contains a description of the special qualities of the plants and wildlife in the area.



The “white conch shell” rock formation, one of the signs of holiness visible in the mountains above Pha bong kha.

Pha bong kha is located on a rise above the fields in the Lha sa suburb of Nyang bran. Just east of the monastery is a [cemetery \(dur khrod\)](#) that is in use even to this day. The cemetery is identified as one of the cemeteries in the *maṅḍala* of Cakrasaṃvara. Informants report that before 1959 only fully ordained monks could be brought here for “sky burial.” Today no such restriction exists, and the bodies of lay people are also disposed of here. Inside the main temple at Pha bong kha there is a small [stone statue of a Buddha](#)⁶ said to have magically emerged self-arisen image out of a stone as Srong btsan sgam po was gestating in his mother’s womb. By the time the king was born, the statue, which was slowly emerging from the stone over the nine months he was in his mother’s womb, took its final and present form. The image faces the cemetery, and – like the [Maitreya statue at Keutsang Hermitage \(Ke’u tshang ri khrod\)](#) that gazes down upon the eastern cemetery of Lha sa – this statue too is said to effectuate the “transition of consciousness” (*’pho ba*) to the pure land for any deceased person whose remains are brought to this cemetery.

⁶ This statue has been variously identified by different sources and informants as Avalokiteśvara, Śākyamuni in his kingly or *jo bo* form, Amitāyus and Amitābha. *Pha bong kha’i dkar chag*, 28a, states that the image is of Amitābha. The same text (26b-27a) also cites *The Compendium on the Maṅi [Mantra] (Ma ni bka’ ’bum)* concerning the tradition that an image emerged from a stone as Srong btsan sgam po was gestating in his mother’s womb. A believer would see this as proof of the authenticity of the image housed at Pha bong kha. A skeptic would see in this an attempt to read events of classical Tibetan mythology into the artistic landscape of Pha bong kha.



The self-arisen image of the Buddha housed in the Pha bong kha temple. It emerged from a rock slowly as Srong btsan sgam po was gestating in his mother's womb.

The first temple that one sees as one arrives at Pha bong kha is the [Temple of the Three Protectors \(Rigs gsum mgon po lha khang\)](#). The temple that presently exists at this site is recent. Before 1959, it seems that only a small shrine to the Three Protectors (Rigs gsum mgon po) existed at this spot.⁷ The [present temple](#) was built sometime in the late 1980s. In 2004 it was being renovated, and new [murals](#) depicting the Eighty Deeds of Tsongkhapa (*tsong kha brgyad bcu*) were being painted on its walls by a group of artists from Gtsang province. The temple contains several important icons:

- In the center portion of the main altar one finds the stone self-arisen images of the Three Protectors – [Avalokiteśvara](#), [Mañjuśrī](#), and [Vajrapāṇi](#).
- On the western portion of the main altar – the left side as one is facing it – there is a miraculous statue of [Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara](#), which is said to grow slightly in size every time the yearly fasting ritual of the deity is performed in this temple.
- Along the eastern wall of the temple, one finds the famous stone containing the [six-syllable mantra](#) (*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*) that was carved into (or that

⁷ The cult of the Three Protectors at Pha bong kha goes back at least to the seventeenth century. For example, in a vision that he had when he was forty-three years old, the Fifth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa) is told by Avalokiteśvara that “In Central Tibet, people must recite the six-syllable *mantra* (*sngags*) 100,000,000 times and in Pha bong kha the ritual method of realization (*sgrub thabs*) of the three divinities, namely Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi must be established”; Samten Gyeltsen Karmay, *The Secret Visions of the Fifth Dalai Lama: The Gold Manuscript in the Fournier Collection* (London: Serindia Publications, 1988), 44.

emerged miraculously from) the rock onto which Thon mi (seventh century), the legendary founder of the Tibetan written language, wrote these letters as the first exemplar of Tibetan writing.

Proceeding northwest from the Temple of the Three Protectors, one arrives at what is arguably the most important structure in the monastery: the temple called [The Boulder House \(Pha bong kha\)](#). Known originally as Maru Castle (Sku mkhar ma ru), it sits atop the largest boulder on the site, the so-called “Female Turtle” (Rus sbal mo) Boulder (see below). The castle – reportedly the first structure built on this site – is said to date from the time of Srong btsan sgam po. It is not clear, however, whether the present temple is (or contains) a remnant of that original building, or whether the castle was completely destroyed and later rebuilt as the temple that exists there today.



The Pha bong kha Temple, purportedly the oldest temple at the hermitage, sits atop the Female Turtle Boulder. At the bottom of the boulder (in the center) one can see the small door that leads into Srong btsan sgam po’s meditation cave (sgrub phug).

One enters this temple building from the north side. The first floor is little more than a vestibule containing stairs that lead to the second story. Ascending the flight of stairs, one arrives at the three chapels that together comprise the second floor:

- A small chapel that houses statues of some of the more important figures in the history of the monastery
- The large [assembly hall \('du khang\)](#) has room for about one-hundred monks. This is the main meeting hall used by the monks of the monastery today. In a small case on the eastern side of this room, facing the windows overlooking the cemetery, one finds the [self-arisen image of the Buddha](#) that emerged from a stone during Srong btsan sgam po’s gestation.
- Behind the main assembly hall is a small [protector deity chapel \(mgon khang\)](#).

The third floor contains the [private rooms of the lama](#).

Beneath the main temple, in the interior of this boulder is a [cave chapel](#), the place where Srong btsan sgam po remained in retreat in order to pacify the negative forces that were hindering the building of the [Jo khang](#). There is a [mortar throne](#) in the middle of the room that is said to be Srong btsan sgam po's actual meditation seat. The altar along the northern wall of this cave contains a self-arisen image rock image of the deity [Dpal lha mo](#), who appeared in a vision to the king while he was in retreat here.

[Tsong kha pa's meditation hut](#) lies just north of the Pha bong kha main temple. Tsong kha pa is said to have stayed here when he once took the one-day Mahāyāna Precepts (*theg chen gso sbyong*). Beside Tsong kha pa's hut is a [small chapel](#) containing a self-arisen image stone image of the Medicine Buddha (*Sman bla*).

North of Tsong kha pa's meditation hut are a series of [stūpas](#) that are said to date to the time that the site was a Bka' gdams pa monastery. And north of *these* is the [Temple of the Five Visions](#), which contains two chapels:

- A small [Chapel to the Eight Medicine Buddhas](#) (*Sman bla bde gshegs brgyad*), and
- A large [Chapel to Tsong kha pa](#). This chapel has large clay statues of Tsong kha pa and his two disciples, as well as statues of Tsong kha pa in various forms as he appeared in visions to his disciple Mkhas grub rje (1385-1438). This set of images of Tsong kha pa is collectively known as the "Five Visions of the Lord (Tsongkhapa)" (*rje gzigs pa lnga ldan*).

Northeast of the Temple of the Five Visions of the Lord (Tsongkhapa) is the [Male Turtle \(Rus sbal pho\) Boulder](#) (see below) with a [small structure](#) atop it. Before 1959, there was a *stūpa* where this small structure now stands.

Finally, to the east of the Male Turtle Boulder are the ruins of what used to be the headquarters of the [estate of Lhaptün Rinpoché \(Lha btsun rin po che'i bla brang\)](#).

In addition to the buildings just mentioned there are many other buildings, like the [kitchen](#), as well as minor structures and shrines, and of course various large buildings that contain [monastic living quarters](#).



In the foreground, the (white) meditation hut of Tsong kha pa. Behind it are the stūpas that are said to date to the time that Pha bong kha was a Bka' gdams pa institution. Behind the stūpas is the Temple of the Five Visions of the Lord (Tsongkhapa).

History

Founding Narratives

Pha bong kha, also known as Maru Castle, has a history that spans more than thirteen-hundred years. Traditional accounts tell us that the oldest building on the site, the temple known as Pha bong kha (“Boulder House/Man”),⁸ predates the Jo khang, Lha sa’s central cathedral. If this is true – and carbon-14 dating may prove definitive in deciding this, as it has in helping us to fix the date of the interior portions of the Jo khang itself – it would make the main temple at Pha bong kha one of the oldest Buddhist monuments in the Tibetan world, dating to seventh century.

There are two distinct narratives of the founding of Pha bong kha. The first relates the founding of the hermitage to the building of the Jo khang. The second relates it to the figure of Thon mi, the legendary founder of the Tibetan writing system and literary language. In each case, the founding of the monastery is associated with foundational events in the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet. In both narratives, the turtle spirit, who resides within the giant boulder at the site, is seen as something to be controlled or dominated. But in the second account, it is portrayed as something wondrous rather than as a threat. In neither of these narratives is the turtle gendered, as it will be in the later apocalyptic myths of the Pha bong kha site (see below).

Version One⁹

According to many Tibetan sources, the Jo khang – the central cathedral of Lha sa and the first Buddhist temple built in Tibet – is said to have been constructed to house the statue of the Jo bo mi bskyod rdo rje, brought to Tibet by Srong btsan sgam po’s Nepalese queen. But the building of the Jo khang was no easy thing. The site where the temple was supposed to sit was a swamp or lake (*mtsho*), and the water of this lake was the heart’s-blood (*snying khrag*) of the female demon that lay supine over (or in some accounts that actually *was*) the landscape of Tibet. The demoness, we are told, had to be subjugated if Buddhism was to thrive in the country.¹⁰ And so, the narrative continues, Srong btsan sgam po ordered that the area be filled with dirt. The dirt was carried on the backs of goats.¹¹ Once the site

⁸ One might image two quite different etymologies of the word “Pha bong kha.” The word might be (1) a corruption of *pha bong khang*, “The house (on) the Boulder”; or (2) a more euphonious form of the word *pha bong pa*, “The Man from the (Site of) the Boulder.” In the first instance, it is the architecture that gives the site its name. In the second instance, it is the first inhabitant.

⁹ The following account is based principally on *Dung dkar tshig mdzod* [*Dungkar Dictionary*], but see also the version found in *Pha bong kha’i dkar chag*, 206f, which varies insignificantly.

¹⁰ The legend and symbolism of the supine demoness has been discussed by Janet Gyatso in “Down with the Demoness: Reflection on a Feminine Ground in Tibet,” in Janice Willis, ed., *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1987).

¹¹ The original name of Lha sa was Ra sa, that is, “Goat Earth.” There are many legends related to goats in Lha sa – from the Great Female Goat [Temple] (Ra mo che) to the statue of the goat inside the Jo khang itself.

had been prepared, construction on the Jo khang began. But the portion of the walls that went up by day would be destroyed by demons at night. The Nepalese queen asked her co-wife, the Chinese queen, to perform an astrological prognostication to determine how to deal with this problem. The Chinese queen determined that an earth spirit, a golden turtle named Gser ma hā,¹² who lived in the northern mountains of the Lha sa Valley, was the cause of the problem.¹³ She recommended that the king build a fortress at the site: an edifice that, being placed atop the huge turtle-boulder, would subdue the spirit beneath it, thus clearing away the obstacles that were impeding the building of the Jo khang temple.



The interior of Srong btsan sgam po's meditation cave located in the Female Turtle Boulder. The throne is said to have been Srong btsan sgam po's actual meditation seat.

Srong btsan sgam po then built a nine-story fort made of bricks mortared with molten metal on the “back” of the Female Turtle Boulder.¹⁴ It was fastened to the boulder in each of the four directions with powerful, magically-blessed chains. He and his two wives then set themselves to meditating in this building for a period of three years. According to an alternate tradition, Srong btsan sgam po meditated not in the castle but in a cave inside the huge boulder: a cave that has been preserved

¹² *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 21b: *sa bdag gser ma hA gser gyi rus sbal gyi dbyibs*.

¹³ Such a turtle is mentioned in other historical works. For example, the *The Clear Mirror: A Royal History (Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long)* states that “in the north at Pha bong kha in Nyang bran there is a black turtle”; Sa skya pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan, *The Clear Mirror: A Traditional Account of Tibet's Golden Age*, transl. by McComas Taylor and Lama Choedak Yuthok (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1996), 165. On the relationship of turtle spirits to divination, see R. A. Stein, *Tibetan Civilization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 209-210.

¹⁴ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 15, quotes 'Khon ston's *dkar chag* to the effect that Maru Castle was built by Srong btsan sgam po “when he was fifteen years old in the female-water-hare (*chu mo yos*) year,” and that he began meditating there when he was twenty-one years old.

to this day.¹⁵ While living in this cave he had a vision of a goddess, Dpal lha mo,¹⁶ who promised to act as the protectress of the site, and of Buddhism in general. According to another account,¹⁷ on the third day of their retreat, the king and his two queens had visions of the Three Protectors, who promised to help the king realize his plan to introduce Buddhism into Tibet. They dissolved into a rock, and the figures of the three deities then emerged spontaneously from the rock-face. These self-arisen images of the three deities are to this day found on the main altar of the Temple of the Three Protectors in the southern part of Pha bong kha hermitage. Finally, Pha bong kha is said to be the place where Srong btsan sgam po and his court created Tibet's first legal code: the set of "sixteen rules of purity for the populace" (*mi chos gtsang ma bcu drug*), which was then spread throughout the empire.¹⁸

Version Two¹⁹

In the alternate narrative of the founding of Pha bong kha, the Jo khang has already been built, and the king and his ministers are residing in Lha sa. One morning, while inspecting the Lha sa Valley from atop the roof of the White Palace in Lha sa, they noticed "a large dark shape" (*nag ril chen po zhig*) in the middle of the trees on the side of Cakrasamvara mountain north of Lha sa. The next day they went to inspect the site, and saw that the dark shape was a giant rock shaped like a turtle. Srong btsan sgam po thought to himself, "Thon mi is about to return from India, and I should build him a palace that can serve as the headquarters from which he can spread the new written language. This place [Pha bong kha] is a beautiful place, and the turtle is a wondrous thing. I will build Thon mi's palace here."



The self-arisen image of the protector deity Dpal lha mo inside Srong btsan sgam po's meditation cave.

¹⁵ Srong btsan sgam po's act of meditating *inside* the Female Turtle might of course be seen as an act of penetration of Tibet's natural spirits, a subjugation of the indigenous spirits of Tibet through an act akin to rape.

¹⁶ This goddess, who presumably as the same deity later known as Dpal lhan lha mo, came to be considered the protector deity of Tibet. After the rise of the Ganden Palace (Dga' ldan pho brang – the government of the Da lai bla mas) the cult of Dpal lhan lha mo became incorporated into the rituals of the state. *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 31a, states that this cave is the actual palace (*pho brang ngos*) of the deity.

¹⁷ *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 22a.

¹⁸ *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 32b-33a.

¹⁹ The account that follows is principally based on that found in *Dungkar Dictionary* (*Dung dkar tshig mdzod*). The account in *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 19bf, on the site's relationship to Thon mi and to the founding of the Tibetan written language, varies only slightly from the one given here.

The king designed the palace himself. Once the foundation was finished, he had molten metal poured onto it so that the turtle-rock and the nine-story building would be forever fused as one. Once Thon mi arrived, Srong btsan sgam po set him up in this palace, and Thon mi began to teach the written language – first to the king and his ministers, and then to others, who in turn spread this knowledge throughout Tibet.²⁰ But before beginning to instruct his fellow Tibetans, Thon mi wrote the six-syllable *mantra* (*om maṇi padme huṃ*) for the sake of good luck. According to one account, the king saw these letters, was amazed, and had them engraved onto a rock. An alternative account tells us that Thon mi from the outset traced out the letters onto the rock’s surface, and that they then magically emerged in bas-relief in a self-arisen image fashion. This rock has been preserved, and can be seen in the Temple of the Three Protectors at Pabongkha Hermitage (*Pha bong kha ri khrod*) even to this day.²¹



The stone bearing what oral lore says are the first Tibetan letters written by Thon mi, kept in the Temple of the Three Protectors at Pha bong kha.

The Gendered/Sexual Landscape

There is one other aspect of the site – related to the narrative of the turtle – that must be mentioned. Oral tradition has it that there are in fact not one but *two* turtle spirits on the site, each associated with its own boulder. The boulder that sits lower on the hill – the one on which Srong btsan sgam po built his castle – is said to be the Female Turtle. Northeast of the Female Turtle, farther uphill, there is another larger boulder identified as the Male Turtle. A small structure (before 1959, it was a *stūpa*) has been built atop it. Oral tradition has it that the Male Turtle is attempting to slide down the hill to unite sexually with the Female Turtle, and that if this event

²⁰ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 15, cites the Fifth Dalai Lama's *The Nāga Song of the Queen of Springtime* (*Dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i klu dbyangs*) as the source for this tradition.

²¹ *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 20a, states that therefore "(Pha bong kha) appears to be the site in Lha sa known as the 'Moon Cliff,' which is said to be where the first Tibetan letters were engraved."

occurs, it will usher in an apocalypse – that is, the destruction of the universe by wind, fire, water, and so forth.

There are two factors that are seen as preventing this. First, each of the two turtle boulders is fixed in its respective location by Buddhist monuments. The Female Turtle is fixed in place by the castle/temple built by Srong btsan sgam po, which is said to have a mythic axis/pole running through its middle that pierces the heart of the Female Turtle and holds her in place so that she cannot move.²² The Male Turtle is held in place by the previously-mentioned *stūpa*. Second, the *stūpas* that have been built between the two turtles are said to act as an additional barrier – a second line of defense, as it were – between the two boulders/spirits. In one account, there are said to be one hundred and eight *stūpas*, each one of them containing one bead from Tsong kha pa’s rosary.²³



The Male Turtle Boulder.

The myth of the turtles both presumes and reinforces aspects of Tibetan gender ideology. First, the relative position of the two turtles is hardly accidental. In the natural world, as in the social world, the male must be located higher. Sexually speaking, as well, the cultural logic requires that the male be in a position to mount the female – yet another reason for situating the Male Turtle on top of (and descending towards) the female. It might seem strange that sexual union, a generative act, should be seen here not only as threatening, but as the very deed that ushers in the end of the world cycle. But we must remember that this was most likely an oral myth created by monks, and that for monks sex *is* the end of a world – the end of their vows, and therefore of their life/world as celibates. Sex that takes place within the confines of a monastery is, moreover, considered to be a great sin (*sdig pa chen po*). Sex in a holy place also brings pollution. From several vantage points, therefore, there is an imperative to keep sex from happening within the

²² In this narrative the Female Turtle takes the place of the supine demoness spoken of in the myths of the founding of the Jo khang.

²³ There is a certain anachronism here, given that (at least in some versions of the history of the site) the *stūpas* are said to have been built by the early Bka’ gdams pa masters who lived at the site, and who *predate* Tsong kha pa by several centuries.

confines of Pha bong kha. Finally, we must not forget that the turtles are in actuality geo-spirits (*sa bdag*): the powerful indigenous gods who are the original “owners” of Lha sa. The mating of the two spirits might have been seen as potentially leading to the proliferation of these creatures as a species, or to their reassertion of power over the land that was once theirs. To have allowed this to happen is to have risked the destruction of the world of Buddhism, whose existence on Tibetan soil depends *metaphysically* on the control of Tibet’s native spirits. The *stūpas* that separate the turtle spirits in the physical space of the monastery are the physical symbols of Buddhism as the force that controls the indigenous spirits of the country in the meta-physical sphere.

Later History

Although the various accounts agree that Pha bong kha was originally built as a fort and not as a monastery, traditional lore has it that the site was converted into a religious center very early in its history. Initially, it is said to have served as the home to “about a hundred tantrikas.”²⁴ According to some accounts, after Tibetans began to get ordained as Buddhist monks, Pha bong kha was converted into a residence for the first seven Tibetan monks (*sad mi mi bdun*). This would have taken place during the reign of Khri srong lde’u btsan). If this is true,²⁵ it would make Pha bong kha one of the oldest monasteries in Tibet.

Pha bong kha was destroyed during the reign of King Glang dar ma. There are different accounts of this event. In the more naturalistic version given by Dung dkar rin po che, the temple on the rock was completely destroyed by the king. According to the more *super*-naturalistic version current among the monks of the monastery, Glang dar ma began to destroy the nine-story temple story-by-story starting from the top. After destroying four stories, the deity Dpal lha mo appeared to him and told him to stop.²⁶ A five-story temple then remained. During the Cultural Revolution the temple lost two more stories. This explains how today it is a three-story building.

We know little about Pha bong kha between the time of Glang dar ma and the eleventh century. It was then that the site was re-established as a Bka’ gdams pa monastery by one of the most important masters of that tradition. The great Bka’ gdams pa master **Po to ba rin chen gsal** (1027/31-1105) is said to have lived in the so-called “Cave of the Tenth Day” (Tshes bcu phug),²⁷ for a period of time. Pha

²⁴ *Lha sa’i dgon tho*, 15: “from the time (of Srong btsan sgam po) up to the ordination of the seven original monks, about one hundred tantrikas with long locks of hair lived continuously at the site.”

²⁵ The claim is made not only in *Dungkar Dictionary* (*Dung dkar tshig mdzod*), but also in *Pha bong kha’i dkar chag*, 33a-b.

²⁶ This is according to the oral account of one of the Pha bong kha monks. According to the *Pha bong kha’i dkar chag*, 34b, Dpal lha mo intervened by calling for Lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje, the monk who assassinated Glang dar ma.

²⁷ The only cave that exists at Pha bong kha today is Srong btsan sgam po’s cave located inside the Female Turtle Boulder. And in fact *Pha bong kha’i dkar chag*, 31a, confirms that it is this cave that is called the “Temple of the Tenth Day” (Tshes bcu lha khang). The cave apparently got its name from the fact that members of Khri srong lde’u btsan’s inner circle used to perform rituals inside the cave

bong kha is the site where Po to ba rin chen gsal transmitted many of the Bka' gdams pa teachings to Dge bshes brag dkar ba (1032-1111), one of his eight great close disciples (*bka' babs bu chen brgyad*).²⁸ Because Po to ba rin chen gsal was quite old at the time, he regretted that he could not bring Pha bong kha back to its former glory, so he entrusted this work to his student. It is Dge bshes brag dkar ba, then, who is credited with the re-establishment of Pha bong kha as a monastic institution.²⁹ He stayed in retreat in the Cave of the Tenth Day for quite some time, and during this period gathered many disciples. He then began the process of reconstruction, and rebuilt at least two stories of the temple that had been destroyed during Glang dar ma's reign. He also taught extensively at Pha bong kha until his death at around the age of eighty. During his decades of residence at Pha bong kha, upwards of three hundred monks gathered around him. The monastery appears to have remained a Bka' gdams pa institution for the next two hundreds of years, passing through seven or more abbots, and growing in size to upwards of four hundred monks.³⁰ Many *stūpas*³¹ are said to have been built at the site by the successive Bka' gdams pa masters who held the throne of Pha bong kha, and some of these monuments still exist at the site today. A small *clay tablet repository* (*tsa khang*) to the east of the temple of the Three Protectors is also said to have been built during the Bka' gdams pa period as an antidote to demonic influences.

After the seventh Bka' gdams pa abbot of Pha bong kha, the monastery went into a period of decline. It appears that it may have then become a Sa skya institution around the time of 'Phags pa (1235-1280), remaining under Sa skya pa control for a period of about two hundred years. At the time of Phag mo gru pa hegemony, Pha bong kha once again went into a period of decline. Tsong kha pa, the founder of the Dge lugs pa school, apparently remained in retreat at Pha bong kha for a short period of time. The site was once again revived – this time as a Dge lugs institution – by Paṅ chen bde legs nyi ma (sixteenth century). Under Paṅ chen bde legs nyi ma's abbacy, Pha bong kha thrived, at least for a short period of time, but, like many institutions in and around Lha sa, it suffered as a result of the internecine warfare that plagued Central Tibet as a whole, and Pha bong kha once again went into a period of decline.

on the tenth day of the lunar month. Since the monastery is in a fairly flat area, it is difficult to imagine that there was any other cave at the hermitage itself in the past. However, *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 30f, lists many caves. These, one assumes, are located in the hills above Pha bong kha.

²⁸ Literally, “the eight great sons who received the oral instruction”; also called the “eight great ones who were named to receive the oral instructions” (Bka' babs ming can brgyad).

²⁹ The Fifth Dalai Lama, in fact, does not mention Po to ba at all, and credits the re-founding of Pha bong kha to Dge bshes brag dkar ba; see Ṅag-dBaṅ Blo-bZaṅ rGya-mTSHo, Fifth Dalai Lama, *A History of Tibet*, trans. by Zahiruddin Ahmad (Bloomington: Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1995), 84.

³⁰ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 16, mentions a certain “Geshé Pabongkha” (Dge bshes pha bong khar grags pa) as having been responsible for increasing the size of the monastery to 400 monks after Dge bshes brag dkar ba's tenure.

³¹ The tradition says that hundred and eight *stūpas* were built. But it also claims that each *stūpa* contained one bead from Tsong kha pa's rosary. This, of course, would be impossible if they were built during the Bka' gdams pa period, since Tsong kha pa was not born until more than 200 years after this time.



Stūpas at Pha bong kha that are said to date to the Bka' gdams pa period.

It was in year 1619 that Pha bong kha came under the aegis of the great Dge lugs pa master 'Khon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub (1561-1637). 'Khon ston was a *bla ma* renowned for his ecumenical outlook. He was an important figure in the history of Se ra, and one of the teachers of the Fifth Dalai Lama. After the death of 'Khon ston, the Fifth Dalai Lama had “a three story palace”³² built at Pha bong kha. He commissioned an image of his teacher, and endowed the institution generously by providing it with fields, pastures for animals, and many head of yak.³³ He also became (at least nominally) the head of Pha bong kha, and it seems that he inaugurated a tradition according to which all of the successive Da lai bla mas visited the institution at least once in their lives.

Sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653-1705), the regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, lists the following abbots from the time of 'Khon ston up to his own day:

- Dpal 'byor rab rgyas (1604-1669)
- Se ra pa 'jam dbyangs grags pa (b. seventeenth century)
- Mkhan ngag dbang bstan 'dzin³⁴
- Smad bla zur blo bzang don grub³⁵

Pha bong kha has remained a Dge lugs institution up to the present time. Informants tell us that one of the great *bla mas* of Se ra, Lha btsun rin po che, established a lama's residence (*bla brang*) at Pha bong kha at some point in time, but we do not know when precisely this was. This compound now lies in ruins.

³² *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 44b. It is unclear which (if any) of the present buildings this might be.

³³ *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 44b: *rab byung gnyug mar gnas pa'i ja tshul thebs/ snye thang bkra shis gling/ gzhis ka dud 'dzin bcu/ lag 'bab khal drug brgya/ nyang bran ka ma can dud gsum dang/ lag 'bab la khal drug cu skor bstsal/.*

³⁴ Perhaps TBRC P939 or P3188?

³⁵ Perhaps TBRC P162?

Before 1959 Pha bong kha was an independent monastery, albeit one that had had strong historical and social ties to Se ra for several hundred years of its history. According to one informant, before 1959 only fully ordained monks were allowed to live at Pha bong kha. While this may have been true in theory, it is difficult to imagine that this rule was strictly observed, given that so much of the



The ruins of the Lhaptün Rinpoché's estate (Lha btsun rin po che'i bla brang) at Pha bong kha.

menial labor in small monasteries like this one (hauling water, cleaning, serving tea, etc.) is traditionally done by novice monks.

As with many of Tibet's great monasteries, Pha bong kha was forcibly closed after the events of 1959. Many of its important images³⁶ were destroyed. It remained closed until the monks of Se ra formally applied for permission to rebuild the site. They began the project of restoring Pha bong kha in the mid 1980s. Today Pha bong kha is owned and administered by Se ra, and all of the monks of the hermitage are Se ra monks.

³⁶ Among the more interesting and important images or religious objects mentioned in *Pha bong kha'i dkar chag*, 47bf, are the following: a set of sixteen *arhat* statues made by Po to ba rin chen gsal himself, a tooth relic of the Buddha Dipamkara, stone statues of Avalokiteśvara and of the protector Trak shad blessed by virtue of the deities' dissolving into them, the self-arisen stone statue that emerged as Srong btsan sgam po was gestating in his mother's womb, the statue of 'Khon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub commissioned by the Fifth Dalai Lama as well as the his highly ornamented funerary *stūpa* that contained his actual body, a silver funerary *stūpa* and statue of 'Jam dbyangs grags pa, a one-story statue of the Buddha made in part from the gold extracted by King Mes dbon from "Gold Cave," a speaking statue of Cakrasaṃvara (Bde mchog) that conversed with the Da lai bla ma Bskal bzang rgya mtsho (1708-1757) while he was doing the retreat of this deity; the self-arisen stone images of the Three Protectors (mentioned above); Thon mi's "*om mani padme hūm*" stone, statues of Tsong kha pa in the five-visions-forms, a volume of the *dhāraṇī* that dates to the Sa skya period. This, of course, is only a sampling of the more important artifacts; there were many other images and religious objects beside those mentioned here. Most of the images in the hermitage were lost or destroyed after 1959.

Panglung Hermitage (Spangs lung ri khrod)



The ruins at Panglung Hermitage (Spangs lung ri khrod).

Location and Layout

Panglung Hermitage (Spangs lung ri khrod) is located in the valley northeast (and downhill) from Phur lcog. It takes about thirty minutes to walk there from Phur lcog. Spangs lung today lies completely in ruins, and we can say little about its layout or its history. We know that it once had a large temple, and that there was a Rdo rje shugs ldan chapel somewhere on the site. The hermitage (*ri khrod*) also had a Rdo rje shugs ldan oracle – an individual who would go into trance to make prognostications while possessed by the god.

An attempt was made to rebuild a portion of Spangs lung in the 1990s, but informants reported that there was considerable opposition from the local people because the site has always been associated with this controversial protector deity, the propitiation of which has been banned in recent years by the present Da lai bla ma.

Purbuchok Hermitage (Phur bu lcog ri khrod)¹



Purbuchok Hermitage (Phur lcog ri khrod) as viewed from the mountain behind it.

Location and Layout

Purbuchok Hermitage (Phur bu lcog ri khrod), one of the most beautiful and best restored of the hermitages of Sera (*se ra'i ri khrod*), is located halfway up the northern mountains in the Lha sa suburb of Dog bde at the northeastern corner of the Lha sa Valley. It takes about two hours to walk to Phur lcog from Lha sa, and almost as long from Se ra, but most people today take a bus to Dog bde and then walk north (up the mountain) from there. Phur lcog is the last hermitage (*ri khrod*) that pilgrims visit on the “Sixth-Month Fourth-Day” (*drug pa tshe bzhi*) pilgrimage route. (To see images of this pilgrimage taken in 2002, please click [here](#).)

¹ There is a constitution (*bca' yig*) for Purbuchok Hermitage (Phur lcog ri khrod) written by Phur lcog blo bzang tshul khriims byams pa rgya mtsho (1825-1901), see [TBRC W2982](#), but this was not available to me at the time of the writing of this piece. In the account that follows I have relied chiefly on a short history published recently in Tibet: Phun tshogs rab rgyas, *Phur lcog rigs gsum byang chub gling gi byung ba mdo tsam brjod pa dad gsum 'dren pa'i lcags kyu* [*A Brief History of Purbuchok Riksum Jangchup Ling: A Hook to Draw in the Three Types of Faith; hereafter Phur byung*], *Bod ljongs nang bstan* [*Tibetan Buddhism*] 1 (2004), and on Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [*A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels*] (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 79-81.

As with most of the hermitages of Sera, the surrounding landscape is considered blessed (*byin can*), and this blessedness or holiness is inscribed into the natural landscape around the monastery. Given its historical association with the so-called “Three Protectors (Rigs gsum mgon po)” – Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi – it is not surprising that several aspects of the landscape surrounding Phur lcog are associated with these three deities. Here is a summary of one account of the mountains around the hermitage:

- To the west is a mountain in the shape of two auspicious golden fish (*bkra shis gser nya*)
- To the north, the Soul-Mountain of Mañjuśrī (*’Jam dpal dbyangs kyi bla ri*), known as *Rmog tho ’go*
- On the side of that mountain there is a rock-outcropping that resembles a drawing of a white conch
- The mountain to the east is associated with the palace of Avalokiteśvara
- Another mountain, that appears as if it had a flag on its pinnacle, is considered the mountain-abode (*gnas ri*) of Vajrapāṇi, who serves as watchman or “door-keeper” (*sgo srung*) for the entire area.



The Temple of the Three Protectors.

As for the actual site on which the hermitage was built, different meditators have had different visions of it. In what we have elsewhere called the “metaphysical rhetoric of sacred space,”¹ sometimes Phur lcog is claimed to be identical to the six-syllable *mantra* (*sngags*) (*om maṇi padme hūṃ*), sometimes it is seen as the Palace of Cakrasaṃvara (Bde mchog gi pho brang), and at other times as the paradise of the Three Protectors.

¹ See the [Pabongkha Hermitage \(Pha bong kha ri khod\) webpage](#).

The history of the different buildings at the site is described in the History section below. What follows here is a description of the hermitage as it existed in 2004. Purchok Hermitage has three basic sections:

- The **main compound** houses the **main temple** (*'du khang*) and the **Temple of the Three Protectors** (*Rigs gsum mgon po lha khang*)
- **Another compound** presently contains the new library building and the debate courtyard
- The **large open area** west and southwest of the library compound contains individual monastic dwellings/huts.

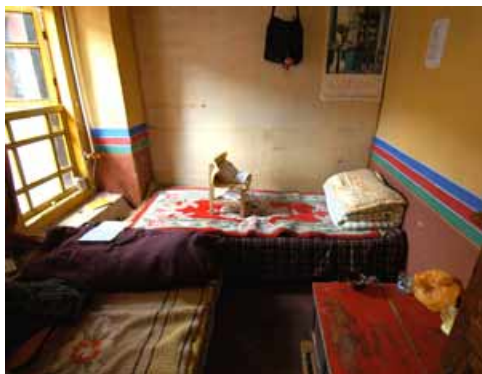
With the exception of a portion of the Temple of the Three Protectors – whose original walls remained intact up to the height of the top of the windows – the main compound has been rebuilt from the ground up. Informants report that there has been an attempt to maintain the original layout of the compound as a whole.



The main temple.

Like many of the mountain hermitages, this main temple compound is built in a tiered fashion that conforms to the landscape. Beginning from the highest (and easternmost) point, we find a large yellow building that towers over the rest of the monastery. This temple was built under the direction of Sgrub khang pa, the founder of the hermitage.² It is the **Temple of the Three Protectors**. All of the original images on its **main altar** were destroyed, but they have been replaced with new images of the **Three Protectors** – Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Vajrapāṇi – as well as other minor images. Adjacent to the temple is a **room for the temple caretaker**, with an adjoining **kitchen**.

² Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* [*The Great Dungkar Dictionary*] (Krungrig go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 739, in the biographical entry on Sgrub khang pa.



The interior of one of the monks' rooms off of the middle courtyard in the main temple compound.

As one follows the steps down from the Temple of the Three Protectors, one arrives at the next major tier of the compound, which contains a [courtyard](#) with several doorways:

- On the northern side of the courtyard are two [monks' rooms](#) that have ornamental yellow windows. In former times these may have been the quarters of high-ranking members of the Purchok Lama's estate (Phur lcog bla brang). Today ordinary monks live there.
- On the southern side are the [private rooms of Phur lcog bla ma](#) (easternmost), and a [reception room](#) (westernmost).

If one proceeds towards the west past the monks' rooms, one passes through an entryway that leads to a much [smaller courtyard](#) with two doorways: to the right (north) is the doorway to [Scripture Chapel \(Bka' 'gyur lha khang\)](#), a room that houses the portion of the canon that is considered the Buddha's actual word. Across from this is a [doorway](#) that leads to residential rooms atop the main temple. These rooms are presently being used by an elder teacher who is responsible for providing instruction to the junior monks of the hermitage.

Below this level where the residential and reception rooms are found, there is a small [area where firewood is kept](#). Here there also hangs [the gong](#) used to call the monks for prayers and meals.

The lowest level of the main temple compound contains (from west to east):

- The [main temple](#)
- The monastery's [main kitchen](#)
- [Storage rooms](#)
- The [cave temple](#) of Phur lcog rin po che
- The [protector deity chapel \(mgon khang\)](#)
- A [mani \[wheel\] temple \(ma Ni lha khang\)](#), where there is a large manual mani wheel (*ma ni 'khor lo*).



The interior of the main temple

Proceeding west out the principal door of the main temple compound, one comes immediately to the **entrance** of the compound that contains the **Dharma enclosure** (*chos rwa*) and the **new library**. That library, which in 2004 was just being completed, is being built so as to house a collection of the *Bstan 'gyur*. The vast open space that is the Dharma enclosure once housed the famous “Dharma Enclosure Assembly Hall” which we know was much bigger than the other temple at Phur lcog. This temple, however, was destroyed and has not been rebuilt. Today only a few of the murals along the base of one of the walls in the Dharma enclosure remind us of the existence of such a building.

Exiting from the Dharma enclosure compound and proceeding west once again, we come to the area of the **individual monks' huts**. It seems that before 1959 most of the administrators and workers of the Purchok Lama's estate lived in the main temple compound. Many other monks, however, lived in these individual huts. In the early history of the hermitage, these huts were most likely the residences of meditators, and even today oral lore has it that some of the greatest masters of the Dge lugs school lived in one or another of these various buildings.

History

According to tradition, the site where Phur lcog was built was originally a place where Padmasambhava (Padma 'byung gnas) meditated. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu gsum pa), in the biography of his teacher, the third Purchok incarnation Yongdzin Jampa Gyatso (Phur lcog sku phreng gsum pa yongs 'dzin byams pa rgya mtsho), says that the main cave at Phur lcog was the practice-place of Padmasambhava known as the Cavern of Dochung Chongzhi (Rdo cung cong zhi'i phug pa).³ Later, the founder of the Tshal pa bka' brgyud school, Zhang 'gro ba'i mgon po g.yu brag pa (1123-1193), founded a practice center here in the twelfth century, and it is from this time that the site came to be

³ *Phur byung*, 56.

known as *phur lcog* (literally, “a dagger at its pinnacle”⁴ because the top of the mountain behind the hermitage resembles a dagger).⁵ At the time that Sgrub khang pa (see [Introduction to the Hermitages](#)) built the Temple of the Three Protectors at the site (more than five centuries after Bla ma zhang [1123-1193]) there could still be seen vestiges of the original Bka’ brgyud institution, like the so-called “Little White Stūpa” (Mchod rten dkar chung).

During Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho’s (1641-1713)⁶ peregrinations throughout Tibet in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, he decided to visit Zangs ri, the place where, several centuries earlier, the great female saint Ma cig lab sgron (twelfth century) had founded her famous center of Zangs ri mkhar dmar. On the night before he was to visit Zangs ri, Sgrub khang pa had a dream in which a man wearing a black hat communicated to him that in a place called Dog bde there was a white *stūpa*. The man told him that a house was to be built there, and then a great light filled the area around the *stūpa*. The next day, when he visited the temple at Zangs ri mkhar dmar, he saw that the man in his dreams was depicted in a statue on the main altar, and he learned that it was none other than Ma cig lab sgron’s son, Thod smyon bsam grub (twelfth century). Later, after Sgrub khang pa moved back to Se ra – to the hermitage that he made his permanent home, Se ra dbu rtse – he began to search for the exact site in Dog bde where the white *stūpa* of his dreams was to be found. After a long search, he finally identified it as Phur lcog. He blessed the site with the necessary preparatory rituals and prayers. The sources disagree as to the precise date, but it seems that these events took place sometime between 1701 and 1706.



A detail of an eighteenth century painting in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art (Image no. 105 on the www.himalayanart.org website) identified as Sgrub khang pa.

The first Purchok incarnation Ngawang Jampa (Phur lcog sku phreng dang po ngag dbang byams pa, 1682-1762), one of Sgrub khang pa’s chief students, made a cave at the site his home. Building apparently started after Phur lcog rin po che was able to garner the support of various sponsors. The first structure built at Phur lcog was a residence (*gzim khang*), perhaps as an extension of Ngag dbang byams pa’s cave. Monks came from Sgrub khang pa’s hermitage of Se ra dbu rtse to

⁴ *Phur byung*, 56-57, gives a slightly different etymology.

⁵ See *Phur byung*, 57, for the sources of this tradition. The author of the *Phur byung* also considers (and rejects) the tradition that sees Phur lcog as the place where the famed Sera dagger (*se ra phur pa*) supposedly fell from the sky (see *Phur byung*, 58).

⁶ On this important figure, see the “History” section of the “[Introduction to the Hermitages](#).”

celebrate the completion of the first building, and Ngag dbang byams pa himself gave an extensive teaching on *bodhicitta* at this time.

Shortly after the first building went up at Phur lcog, several sponsors committed to providing the funds necessary to build the Temple of the Three Protectors. Sgrub khang pa once again took to the road to garner further financial support for the project. Meanwhile, construction on the temple began. In the spring of 1705, with the temple just about completed, the construction of the statues began, and Sgrub khang pa entered into retreat. When the statues were finished, extensive offerings were made and elaborate rituals were performed in order to consecrate them. At several times during these events it rained flowers (*me tog char babs*), a sign of the power of the prayers, and of the efficacy of the rituals. While the consecration was taking place, Sgrub khang pa had many auspicious dreams, including one in which he saw the site of



An old statue of Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa preserved in the Cave Temple at Purchok Hermitage.

Phur lcog as being of the same nature as the six-syllable *mantra* of Avalokiteśvara (*om maṇi padme hūm*), and another in which Padmasambhava arrived to bless the site. By 1706, there were eight⁷ fully ordained monks living at the site, fulfilling Sgrub khang pa's original plan for the hermitage. In that same year Sgrub khang pa ordered the building of the assembly hall (*'du khang*)⁸ and kitchen complex. In the summer, the Queen Tsering Trashi (Rgyal mo tse ring bkra shis) donated the funds for the statues inside the assembly hall. The next year, Sgrub khang pa himself filled the statues with the appropriate substances *gzungs 'bul*, and, together with his eight monks, spent many days performing the consecrations. Throughout all of this, Phur lcog rin po che, rather than assuming the privileged position of the great scholar that he was, took part in the actual construction work – hauling earth, stones and water, mixing mud, painting, and so forth – all of this so as to fulfill his teacher's vision of creating an institution at Phur lcog.⁹

⁷ *Phur byung*, 60, and *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 79. Other accounts claim that his original plan was for a hermitage of one hundred fully ordained monks. The confusion is perhaps attributable to the fact that the words *brgyad* (eight) and *brgya* (one hundred) are very similar in Tibetan.

⁸ It is unclear why the Temple of the Three Protectors could not serve as an assembly hall, given that it is about the same size as the assembly hall of the hermitage.

⁹ See, for example, *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 80.



The entrance to Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa's cave.

The first monastic confession ritual (*gso sbyong*) was held in the new assembly hall in 1708. In that same year, Paṅ chen blo bzang ye shes (1663-1737), Ngag dbang byams pa's ordaining abbot, wrote the constitution (*bca' yig*) for the new monastery. With all of the work of founding the monastery having reached its conclusion, Sgrub khang pa called for Phur lcog rin po che, and revealed to him that Purchok Mountain (Phur lcog ri) was in actuality the Palace of Cakrasaṃvara. He advised Phur lcog rin po che to institute the practices of this deity at the hermitage, for, given the auspiciousness of the site, "accomplishments were within easy reach." He advised him to institute a system of examinations and of giving "public admonition" (*tshogs gtam*)¹⁰ to the monks, and, with these words, he handed the monastery over to him. Sgrub khang pa, in preparation for his impending death, had his personal library of over two hundred volumes moved to the Temple of the Three Protectors around this time. He died at Phur lcog on the seventh day of the first Tibetan month in the year 1713.

Phur lcog rin po che had been initiated into the practices of the deity Dpal ldan lha mo by Sgrub khang pa, and at this time he did a five month retreat on this deity. He had many visions during his retreat, and from this point forward, Dpal ldan lha mo has been considered the special protector deity of the hermitage. Her statue, found in the protector deity chapel in the hermitage, is considered extremely holy.

¹⁰ *Phur byung*, 62, states that from this time on, Phur lcog rin po che meticulously instructed the monks of Phur lcog on the constitution of the monastery and gave the public admonitions on a yearly basis on the fifteenth day of the sixth month. Such a tradition is, of course, reminiscent of the system of public admonitions practiced at Se ra. See José I. Cabezón, "The Regulations of a Monastery," in *Religions of Tibet in Practice*. ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 335-51.



The protector deity chapel at Phur lcog, the site of the famous statue of Dpal ldan lha mo.

Under Phur lcog rin po che's abbacy, the hermitage flourished. Tremendously devoted to the institution, he left it only when absolutely necessary. Otherwise, he was continuously in residence, maintaining an extremely active teaching schedule from the time he was thirty-six years of age until he died at the age of eighty. His lectures focused mainly on graded stages of the path (*lam rim*), and he was especially fond of two texts: the Fifth Dalai Lama's (Da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa) famous graded stages of the path, *The Revelations of Mañjuśrī: A Lamrim (Lam rim 'jam dpal zhal lung)*, and *The Easy Path: A Lamrim (Lam rim bde lam)*. These two texts he taught, respectively, every spring and autumn. Ngag dbang byams pa also gave tantric teachings at Phur lcog, but the emphasis clearly was on graded stages of the path.

As might be expected, under Phur lcog rin po che's tenure the number of monks grew. With the patronage of the Tibetan king Pho lha nas (1689-1747),¹¹ in 1733 work began on a "Dharma enclosure/courtyard"¹² and (next to it) a new and larger assembly hall. Within the span of a few years, however, the Dharma enclosure once again proved too small to hold the large numbers of monks and laypeople that came from all over Tibet to listen to graded stages of the path teachings at Phur lcog,¹³ and it had to be expanded once again.

¹¹ On this important figure, see the [History](#) section of the [Introduction to the Hermitages](#). Phur lcog enjoyed the patronage of the various rulers of the day – not only of Pho lha nas, but after him of the Seventh Dalai Lama Kelzang Gyatso (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bdun pa skal bzang rgya mtsho, 1708-1757). For example, it was the "government" who acted as patron (*sbyin bdag*) during the annual graded stages of the path teachings at Phur lcog, offering "seven teas and two soups" (*ja bdun dang thug pa gnyis*) daily to the one-thousand or so people in attendance.

¹² It appears that part of the function of the Dharma enclosure was to serve as the site of large public teachings. *Phur byung*, 63, says that the original enclosure could hold up to six-hundred monks.

¹³ The schedules for the annual spring and autumn teachings given by Ngag dbang byams pa at Phur lcog are given in extenso in *Phur byung*, 64, and *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 80-81.



The Dharma enclosure, the site of Phur lcog rin po che's graded stages of the path teachings. There used to exist another large assembly hall here, but it was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.

Other major renovations and additions to the hermitage continued to occur throughout the years of Ngag dbang byams pa's tenure. In 1735, with the patronage of a Lha sa family known as Dpa' grong shag pa, he ordered a major renovation of the Temple of the Three Protectors, and in 1742 he commissioned a set of scriptures written in gold for the monastery, which he housed in the new, larger assembly hall next to the "Dharma enclosure."¹⁴ One source¹⁵ states that toward the end of Ngag dbang byams pa's life there were about one thousand monks in residence at the hermitage, though this seems like a tremendous exaggeration.¹⁶

After Phur lcog rin po che's death, the monastery passed into the hands of the second Purchok incarnation Lozang Jampa (Phur lcog sku phreng gnyis pa blo bzang byams pa),¹⁷ and continued to flourish as an institution. However, without the charismatic leadership of Ngag dbang byams pa – who was a committed contemplative – the hermitage began to take a different path from this point in time, emphasizing tantric ritual cycles¹⁸ rather than graded stages of the path teachings and meditation.

The third Purchok incarnation Lozang Tsültrim Jampa Gyatso (Phur lcog sku phreng gsum pa blo bzang tshul khriims byams pa rgya mtsho) served as tutor to

¹⁴ According to *Phur byung*, 65, this set of texts is today housed in the Eastern Assembly Hall (*tshoms chen shar*) of the Potala.

¹⁵ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 80.

¹⁶ Se ra itself had only about fifteen-hundred monks around this time.

¹⁷ *Phur byung*, 66, mentions that it was this figure who was responsible for building the first structures at the [Purchok Lama's estate at Se ra](#).

¹⁸ *Phur byung*, 66, mentions that the following ritual cycles began to be practiced yearly during the tenure of the second Phur lcog rin po che: the self-initiation rituals (*bdag 'jug*) of Guhyasamāja (Gsang ba 'dus pa), Yamāntaka, and Cakrasaṃvara (Bde mchog), as well as various other ritual cycles related to Tārā (Sgrol ma), Dugs dkar, and the Lion-Headed Ḍākinī (Seng gdong ma).

both the Twelfth and the Thirteenth Dalai Lamas (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu gsum pa). Given his position as tutor to two Da lai bla mas, it is not surprising that during his tenure Purchok Hermitage received from the government the Dog sde lho smon estates for the support of the hermitage. Both the hermitage and the Purchok Lama's estate greatly increased in wealth during the last half of the nineteenth century, and the number of monks at the hermitage itself grew, reaching a total of eighty by the end of the nineteenth century. Beginning in 1882, major renovations were done to several of the buildings at the hermitage. Some buildings were rebuilt from scratch, others gained second stories, and at least one new major temple – dedicated to housing a large statue of Maitreya (Byams pa) – was constructed during this time.

In the last few years of the third Purchok incarnation Yongdzin Jampa Gyatso's (Phur lcog sku phreng gsum pa yongs 'dzin byams pa rgya mtsho) life, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama visited Purchok Hermitage. This is seen as a major event in the history of the institution. After his teacher's death, it was the Da lai bla ma himself who took upon himself the responsibility of creating and consecrating the funerary *stūpa* and various memorial statues (including a statue of his teacher). All of these were placed inside the temple next to the Dharma enclosure.

Because of the extensive building and renovation done at Phur lcog by the third Phur lcog rin po che, very little had to be done at the hermitage by his successor. The fourth Phur lcog bla ma did do some renovation on one of the assembly halls and he refurbished some older portions of the *bla ma*'s residence that were in poor condition. He also built a building at the so-called Pond Park (Chab rdzing gling kha).

In 1959, the hermitage housed somewhere between eighty and one hundred monks. Between residential rooms, kitchens, meeting and storage rooms, etc., the *bla ma*'s household ended up utilizing about fifty rooms. All together the various temples occupied a space the equivalent of "150 pillars."¹⁹ There were about thirty huts in the vicinity of the main hermitage compound, and about ninety monks' rooms inside the compound itself.

After the Cultural Revolution, most of these buildings were in a state of near total collapse. Then came the period of liberalization. Permission to rebuild the hermitage was requested from the local authorities in 1984. The preparatory rituals to ensure the success of the project were enacted the following year on the fifteenth day of the fourth Tibetan month. With some funds from the Chinese government and with considerable monetary contributions and volunteer labor from local people, the hermitage has been restored to about seventy percent of its former state.²⁰ Several of the individual monks' huts that lay outside of the main compound were never rebuilt, and rather than rebuilding the assembly hall that used to be located next to the Dharma enclosure, the residents of Phur lcog chose instead to

¹⁹ Buildings in Tibet are often measured by the number of pillars they have.

²⁰ See the description of the present layout of the hermitage above.

build there a “library” to house a collection of scriptures (*Bstan ’gyur*). This library was still under construction in 2004.



Monks perform rituals during the Sixth-Month Fourth-Day pilgrimage day. Phur lcog is the last hermitage that laypeople visit when they make the Sera Mountain Circumambulation Circuit (se ra ’i ri ’khor) on this day.

Today, the monastery has about thirty-eight monks – thirty official and eight unofficial – and it is principally a ritual institution (just as it has been for most of the past two centuries). Its monthly ritual cycle includes the performance of the self-initiation (*bdag ’jug*) rituals of Vajrabhairava (Rdo rje ’jigs byed) and Sarvavid Vairocana (Kun rig rnam par snang mdzad), as well as the rituals of the Medicine Buddha (Sman bla), the Sixteen Arhats (Gnas brtan bcu drug), and the monastery’s protector deities. In the year 2000, a class for younger monks that focuses on the classical philosophical texts was inaugurated at Phur lcog, and from that time a senior textualist has resided permanently at the monastery in a teaching capacity. This represents a departure from tradition, given that Phur lcog monks who wanted to study philosophy would have traditionally matriculated at Se ra. However, it is consistent with the widespread shift in the ethos of contemporary Tibetan monasticism, where a basis in doctrinal studies is seen as necessary even for monks who are ritualists.²¹

²¹ For example, the Da lai bla ma, in exile, has inaugurated doctrinal/philosophical studies at his own ritual monastery of Rnam rgyal, and has encouraged similar undertakings at ritual institutions like the two tantric colleges (*sngags pa grwa tshang*) – Upper Tantric [College] (Rgyud stod) and Lower Tantric [College] (Rgyud smad).

Rakhadrak Hermitage (Ra kha brag ri khrod)

Location and Layout



A view of the Ra kha brag upper temple compound (above) as viewed from the cave compound. In the foreground is a monk's hut that is a part of the cave compound.

Rakhadrak Hermitage (Ra kha brag ri khrod) is located northeast of (and one ridge over from) Se ra. It takes about forty-five minutes to walk from Se ra to the hermitage (*ri khrod*). Ra kha brag is also just a ten-minute walk up the mountain from [Keutsang Hermitage \(Ke'u tshang ri khrod\)](#). Like Ke'u tshang, it is one of the hermitages on the “Sixth-Month Fourth-Day” (*drug pa tshe bzhi*) pilgrimage circuit. (To see images of this pilgrimage taken in 2002, please click [here](#).)



A view of the lower complex of buildings from the upper temple compound. On the left, the building that used to contain monastic residences; in the middle, a small kitchen; and on the right the three-cave compound that contains the caves of Tsong kha pa (1357-1419) and his two disciples. Lha sa can be seen in the distance.

The site is divided into two parts. In the lower portion, one finds a **compound**, which is the site of the caves of **Tsong kha pa (1357-1419)**, **Rgyal tshab rje (1364-1432)** and **Mkhas grub rje (1385-1438)**. It is also the site of a **small hut** that belonged to Byams chen chos rje (1354-1435), the founder of Se ra, where the latter is said to have begun the tradition of the the Ganden Feast of the 25th (*dga' ldan lnga mchod*) commemoration of the death-date of Tsong kha pa. East of this compound, there is a **small kitchen** and a **large building** that before 1959 appears to have served as monastic living quarters.



The cave compound, where the caves of Tsong kha pa and his two disciples are found.



The inside of Tsong kha pa's meditation cave (sgrub phug).

Farther uphill from (north of) the cave compound there is another [compound](#) that contains the [main temple](#), a [kitchen](#), a [bla ma's residence](#), [rooms](#) for visiting Se ra monks, and a [temple to Tsong kha pa](#) where thousands of small pressed-clay tablets (*tsha tsha*) of Tsong kha pa are housed.

History

Ra kha brag is renowned in Dge lugs history chiefly for two things. It was the place where Tsong kha pa composed his great classic, the *The Essence of Eloquence that Distinguishes Between the Provisional and Definitive Meaning of the Scriptures (Drang nges legs bshad snying po)*, and it is one of the places where Tsong kha pa received the delegation from the emperor of China, the so-called “bearers of the golden letter” (*gser yig pa*) who had been sent with an invitation requesting Tsong kha pa's presence at the Chinese court.

One contemporary Tibetan historian¹ informs us that the site was founded as a formal monastic institution with twelve fully ordained



The entrance to the upper temple compound.

¹ Dung dkar blo zang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo [The Great Dungkar Dictionary]* (Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe krung khang, 2002), 736.

monks by Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho (1641-1713) in the eighteenth century. Another contemporary historian of Se ra identifies the founder of Ra kha brag as Ra kha brag a zhu bsod noms (b. seventeenth century). This latter account accords with the oral report of one of the monks presently living at the site, who gives the name of this figure A kha bsod noms bzang po (b. seventeenth century),² and who adds that he was a student of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng Inga pa). This informant also states that the upper temple complex was founded as a formal monastery with the financial sponsorship of the mother of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng Inga pa), who apparently was the hermitage's main sponsor throughout most of her adult life. The two accounts may not be mutually contradictory. It may be that the upper temple compound, housing a handful of monks, was initially built with the financial sponsorship of members of the Fifth Dalai Lama's court in the seventeenth century. The institution may have then come under the control of the charismatic Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho several decades later, and perhaps it was at this time that it began to flourish as a formal monastery.

Apart from these few facts, we can say little about the history of Ra kha brag at this point in our research. Like all of hermitages of Sera (*se ra'i ri khrod*), Ra kha brag was abandoned and deteriorated following the events of 1959, and especially following the Cultural Revolution. It was taken over by Se ra in the 1980s, and the main sites – the lower cave complex and a portion of the upper temple compound – have been minimally restored. Today it is staffed by two elder Se ra monks, who keep the site open for pilgrims. A few rooms are made available to Se ra monks who wish to do retreat at the hermitage during inter-terms. There is no longer any active ritual life at the hermitage.



A Se ra monk is engaged in retreat in the ante-room outside Tsong kha pa's meditation cave at Ra kha brag.

² Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 41. On this figure, see [TBRC P2275](#).

Sera Chöding Hermitage (Se ra chos sdings ri khrod)



The main temple at Se ra chos sdings, which before 1959 used to belong to the Lower Tantric College (rgyud smad grwa tshang)

Location and Layout

Se ra chos sdings is the closest of all of the hermitages to Se ra, a mere fifteen-minute walk up the mountain just above the monastery. Like Se ra, it faces south.

There are several important buildings at the site. From west to east, they are as follows:

The [yellow retreat hut](#) was one of Tsong kha pa's (1357-1419) principal retreat spots. According to some oral sources, it was the first real house Tsong kha pa allowed to be built for him. In this house there is a small window through which the local site-spirit (*gzhi bdag*) would enter to visit him, and there is a famous mural of Tsong kha pa on the wall that is said to be an "image that speaks" speaking-statue (*gsung byon ma*).

Just below (and slightly east of) the yellow retreat hut is the [large temple](#) or assembly hall (*'du khang*), which was the place where the Lower Tantric College celebrated one of its most important yearly ritual cycles or *chos thog*. The [murals](#) in the clerestory of this temple date to before 1959. The [second story of the temple](#) contains meeting/reception rooms and the living quarters for administrators and

hierarchs of the Tantric College (*sngags pa grwa tshang*), where they would have stayed while visiting Chos sdings.



Tsong kha pa's Yellow Retreat Hut at Chos sdings is located just behind the main temple.

There are two different Dharma enclosures (*chos rwa*): **one** is adjacent to the large temple, **the other** is closer to the spring (see below).

Tsong kha pa's (1357-1419) throne was the place where he gave the lectures that resulted in one of his most famous texts, the *Ocean of Reasoning* (*Rigs pa'i rgya mstho*). In 2004, work on a **small structure** to house this throne was almost complete.

A **spring** with waters that have curative powers was discovered as the result of instructions given by the former abbot of Se ra, Dge bshes seng ge (d. 1990s).

Farther from these various buildings, there are **several huts and caves** that are reputed to have served as meditation retreat sites for some of Tsong kha pa's closest disciples.

The **view of Se ra** from the far eastern corner of the Chos sdings complex is one of the best views of the monastery.

History'

Sera Chöding Hermitage (*Se ra chos sdings ri khrod*) was one of Tsong kha pa's principal retreat centers. It was the place where he gave many of his most important teachings,² and, as we have said, where he composed one of his most famous works,

¹ See Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 34-35.

² For a list of these, see Bshes gnyen tshul khrims, *Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [*A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels*] (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 47.

his *Great Commentary on the Prajñāmūla (Rtsa shes t̄ik chen)*.³ Chos sdings is the place where Tsong kha pa's closest disciple, Mkhas grub rje (1385-1438), first met his master. It is where Tsong kha pa ordered **Byams chen chos rje (1354-1435)**, the founder of Se ra, to go to China as his representative. At Chos sdings, Tsong kha pa tamed the "site-spirit," converting him into a protector of Buddhism. Finally, it is the place where Tsong kha pa entrusted his Tantric teachings to **Rje shes rab seng ge (1383-1445)**, the founder of the Tantric Colleges.

It is perhaps because of this association with Rje shes rab seng ge that at some point in its history the site came under the aegis of the Lower Tantric College. We do not know precisely when this occurred, but from that point on, Chos sdings became the location of one of the Tantric College's annual ritual cycles. Before 1959, Se ra was responsible for sending one monk every year to serve as caretaker of the main Chos sdings temple. This appears to be the vestige of a more formal affiliation to Se ra in the past. However, up to 1959 the hermitage was for all intents and purposes run by monks of the Lower Tantric College.

After liberalization permitted the rebuilding of the smaller monasteries around Lha sa, Se ra formally claimed Chos sdings as its own. Today, it is the property of Se ra and has no formal affiliation with the Tantric College. There is one elder caretaker monk who keeps the hermitage open for visitors and pilgrims.



Tsong kha pa's throne at Chos sdings – the place where he gave some of his most important teachings.

³ The work has been translated by Jay Garfield and Ngawang Samten, *An Ocean of Reasoning* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2006).

Sera Gönpasar Hermitage (Se ra dgon pa gsar ri khrod)



The ruins at the site of Sera Gönpasar Hermitage (Se ra dgon pa gsar ri khrod)

Location and Layout

The words *dgon pa gsar* mean “new monastery.” The site obviously received its name when a monastery or hermitage (*ri khrod*) was first built there, and then the name simply stuck. The hermitage belonged to the *bla mas* of the Dgon pa gsar incarnation lineage. It was founded as a Dge lugs hermitage by the first Gönpasar incarnation Ngawang Döndrup (Dgon pa gsar sku phreng dang po ngag dbang don grub).¹ It seems that there were thirteen fully ordained monks that formed the ritual core of the institution before 1959.²

Today the entire site is in ruins, and while the shapes of certain buildings can be discerned from the foundations and fragments of walls that remain, we have no idea of what these various structures actually were. The site contains at least one large *stūpa*, and many carved boulders and/or self-arisen images (*rang byon*). Apart

¹ The entry for Dgon pa gsar in Bshes gnyen tshul khriṃs, *Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [*A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels*] (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 95-98, appears to be a description not of Se ra Dgon pa gsar but of 'Bras spungs Dgon pa gsar, a hermitage with the same name but affiliated with 'Bras spungs.

² *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 95.

from this, there is little more that we can say about this hermitage at the present time.



The ruins of a large stūpa at the site.



A large boulder with carvings or self-arisen images on its surface.

Sera Utsé Hermitage (Se ra dbu rtse ri khrod)



Se ra dbu rtse as seen from below.

Location and Layout

The words “*se ra dbu rtse*,” sometimes abbreviated *se ra rtse*, literally mean “Sera Peak.” The name is fitting since, of the several small hermitages (*ri khrod*) that are located on the mountain behind (to the north of) Se ra, this is the one that is highest on the mountain, very close to the peak. Even at a brisk pace, it is a strenuous one hour to walk up to Se ra dbu rtse from Se ra. Tradition has it that the site contained one of Tsong kha pa’s (1357-1419) meditation huts or *sgrub khang*, and so when Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho (1641-1713) started living at this site at the end of the seventeenth or early eighteenth century, he came to be known as “the man from the *sgrub khang*,” or Sgrub khang pa.



The assembly hall (‘du khang) at Se ra dbu rtse.

The hermitage was quite large before 1959. Most of it was destroyed after 1959, and only a portion has been rebuilt. What exists today is:

1. One large building complex with two courtyards. This large complex contains:
 - A small [assembly hall](#). Since only three monks live here, it is not in use, but it is still well maintained. The assembly hall before 1959 – which, in fact, may have been located in another building – contained a large metal statue of Vajrabhairava (Rdo rje 'jigs byed), a magnificent statue of Yamāntaka Ekavīra, statues of the Buddha and the sixteen arhats, a speaking Tārā (Sgrol ma) statue, large images of Tsong kha pa and his two disciples, and statues of the *bla mas* of the Drupkhang incarnation (Sgrub khang sprul sku) lineage. There were also copies of the *Bka' 'gyur* and *Bstan 'gyur*, and a Bka' gdams pa *stūpa*. But no such statues or texts exist today, and indeed it is difficult to imagine them fitting into a temple this size.¹
 - The *bla ma*'s residence for the Sgrub khang *bla mas* consists of two rooms with a waiting room between them.
 - The meditation hut or “[cave](#)” where Sgrub khang pa meditated has been made into a chapel, and has an [ante-room](#).
 - A small [protector deity chapel](#).
2. A separate [hut built underneath a boulder](#) was built by the patron (*sbyin bdag*) who was responsible for financing the rebuilding of the hermitage.
3. A [Dharma enclosure](#) (*chos rwa*).
4. A [dilapidated kitchen](#) that is no longer used.
5. Various and [sundry smaller buildings](#) that today are used mostly for storage.

¹ Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 140.



The entrance to Sgrub khang pa's meditation hut.

History

We know nothing of the history of this site before the fourteenth century. The monastery was originally one of the places where Tsong kha pa did retreat. This is what gives the site its name: “*sgrub khang*” means “retreat house.” It was the fact that it had been a retreat spot for Tsong kha pa that drew the founder, Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho,² to the site. Sgrub khang pa was advised to make it his residence by the abbot of the Jé College (Grwa tshang byes) of Se ra, Jo ston bsod nams rgyal mtshan (seventeenth century). Sgrub khang pa lived in Tsong kha pa’s retreat house at the site for many years, leading an extremely frugal and ascetic existence. It was his reputation as a great meditator, combined with his knowledge of the philosophical tradition that drew students to him.³ The most famous of these became posthumously recognized as the first incarnations of important *bla ma* lineages of Se ra. Following the example of their teacher, they also lived in retreat for a good portion of their lives, either founding or serving as the head lamas (*gnas kyi bla ma*) of important Se ra-affiliated retreat centers. Sgrub khang pa’s students include, for example, Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa (1682-1762), and Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho (1672-1749). There is a tradition, reported by Dung dkar rin po che, that Sgrub khang pa was responsible for founding three hermitages as practice-centers (*sgrub sde*): his own hermitage with seventeen fully ordained monks, Purchok Hermitage (Phur lcog ri khrod) with one hundred monks, and Rakhadrak Hermitage (Ra kha brag ri khrod) with twelve monks.⁴

² On Sgrub khang pa, see the Introduction to the Hermitages, [history section](#).

³ See the Introduction to the Hermitages, [history section](#) for more on this important figure.

⁴ Dung dkar blo bzang ’phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* [*The Great Dungkar Dictionary*] (Krung go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 736. For the possible source of these figures see Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa’i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [*A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels*] (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 94.



An image of Sgrub Khang pa at Se ra dbu rtse.

Takten Hermitage (Rtags bstan ri khrod)



Takten Hermitage (Rtags bstan ri khrod).

Location and Layout

The words *rtags bstan* mean “revealed sign.”¹ According to one source,² when the famous Dge lugs pa *bla ma*, [Pha bong kha bde chen snying po \(1878-1941\)](#), was looking for a retreat place in the hills north of Se ra, he arrived at this site and had a vision in which a crow spoke to him. This was the “sign” that “revealed” to him that this was the spot where he should remain in retreat.

The hermitage (*ri khrod*) is located northeast of Se ra and just east of [Trashī Chöling Hermitage \(Bkra shis chos gling ri khrod\)](#). It takes about fifty minutes to walk from Rtags bstan to Se ra, but only about fifteen minutes to reach Bkra shis chos gling. Rtags bstan is the third hermitage at which pilgrims stop during the “Sixth-Month Fourth-Day” (*drug pa tshe bzhi*) pilgrimage. (To see images of this pilgrimage taken in 2002, please click [here](#).)

¹ In fact the words can be spelled two other ways in Tibetan, and each spelling has a different meaning. When spelled *rtags brtan*, the words mean “stable or trustworthy sign.” When spelled *rtag brtan*, they mean “permanent and stable.” Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 39, prefers the “revealed sign” (*rtags bstan*) etymology. Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* [*The Great Dungkar Dictionary*] (Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 985, prefers the “permanent and stable” (*rtag brtan*) etymology.

² Ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad lo rgyus* [*A History of Sera Mé*], 39.

The hermitage for the most part consists of caves. Façades (and sometimes rooms) have been added in front of the cave entrances. There are a few [separate buildings](#) that have not been constructed onto the face of the cliff, however. Self-arisen images (*rang byon*) are ubiquitous throughout the site. One of the most important is the self-arisen image of [one of the eyes of Cakrasaṃvara \(Bde mchog\)](#),³ and indeed Rtags bstan in general is renowned as a site with a strong connection to this deity. There is also a famous [spring](#) whose waters are said to have magical, curative properties. The spring is connected with the deity Na ro mkha' spyod ma.



The eye of Cakrasaṃvara in one of Rtags bstan's caves.

History

The famous Dge lugs pa scholar/*yogi* Dben sa pa blo bzang don grub (1504/5-1565/6)⁴ lived in a cave at the site at some point in his life. And, as has been mentioned, Pha bong kha bde chen snying po also lived at Rtags bstan for a period of time in the 1930s with some of his students. But apart from these few facts, we can say little about Rtags bstan at this point in time.

The hermitage was a monk's institution before 1959, and (since the 1930s at least) belonged to the Pabongkha Lama's estate (Pha bong kha bla brang). Today, only Dge lugs pa nuns live at the site, and it is they who are responsible for any restoration that has been done to the hermitage. Rtags bstan today has a strong connection with Bkra shis chos gling, the other hermitage that has traditionally belonged to the Pabongkha Lama's estate.

³ The other two eyes of the deity are located at [Pabongkha Hermitage \(Pha bong kha ri khrod\)](#) and at [Garu Nunnery \(Ga ru dgon pa\)](#).

⁴ For a biography of Dben sa pa, see Janice D. Willis, *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 51-70.



Bundled up on a cold day, a Rtags bstan nun makes multiple “water-bowl offerings” as a way of accumulating merit.

Trashi Chöling Hermitage (Bkra shis chos gling ri khrod)

Location and Layout

Bkra shis chos gling¹ – literally “The Place of Auspicious Dharma” – is located about three kilometers from Se ra in the [mountains northwest of the monastery](#). It takes about one hour to walk from Se ra to Bkra shis chos gling. The hermitage (*ri khrod*) also lies approximately halfway between two other important hermitages – [Pha bong kha](#), which is about half a kilometer to the west and downhill, and [Rtags bstan sgrub phug](#), which is slightly less than half a kilometer to the east, across a gorge, and then uphill. Bkra shis chos gling is, together with these latter two sites, one of the main stops on the famous Sera Mountain Circumambulation Circuit (*se ra ri 'khor*), a pilgrimage route that thousands of people from Lha sa and the surrounding area traverse as a merit-making activity on the “Sixth-Month Fourth-Day” (*drug pa tshe bzhi*) religious festival. To see images of this event taken in 2002, click [here](#).



Two pictures of the hermitage showing the way that buildings have been erected in tiers, conforming to the landscape. The two top tiers of the hermitage are now in ruins.

The hermitage faces south. As is typical of many mountain monasteries, Bkra shis chos gling is built in a tiered fashion on terraces that conform to the landscape. At the lowest level there is a large open courtyard surrounded by a perimeter wall. Proceeding north (uphill), one enters the main compound where one finds, from south to north (downhill to uphill), the following buildings at different levels:

- [Monks' quarters](#) (presently two floors), and a [kitchen](#), located just beneath the main temple and across from the monks living quarters
- The [main temple](#) (today only two floors, but previously four)

¹ The institution corresponds to [TBRC G2482](#).

- The former [residence of Pha bong kha rin po che](#), with its ancillary chapels
- The [temple of Rdo rje shugs ldan](#)

The first two tiers of the hermitage – the monks’ quarters and the main temple – still exist today, although we know from old photos and informants’ accounts that they are only a fraction of their former size. The last two tiers – the private residence of the *bla ma* and the Rdo rje shugs ldan temple – are in ruins, and have not been rebuilt. This is perhaps due to the fact that Rdo rje shugs ldan is a controversial deity whose propitiation has been banned by the present Da lai bla ma.²



An old photo of Bkra shis chos gling taken before 1959. It shows the original temple with all four of its floors intact. The set of three windows in the lowest portion of the picture belong to the second floor of the monks’ living quarters.



Trashi Chöling Hermitage (Bkra shis chos gling ri khrod) as viewed from the front.

Prior to 1959 the main image on the altar of Bkra shis chos gling was a statue of Maitreya (Byams pa) called the Maitreya as Lord of Men (Mi dbang byams pa).³ There was also an important set of images of the Sixteen Arhats (Gnas brtan bcu drug), and of Cakrasaṃvara (Bde mchog). All of these have been destroyed or are missing. All of the images in the temple today are new, with the exception of one [old statue of Cakrasaṃvara](#) found on the altar in the northwestern corner of the temple, and this, in fact, may not have originally belonged to the hermitage. The central figures on the main altar are [Tsong kha pa \(1357-1419\) and his two disciples](#). To the left of these large (one-story) statues are two smaller statues of the Buddha. To the right of the Tsong kha pa triad are life-size statues of [Khri byang rin po che \(1901-1981\)](#),⁴ [Pha bong kha bde chen snying po \(1878-1941\)](#),

² On the history of this controversy, see Georges Dreyfus, “The Shuk-Den Affair: Origins of a Controversy,” at <http://www.tibet.com/dholgyal/shugden-origins.html>. To see a *thang ka* painting of the deity in question, see <http://www.tibetart.com/image.cfm/90554.html>.

³ The main images that existed at Bkra shis chos gling before 1959 are mentioned in Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa’i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan [A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels]* (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 24.

⁴ Blo bzang ye shes bstan ’dzin rgya mtsho (1901-1981), junior tutor to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu bzhi pa), and one of the chief Dharma-heirs of Pha bong kha pa

and Rje btsun bla ma ngag dbang rnam sgröl, purportedly founder of the hermitage. To the right of these, along the eastern wall of the temple, are [three funerary stūpas \(gdung rten\)](#) of these same three figures.



The front façade of the present temple.

The top floor of the main temple contains, along its southern wing, (to the east) a reception room, where guests are received, and (to the west of the reception room) the [private living quarters of Pha bong kha rin po che](#). It also contains a kitchen and monks' quarters.

The only portion of the monks' dormitory that remains is that found in front (south) of the main temple, where two floors of rooms have been preserved.

Dung dkar rin po che tells us that there were twenty-one monks living at Bkra shis chos gling in 1959,⁵ though it seems clear from the number of monks' rooms at the hermitage that this number does not include supporting staff. If one includes the entire staff of the Pabongkha Lama's estate (Pha bong kha bla brang), there could have easily been three times that many men living at the hermitage.

Affiliation

Bkra shis chos gling has had a long and complex relationship to Se ra. The hermitage did not become the property of Se ra until the early eighteenth century, when it passed into the hands of the Sera Tantric College (Se ra sngags pa grwa tshang) (see below). In the 1920s or 1930s, the Tantric College (Sngags pa grwa tshang) donated the hermitage to Pha bong kha bde chen snying po. From 1930 until 1959, then, the hermitage belonged to the Pabongkha Lama's estate. Since

(1878-1941). It was Khri byang rin po che, for example, who was responsible for compiling Pha bong kha rin po che's teachings on the graded stages of the path (*lam rim*) into the classic text known as [Liberation in Our Hands \(Rnam grol lag bcangs\)](#). That work has been translated twice into English. See Artemus B. Engle, tr., *Liberation in Our Hands* (New Jersey: Mahāyāna Sūtra and Tantra Press, 1999).

⁵ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 24, gives the number of fully ordained monks as twenty-five.

that time it has therefore *not* belonged to Se ra, although it has had informal ties both to the Mé College (Grwa tshang smad), and to the Sera Tantric College, the two loci of Pha bong kha rin po che's affiliations to Se ra. From the 1990s, when the hermitage was rebuilt, up to the present time, Bkra shis chos gling has functioned as an autonomous institution with only minimal ties to Se ra.⁶ The hermitage reverted to the Pabongkha Lama's estate after the present incarnation's recent return to Tibet.



The remaining wing of monks' rooms on the left, and the kitchen on the right.

History

One contemporary Tibetan author states that according to oral tradition Bkra shis chos gling may date to the time of the Buddhist king (of Tibet) Songtsen Gampo (Chos rgyal srong btsan sgam po), that is, to the seventh century, being known at that time not under its present name, but rather as Gdugs yur dgon.⁷ The first real evidence we have of a monastic institution existing at the site, however, is much later. According to one contemporary Tibetan historian,⁸ Bkra shis chos gling is

⁶ The author of *Lha sa'i dgon tho* reports, however, that at the time of the writing of his book there were four monks of the Sera Tantric College living at the hermitage.

⁷ *Lha sa'i dgon tho*, 23.

⁸ Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 140, states: "On that [same] mountain [as Pabongkha Hermitage] is the hermitage of Bkra shis chos gling. In the past, it was the assembly place of King Lhazang Khan's (Lha bzang khāng) ritual college (*sku rim grwa tshang*). Later, the ritual college was moved to Se ra's old assembly hall (*'du khang*) and Bkra shis chos gling became a hermitage. Bkra shis chos gling was [then] offered by the Tantric College to the Pha bong kha incarnation – Byams pa bstan 'dzin 'phrin las rgya mtsho (1878-1941) – of Sera Mé College (Se ra smad) [Gyelrong Regional House](#) (Rgyal rong khang tshan). This holy person completely redid the shrines and offerings. [At this hermitage] there is an assembly hall, personal residence, protector deity chapel (*mgon khang*), gold-plated statue of the protector Maitreya (Byams pa), unlimited numbers of representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind, as well as many monks' quarters."

the place where the Mongolian ruler of Tibet, Lhazang Khan (Lha bzang khāng), housed the monks of his private ritual college during the winter months. We know from different historical sources that Lha bzang's ritual college – the monks who were responsible for performing all of the necessary merit-making and protection rituals for the king – met in Northern Tibet (Byang) during the summer months, and then moved to a site just north of Lha sa for the winter. Bkra shis chos gling, it seems, was that site.



Rje btsun bla ma ngag dbang rnam sgrol, seen by the monks who live here as the founder of the monastery.

Shortly after Lha bzang came to power in 1705, he came to an agreement with the monks of Se ra. Seeing that the Sera Assembly Hall – the place where all of the monks gathered for communal rituals – was too small to fit the entire monastic population, he offered to build the community a new assembly hall. The monks, from their side, had to surrender the old assembly hall to the king, who proposed to use it as the permanent home for his private ritual college. An agreement was reached, and the king built what is today the [Sera Great Assembly Hall](#). The old assembly hall then became the headquarters for the ruler's ritual college. After the death of Lha bzang in 1717, his ritual college became the Sera Tantric College,⁹ an institution that continues to flourish to the present day.

⁹ It is not clear whether this transition from the private ritual college to the [Sera Tantric College](#) took place immediately or over a period of years.



Lhazang Khan (Lha bzang khāng), from a mural in the Sera Great Assembly Hall (Se ra tshogs chen).

Although the monks of Lha bzang's ritual college moved to Se ra permanently, it seems clear that they did not give up their rights to their old winter residence at Bkra shis chos gling in the mountains northwest of Se ra. And when Lha bzang's ritual college became the Sera Tantric College, then, of course, ownership of Bkra shis chos gling passed on to the Sera Tantric College. For 200 years – from the early eighteenth century until the early twentieth century – we know little about Bkra shis chos gling except for the fact that it was (or so it seems) the property of the

Sera Tantric College. Dung dkar rin po che informs us that there was a tradition that the Sera Tantric College had to send twenty-one monks to Bkra shis chos gling to maintain the hermitage and to enact its ritual cycles, and this is certainly consistent with the facts as we know them.

In the early twentieth century, the Pha bong kha bde chen snying po did an extensive retreat in some caves close to Bkra shis chos gling at a site called [Rtags bstan sgrub phug](#). This established Pha bong kha pa's connection to this general area. Later, when Pha bong kha rin po che's fame and reputation grew, the Sera Tantric College offered the monastery of Bkra shis chos gling to him as his private hermitage or retreat.¹⁰ In return, Pha bong kha pa rin po che agreed to officially enter the Tantric College (an action that brought this institution a certain prestige, given the *bla ma's* reputation). From that point on, then, Pha bong kha had two affiliations at Se ra: the Tantric College, and the Mé College. Informants tell us that from then on Pha bong kha rin po che lived at Bkra shis chos gling during the summer months, and in private rooms in a section of the [Spo 'bo ra spyi khang](#) at Se ra during the winter months.

¹⁰ This coincided with Pha bong kha pa officially becoming part of the Sera Tantric College. And according to at least one informant, the offering of Bkra shis chos gling to Pha bong kha pa was in fact a way of inducing him to affiliate with the Sera Tantric College. This tradition is carried on today, and the present Pha bong kha pa rin po che, for example, has affiliations both to the Smad and Tantric College.

Under Pha bong kha bde chen snying po the hermitage was extensively refurbished and expanded. It was perhaps under him as well that a very large temple to the protector deity Rdo rje shugs ldan¹¹ was built on the topmost tier of the complex. Today, as had been mentioned, this lies in ruins.

After the events of 1959 Bkra shis chos gling suffered the fate of all of Se ra's hermitages. Over thirty years of neglect brought the site to the brink of complete collapse. Restoration did not begin until a monk – a student of Pha bong kha bde chen snying po – undertook the labor of renovating the hermitage as a personal project in the early 1990s. The hermitage is



A statue of Pha bong kha rin po che in the main temple at Bkra shis chos gling.

maintained today by two elder monks who serve as temple attendants and caretakers of the site. They also receive help from the nuns of Takten Hermitage (Rtags brten ri khrod), who live just up the hill.

¹¹ Pha bong kha pa rin po che was known as one of the strongest proponents of this controversial deity in the twentieth century.

Glossary

Note: These glossary entries are organized in Tibetan alphabetical order. All entries list the following information in this order: THDL Extended Wylie transliteration of the term, THDL Phonetic rendering of the term, English translation and/or Sanskrit equivalent, dates (when applicable), and type. To jump to a particular letter, open the bookmarks tab to the left and expand the Glossary bookmark by clicking on the (+) sign. Then, click on the transliteration of the desired Tibetan letter.

Ka				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>ka thung</i>	katung	short pillar		Technical Term
<i>ka ring</i>	karing	long pillar		Technical Term
<i>kang shi</i>	Kangshi	Kangxi	1654-1722	Person
<i>kun rig rnam par snang mdzad</i>	Künrik Nampar Nangdzé	Sarvavid Vairocana		Deity
<i>ke'u tshang</i>	Keutsang			Monastery
<i>ke'u tshang</i>	keutsang	cave, cavern, or overhang		Technical Term
<i>ke'u tshang sku phreng lnga pa</i>	Keutsang Kutreng Ngapa	the fifth Keutsang incarnation		Person
<i>ke'u tshang sku phreng gnyis pa</i>	Keutsang Kutreng Nyipa	the second Keutsang incarnation	b. 1791	Person
<i>ke'u tshang sku phreng gnyis pa blo bzang 'jam dbyangs smon lam</i>	Keutsang Kutreng Nyipa Lozang Jamyang Mönlam	the second Keutsang incarnation Lozang Jamyang Mönlam	b. 1791	Person
<i>ke'u tshang sku phreng dang po byams pa smon lam</i>	Keutsang Kutreng Dangpo Jampa Mönlam	the first Keutsang incarnation Jampa Mönlam	d. 1790	Person
<i>ke'u tshang 'jam dbyangs blo gsal</i>	Keutsang Jamyang Losel			Person
<i>ke'u tshang nub</i>	Keutsang Nup	Keutsang West		Monastery
<i>ke'u tshang nub ri khrod</i>	Keutsang Nup Ritrö	Keutsang West Hermitage		Monastery
<i>ke'u tshang sprul sku</i>	Keutsang Trülku	Keutsang incarnation		Person
<i>ke'u tshang bla brang</i>	Keutsang Labrang	Keutsang Lama's estate		Monastery
<i>ke'u tshang bla ma</i>	Keutsang Lama			Person
<i>ke'u tshang ri khrod</i>	Keutsang Ritrö	Keutsang Hermitage		Monastery
<i>ke'u tshang shar</i>	Keutsang Shar	Keutsang East		Monastery
<i>ke'u tshang shar ri khrod</i>	Keutsang Shar Ritrö	Keutsang East Hermitage		Monastery
<i>kong po jo rdzong</i>	Kongpo Jodzong			Place
<i>krung go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang</i>	Trunggö Börikpa Petrünkhang			Publisher
<i>klong rdol bla ma ngag dbang blo bzang</i>	Longdöl Lama Ngawang Lozang		1719-1794	Person

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>dkar chag</i>	karchak	inventory		Technical Term
<i>dkar chag</i>	karchak	catalogue		Technical Term
<i>bka' 'gyur</i>	Kangyur	Scriptures		Textual Collection
<i>bka' 'gyur lha khang</i>	Kangyur lhakhang	Scripture Temple		Building
<i>bka' brgyud</i>	Kargyü			Organization
<i>bka' gdams pa</i>	Kadampa			Organization
<i>bka' gdams lha khang</i>	Kadam Lhakhang	Kadam Chapel		Room
<i>bka' babs bu chen brgyad</i>	kabap buchen gyé	eight great close disciples		Technical Term
<i>bka' babs ming can brgyad</i>	Kabap Mingchen Gyé	the "eight great ones who were named to receive the oral instructions"		Name
<i>bkra shis chos gling</i>	Trashi Chöling			Monastery
<i>bkra shis chos gling ri khrod</i>	Trashi Chöling Ritro	Trashi Chöling Hermitage		Monastery
<i>bkra shis gser nya</i>	trashi sernya	two auspicious golden fish		Technical Term
<i>bkra shis lhun po</i>	Trashi Lhünpo			Monastery
<i>sku mkhar</i>	kukhar	castle		Technical Term
<i>sku mkhar ma ru</i>	Kukhar Maru	Maru Castle		Building
<i>sku bzhi khang</i>	Kuzhi Khang	Chapel of the Four Statues		Room
<i>sku rim grwa tshang</i>	kurim dratsang	ritual college		Technical Term
<i>bskang gso</i>	kangso	propitiation ritual		Ritual
<i>bskal bzang rgya mtsho</i>	Kelzang Gyatso		1708-1757	Person

Kha

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>khang tshan</i>	khangtsen	regional house		Technical Term
<i>khams</i>	Kham			Place
<i>khal</i>	khel	a unit of weight/volume equal to about 25-30 lbs.		Technical Term
<i>khri byang sku phreng gsum pa blo bzang ye shes</i>	Trijang Kutreng Sumpa Lozang Yeshé	the third Trijang incarnation Lozang Yeshé	1901-1981	Person
<i>khri byang rin po che</i>	Trijang Rinpoché		1901-1981	Person
<i>khrod</i>	trö	in the midst of		Technical Term
<i>khrod</i>	trö	on the side of		Technical Term
<i>mkhan ngag dbang bstan 'dzin</i>	Khen Ngawang Tendzin			Person
<i>mkha' spyod dbyings</i>	Khachö Ying			Room
<i>mkhar rdo</i>	Khardo			Monastery
<i>mkhar rdo sku phreng lnga pa jam dbyangs chos kyi dbang phyug</i>	Khardo Kutreng Ngapa Jamyang Chökyi Wangchuk	the fifth Khardo incarnation Jamyang Chökyi Wangchuk	19th-20th centuries	Person

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>mkhar rdo sku phreng drug pa 'jam dpal thub bstan nyan grags rgya mtsho</i>	Khardo Kutreng Drukpa Jampel Tupten Nyendrak Gyatso	the sixth Khardo incarnation Jampel Tupten Nyendrak Gyatso	1909/12?-1956?	Person
<i>mkhar rdo sku phreng bdun pa 'jam dpal bstan 'dzin nyan grags rgya mtsho</i>	Khardo Kutreng Dünpa Jampel Tendzin Nyendrak Gyatso	the seventh Khardo incarnation Jampel Tendzin Nyendrak Gyatso		Person
<i>mkhar rdo sku phreng bzhi pa padma dga' ba 'i rdo rje</i>	Khardo Kutreng Zhipa Pema Gawé Dorjé	the fourth Khardo incarnation Pema Gawé Dorjé	19th century	Person
<i>mkhar rdo sku phreng gsum pa chos kyi rdo rje</i>	Khardo Kutreng Sumpa Chökyi Dorjé	the third Khardo incarnation Chökyi Dorjé	b. 18th century	Person
<i>mkhar rdo sku phreng gsum pa rigs 'dzin chos kyi rdo rje</i>	Khardo Kutreng Sumpa Rikdzin Chökyi Dorjé	the third Khardo incarnation Rikdzin Chökyi Dorjé		Person
<i>mkhar rdo mthun mchod</i>	Khardo Tünchö			Festival
<i>mkhar rdo ba</i>	Khadowa			Person
<i>mkhar rdo bla brang</i>	Khardo Labrang	Khardo Lama's estate		Organization
<i>mkhar rdo tshoms chen</i>	Khardo Tsomchen	Khardo Assembly Hall		Room
<i>mkhar rdo ri khrod</i>	Khardo Ritrö	Khardo Hermitage		Monastery
<i>mkhar rdo rin po che</i>	Khardo Rinpoché			Person
<i>mkhar rdo srong btsan</i>	Khardo Songtsen			Deity
<i>mkhar rdo sgrub sde gsum</i>	Khardo Drupdé Sum	the three practice centers of kardo		Monastery
<i>mkhar rdo ba</i>	Khadowa			Person
<i>mkhar rdo bla ma</i>	Khardo Lama			Person
<i>mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho</i>	Khardo Zöpa Gyatso		1672-1749	Person
<i>mkhar rdo gshin rje 'khrul 'khor</i>	Khardo Shinjé Trülkhör	Khardo (Hermitage's) Lord of Death Machine		Technical Term
<i>mkhas grub rje</i>	Kedrupjé		1385-1438	Person
<i>'khon ston</i>	Khöntön		1561-1637	Person
<i>'khon ston dpal 'byor lhun grub</i>	Khöntön Peljor Lhündrup		1561-1637	Person
<i>'khrungs lha/bla dbu rtse</i>	Trunglha/la Utsé	Birth Deity/Soul Peak		Place
<i>'khrungs ba'i bla ri</i>	Trungwé Lari	Birth Soul Mountain		Place
<i>'khrungs ba'i lha ri</i>	Trungwé Lhari	Birth Deity Peak		Place

Ga

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>ga ru</i>	Garu			Monastery
<i>ga ru dgon pa</i>	Garu Gönpa	Garu Nunnery		Monastery
<i>gar</i>	gar	dance		Technical Term
<i>gar dgon bsam gtan gling</i>	Gargön Samten Ling	Dance Gompa: Place of Meditative Equipoise		Monastery
<i>gar dgon bsam gtan gling gi lo rgyus mun sel mthong ba don ldan</i>	Gargön Samten Linggi Logyi Münsel Tongwa Dönden	A History of Gargön Samten Ling: Clearing Away Darkness, Meaningful to Behold		Text
<i>gar lo</i>	Garlo	A History of Garu [Nunnery]		Text
<i>gu ru rin po che</i>	Guru Rinpoché		8th century	Person

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>grub thob lha khang</i>	Druptop Lhakhang	Siddha Chapel		Room
<i>grog mo chu mig</i>	Drokmo Chumik	Ravine Spring		Place
<i>grong smad</i>	Drongmé			Place
<i>grwa tshang byes</i>	Dratsang Jé	Jé College		Monastery
<i>grwa tshang smad</i>	Dratsang Mé	Mé College		Monastery
<i>grwa bzhi</i>	Drapchi			Building
<i>grwa bzhi lha khang</i>	Drapchi Lhakhang	Drapchi Temple		Building
<i>glang dar ma</i>	Langdarma		d. 842	Person
<i>dga' chos dbyings</i>	Gachö Ying			Room
<i>dga' ldan</i>	Ganden			Monastery
<i>dga' ldan khri pa</i>	Ganden tripa	throne-holder of Ganden		Technical Term
<i>dga' ldan lnga mchod</i>	Ganden Ngamchö	the Ganden Feast of the 25th		Festival
<i>dga ldan chos 'nyung bai dūrya ser po</i>	Ganden Chönyung Baidurya Serpo	Yellow Lapis: A History of the Ganden [School]		Text
<i>dga' ldan pho brang</i>	Ganden Podrang	Ganden Palace		Organization
<i>dga' spyod dbyings</i>	Gachö Ying			Room
<i>dgun nyi ldog gi cho ga</i>	Gün Nyidokgi Choga	Winter Solstice Ritual		Ritual
<i>dge lugs</i>	Geluk			Organization
<i>dge lugs pa</i>	Gelukpa			Organization
<i>dge bshes</i>	geshé			Technical Term
<i>dge bshes pha bong khar grags pa</i>	Geshé Pabongkhar drakpa	“Geshé Pabongkha”		Person
<i>dge bshes brag dkar ba</i>	Geshé Drakkarwa		1032-1111	Person
<i>dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug</i>	Geshé Yeshé Wangchuk		b. 20th century	Person
<i>dge bshes seng ge</i>	Geshé Senggé		d. 1990s	Person
<i>dge slong</i>	gelong	fully-ordained monk		Technical Term
<i>dgon pa</i>	gönpa	monastery		Technical Term
<i>dgon pa gsar</i>	Gönpasar			Monastery
<i>dgon pa gsar</i>	gönpa sar	new monastery		Technical Term
<i>dgon pa gsar sku phreng dang po ngag dbang don grub</i>	Gönpasar Kutreng Dangpo Ngawang Döndrup	first Gönpasar incarnation Ngawang Döndrup	18th century	Person
<i>dgon pa gsar ri khrod</i>	Gönpasar Ritrö	Gönpasar Hermitage		Monastery
<i>mgon dkar</i>	Gönkar	White Mahākāla		Deity
<i>mgon khang</i>	gönkhang	protector deity chapel		Technical Term
<i>mgon po</i>	Gönpo	Mahākāla		Deity
<i>mgon po gtor rgyag</i>	Gönpo Torgyak	Throwing of the Torma to Mahākāla		Ritual
<i>mgon po phyag drug</i>	Gönpo Chakdruk	Six-Armed Mahākāla		Deity
<i>mgon po a gho[ra]</i>	Gönpo Agho[ra]			Deity
<i>'gyed</i>	gep	money offering to monks		Technical Term
<i>rgya mtsho mtha' yas</i>	Gyatso Tayé			Person

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>rgya res</i>	Gyaré			Deity
<i>rgya res tshoms chen</i>	Gyaré Tsomchen			Building
<i>rgyal chen karma 'phrin las</i>	Gyelchen Karma Triné			Deity
<i>rgyal ba lnga pa chen po</i>	Gyelwa Ngapa Chenpo	the Great Fifth Dalai Lama	1617-1682	Person
<i>rgyal ba 'i rigs lnga bla ri</i>	Gyelwé Riknga Lari	Soul Mountain of the Buddhas of the Five Families		Place
<i>rgyal mo tshe ring bkra shis</i>	Gyelmo Tsering Trashi	Queen Tsering Trashi	18th century	Person
<i>rgyal tshab rje</i>	Gyeltsapjé		1364-1432	Person
<i>rgyal rabs gsal ba 'i me long</i>	Gyelrap Selwé Melong	The Clear Mirror: A Royal History		Text
<i>rgyal rong khang tshan</i>	Gyelrong Khangtsen	Gyelrong Regional House		Monastery Subunit
<i>rgyugs</i>	gyuk	examination		Technical Term
<i>rgyud stod</i>	Gyütö	Upper Tantric [College]		Monastery
<i>rgyud smad</i>	Gyümé	Lower Tantric [College]		Monastery
<i>rgyud smad grwa tshang</i>	Gyümé Dratsang	The Lower Tantric College		Monastery
<i>rgyun ja</i>	gyünja	daily tea or prayer		Technical Term
<i>sgo gnyer</i>	gonyer	temple attendant		Technical Term
<i>sgo srung</i>	gosung	door-keeper		Technical Term
<i>sgom chen</i>	gomchen	meditator		Technical Term
<i>sgom sde nam kha' rgyal mtshan</i>	Gomdé Namkha Gyeltsen		1532-1592	Person
<i>sgom sde pa</i>	Gomdepa		1532-1592	Person
<i>sgra 'dzin chu mig</i>	Dradzin Chumik	Sound-Catcher (or Ear) Spring		Place
<i>sgrub khang</i>	drupkhang	meditation hut		Technical Term
<i>sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho</i>	Drupkhang Gelek Gyatso		1641-1713	Person
<i>sgrub khang pa</i>	Drupkhangpa		1641-1713	Person
<i>sgrub khang sprul sku</i>	Drupkhang Trülku	Drupkhang incarnation		Person
<i>sgrub khang bla brang</i>	Drupkhang Labrang	Drupkhang Lama's estate		Organization
<i>sgrub khang bla ma</i>	Drupkhang lama			Person
<i>sgrub khang ri khrod</i>	Drupkhang Ritro	Drupkhang Hermitage		Monastery
<i>sgrub grwa</i>	drupdra	practice center		Technical Term
<i>sgrub thabs</i>	druptap	ritual method of realization		Technical Term
<i>sgrub sde</i>	drupdé	practice-center		Technical Term
<i>sgrub phug</i>	drupbuk	meditation cave		Technical Term
<i>sgrol chog</i>	Drölchok	Tārā Ritual		Ritual
<i>sgrol ma</i>	Drölma	Tārā		Deity
<i>sgrol ma lha khang</i>	Drölma Lhakhang	Tārā Chapel		Building

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>brgya</i>	gya	hundred		Technical Term
<i>brgyad</i>	gyé	eight		Technical Term

Nga

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>ngag dbang byams pa</i>	Ngawang Jampa		1682-1762	Person
<i>ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho</i>	Ngawang Lozang Gyatso		1617-1682	Person
<i>ngag dbang sman rgyal</i>	Ngawang Mengyal		20th century	Person
<i>ngul gyi par khang</i>	ngülgyi parkhang	money printing press		Technical Term
<i>sngags</i>	ngak	mantra		Technical Term
<i>sngags pa</i>	ngakpa	tantric priest		Technical Term
<i>sngags pa grwa tshang</i>	Ngakpa Dratsang	Tantric College		Monastery

Ca

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>gcig bu pa</i>	chikbupa	recluse		Technical Term
<i>bca' yig</i>	chayik	constitution		Technical Term

Cha

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>chab rdzang gling kha</i>	Chapdzang Lingkha	Pond Park		Place
<i>chu mo yos</i>	chumo yō	female-water-hare (year)		Date
<i>chu bzang</i>	chupzang	good waters		Technical Term
<i>chu bzang</i>	Chupzang			Monastery
<i>chu bzang dgon</i>	Chupzang Gön	Chupzang Nunnery		Monastery
<i>chu bzang ye shes rgya mtsho</i>	Chupzang Yeshé Gyatso		1789-1856	Person
<i>cho ga phyag len</i>	choga chaklen	ritual		Technical Term
<i>chos kyi rdo rje</i>	Chökyi Dorjé		b. 18th century?	Person
<i>chos kyi seng ge</i>	Chökyi Senggé			Person
<i>chos skyong</i>	chökyong	protector deity		Technical Term
<i>chos khang rtse ba dgon pa</i>	Chökhang Tsewa Gönpa	Chökhang Tsewa Monastery		Monastery
<i>chos 'khor dus chen</i>	Chökhör Düchen	Festival of the Turning of the Wheel of the Doctrine		Festival
<i>chos gos</i>	chögō	yellow ceremonial robe		Technical Term
<i>chos rgyal</i>	Chögyel	Dharmarāja		Deity
<i>chos rgyal khri srong lde'u bisan</i>	Chögyel Trisong Detsen	the Buddhist king (of Tibet) Trisong Detsen	742-796	Person

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>chos rgyal srong btsan sgam po</i>	Chögyel Songtsen Gampo	the Buddhist king (of Tibet) Songtsen Gampo	617-650	Person
<i>chos thog</i>	chötök	ritual cycle		Technical Term
<i>chos sdings</i>	Chöding			Monastery
<i>chos sdings ri khrod</i>	Chöding Ritrö	Chöding Hermitage		Monastery
<i>chos me khang</i>	chömé khang	butter-lamp offering house		Technical Term
<i>chos mtshams</i>	chötsam	doctrine retreat		Technical Term
<i>chos gzhis</i>	chözhi	estate lands		Technical Term
<i>chos rwa</i>	chöra	Dharma enclosure or Dharma courtyard		Technical Term
<i>mchod mjal</i>	chönjel	worship		Technical Term
<i>mchod rten dkar chung</i>	Chöten Karchung	Little White Stüpa		Monument
<i>'chi med lha khang</i>	Chimé Lhakhang	Chapel of Deathlessness		Building

Ja

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>ja bdun dang thug pa gnyis</i>	ja dün dang tukpa nyi	seven teas and two soups		Technical Term
<i>jo khang</i>	Jokhang			Monastery
<i>jo ston bsod nams rgyal mtshan</i>	Jötön Sönam Gyeltsen		17th century	Person
<i>jo bo</i>	jowo	the Lord		Technical Term
<i>jo bo mi bskiyod rdo rje</i>	Jowo Mikyö Dorjé			Deity
<i>jo mo si si</i>	Jomo Sisi			Place
<i>'jam dpal bla ri</i>	Jampel Lari	Mañjuśrī Peak		Place
<i>'jam dpal dbyangs kyi bla ri</i>	Jampelyangkylari	the Soul-Mountain of Mañjuśrī		Place
<i>'jam dbyangs grags pa</i>	Jamyang Drakpa			Person
<i>'jigs byed kyi me long</i>	Jikjekyi Melong	Mirror of Vajrabhairava		Place
<i>'jigs byed lha bcu gsum</i>	Jikjé Lha Chuksum	Thirteen-Deity Vajrabhairava		Deity
<i>'jog po</i>	Jokpo			Monastery
<i>'jog po ngag dbang bstan 'dzin</i>	Jokpo Ngawang Tendzin		b. 1748	Person
<i>'jog po bla brang</i>	Jokpo Labrang	Jokpo Lama's estate		Organization
<i>'jog po bla brang</i>	Jokpo Labrang	Jokpo Lama's residence		Organization
<i>'jog po ri khrod</i>	Jokpo Ritrö	Jokpo Hermitage		Monastery
<i>'jog po rin po che</i>	Jokpo Rinpoché		B. 1748	Person
<i>'jog ri ngag dbang bstan 'dzin</i>	Jokri Ngawang Tendzin		b. 1748	Person
<i>rje btsun nam mkha' spyod sgrol rdor dbang mo</i>	Jetsün Namkhachö Dröldor Wangmo	Jetsün (or Khachö) Dröldor Wangmo		Person
<i>rje btsun bla ma ngag dbang rnam grol</i>	Jetsün Lama Ngawang Namdröl			Person

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>rje gzigs pa lnga ldan</i>	Jé Zikpa Ngaden	Five Visions of the Lord (Tsongkhapa)		Painting Series
<i>rje shes rab seng ge</i>	Jé Sherap Senggé		1383-1445	Person

Nya

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>nyang bran</i>	Nyangdren			Place
<i>nyang bran rgyal chen</i>	Nyangdren Gyelchen			Deity
<i>nyi 'od pho brang</i>	Nyiwö Podrang	Palace of the Rays of the Sun		Room
<i>nye ba 'i gnas bzhi</i>	nyewé né zhi	Four Principal Sites		Place
<i>gnyer pa</i>	nyerpa	manager		Technical Term
<i>gnyer tshang</i>	nyertsang	manager's room		Technical Term
<i>rnying</i>	nying	old		Technical Term
<i>rnying ma</i>	Nyingma			Organization
<i>rnying ma sgrub grwa</i>	Nyingma drupdra	Nyingma practice center		Technical Term
<i>rnying ma pa</i>	Nyingmapa			Organization
<i>rnying ma bla ma</i>	Nyingma lama			Technical Term
<i>snying khrag</i>	nyingdrak	heart's-blood		Technical Term
<i>bsnyen pa</i>	nyenpa	approximation retreat		Technical Term

Ta

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>tā rā 'i bla ri</i>	Taré Lari	the Soul-Mountain of Tārā		Place
<i>trak shad</i>	Trakshé			Deity
<i>gter</i>	ter	treasure		Technical Term
<i>gter bdag srong btsan</i>	Terdak Songtsen	Treasure Lord Songtsen		Deity
<i>gter nas ston pa</i>	terné tönpa	discovered as treasure		Technical Term
<i>rta mgrin</i>	Tamdrin	Hayagrīva		Deity
<i>rta mgrin gsang sgrub</i>	Tamdrin Sangdrup	Hayagrīva in his "Secret Accomplishment" form		Deity
<i>rta ma do nyag</i>	Tama Donyak			Place
<i>rta tshag ye shes bstan pa 'i mgon po</i>	Tatsak Yeshé Tenpé Gönpö		1760-1810	Person
<i>rtag brtan</i>	takten	permanent and stable		Technical Term
<i>rtags brtan</i>	takten	stable sign		Technical Term
<i>rtags brten</i>	Takten			Monastery
<i>rtags brten ri khrod</i>	Takten Ritrö	Takten Hermitage		Monastery
<i>rtags bstan</i>	takten	revealed sign		Technical Term

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>rtags bstan</i>	Takten			Monastery
<i>rtags bstan sgrub phug</i>	Takten Druppuk			Monastery
<i>rtags bstan ri khrod</i>	Takten Ritrö	Takten Hermitage		Monastery
<i>rten khang</i>	tenkhang			Technical Term
<i>mchod rten</i>	chöten	stüpa		Monument
<i>bstan 'gyur</i>	tengyur	Collection of Translated Śāstras		Text
<i>bstan 'gyur lha khang</i>	Tengyur lhakhang	Tengyur chapel		Building
<i>bstan nor mkhar rdo</i>	Tennor Khardo		b. 1957	Person
<i>bstan ma</i>	Tenma			Class of Deities

Tha				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>thang ka</i>	tangka			Technical Term
<i>thang stong rgyal po</i>	Tangtong Gyelpo		1361-1485	Person
<i>thu'u bkwan</i>	Tuken		1737-1802	Person
<i>theg chen gso sbyong</i>	Tekchen Sojong	Mahāyāna Precepts		Technical Term
<i>phyag stong spyang stong</i>	chaktong chentong	Thousand-Armed Thousand-Eyed Avalokiteśvara		Deity
<i>thogs med rin po che</i>	Tokmé Rinpoché		20th century	Person
<i>thod smyon bsam grub</i>	Tönyön Samdrup		12th century	Person
<i>thon mi</i>	Tönmi		7th century	Person

Da				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>dā ma la nyag</i>	Damala Nyak			Place
<i>da lai bla ma</i>	Dalai Lama			Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng dgu pa</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Gupa	the Ninth Dalai Lama	1806-1815	Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng bgyad pa 'jam dpal rgya mtsho</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Gyepa Jampel Gyatso	the Eighth Dalai Lama Jampel Gyatso	1758-1804	Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Ngapa	the Fifth Dalai Lama	1617-1682	Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Ngapa Ngawang Lozang Gyatso	the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatso	1617-1682	Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu bzhi pa</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Chuzhipa	the Fourteenth Dalai Lama	b. 1935	Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu gsum pa</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Chuksumpa	the Thirteenth Dalai Lama	1876-1933	Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng bcu gsum pa thub bstan rgya mtsho</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Chuksumpa Tupten Gyatso	the Thirteenth Dalai Lama Tupten Gyatso	1876-1933	Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng drug pa</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Drukpa	the Sixth Dalai Lama	1683-1706	Person

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng bdun pa</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Dünpa	the Seventh Dalai Lama	1708-1757	Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng bdun pa bskal bzang rgya mtsho</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Dünpa Kelzang Gyatso	the Seventh Dalai Lama Kelzang Gyatso	1708-1757	Person
<i>da lai bla ma sku phreng gsum pa</i>	Dalai Lama Kutreng Sumpa	the Third Dalai Lama	1543-1588	Person
<i>ḍākinī</i>	dakini	ḍākinī		Technical Term
<i>dam chen chos rgyal</i>	Damchen Chögyel	Dharmarāja		Deity
<i>dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las</i>	Dungkar Lozang Trinlé		1927-1997	Person
<i>dung dkar tshig mdzod</i>	Dungkar Tsikdzö	Dungkar Dictionary		Text
<i>dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo</i>	Dungkar Tsikdzö Chenmo	The Great Dungkar Dictionary		Text
<i>dung dkar rin po che</i>	Dungkar Rinpoché		1927-1997	Person
<i>dur khrod</i>	durtrö	cemetery		Technical Term
<i>dus 'khor</i>	Dükhör	Kālacakra		Deity
<i>de bi ko ṭi</i>	Debi Koti	Debikoti		Place
<i>de mo sku phreng brgyad pa ngag dbang blo bzang thub bstan 'jigs med rgya mtsho</i>	Demo Kutreng Gyepa Ngawang Lozang Tupten Jikmé Gyatso	the eighth Demo incarnation Ngawang Lozang Tupten Jikmé Gyatso	1778-1819	Person
<i>dog bde</i>	Dodé			Place
<i>dog sde</i>	Dokdé	Dodé		Place
<i>dog sde lho smon</i>	Dodé Lhomön			Place
<i>dwags po grwa tshang</i>	Dakpo Dratsang	Dakpo College		Monastery
<i>drag phyogs kyi las</i>	drakchokkyi lé	wrathful magical powers		Technical Term
<i>drang nges legs bshad snying po</i>	Drangngé Lekshé Nyingpo	The Essence of Eloquence that Distinguishes between the Provisional and Definitive Meaning		Text
<i>drug pa tshe bzhi</i>	Drukpa Tsezhi	Sixth-Month Fourth-Day		Festival
<i>drug pa brtson 'grus rgyal mtshan</i>	Drungpa Tsöndrū Gyeltsen		fl. 17th century	Person
<i>drug pa rin po che</i>	Drungpa Rinpoché		fl. 17th century	Person
<i>gdan sa</i>	densa	seats of learning		Technical Term
<i>gdan sa gsum</i>	Densa Sum	the three great Geluk seats of learning		
<i>gdugs dkar</i>	Dukar			Deity
<i>gdugs pa 'i bla ri</i>	Dukpé Lari	the Parasol Soul Mountain		Place
<i>gdugs yur dgon</i>	Dukyur Gön			Monastery
<i>gdung rten</i>	dungen	funerary stūpa		Technical Term
<i>bdag bskyed</i>	dakkyé	self-generation		Ritual
<i>bdag 'jug</i>	danjuk	self-initiation		Ritual
<i>bde chen pho brang</i>	Dechen Podrang	Palace of Great Bliss		Room
<i>bde mchog</i>	Demchok	Cakrasaṃvara		Deity

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>bde mchog gi pho brang</i>	Demchokgi Podrang	Palace of Cakrasaṃvara		Place
<i>bde mchog bla mchod</i>	Demchok Lachö	Offering to the Master Based on the Deity Cakrasaṃvara		Ritual
<i>bde mchog bla ri</i>	Demchok Lari	Soul Mountain of Demchok		Place
<i>mdo skal bzang</i>	Do Kelzang	Sūtra of Good Fortune		Text
<i>'du khang</i>	dukhang	assembly hall		Technical Term
<i>'dra sku</i>	draku	simulacrum (type of statue)		Technical Term
<i>rdo sku</i>	doku	stone image		Technical Term
<i>rdo cung cong zhi 'i phug pa</i>	Dochung Chongzhi Pukpa	Cavern of Dochung Chongzhi		Place
<i>rdo rje 'jigs byed</i>	Dorjé Jikjé	Vajrabhairava		Deity
<i>rdo rje rnal 'byor ma</i>	Dorjé Neljorma	Vajrayoginī		Deity
<i>rdo rje btsun mo</i>	Dorjé Tsünmo			Deity
<i>rdo rje g.yu sgron ma</i>	Dorjé Yudrönma			Deity
<i>rdo rje shugs ldan</i>	Dorjé Shukden			Deity
<i>rdo rje sems dpa'</i>	Dorjé Sempa	Vajrasattva		Deity
<i>rdo gter</i>	Dodé			Place
<i>rdo ring</i>	Doring			Clan
<i>sdig pa chen po</i>	dikpa chenpo	great sin		Technical Term
<i>sde srid</i>	desi	regent		Technical Term
<i>sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho</i>	Desi Sanggyé Gyatso		1653-1705	Person

Na

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>na chung rtse mo ri</i>	Nachung Tsemo Ri			Place
<i>na ro mkha' spyod ma</i>	Naro Kachöma			Deity
<i>na ro mkha' spyod ma 'i bdag 'jug</i>	Naro Khachömé Danjuk	Self-initiation Ritual of Naro Khachöma		Ritual
<i>nag chu</i>	Nakchu			Place
<i>nag chu zhabs brtan dgon pa</i>	Nakchu Zhapten Gönpa			Monastery
<i>nag ril chen po zhig</i>	nakril chenpo zhik	a large dark shape		Technical Term
<i>nang rten gtso bo</i>	nanngen tsowo	main inner image(s)		Technical Term
<i>nam mkha' rgyal mtshan</i>	Namkha Gyeltsen		1532-1592	Person
<i>nor bu gling kha</i>	Norbu Lingkha			Place
<i>gnas kyi bla ma</i>	nekya lama	head lama		Technical Term
<i>gnas sgo gdong</i>	Negodong			Monastery
<i>gnas sgo gdong ri khrod</i>	Negodong Hermitage			Monastery
<i>gnas bcu lha khang</i>	Nechu Lhakhang	Temple of the Sixteen Arhats		Building
<i>gnas chung</i>	Nechung			Deity

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>gnas brtan bcu drug</i>	Neten Chudruk	Sixteen Arhats		Ritual
<i>gnas brtan bcu drug</i>	Neten Chudruk	Sixteen Arhats		Deity
<i>gnas brtan phyag mchod</i>	Neten Chakchö	Offering of Homage to the (Sixteen) Arhats		Ritual
<i>gnas brtan bla ri</i>	Neten Lari	the Soul-Mountain of the Arhats		Place
<i>gnas bdag</i>	nedak	site deity		Technical Term
<i>gnas nang</i>	Nenang			Monastery
<i>gnas nang dgon pa</i>	Nenang Gönpa	Nenang Nunnery		Monastery
<i>gnas nang ri khrod</i>	Nenang Ritrö	Nenang Hermitage		Monastery
<i>gnas mo</i>	Nemo			Place
<i>gnas rtsa chen po</i>	né tsa chenpo	a holy site		Technical Term
<i>gnas ri</i>	neri	mountain-abode		Technical Term
<i>rnam grol lag bcangs</i>	Namdröl Lakchang	Liberation in Our Hands		Text
<i>rnam rgyal</i>	Namgyel			Monastery
<i>rnam sras</i>	Namsé	Vaiśravaṇa		Deity
<i>rnam sras bang mdzod</i>	Namsé Bangdzö	Treasure-House of Vaiśravaṇa		Room
<i>rnal 'byor ma'i bdag 'jug</i>	Neljormé Danjuk	Self-Initiation Ritual of Vajrayoginī		Ritual

Pa

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>padma 'byung gnas</i>	Pema Jungné	Padmasambhava	8th century	Person
<i>paṅ chen sku phreng gsum pa</i>	Penchen Kutreng Sumpa	the Third Penchen Lama		Person
<i>paṅ chen bde legs nyi ma</i>	Penchen Delek Nyima		16th century	Person
<i>paṅ chen bla ma</i>	Penchen Lama			Person
<i>paṅ chen blo bzang ye shes</i>	Penchen Lozang Yeshé		1663-1737	Person
<i>po ta la</i>	Potala			Building
<i>po to ba rin chen gsal</i>	Potowa Rinchen Sel		1027/31-1105	Person
<i>dpa' grong shag pa</i>	Padrong Shakpa			Clan
<i>dpal ldan lha mo</i>	Pelden Lhamo			Deity
<i>dpal 'byor rab rgyas</i>	Peljor Rapgyé		1604-1669	Person
<i>dpal lha mo</i>	Pel Lhamo			Deity
<i>dpe cha ba</i>	pechawa	textualist		Technical Term
<i>dpe mtshams</i>	petsam	textual retreat		Technical Term
<i>dpyid kyi rgyal mo'i klu dbyangs</i>	Chikyi Gyelmo Luyang	The Nāga Song of the Queen of Springtime		Text
<i>spang lung</i>	Panglung			Monastery
<i>spang lung ri khrod</i>	Panglung Ritro	Panglung Hermitage		Monastery
<i>spangs lung sku phreng dang po blo bzang thugs rje</i>	Panglung Kutreng Dangpo Lozang Tukjé	the first Panglung incarnation Lozang Tukjé	1770-ca. 1835	Person
<i>spo 'bo ra spyi khang</i>	Bombora Chikhang			Building
<i>spyi mi</i>	chimi	representative		Technical Term

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>sprul sku</i>	trülku	incarnation		Technical Term

Pha				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>pha dam pa</i>	Pa Dampa		b. 11th century	Person
<i>pha dam pa sangs rgyas</i>	Pa Dampa Sanggyé		b. 11th century	Person
<i>pha bong kha/khang</i>	Pabongkha/khang	The Boulder Man/House		Building
<i>pha bong kha</i>	Pabongkha			Monastery
<i>pha bong kha[ng]</i>	Pabongkha[ng]	The Boulder House		Building
<i>pha bong kha rgya mtsho mtha' yas</i>	Pabongkha Gyatso Tayé		b. 18th century	Person
<i>pha bong kha bde chen snying po</i>	Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo		1878-1941	Person
<i>pha bong kha pa</i>	Pabongkhapa		1878-1941	Person
<i>pha bong kha sprul sku</i>	Pabongkha Trülku	Pabongkha incarnation		Person
<i>pha bong kha bla brang</i>	Pabongkha Labrang	Pabongkha Lama's estate		Organization
<i>pha bong kha ri khrod</i>	Pabongkha Ritrö	Pabongkha Hermitage		Monastery
<i>pha bong kha rin po che</i>	Pabongkha Rinpoché		1878-1941	Person
<i>pha bong kha'i dkar chag</i>	Pabongkhé Karchak	A Catalogue of Pabongkha		Text
<i>phag mo gru pa</i>	Pakmo Drupa			Organization
<i>phun tshogs 'phrin las</i>	Püntsok Trinlé		20th century	Person
<i>phun tshogs rab rgyas</i>	Püntsok Rapgyé		20th century	Person
<i>phur lcog</i>	Purchok			Monastery
<i>phur lcog sku phreng gnyis pa blo bzang byams pa</i>	Purchok Kutreng Nyipa Lozang Jampa	the second Purchok incarnation Lozang Jampa	1763-1823	Person
<i>phur lcog sku phreng dang po ngag dbang byams pa</i>	Purchok Kutreng Dangpo Ngawang Jampa	the first Purchok incarnation Ngawang Jampa	1682-1762	Person
<i>phur lcog sku phreng gsum pa blo bzang tshul khriims byams pa rgya mtsho</i>	Purchok Kutreng Sumpa Lozang Tsültrim Jampa Gyatso	the third Purchok incarnation Lozang Tsültrim Jampa Gyatso	1825-1901	Person
<i>phur lcog sku phreng gsum pa yongs 'dzin byams pa rgya mtsho</i>	Purchok Kutreng Sumpa Yongdzin Jampa Gyatso	the third Purchok incarnation Yongdzin Jampa Gyatso		Person
<i>phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa</i>	Purchok Ngawang Jampa		1682-1762	Person
<i>phur lcog bla brang</i>	Purchok Labrang	Purchok Lama's estate		Organization
<i>phur lcog bla ma</i>	Purchok lama			Person
<i>phur lcog blo bzang tshul khriims byams pa rgya mtsho</i>	Purchok Lozang Tsültrim Jampa Gyatso		1825-1901	Person
<i>phur lcog ri</i>	Purchok Ri	Purchok Mountain		Place
<i>phur lcog ri khrod</i>	Purchok Ritrö	Purchok Hermitage		Monastery
<i>phur lcog rigs gsum byang chub gling gi byung ba mdo tsam brjod pa</i>	Purchok Riksum Jangchup Linggi Jungwa Dotsam Jöpa	A Brief Explanation of the History of Purchok Riksum Jangchup Ling		Text
<i>phur lcog rigs gsum byang chub gling gi byung ba mdo tsam brjod pa dad gsum 'dren pa'i lcags kyu</i>	Purchok Riksum Jangchup Linggi Jungwa Dotsam Jöpa Desum Drenpé Chakkyu	A Brief History of Purchok Riksum Jangchup Ling: A Hook to Draw in the Three Types of Faith		Text

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>phur lcog rin po che</i>	Purchok Rinpoché			Person
<i>phur bu lcog</i>	Purbuchok			Monastery
<i>phur bu lcog ri khrod</i>	Purbuchok Ritrö			Monastery
<i>phur byung</i>	Purjung	A Brief History of Purchok		Text
<i>pho brang ngos</i>	podrang ngö	the actual palace		Technical Term
<i>pho lha nas</i>	Polhané		1689-1747	Person
<i>phyag mdzod</i>	chandzö	administrative head		Technical Term
<i>phyi dar</i>	chidar	later propagation period		Technical Term
<i>phrin las rgya mtsho</i>	Trinlé Gyatso		d. 1667	Person
<i>'phags pa</i>	Pakpa		1235-1280	Person
<i>'phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa brgyad stong pa'i mdo</i>	Pakpa Sherapkyi Paröltu Chinpa Gyetongpé Do	Eight Thousand-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra (Skt., <i>Āryāṣṭasāhasikāprañāpāramitā Sūtra</i>)		Text
<i>'phan po</i>	Penpo			Place
<i>'pho ba</i>	powa	transition of consciousness		Technical Term

Ba

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>bar skor</i>	Barkor			Place
<i>sangs rgyas</i>	sanggyé	Buddha		Deity
<i>bai dūrya ser po</i>	Baidurya Serpo	Yellow Lapis		Text
<i>bod ljongs nang bstan</i>	Böjong Nangten	Tibetan Buddhism		Journal
<i>bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang</i>	Böjong Mimang Petrünkhang			Publisher
<i>byang</i>	Jang	Northern Tibet		Place
<i>byang chub chos 'phel</i>	Jangchup Chöpel		1756-1838	Person
<i>byang chos 'khor gling</i>	Jang Chökhör Ling			Monastery
<i>byams khang</i>	Jamkhang	Maitreya Chapel		Room
<i>byams chen chos rje</i>	Jamchen Chöjé		1354-1435	Person
<i>byams pa</i>	Jampa	Maitreya		Deity
<i>byams pa gling</i>	Jampa Ling			Monastery
<i>byams pa bstan 'dzin 'phrin las rgya mtsho</i>	Jampa Tendzin Trinlé Gyatso		1878-1941	Person
<i>byams pa thub bstan rin po che</i>	Jampa Tupten Rinpoché		20th century	Person
<i>byin can</i>	jinchen	blessed		Technical Term
<i>byin rlabs</i>	jinlap	blessing		Technical Term
<i>byes</i>	Jé			Monastery
<i>byes mkhan po rgyal mtshan don grub</i>	Jé Khenpo Gyeltsen Döndrup		17th century	Person
<i>byes sgom sde khang tshan</i>	Jé Gomdé Khangtsen	Jé Gomdé Regional House		Monastery Subunit
<i>byes 'du khang</i>	Jé Dukhang	Jé College Assembly Hall		Building

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>byes har gdong khang tshan</i>	Jé Hamdong Khangtsen	Hamdong Regional House of the Jé College		Monastery Subunit
<i>brag mchod sa</i>	Drak Chösa	Offering Place Cave		Place
<i>brag ri</i>	Drakri			Monastery
<i>brag ri</i>	drakri	crag		Technical Term
<i>brag ri sku phreng gnyis pa rgya mtsho chos 'byor</i>	Drakri Kutreng Nyipa Gyatso Chönjor	the second Drakri incarnation Gyatso Chönjor	b. 19th century	Person
<i>brag ri rgya mtsho mtha 'yas</i>	Drakri Gyatso Tayé			Person
<i>brag ri sprul sku</i>	Drakri Trülku	Drakri incarnation		Person
<i>brag ri sprul sku blo bzang theg mchog dbang po</i>	Drakri Trülku Lozang Tekchok Wangpo	the Drakri incarnation Lozang Tekchok Wangpo		Person
<i>brag ri bla brang</i>	Drakri Labrang	Drakri Lama's estate		Organization
<i>brag ri bla ma</i>	Drakri lama			Person
<i>brag ri ri khrod</i>	Drakri Ritrö	Drakri Hermitage		Monastery
<i>brag ri rin po che</i>	Drakri Rinpoché			Person
<i>bla brang</i>	labrang	lama's estate		Technical Term
<i>bla ma</i>	lama			Technical Term
<i>bla ma mchod pa tshog</i>	Lama Chöpa Tsok	Offering-Ritual to the Lama		Ritual
<i>bla ma zhang</i>	Lama Zhang		1123-1193	Person
<i>bla ri</i>	lari	soul mountain		Technical Term
<i>blo bzang sgom chung</i>	Lozang Gomchung	Lozang the Little Mediator		Person
<i>blo bzang ye shes bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho</i>	Lozang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso		1901-1981	Person
<i>dbang 'dus 'khor lo</i>	Wangdü Khorlo	Cycle for Gathering Power		Text
<i>dbang phyug chen po</i>	Wangchuk Chenpo	Maheśvara		Deity
<i>dbu gdugs ri</i>	Udukri	Mount Parasol		Place
<i>dbu mdzad</i>	umdzé	chant leader		Technical Term
<i>dben gnas</i>	ené	solitary site		Technical Term
<i>dben sa</i>	ensa	solitary place		Technical Term
<i>dben sa pa</i>	ensapa	recluse		Technical Term
<i>dben sa pa</i>	Ensapa	Ensapa	1504/5-1565/6	Person
<i>dben sa pa blo bzang don grub</i>	Ensapa Lozang Döndrup		1504/5-1565/6	Person
<i>dbyar gnas</i>	yarné	rainy-season retreat		Technical Term
<i>'bras spungs</i>	Drepung			Monastery
<i>'brog pa</i>	drokpa	nomad		Technical Term
<i>sba ri</i>	Bari			Lineage
<i>sba ri bla brang</i>	Bari Labrang	Bari Lama's estate		Organization
<i>sba ri bla ma</i>	Bari lama			Person
<i>sba ri ri khrod</i>	Bari Ritrö	Bari Hermitage		Monastery

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>sba ri rin po che</i>	Bari Rinpoché			Person
<i>sbyin bdag</i>	jindak	patron		Technical Term

Ma				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>ma cig lab sgron</i>	Machik Lapdrön		12th century	Person
<i>ma ni bka' 'bum</i>	Mani Kabum	The Compendium on the Maṇi [Mantra]		Text
<i>ma ni 'khor lo</i>	mani khorlo	mani wheel		Technical Term
<i>ma ni lha khang</i>	mani lhakhang	mani [wheel] temple		Technical Term
<i>maṅḍala</i>	mendel	maṅḍala		Technical Term
<i>mi chos gtsang ma bcu drug</i>	michö tsangma chudruk	sixteen rules of purity for the populace		Technical Term
<i>mi dbang byams pa</i>	Miwang Jampa	Maitreya as Lord of Men		Deity
<i>mi g.yo ba</i>	Miyowa	Acala		Deity
<i>mi la 'i brag</i>	Milé Drak	Cave of Mila		Place
<i>mi ser</i>	miser	serf		Technical Term
<i>me tog char babs</i>	metog charbap	rained flowers		Technical Term
<i>me mo phag</i>	memopak	female-fire-pig (year)		Date
<i>mes dbon</i>	Mewön			Person
<i>mo barha nyag</i>	Mo Barha Nyak			Place
<i>dmar gdung</i>	mardung	mummified corpse		Technical Term
<i>rmog tho 'go</i>	Moktogo			Place
<i>smad</i>	Mé			Monastery
<i>smad 'du khang</i>	Mé Dukhang	Mé College Assembly Hall		Building
<i>smad bla zur blo bzang don grub</i>	Mé Lazur Lozang Döndrup			Person
<i>sman bla</i>	Menla	Medicine Buddha		Deity
<i>sman bla</i>	Menla	Medicine Buddha		Ritual
<i>sman bla bde gshegs brgyad</i>	Menla Deshek Gyé	Ritual of the Eight Medicine Buddhas		Ritual
<i>sman bla bde gshegs brgyad</i>	Menla Deshek Gyé	Eight Medicine Buddhas		Deity
<i>sman bla yid bzhin dbang rgyal</i>	Menla Yizhin Wanggyel	Medicine Buddha [Ritual]: Yizhin Wanggyel		Ritual
<i>smyung gnas</i>	nyungné	fasting ritual		Ritual

Tsa				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>tsa khang</i>	tsakhang	clay tablet repository		Technical Term
<i>tsa tsa</i>	tsatsa	pressed-clay tablets		Technical Term
<i>tsong kha brgyad bcu</i>	Tsongkha Gyepchu	Eighty Deeds of Tsongkhapa		Series of Paintings

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>tsong kha pa</i>	Tsongkhapa		1357-1419	Person
<i>gtsang</i>	Tsang			Place
<i>btsan khang</i>	tsenkhang	tsen chapel		Technical Term
<i>rtsa shes tik chen</i>	Tsashé Tikchen	Great Commentary on the Prajñāmūla		Text
<i>rtsa gsum lha khang</i>	Tsasum Lhakhang	“Three Roots” Chapel		Room
<i>rtsam pa</i>	tsampa			Technical Term

Tsha				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>tsha khang tshan</i>	Tsa Khangtsen	Tsa Regional House		Monastery Subunit
<i>tshal pa bka' bgyud</i>	Tselpa Kagyü			Organization
<i>tshé mchog gling</i>	Tsechokling			Monastery
<i>tshé dpag med lha dgu</i>	Tsepakmé Lhagu	Nine Deities [related to] Amitāyus		Deity
<i>tshes bcu phug</i>	Tsechupuk	Cave of the Tenth Day		Room
<i>tshes bcu lha khang</i>	Tsechu Lhakhang	Temple of the Tenth Day		Room
<i>tshogs chen</i>	Tsokchen	Great Assembly Hall		Building
<i>tshogs chen sprul sku</i>	Tsokchen Trülku	incarnation of the Great Assembly Hall		Technical Term
<i>tshogs gtam</i>	tsoktam	public admonition		Technical Term
<i>tshogs bdag lag na 'khor lo</i>	Tsokdak Lakna Khorlo	Cycle on Gaṇeśa		Text
<i>tshong pa</i>	tsongpa	merchant		Technical Term
<i>tshoms chen shar</i>	Tsomchen Shar	Eastern Assembly Hall		Building
<i>mtshan zhabs</i>	tsenzhap	assistant tutor		Technical Term
<i>mtshams pa</i>	tsampa	retreatant		Technical Term
<i>mtsho</i>	tso	lake		Technical Term
<i>mtsho sngon po</i>	Tso Ngönpo	Kokonor		Place
<i>mtshon cha'i 'khor lo</i>	tsönché khorlo	wheel of weapons		Technical Term

Dza				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>mdzo</i>	dzo			Technical Term
<i>'dzam gling rgyas bshad</i>	Dzamling Gyeshé	Extensive Explanation of the World		Text

Wa				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>wāgīndamatibhadrapaṭu bandashāsadharasagara</i>	Vagindamatibhadrapatu Bandashasadharasagara			Person

Zha				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>zhang 'gro ba 'i mgon po g.yu brag pa</i>	Zhang Drowé Gönpo Yudrakpa		1123-1193	Person
<i>zhabs rjes</i>	zhapjé	footprint		Technical Term
<i>zhabs brtan</i>	zhapten	ritual		Technical Term
<i>zhi byed</i>	Zhijé	Pacification		Organization
<i>zhing pa</i>	zhingpa	farmer		Technical Term
<i>gzhi bdag</i>	zhidak	site-spirit		Technical Term
<i>gzhung dgon</i>	zhunggön	state monastery		Technical Term
<i>gzhung sgo</i>	zhunggo	main door		Technical Term
<i>gzhung pa khang tshan</i>	Zhungpa Khangtsen	Zhungpa Regional House		Monastery Subunit

Za				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>zangs dkar</i>	Zangkar	Zangskar		Place
<i>zangs mdog dpal ri</i>	Zangdok Pelri	Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain		Place
<i>zangs ri</i>	Zangri			Place
<i>zangs ri mkhar dmar</i>	Zangri Karmar			Monastery
<i>gzim khang</i>	zimkhang	residence		Technical Term
<i>gzims khang gong ma</i>	Zimkhang Gongma	Upper Residence		Building
<i>gzungs 'bul</i>	zungbül	to offer zung [inside of statues]		Technical Term
<i>bzod pa rgya mtsho</i>	Zöpa Gyatso		1672-1749	Person

'A				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>'od zer phung po che</i>	Özer Pungpoché	Great Heap of Light		Place
<i>'ol khar</i>	Ölkhar	Ölkhar		Place

Ya				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>yang gam</i>	yanggam	wealth-box		Technical Term
<i>yi dam</i>	yidam	tutelary deities		Technical Term
<i>yig cha</i>	yikcha	(a monastery's) ritual texts		Technical Term
<i>yul nyer bzhi 'i ya rgyal/ de bi ko 'i dang ming gzhan pha bong kha byang chub shing gi nags khrod du bkod pa 'i dkar chag dad ldan padmo</i>	Yül Nyerzhi Yagyel/ Debi Koti dang Mingzhen Pabongkha Jangchup Shinggi Naktrödu Kopé Karchak Deden Pemo Gyejé Zijin Ötong Barwé Norbu	An Inventory of [the Institution that,] from among the Four Sites, is Debikoti, a.k.a. Pabongkha, Forest of Bodhi Trees: A		Text

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>rgyas byed gzi sbyin 'od stong 'bar ba 'i nor bu</i>		Jewel Radiating a Thousand Rays, the Resplendent Ripener of the Lotus of the Faithful		
<i>ye shes rgyal mtshan</i>	Yeshé Gyeltsen		1713-1793	Person
<i>yongs 'dzin ye shes rgyal mtshan</i>	Yongdzin Yeshé Gyeltsen		1713-1793	Person

Ra				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>ra kha brag</i>	Rakhadrak			Monastery
<i>ra kha brag ri khrod</i>	Rakhadrak Ritrö	Rakhadrak Hermitage		Monastery
<i>ra kha brag a zhu bsod nams</i>	Rakhadrak Azhu Sönam		b. 17th century	Person
<i>ra mo che</i>	Ramoché	Great Female Goat [Temple]		Building
<i>ra sa</i>	Rasa			Place
<i>rang byon</i>	rangjön	self-arisen image		Technical Term
<i>rab byung</i>	rapjung	calendrical cycle		Technical Term
<i>rab gsal</i>	rapsel	sun room		Technical Term
<i>ri</i>	ri	the mountain		Technical Term
<i>ri khrod</i>	ritrö	hermitage		Technical Term
<i>ri khrod pa</i>	ritröpa	hermit		Technical Term
<i>ri 'khor</i>	rikhor	mountain circumambulation		Name
<i>ri 'go sgo ma</i>	Rigo Goma			Place
<i>ri chen gsum</i>	Richen Sum	Three Great Mountains		Place
<i>rigs pa 'i rgya mstho</i>	Rikpé Gyatso	Ocean of Reasoning		Text
<i>rigs 'dzin chos kyi rdo rje</i>	Rikdzin Chökyi Dorjé		b. 1790?	Person
<i>rigs gsum mgon po</i>	Riksum Gönpö	Three Protectors		Deity
<i>rigs gsum mgon po lha khang</i>	Riksum Gönpö Lhakhang	Temple of the Three Protectors		Building
<i>rin po che</i>	rinpoché			Technical Term
<i>rus sbal pho</i>	rübelpo	male turtle		Place
<i>rus sbal mo</i>	rübeldo	female turtle		Place
<i>rwa sgren</i>	Radreng		d. 1947	Person
<i>rwa sgren sku sgren lnga pa</i>	Radreng Kutreng Ngapa	the fifth Radreng incarnation	d. 1947	Person
<i>rwa sgren rin po che</i>	Radreng Rinpoché		d. 1947	Person

La				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>lam rim</i>	lamrim	graded stages of the path		Technical Term

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>lam rim 'jam dpal zhal lung</i>	Lamrim Jampel Zhellung	The Revelations of Mañjuśrī: A Lamrim		Text
<i>lam rim bde lam</i>	Lamrim Delam	The Easy Path: A Lamrim		Text
<i>las rung</i>	lerung	enabling retreat		Technical Term
<i>li thang</i>	Litang			Place
<i>lo gsar</i>	Losar	New Year		Festival

Sha				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>shug pa'i nags bla ri</i>	Shukpé Nak Lari	The Soul-Mountain of Juniper Forests		Place
<i>shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i mdo</i>	Sherapkyi Parölu Chinpé Do	Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras (Skt., Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra)		Text
<i>gshin rje'i rang thag</i>	Shinjé Rangtak	the Mill of the Shinjé		Technical Term
<i>bshes gnyen tshul khrims</i>	Shenyen Tsültrim		20th century	Person

Sa				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>sa skya</i>	Sakya			Organization
<i>sa skya pa</i>	Sakyapa			Organization
<i>sa skya pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan</i>	Sakyapa Sönam Gyeltsen			Person
<i>sa brtag</i>	satak	site investigation		Technical Term
<i>sa bdag</i>	sadak	geo-spirits		Technical Term
<i>sa dpyad</i>	saché	site investigations		Technical Term
<i>sa pho bya</i>	sapoja	male-earth-bird (year)		Date
<i>sa sbyang</i>	sajang	purity of the site		Technical Term
<i>sangs rgyas rgya mtsho</i>	Sanggyé Gyatso		1653-1705	Person
<i>sad mi mi bdun</i>	semi midün	the first seven Tibetan monks		Technical Term
<i>sin dhu ra</i>	sindura	sindhura		Technical Term
<i>se ra</i>	Sera			Monastery
<i>se ra byes grwa tshang</i>	Sera Dratsang Jé	Sera Jé College		Monastery
<i>se ra sngags pa grwa tshang</i>	Sera Ngakpa Dratsang	Sera Tantric College		Monastery
<i>se ra chos sdings</i>	Sera Chöding			Monastery
<i>se ra chos sdings ri khrod</i>	Sera Chöding Ritrö	Sera Chöding Hermitage		Monastery
<i>se ra theg chen khang gsar</i>	Sera Tekchen Khangsar			Building
<i>se ra theg chen gling</i>	Sera Tekchen Ling	Sera Mahāyāna Monastery		Monastery
<i>se ra pa 'jam dbyangs grags pa</i>	Serapa Jamyang Drakpa		b. 17th century	Person
<i>se ra spyi so</i>	Sera chiso	Sera as a whole		Monastery
<i>se ra phur pa</i>	Sera purpa	Sera dagger		Technical Term

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>se ra byes</i>	Sera Jé	Sera Jé (College)		Monastery
<i>se ra dbu rtse</i>	Sera Utsé			Monastery
<i>se ra dbu rtse</i>	Sera utsé	Sera peak		Technical Term
<i>se ra dbu rtse ri khrod</i>	Sera Utsé Ritrö	Sera Utsé Hermitage		Monastery
<i>se ra smad</i>	Sera Mé	Sera Mé (College)		Monastery
<i>se ra rtse</i>	Sera tsé	Sera peak		Technical Term
<i>se ra tshogs chen</i>	Sera Tsokchen	Sera Great Assembly Hall		Building
<i>se ra'i ri khrod</i>	Seré ritrö	hermitage of Sera		Technical Term
<i>se ra'i ri 'khor</i>	Seré Rikhor	Sera Mountain Circumambulation Circuit		Pilgrimage Cycle
<i>seng gdong ma</i>	Sengdongma	Lion-Headed Däkinī		Deity
<i>ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba</i>	Sermé Tösam Norling Dratsanggi Chöjung Logyü Norbū Trengwa	A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels		Text
<i>ser smad lo rgyus</i>	Sermé Logyü	A History of Sermé		Text
<i>srung ma</i>	sungma	protector deity		Technical Term
<i>srog snying</i>	soknying	life-essence		Technical Term
<i>srong btсан sgam po</i>	Songtsen Gampo		604-650	Person
<i>slob dpon</i>	loppön	senior teacher		Technical Term
<i>gsag sbyang</i>	sakjang	accumulation and purification		Technical Term
<i>gsang ba 'dus pa</i>	Sangwa Düpa	Guhyasamāja		Deity
<i>gsar</i>	sar	new		Technical Term
<i>gsung byon ma</i>	sungjönma	speaking-stature		Technical Term
<i>gser ma hä</i>	Ser Maha			Deity
<i>gser yig pa</i>	seryikpa	bearer of the golden letter		Technical Term
<i>gso sbyong</i>	Sojong	monastic confession ritual		Ritual
<i>bsangs gsol dar 'dzugs</i>	sangsöl dardzuk	(to) make burnt juniper offerings and raise flags		Technical Term

Ha				
Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>ha ha rgod pa'i dur khrod</i>	Haha Göpé Durtrö			Place
<i>har gdong khang tshan</i>	Hamdong Khangtsen	Hamdong Regional House		Monastery Subunit
<i>hwa shang</i>	Hashang			Person
<i>lha mo</i>	Lhamo			Deity
<i>lha mo khar</i>	Lhamokhar			Place
<i>lha mo nyi ma gzhon nu</i>	Lhamo Nyima Zhönnu			Deity
<i>lha mo nyi gzhon</i>	Lhamo Nyizhön			Deity
<i>lha btsun rin po che</i>	Lhaptün Rinpoché			Person

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>lha btsun rin po che'i bla brang</i>	Lhaptün Rinpoché Labrang	Lhaptün Rinpoché's estate		Organization
<i>lha btsun rin po che'i bla brang</i>	Lhaptün Rinpoché Labrang	estate of Lhaptün Rinpoché		Organization
<i>lha bzang</i>	Lhazang		d. 1717	Person
<i>lha bzang khāng</i>	Lhazang Khang	Lhazang Khan	d. 1717	Person
<i>lha lung dpal gyi rdo rje</i>	Lhalung Pelgyi Dorjé		9th century	Person
<i>lha sa</i>	Lhasa			Place
<i>lha sa'i dgon tho</i>	Lhasé Gönto	A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa		Text
<i>lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan</i>	Lhasé Gönto Rinchen Punggyen	A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels		Text
<i>lho pa khang tshan</i>	Lhopa Khangtsen	Lhopa Regional House		Monastery Subunit
<i>a kha bsod nams bzang po</i>	Akha Sönam Zangpo		b. 17th century	Person

A

Wylie	Phonetic	Trans./Skt.	Dates	Type
<i>a khu rin po che</i>	Akhu Rinpoché		1803-1875	Person
<i>a mdo rdo rje sku 'bum</i>	Amdo Dorjé Kumbum			Place
<i>a ma</i>	ama	mother		Technical Term
<i>om maṇi padme hūṃ</i>	om maṇi peṃe hum	om maṇi padme hūṃ		Mantra

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