

# **FATHER ESTEVAO CACELLA'S REPORT ON BHUTAN IN 1627**

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## **Abstract**

The article introduces a translation of the account written in 1627 by the Jesuit priest Father Estevao Cacella, of his journey with his companion Father Joao Cabral, first through Bengal and then through Bhutan where they stayed for nearly eight months. The report is significant because the Fathers were the first Westerners to visit and describe Bhutan. More important, the report gives a first-hand account of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, the Founder of Bhutan.

## **Introduction**

After exploring the Indian Ocean in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Portuguese settled as traders in several ports of the coast of India, and by mid 16<sup>th</sup> century Jesuit missionaries had been established in the Malabar Coast (the main centres being Cochin and Goa), in Bengal and in the Deccan. The first Jesuit Mission disembarked in India in 1542 with the arrival of Father Francis Xavier, proclaimed saint in 1622.

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The aim of the Jesuits was to spread Christianity in India and in the Far East, but the regions of Tibet were also of great interest to them. It was believed that Christian communities existed somewhere in Central Asia which, through lack of contact with the original church, practised distorted forms of the faith. It was therefore necessary to re-introduce them into the Church.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century a number of Jesuit missionaries travelled to Tibet by various routes. They experienced hardships and dangers, for they had no maps and sometimes travelled with guides they could not be sure they could trust. Their travels show their courage and persistence and the sacrifices they were prepared to make for the sake of their faith. The Jesuits also contributed in a significant way to reveal Asian civilisations to the Western World, either through the annual letters they wrote to their superiors in India and Rome, or through the systematic studies they made of the languages, customs, religions and the history of Oriental peoples.

Bento de Goes skirted Tibet in a journey which lasted from 1602 to 1605, starting at Agra and passing through Kabul, Yarkand, and the Gobi Desert till he reached Su-cheu in China (Cathay). In 1624 Antonio de Andrade and Manuel Marques set out from Agra travelling via Srinagar and across the Mana Pass, to Tsaparang, the capital of the kingdom of Guge in Western Tibet, and in 1626 built a church there and established a mission which lasted until 1635.

The two Jesuit missionaries who came to Bhutan, Estevao Cacella and Joao Cabral, followed their predecessors in an endeavour to reach Tibet. Cacella was born in Aviz in 1585, joined the Jesuits at the age of nineteen, and sailed for India in 1614 where he worked for some years in Kerala. Cabral was born in Celorico in 1599, joined the Jesuits in 1615, and went to India in 1624.

In 1626, Father Cacella and Father Cabral travelled from Cochin to Bengal where they spent six months preparing for a

journey through Bhutan, which would eventually take them to Tibet where they founded a mission in Shigatse, the seat of the Panchen Lama and of the great Tibetan monastery of Tashilhunpo. Cacella arrived in Shigatse in November 1627 and Cabral followed in January 1628. Although the Jesuits were well received and had high hopes for the success of the mission in Shigatse, it only lasted a few years. Father Cacella's poor health led to his death in 1630; Father Cabral continued his work there, but events in Tibet following a power struggle between the lamas of the Yellow Sect and the rajahs of the old regime resulted in the closing of the mission in 1635. Father Cabral returned to India and continued his long career as a missionary in Cochin, Malacca, Tonking, Macao and Japan; he died in Goa in 1669.

While in Bhutan, Father Cacella and Father Cabral met Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel, and at the end of a stay of nearly eight months in the country, Father Cacella wrote a long letter from Cheri Monastery, to his superior in Cochin in the Malabar Coast; it was a report, (*The Relacao*), relating the progress of their travels.

The *Relacao*, dated 4<sup>th</sup> October 1627, is important because it gives the first description of Bhutan by Western visitors. It is a detailed account of the way of life, religion and customs of Bhutan, but of particular importance is the description of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel. The picture that emerges is that of a strong leader, both spiritual and temporal, at the same time a caring, saintly man, highly literate and a gifted artist. The Shabdrung shows tolerance in allowing the Jesuits to practice their religion and to offer instruction to some young monks, as well as to lay people who were drawn to the Catholic faith. He also offers to build a church and house for them in Paro. Conversely, the Jesuits were less open to the Buddhist religion, but perhaps allowance should be made for the fact that because of the many similarities in the ceremonies of both religions, they believed that it was a form of Christianity that needed to be brought back to the true faith.

The translation of Cacella's *Relacao* has been made from a photocopy of the Portuguese text preserved in the archives of the Society of Jesus in Rome. While the present article includes the first full translation of the *Relacao*, Michael Aris (1986) provides a translation of the section dealing with Bhutan, along with many useful notes to the text. The only other text that deals with the *Relacao* is Wessels (1924) which includes a copy of the Portuguese text, as well as a description of the lives of Father Estevao Cacella and Father Joao Cabral, and of their travels to Bhutan and Tibet.

REPORT WHICH FATHER ESTEVAO CACELLA OF THE  
SOCIETY OF JESUS  
SENT TO FATHER ALBERTO LAERCIO,  
PROVINCIAL OF THE PROVINCE OF MALABAR OF EAST  
INDIA<sup>1</sup>,  
ABOUT HIS JOURNEY TO CATHAY [CHINA],  
UNTIL HE CAME TO THE KINGDOM OF BHOTANTA<sup>2</sup>  
[BHUTAN/TIBET].

(Fol. 1) In my letters to Your Reverence last year, I wrote of all that happened concerning our journey until we reached Bihar [Koch Bihar], principal city of the kingdom of Koch but as I do not know if your Reverence has received those letters, I shall refer in this one to all our travels until reaching this kingdom of Cambirasi<sup>3</sup> [Bhutan] which is the first of the kingdoms of Bhotanta [Bhutan/Tibet]; I shall be brief in my references to Bihar as I do not wish to repeat myself and I shall therefore describe in greater detail what happened during the rest of the journey.

### **Dhaka**

We left Hugli on the 2nd of August 1626, arriving in Dhaka on the 12th of the same month; we left there on the 5th of September and on the 26th of the same we passed through Hajo, arriving at Pandu where we stayed with Rajah Satargit a few days, and returning to Hajo, we left on the 8th of October for Bihar where we arrived on the 21st of the same month:

here, we had to wait four months before we could cross the mountains, and on the 2nd of February 1627, we went to Rangamati [Jaigon] the last territory of Koch; on the 21st of the same month we entered the kingdom of Bhotanta [Bhutan] beginning to climb the mountains on the 23rd, and after an eighteen day journey through them, on the 10th of April we met the Dharma-Rajah [Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel] King and chief lama of this kingdom considered the most learned and most authoritative of all the highest lamas, who are six in all the kingdoms of Bhotanta [Tibet/Bhutan].

When we left Hugli, Father Joao Cabral, Brother Fonteboa and myself were dressed as Portuguese soldiers, so that we would not be prevented from leaving Dhaka by the Muslims who governed the city in the absence of the nawab who was then in Rajmahal; as Father Simao de Figueiredo knew the Muslims who had always treated him with kindness and respect, he came with us, even though he was ill, to help us leave that city; however, on arrival, our boat was seized, two servants and all the sailors being arrested; the reason was that, at the same time, another Portuguese boat had arrived carrying some soldiers who in the previous year had helped the Mogul in the sack of Dhaka; on landing, one of them was recognised and arrested, and with him the boats which had arrived and the people in them suspected of having been sent by the Mogul to act as spies; after twelve days, the men and the boat were released, and I immediately sent the boat to Sripur to collect Father Joao Cabral who had stayed there with Brother Bartolomeu Fonteboa, as only myself and Father Simao de Figueiredo had come to Dhaka to make our arrival less conspicuous. I wrote to Brother Fonteboa about the difficulties we faced from the information gathered regarding the journey, telling him that it was not possible for all of us to go together, and so to my great regret at having to leave him, I ordered him to return to Hugli, assuring him that at the first opportunity I would send word as to how he should join us; it seems it was the will of God that the Brother should be rewarded for his willingness to make the journey, by staying at the College of Hugli, to enjoy its comforts, which he amply

did, rather than suffer the discomforts of the journey. Father Joao Cabral could not come straight away from Sripur as he was prevented from doing so by the commander of the Mogul navy who apprehended his boat; it was during the following eight days, while Father Cabral was prevented from leaving, that there happened in Dhaka the incident with Jorge de Souza, which I hasten to say, made the Portuguese there so frightened, that those who were from outside quickly left for Hugli, while those who lived there believed all was lost; some who left tried to persuade Father Cabral also to leave the area, but he didn't, comforting everyone with his presence, and inspiring them with the spirit which led him ( Fol. 2 ) to risk his mission, rather than try to avoid the danger of staying in the area, as so many did; however, Father Cabral was able to leave Sripur with the help and in the company of some Portuguese without the Muslims knowing, arriving in Dhaka when the disturbance had passed, although the Christians who lived there were still very much afraid. The incident happened as follows.

An old Portuguese man, who had long lived in Dhaka, tried to have a soldier killed, but his servants did not do so as their guns were taken from them, so he himself went with a crowd to seek out the soldier, even though some people tried to persuade him against it; the motive was to avenge the soldier's killing of another Christian a few months earlier and thus punish him for his sins. A mob from the opposing side had also gathered, and when the two groups came within sight of each other, the old man who was in front was the first to be shot dead without the opportunity for confession as happened in the case of the other Christian, which goes to show that in Bengal, he who kills another without giving him the opportunity of confession is also killed without the opportunity of confession himself, of which there are many examples. On both sides all were Christian soldiers and, as captain of all, Jorge de Souza, unarmed, arrived to separate them; on being aware of his presence, the Christians from both factions ran away in panic; there now appeared on the scene a large company of native, fierce and barbaric Rajput

soldiers, their captain being a close relative of the rajah; all fell on Jorge de Souza, but the captain of the Rajputs was knocked down from his horse, and his men, abandoning Jorge de Souza without having inflicted any injury on him, turned their attention to the houses in the area, which they set on fire and pillaged; the houses were large and close together, the fire spreading every-where, and the burning, shouting, fury and ransacking of the houses by the Rajputs, went on for a long time without rescue of any kind by the forces of law and order, thus making it a most terrible day; all was disorder, everyone acting as he pleased; many were wounded and at least twelve people died, and it would have been much worse, if the Catual, law authority of the city, had not come to the rescue after a few hours who, although lacking enough men to arrest and punish such a multitude of soldiers, still managed to bring the situation under control.

Everyone was astonished at how Jorge de Souza had escaped from such danger alive and unscathed, attributing this to the Lord's providence who it seems wanted to give him a sign that He was pleased at some service rendered; this had in fact happened, Jorge de Souza having obtained from the Governor of Dhaka the permit for our journey to Koch which he had sent me an hour before the disturbance, it being the will of God that he send me one copy, rather than keep it with the other which in fact we had no need of, and which was lost in the fire that burnt down the houses; it was indeed providence and the Lord's mercy that allowed the copy of the document we needed to leave Jorge de Souza's hands and not be lost with the other, for he was in no position to request another permit for the supply of wood for the building of many boats in Koch as requested in the previous permit, which would cost many thousands of tangas [coins]<sup>4</sup>. In addition to this mercy of the Lord, we experienced here many others from His divine hand. We found ourselves in the midst of the fury of the Rajputs who did not forgive any Christians they found, killing or wounding them and setting fire to the houses of the soldiers in that neighbourhood - we were at the time occupying one vacated by a soldier for our convenience - the

Lord protected us, as the fire never reached us, nor did the native soldiers know where we were while we could clearly hear the shouting and wailing of the people in the burning and the pillaging they were suffering. It was the will of the Lord to show us one more mercy in that when we first arrived here we did not occupy the houses that had originally been prepared for us which were the very ones which the Rajputs set on fire - from one of these a Portuguese (Fol. 3) merchant escaped with difficulty, having first paid a Muslim neighbour to wear his cabaya [long robe] and cap by way of disguise. The cause and origins of this incident are well known, the result of evils that were here committed, and I do not excuse even those who were shown so publicly to be at fault.

## **Koch**

Intending to have timber cut for the building of boats, we came to Koch accompanied by the people that Jorge de Souza had sent for that purpose; they were a great help to us in passing the choqueys, custom houses of which there are sixty plus in the waterways that lead to Hajo and where duty is paid on goods - one passes through pleasant canals with good fresh water, and through many well supplied villages that line their banks. Hajo is the principal city of the kingdoms of Koch <sup>5</sup> - a rich area with a large population where the late Liquinarane [Bir Narayna], King of Koch, lived, and where the nabob of Mogor receives tribute from the surrounding lands. Having by-passed this town, we arrived at Pandu where Rajah Satargit, a native of Busna, has his seat - he is also commander-general of the Mogul army on the Assamese front; Pandu is not a large place but very busy; it does not stretch much inland but lies along the banks of this lovely river of Koch; there is an on-going war between Pandu and Assam, their territories lying adjacent to each other. King Satargit received us with great kindness, granting us many honours in the presence of a crowd of his important subjects and Muslim captains who form part of his retinue and are a necessary element of his war machinery of three hundred boats. He read the letters we brought and we told him that



the purpose of our journey was to go to Cathay [China], but no one seemed to have heard of that kingdom except a reliable muslim who said that it was beyond a town called Coscar [Kashgar] <sup>6</sup>, that from Koch he did not know the way, but that once across the mountains of Bhotanta [Bhutan] we would find it. In order to find the best way to enter Bothanta, Rajah Satargit advised us to go to Hajo to see Liquinarane, King of the area between Koch and Hajo, who would know more about it and of the people who came down to his dominions through various points of entry.

The Rajah did not want us to go alone, and he himself came to introduce us to Liquinarane and see us on our way; some beautifully decorated boats were made ready for us and on the following day we went with him to visit the King. One cannot exaggerate the kindness of the Rajah of Busna, the honours he bestowed on us and the care which he took regarding our endeavour - you cannot imagine the prestige of these rulers, the pomp and splendour surrounding them, as seen only in some parts in India; here it is very different, these rulers treat themselves very well enjoying royal status, their men do not go about naked, rather they are well dressed and carry themselves with dignity, whether on foot or on horse; it was noticeable how Rajah Satargit, because of his wisdom and personality, is well loved in the whole of this kingdom, as we observed in Hajo where he was acclaimed by the people in the streets as if he were their own King - no doubt a show of appreciation for his generosity in sharing with many people the rents he receives, which does him much credit, even though the total amounts to less than two hundred tangas [coins] per annum.

In order to be received by King Liquinarane, we had to go through three large courtyards surrounded by wide verandas where there were many people; we passed between the courtyards through large strong gates which are always closed, watched by sentries and many guards; in the last two, there were many soldiers who served as the King's guard, grouped in an orderly manner according to rank, all

smart and well equipped as if for the battlefield. Next, we passed into a lovely large garden in the middle of which was a beautifully decorated house where the King awaited us. He received us with much kindness, and after conversing with us about the Kingdom of Portugal and other places, turning to the subject of our journey, he advised us to go to Bihar which was governed by his son Gaburrasa and that from there we should go to Rangamati [Jaigon], reaching the end of his territory before passing on to Bothanta; he then offered to write to his son asking him to help us in every way he could; when we said good-bye to him he gave us the letter, and very (Fol.4) generously provided us with money for the journey; Rajah Satargit was also very generous in sending us nine pieces of silk, with his regrets that he was not able to show in any other way the love he had for us - he also sent one of his close relatives to accompany us, providing one boat for him and one for us; after dispatching a Brahmin from his household with a letter for Prince Gaburrasa, he returned to Pandu and we left for Bihar.

The town of Bihar [Koch Bihar] is situated on a river [tributary of the Brahma-putra] with nice views stretching over several leagues; it covers an area which is as wide as long; with the exception of the more humble houses as found in other kingdoms of Bengal, there is much that is worthwhile seeing; it has a big population, being well provided with all kinds of goods from the kingdom itself as well as from goods that come from Patna, Rajmahal and Gaur; there are many bazaars with everything that the land produces; in particular, there are pine- apples which are better than the ones found in India - and there are oranges of every kind. The Prince was not in Bihar as, on account of the floods which occur regularly in that town, he had moved inland a few months earlier to a cool location on one of the small channels of the same river. The place was previously called Kalabari. In order to please the Prince, the merchants of Bihar were quick to develop the new town, and by the time we arrived there, it compared favourably with Bihar [Koch Bihar] in its beauty and the well laid out streets. At Kalabari we

were well received and taken care of, by order of the Prince who learnt from the letters of his father the King, and from those of Rajah Satargit what the purpose of our journey was, and offered to help us in every possible way. I soon set out with his men for Rangamati where I met seven or eight people from those kingdoms whom I had been looking forward to meeting and was very pleased to see. They gave me all the information they could but told me that it would not be possible to cross the mountains because of the thick snows, strong winds and heavy rains normal at that time of the year, so although I very much wished to proceed with my journey, it was not possible, and we were forced to wait four more months in the kingdom of Koch.

Under those circumstances and the necessity to stay, I wrote immediately to Brother Bartolomeu Fonteboa to come and join us, eventually to continue our mission, as the people of Bhotanta [Bhutan] would facilitate the rest of the journey; to this end, and also to keep Your Reverence informed that we were already in that kingdom, we sent to Hugli the interpreter we had brought with us, as he was familiar with the way and would look after the Brother well, but although the latter was still alive when my letter reached him, it was God's will a few months later to reward him for his dedication to his mission in spite of his advanced age which might have made him withdraw from the endeavour. Brother Fonteboa was gifted with a spirit of dedication and fervour which he put to the service of others; but, just as he was about to begin work in another mission of the Lord, it was the Lord's will to give him eternal rest. It was also the Lord's will and his paternal providence that made us spend four months in that kingdom, and He gave us the spiritual strength needed for what was left of the journey for us; first, I fell ill and three days later, Father Joao Cabral, both with malaria, as well as one of our servants who became very seriously sick; there only remained the other servant who couldn't speak the language who, a few days later, also fell ill and died; it was the Lord's will that my illness did not last long, as my health soon improved and I was cured; Father Joao Cabral suffered long

and although cheerful he became extremely weak and was near death for many days; the two servants were also near death, unable to reason and talk, waiting for their hour; such was our plight, alone in a small house during the months of November and December while the sickness lasted, but we felt we received many mercies from our Lord (Fol.5) that showed He was with us and watching over us; for in the midst of that situation which to human eyes made it seem as if everything was lacking, it was not so; for even without doctors, medicines, help and the care needed to alleviate illness, our Lord restored us to our health.

As the time to continue our journey was approaching, Father Cabral still being ill, I went to say good-bye to Prince Gaburra and obtain the permits for the captain of Rangamati and the men from Bhotanta [Bhutan]; the papers were ordered without delay, and the Prince was also generous enough to give us a horse, seeming concerned about handing us over to the men of Bhotanta because the people of Koch are very much afraid of them from observing how proudly they go about Rangamati without fearing anyone; I took my leave and said how very pleased we were. We remained the whole of January in Bihar [Koch Bihar] waiting for the arrival of Brother Bartolomeu Fonteboa, whose death we did not know about, and for the interpreter who had gone to fetch him whom we required to be with us because the two servants were still sick and one of them was supposed to return to Hugli; however, as no one had come by the 2nd of February, feast of the Purification of Our Lady <sup>7</sup>, we left for Rangamati to wait there a few more days and buy provisions for our journey which we hoped to begin on the 20th of February; on the 19th, the interpreter arrived from Hugli; it was as if an angel from heaven sent by the Lord on the last day of our stay in Koch, a sign of His particular concern for our journey, allowing the interpreter to hurry with the things he had brought for us, otherwise he would not have found us in Rangamati and he would not have been able to follow us; we waited one more day and entered these kingdoms on the 21st of February, the first Sunday of Lent<sup>8</sup>, being comforted

by the thought that it was on that day that the Lord had gone into the desert, and in His company we had no doubt that we would overcome any enemies which are certain to be found in such journeys.

### **Entering Bhutan**

On the 26th of February, after travelling four days in the mountains we arrived in the first village of these kingdoms and although we wanted to continue we could not do so immediately, because the man we had hired to come with us, an important person among these people, had stayed behind in Rangamati on his own business; he had provided people to accompany us but they had orders to keep us in that village till his arrival six months later, and we were not to be given permission to proceed. We did everything we could to overcome the obstructions put in our way; but at the end of twelve days in the village, I decided to carry on, myself and a Christian lad, and two natives of Koch who could speak a little of the local language, leaving behind Father Joao Cabral so that on arriving at the next village, I would send him people with whom he could continue the journey; you can't imagine the pressure they put on us not to leave the village, saying that without a guide, robbery, arrest, death and other dangers would befall us; however, it seemed to us, all were excuses by the enemy to prevent our journey; ignoring all this therefore, I left, but found on the way some people who were travelling to Rangamati who put the same difficulties to me, adding that I should return to the village, and that they would take me to the King. But as I already knew that the people there were under orders from their chief to detain us, I did not return then but wrote to Father Joao Cabral to do everything possible to come. As I continued on my way, I met two soldiers from these kingdoms who said they were going in the same direction as I was; I trusted them and agreed that they should guide me; however, on the second (Fol. 6) day, they plotted with the two natives [of Koch] to rob us; it was quite obvious that this was their intention - robbery was bad enough but there would probably follow other impediments to

our journey and in fact, after crossing a stream, they left me a little behind, the soldiers shared their weapons with the natives and all four left in such a hurry that they were soon out of hearing. Finding myself without my interpreters in the middle of mountains frequented by thieves, without a guide, I thought it best to return to the village and find another way of continuing the journey, but because we faced the same risks going back to the village, we did it that night, the Christian lad and myself, walking in the cold, wind and snow, normal in these parts in the month of March; in the darkness of the night, we struggled sometimes on hands and knees, up and down, along the narrow paths of those steep valleys, my former companions having relieved me of all possessed except my breviary<sup>9</sup> and walking stick. We arrived at the village the following day, where I found Father Joao Cabral negotiating with the travellers I had met on the way, and it was God's compassion which moved the people who were holding us to let us go and help us negotiate our advance - thus we all continued the journey on the 16th of March.

Having left the village, after six days in the mountains we arrived at a bigger one called Rintan where we found the first house of the King, whose people looked after us; on the same day, there arrived a man who was a relative of the person in Rangamati who had negotiated our coming - he said he would take us to Paro, main town of this kingdom, and from there to the King; as we were very anxious to avoid being detained again, we were happy to leave with him for Paro, arriving there at the end of four days journey.

## **Paro**

The town of Paro, surrounded by mountains pleasant to look upon, lies in a beautiful wide plain, which at the time was covered with neat fields of wheat and rice; the plain, divided by two large rivers, is very attractive specially because of the presence of cool large willow trees and the many channels that originate from the rivers; on the plain, the houses are large and tall, usually of three, four or five floors, with thick

walls and decorated windows and balconies; these buildings are not arranged along streets but are separated from each other at random throughout the plain and along the foothills of the mountains, thus forming a town, but so long that we walked for about three leagues without seeing the whole of it; the plain continues as I have described, till it reaches a mountain which divides the town in two; the rivers flow down on each side of the mountain and irrigate the plain, and hugging the sides of the mountain, two long arms of the town climb up following the course of the rivers. It seems a lot of people live there and I would guess more than five hundred thousand<sup>10</sup>; it helps to find living space in the way they share the buildings because in each there are many tenants spread out among the floors and divisions created for accommodation; we arrived in the town on the 25th March, day on which the Eternal Word<sup>11</sup> was made flesh, [Feast of the Annunciation], and we hoped that His infinite goodness would allow our entry in that place on that day, to contribute to those people's acceptance of Him as their Saviour. We were not able to reach the house of the guide accompanying us that day, and when we arrived the following morning we found he had robbed us of everything we had brought for our sustenance; his house was so dark that even at midday we couldn't see each other - it seemed more like a prison than anything else. We asked him to go and get what we were in need of, as it was his duty as guide to be responsible for our safety; but he, very sure of himself, replied that he would first rest and then do what we asked, showing very clearly how little he cared for having betrayed us after we had trusted him, and was annoyed at our mentioning the subject (Fol. 7) saying that the job would not take one day, rather months, and that once the man from Rangamati arrived, he would do as he thought best.

Seeing the determination of that man and other signs of his evil character that later became apparent to us, but which the Lord protected us from, we decided to leave his house although it would be very difficult, and after two days, seeing that he spent a lot of time away from the house, we left;

however his relatives stopped us and sent him word of what was happening; it was extraordinary the passion with which this man tried to prevent us from leaving and how he tried to force us back into the house, using weapons and everything else he could against us; but with the Lord's help, we resisted with patience and overcame the passion and anger that possessed him. As a lot of people had witnessed the unreasonable behaviour of that man, they showed sympathy for us and whilst they were trying to calm him and take him back into the house, we slipped away; that night we took shelter in the house of a kind old man who, thank the Lord our God, made us comfortable, and the next day a trusted lama who Father Joao Cabral had already talked to, sent us horses and attendants to take us to his house which was quite far away; however, on arriving, we found the lama was afraid to give us shelter in case he had to fight the man who had robbed us; but it was God's will to encourage the lama to overlook that inconvenience although, once we were in the house, he was still afraid and stopped us from continuing our journey, his attendants using weapons to prevent us from doing so when another lama offered to take us. Seeing ourselves in this predicament and because of many difficulties and impediments which I shall not give details of, in this land where no one can help, each man having absolute power in his own house there being no one they can answer to for their actions, we met the King's principal lama; when he learnt of the obstacles we had to face before reaching the King, he said that he would take us because he was there on the King's business, and that we should stay in his house; this we did with the approval of the lama who had given us shelter, he took us himself and accompanied us to the King; but even here the enemy was waiting with his usual excuses to prevent us from continuing our journey for, when we discussed the matter with the principal lama, he tried to persuade us not to go, but rather wait for the King there who he said would arrive in a month's time [false information, because it is now six months since he was supposed to arrive]. We believe this change of mind was due to the fear he also had of the man who had robbed us; in spite of this, we



said good-bye to the lama and we began to walk alone determined to continue our journey trusting that God would guide us safely, for having done everything we could, there was no other way to go forward. Seeing how determined we were, the lama felt he had to ask us to stay a few more hours, in order to prepare our safe-conducts and arrange the journey at his responsibility - for if the King were to find out that we had travelled without proper arrangements, or if anything untoward should happen to us on the way, he would punish the lama severely. So we waited one day and were given men and horses for the rest of the journey, and we left Paro on the 5th of April, in the second week of Easter, accompanied by the first lama.

At the end of three days, we came to a village where we found a lama, a relative of the King who had come to meet us with men and horses to accompany us; he immediately wrote to the King that we were about to arrive and the King ordered other lamas to be waiting for us at the next stop, with two very well harnessed horses for our use; travelling thus with all this company, sometime before our arrival he sent more of his men to offer us tea which he and his people drink much of; we continued along a track in very high mountains and getting close to the place where the King was he sent other young lamas on horseback, to entertain us with many races in a spot where the terrain allowed this, and soon we saw through the trees a great number of people waiting to welcome us and we heard the sound of (Fol. 8) cornets and trumpets similar to the instruments used in their festivals. Here there were a hundred young lamas between the ages of twelve and twenty lined up in two rows to receive us - in the middle were three small lamas carrying incense in their thuribles<sup>12</sup>, an honour only given to the King.

### **Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel**

They took us to the place which had been prepared for us, a very well made tent lined with Chinese silk with a canopy and area where we could rest; shortly, the King sent word that we could go to him and we found him in another tent well decorated with silk - he was sitting on a high platform dressed in red silk trimmed with gold; to his right and quite close to him, in a corresponding position, there was an image of his father with a lamp in front which was always kept burning; there were two high places for us, but no place for any lama however important, except on the mats on the floor. The King received us with great affability, showing that he was happy to meet us - he wanted to know where we came from, from which kingdom or nation and asked us many other questions as is usual on a first encounter; we told him that we were Portuguese, and as strangers never come to these mountains, no one could remember ever having seen or heard that similar people had passed through that land, and therefore had never heard the word Franguis which is the name the Portuguese are known by, throughout the East.

We were more than a little disappointed at finding ourselves here without a good interpreter, because although we had with us someone who spoke Hindi, Persian and the language of Koch very well, we only found a lama from Tsaparang [Western Tibet], a favourite of the King, who understood something, but very little of Hindi; through him, we communicated as best we could but with difficulty, and to the regret of ourselves and the King who very much wished that we would speak directly to him during the long conversations he had with us; we told him that we had been sent here to preach the religion of Christ our Lord, in the belief that it had been practised in the past although forgotten for lack of teachers and the passing of time, and that some elements of it still existed; he showed pleasure in our coming and said that we should learn the language well so that we could speak to him, and that he could not refuse to accept our teaching for it could only be for very good reasons that we had come so

far to find him; he therefore immediately released the lama of Tsaparang from his ordinary duties and ordered him to give us lessons daily.

This King, known as Dharma Rajah [Shabdrung], is 33 years old; he is both King and highest lama of this kingdom of Cambirasi [Bhutan], the first kingdom of Bhotanta [Bhutan/Tibet] in these parts - it is very large and well populated; the King prides himself in his gentleness for which he is very much esteemed rather than feared; in fact at this particular time there is a lama in his house, a relative, who committed a serious offence against him, but he treats him well and told us that he would soon set him free for he did not have the heart to give him another punishment even though he knew that once out of detention he would probably offend again. The King is also famous for his abstinence as he never eats rice, meat or fish, sustaining himself only with milk and fruit; he is also renowned for the three-year retreat he went on before we arrived here, having lived in a tiny hut he built above a rock on a high mountain, without seeing or being seen by any one; he got his food by sending down two ropes from his little hut linked to two others below which he then pulled up, never talking to anyone during all that time; he told us he occupied himself in praying, and in his spare time carved some pieces - he showed us one which was his best, an image of God in white sandalwood, small but exquisitely made - he is very proud of this piece of art, and he is also a good painter - he showed us some of his paintings; having seen a panel of St. Raphael which we carried with us he wanted to paint one himself and started immediately, and has got on with (Fol. 9) it very well but has not yet finished because of his many occupations. This King is also well known as a man of letters and is revered as such by all the other high lamas - kings send him gifts and he is very much sought out by people around this area, being host to lamas from far away kingdoms. The reason for finding him living in a tent on this mountain is that the people from each village ask him to visit and so he camps at some place where he is near to all of them; they give him many presents of horses,

cattle, rice, cloth and other goods which are his principal revenue, and those people that do not invite him to their villages because they are very far away, come themselves to him with their offerings. It was for this reason that he was in that mountain with his lama school which always accompanies him; the school has more than a hundred lamas who apply themselves to their studies and perform ceremonies.

These lamas are called *guelongs* [dGe-slön] - they are the most important lamas because they do not marry and do not eat more than once before midday, after which they are not allowed to eat rice, meat or fish, and they never drink wine - thus they are different from other lamas who are not so strict; they spend the whole day at the school where they eat and sleep, all going out together twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon; they retire in an orderly manner one after the other very composed and with modesty, so well taught and disciplined are they - but on the other hand, it is very sad to see them so occupied with the errors they are taught and how they spend a good part of the day saying their prayers, how they all get up at night at a signal and pray for half an hour and again at dawn when they chant in chorus like priests.

For two months we accompanied the King through these and other mountains until we reached his house which is situated in the mountain where he went on retreat<sup>13</sup>; he keeps no more than his lamas with him because the place cannot hold more people as in order to build a house one would have to cut many rocks and work very hard to level some space in that very steep mountain; he had chosen that place to protect himself from a King who lives some eight days distance from here, Demba Cemba [sDe pa gTsang pa], the most important king of Bhotanta [Tibet] who had fought him [the Shabdrung] some years previously, as he told us, for not wanting to give him a bone<sup>14</sup> from his late father and for which reason he left his town of Ralun [Ra-lung], a large and important one, which is five days walk from here. He made us very comfortable in

part of his house where we found space to put up a well decorated chapel to which we invited him on the feast of our Saint Father Ignatius<sup>15</sup>, and it was God's will that in spite of two robberies we still had everything we needed for the altar and all the images - even a picture of our Virgin Lady<sup>16</sup> that had been stolen in the first robbery was recovered by a lama who found it in the hands of one of the thieves and brought it back to us here, together with a bible that had also been stolen; the King came to see the chapel with his master<sup>17</sup> who is a very old lama and scholar he has great respect for, and with the other lamas, who were all very pleased with what they saw, spending some hours looking and asking about everything.

During these months we tried very diligently to learn the language, but in spite of being on the move from tents to unfamiliar houses which wasted much of our time, God showed us many mercies in this and in other matters; the greatest problem was not having a teacher, because we had much difficulty in understanding the one available - as he was not of this kingdom but from Tsaparang [Western Tibet], he did not know the language of this area which was the one we most needed because although in these kingdoms they all speak the same language there are differences in pronunciation and word endings, and the corruption of the language in some areas almost makes it foreign specially in this kingdom where the language is very changed - this kingdom being in a remote corner does little business with other kingdoms; however, all the lamas and the people generally understand the other languages and so with the one we know we are able to communicate in all these parts and we try very hard to learn well the one spoken here where by the will of God we are in the (Fol 10) first stage of our mission, and thus, thanks be to God our Lord, at present we understand quite a lot reasonably well, and we practice our holy faith; we compose prayers and the necessary instructions in this language and have them written in their script so that the people can more easily learn them; it is also a great help to us that we can already read their books

although we do not always fully understand them because they are written in the best and most polished form of the language.

During all this time, we frequently spoke with the King on the subject of our Lord which he enjoyed listening to; but we were aware that there was a big difference in belief between him and us regarding our holy faith and we noticed quite clearly a dislike and coldness about the things that concerned us; therefore after thanking him very much for the kindness shown to us, and as in this kingdom we had nothing to do, we asked if he would graciously give us permission to continue our journey towards Tsaparang and to provide us with guides.

The King was very embarrassed with our request and deferring his answer for a few days made efforts via the other lamas to persuade us not to go; we persisted in our request but he gave us the same answer saying that it would be a discredit to him if we left - that all the surrounding kingdoms knew we were with him and that having us here was a great honour for him for which reason we should not leave, particularly as we had told him that we would always remain here and not leave him. To this we replied that we would stay if he would be pleased to let us preach the true law of Christ our Lord in his kingdom and especially if he himself accepted the law and wished to become a Christian; but as we had seen in him little interest in this matter which was the only reason for our being here, there was no point in staying. He acknowledged that this was true but that he feared he would die immediately if he embraced our law because he believed in the same law as his ancestors and they had never been Christians; however, he added that we should continue to read his books and talk more deeply about the law with him; in the meantime we should start to make Christian converts and preach our faith which was a very good one, he believed, and we would soon have many Christians as was our wish, and that to begin with he would give us, and indeed he did in his presence, a twenty year old lama who was close to him

and first cousin of another lama who is the whole government of the King<sup>18</sup>; he would then give us two more, followed by many others and he also said that he would build a house for us and a church in Paro. Seeing the resolution of the King we said we wanted to please him as it was his pleasure that we should stay in this kingdom and because of the hope he gave us of spreading the faith of the Lord here; we thanked him for the lamas he gave us who wanted to become Christians and for the church he wanted to build in Paro; we said that on the matter of his dying immediately for accepting the faith of the Lord, he would see the opposite in those that would become Christians, because Christ being the true life of our souls did not kill our bodies, rather in Him would be found all that was good of body and soul.

### **On Buddhism**

I will inform Your Reverence about the religion of this kingdom which we learnt from the conversations we had with the King and his old master; first, they say they were never Christians and that they have not found in their books any reference that their ancestors in the whole of Bhotanta had a knowledge of Christ our Lord or of the gospels; they say they are not pagans, rather they laugh and mock pagan beliefs like the worship of animals and they abominate the killing of cattle in the temples and other rituals of the pagans; they are very critical of the muslims and muslim is a word they use to describe a very bad man. They say they worship only one God and have well made images of him - the King showed us one of yellow metal, very well made, simple and artistic, holding between his hands a vase with water, and he told us that the water was the symbol of how God washes our souls from sin. He also showed us a painting of God on dark blue cloth; when we remarked that it was a strange colour he explained that God was painted thus, not because He was of that (Fol 11) colour but because his abode was in heaven and therefore He was portrayed in the colour of the sky; he also showed us another painting of the sky with a square house<sup>19</sup> in the middle where God lives; it is generally believed that

God is infinite and that therefore he is everywhere; they say there are three persons [manifestations] in one God - two do not have a body, but one has and he is known as Trulku which means son, and from the way they speak of his birth the implication is that he was born to a virgin mother and they showed us an image of a woman who is said to be the mother of God<sup>20</sup>. They believe in heaven where the good go, and in hell where the bad are punished and where they suffer the torments of fire and cold. It is quite clear to us that somehow the light of the Holy Gospel <sup>21</sup> reached this place, and from other ceremonies and blessings they perform, there are many similarities with Christianity; but they also have other very far fetched beliefs - they say that six hundred years ago no one existed in this kingdom of Bhotanta, that there was only water everywhere and when it dried up, there were trees on the earth and only two monkeys and from these two descend all the inhabitants of Bhotanta; the monkeys then went to heaven; when these kingdoms first came into existence there was a King who had twelve heads<sup>22</sup>. When we laughed at this and said that it was all false and derisory, he very seriously replied that it was written in the books. They also believe in three paradises where the good pass from one to the other till they are completely spiritualised, and that those who go to heaven enter the same God and become gods themselves; thus they worship their masters and kings who they believe become saints, like God, after they die; this is the reason why this King uses his imagination and artistic ability to make well crafted images of his father and celebrates him in festivals - he built a shrine, where he prays, to house only a large image of his father in a beautiful silver casket<sup>23</sup>. On hearing us say that it was only in the law of Christ our Lord that we could find salvation, they declared that many ancestors of this King had risen to heaven in body and soul witnessed by many people and that this was not something that happened a long time ago but only a few years back - also that the father of the Dharmaraja (Zhabs-drung Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal) was so holy that when he stepped on a rock there would sometimes appear the imprint of his foot; they also related stories about their ancestors, the work of the



devil (we believe) who cheats them and keeps them in ignorance.

Regarding the Son of God they believe he is Sakyamuni whose image is found in a very famous temple in these parts twelve days walk from here - they say he was borne two thousand years ago and that his mother carried him in her womb for twelve months; this was told to us by the principal lama who governs the King's house; previously, the King had told us that Sakyamuni was not God and that the educated lamas did not worship him, only the common people who were ignorant; the King, however, hearing what the lama said did not contradict him, both becoming embarrassed and confused, apparently not knowing who this son of God was who they seemed to know but did not know much about - we told them the many things we knew about the son of God - they have not shown, up till now, that they have any idea of the other mysteries of the life of the Lord, nor have we found here any signs of the Holy Cross<sup>24</sup>, except a similarity in the name because what we call cross they call *cruca* (*sku-ru-kha*) but they do not recognise that this sign has a sacred significance. Everyone has great esteem for this King and high lama and they give him what they can so that when they die, he may send them to heaven; when very near death, the King is called to preside at a ceremony where he assists the person dying with his prayers, and after death the King pulls their hair<sup>25</sup> and thus performs what they call the great act of mercy, that is the sending of the soul to heaven. I asked one of the lamas if he had pulled the hair of a lama who died, before or after his death; he was very surprised at the question and said that pulling the hair before death was a very serious sin. After a man dies they divide his belongings between as many people as possible to help his soul get on well in his other life, and those that are absent at the death of a relative, take the most important belongings of the deceased to the King for him to pray over. Such, more or less, are the religious ceremonies (Fol 12) practised in all these kingdoms of Bhotanta [Bhutan] as we understood from the King and the lamas who are here from all these kingdoms.

## **China/Shambala**

We asked as many questions as we could about the kingdom of Cathay [China] but have heard nothing of it by this name, which is completely unknown here; however, there is a kingdom which is very famous here and which they say is very large called Xembala [Sham-bha-la] next to another called Sopo [Sog-po] (Mongolia); the King does not know the law of Xembala and he has asked us about it many times. We believe it might be the kingdom of Cathay because that of Sopo belongs to the Tartars who we understand are constantly at war with China, according to information given by the King who also says that the King of China rules over a larger population; however he believes that the people of Sopo are stronger and thus normally defeat the Chinese, which is in agreement with all that is already well known about the war between the Tartars and the Chinese, and as the kingdom of Cathay is very large and the only on this side that is next to that of the Tartars as the maps show, it seems we can deduce with some probability that it is the kingdom known here as Xembala. The fact that it is not known here by the other name does not contradict our assumption, as neither China, Tartary or Tibet are known by these names, the people here having no knowledge of them; China they call Guena [rGya-nag], Tartary Sopo, and Tibet Bothanta; we are told that the way to the kingdom of Xembala is very difficult; however, I trust in the Lord because as He has brought us this far with our thoughts focused on that kingdom, so will He take us where we can see it close up, and thus next year I shall send Your Reverence news of it.

## **Teaching Christianity**

It will not be possible for both Father Joao Cabral and myself to go together in view of the decision of this King that we should not continue the journey; therefore God willing, Father Joao Cabral will stay here in the house and church which the King is having built for us, preaching the Holy Gospel to these people with the help of the three lamas the King provided,

seeing what success can be made in gaining souls in this kingdom, after which we can discuss the establishment of a mission; with the help of the Lord I shall try to go into the kingdom of Xembala where perhaps, either there or in another kingdom in the area, our Lord will give us the opportunity to serve Him, and next year I shall inform Your Reverence of everything we can find out.

The King offered us the two more lamas he had promised - one is a twelve year old candid and able boy and the other is nineteen and applies himself very well to what he is taught; we are teaching the catechism<sup>26</sup> and instructing all three in the things of our Holy Faith. Also, there is another lama, 27 years old, from an important family with many relatives, who has been helping the King during all these months in the interests that occupy him like painting, sculpture and cabinet-making for the adornment of the image of his father; he has also promised me many times that he will become a Christian as soon as he finishes the work he is doing for the King, which will be in a month and a half from now - he helps me to put down correctly in writing our prayers and Christian doctrine; a few days ago as he was writing the chapter in the catechism on the Holy Cross being the sign of Christ and other items about the birth of Christ our Lord and the purity of the immaculate Virgin, Our Lady, he was very pleased and told me afterwards that it was close to his heart and that it made him very happy.

Also, a man who came here from another village seeing our chapel and hearing about some of the teachings of our Lord, said he wanted to stay with us and that if he went to our house by being in our presence the Lord might forgive a sin he had committed and which was making him very unhappy - by accident, he had killed a man with an arrow; this person has come back and persists in the same intention. There are also others drawn to our beliefs who have promised to bring their children for us to teach, and one of these is particularly grateful for the mercy which he says God showed by restoring the health of his son - he had brought his sick son to us while

we were with the King in his tent - when he asked for a holy object to use for healing, Father Joao Cabral gave him a relic, to which the man attributes the return to health of his child; many other people often ask for holy water which they believe cures them of their aches and pains. The lamas and other people who come here to see us, also bring offerings of milk and fruit; when they see the images and the decoration of the chapel they are amazed (Fol.13) and they prostrate themselves repeatedly before the image of our Virgin Lady and of Christ our Lord, kissing the foot of the altar with much devotion.

All this happens inside the house of the King, next to his temple where the devil wages a continuous war against souls<sup>27</sup> with the singing and praying of the lamas of the King's school and the sound of the various instruments which they always use during their ceremonies in the presence of the King him- self who knows about everything that goes on here; the people compare our ceremonies with his and prefer ours, and it is quite obvious that he does not like it; thus, from these beginnings, we think it likely that we will make better progress in winning souls, having faith in God our Lord that once we leave this fortress held by the devil, He will help us win many victories dispossessing the devil of the many souls now subject to him.

Other than this one, temples are very rare, as when we walked through these mountains during the first sixteen days of our journey we found none, only a structure made of stones roughly put together with some paintings of the devil and idols; besides, in Paro the town that I described, we saw no more than a small house of a private lama which he used as a temple; thus, if we build churches where the people can come, we can expect, the Lord willing, the reward of achieving what is good for the souls of the people who quite clearly show the thirst they have for knowledge of their creator, the willingness and pleasure in hearing what we tell them about God, the devotion and reverence they have for any image of God that we show them and to the ritual of the divine

service<sup>28</sup>; the freedom that exists in this fairly large and well populated kingdom will greatly help to achieve our ends, as the people willingly submit to the King, without feeling any obligation to defer to him or follow his doctrine, nor does he have the power to force anyone to do anything; rather, his main revenues come from what the people voluntarily give him - he does not wish anyone to be unhappy and everyone is free to do what he wants, as the King himself told us many times when speaking of his lamas who are the group most dependent on him.

This is the situation we find ourselves in at the present time; to help us make progress, we ask Your Reverence to commend us to our Lord in that province [Malabar]<sup>29</sup>, because it is through the sacrifices and prayers of the faithful there that we have been able to carry out the work of the Lord and receive many blessings from His divine hand, both in our actions and in the interior satisfaction of our souls, as in these journeys it seems the Lord provides in different ways than in His colleges and houses, and apart from everything we do for love of Him we owe Him a debt for all the mercies we receive from Him; it seems as if his mercies buy spiritual consolation for every step we take for love of Him, and as it is the Lord's custom, like an affectionate father, to sometimes hide himself, we wish to please him even more in order to avoid the suffering of not feeling Him so close; here, He is like a dedicated mother occupied in giving pleasure to her children, providing so much beauty in all that can be seen in these mountains, guiding us through these rocky paths, giving warmth and comfort during the cold rain and snow on the nights when we sleep in caves inside the rocks, providing abundance when there is scarcity, alleviating setbacks and difficulties, bringing gentleness into meetings with people of irascible nature - all this gives our spirits complete satisfaction - clearly the measure by which the Lord grants his mercies, as He has said, full to the brim.

You are well aware in your colleges of the good things the Lord gives a taste of in order to attract the souls of his

servants to the success of this enterprise; however, there you care, whereas here we see and experience, and in this matter it is indeed appropriate to say that it is one thing to care and quite another to experience; but it is also true that care and expectations do not always match reality. Yet, he who will deeply feel spiritual consolation in the preaching of the Holy Gospels, once involved in the work, will experience it very strongly, being able to speak clearly to kings about the teachings of the Lord, putting doubt even in the minds of the learned about their belief in sects from Hell, showing them the errors of their ways, helping many to escape from the mouth of Hell inside which they already are, assisting them to honour the real God, persuading them to come to know and adore Him and to make war on Hell by winning vassals; Heaven will thus be pleased at the sight of infidels gradually reaching understanding and showing willingness to enter Heaven, and, ultimately, co-operating with the most precious blood of Jesus Christ<sup>30</sup>, Redeemer, Lord and all that is good for us, as proof of the love that his faithful have for Him, He will use them to give testimony to the infidels that He is their Saviour. All this will create such a rich treasure of consolation for the soul, that the cost of whatever hard work there might be, and of sacrifices made, will be nothing in comparison. For myself, I particularly ask Your Reverence to grant me the favour of your prayers, so that no impediments are put in the way of these blessings and also, that I may be able with other faithful servants to enter the enjoyment of the Lord, earning many souls for Him, with profits, for in His infinite goodness, He has seen fit to profit from this enterprise.

### **The Land of Bhutan**

(Fol. 14) I have not told your Reverence yet of the particulars of this land itself and of its climate; it is very healthy as after entering these mountains we have always had very good health, mine never as good in India as here; this is usual with everyone here because very rarely do we find anyone sick, and

there are many people who although very old are very healthy and vigorous; some of our servants who were not feeling well when they first came with us and who had previously been ill have recovered perfect health; we have already been here seven months and the weather has always been very temperate without cold or excessive heat at the moment; in the four months that will follow from November to February it will be colder, but the people have very good quality woollen cloth with which they clothe themselves. The land produces an abundance of wheat, rice, meat, all very cheap - there is a variety of very good fruit, pears of different types, some very big, all good, excellent peaches, apples, nuts, quinces, everything in great abundance, and also no shortage of rose apples from India; there are also peas and very good turnips as well as other foods and indigenous fruits. There are no fish here but it comes either from the nearby Salt Lake which also provides salt, or from the kingdom of Koch; some of the things which are not available here come from other places not very far away, like grapes, from which wine is made, available in a town called Kong-po, twenty days journey from here. This country receives goods from China such as silk, gold, and porcelain all coming south from the town of Kong-po [in Tibet]; also from Kashmir via Tsaparang [in Western Tibet], there is commerce with the countries which adjoin this kingdom, and many foreigners go to Gyantse [in Tibet] which is the Court of Demba Cempa [sDe-pa gTsang-pa], the most powerful King of Bhotanta [Tibet], eight days journey from here, and to Lhasa the town where the temple of Sakyamuni is found much frequented by yogis and foreign merchants; however, in the mountains where we are, no foreigner comes, the local people remembering only the very rare occasion when a yogi passed by; nor do people from Koch come here except captives who are brought to this kingdom by locals who go down there; an uncle of the King of Koch who was curious to see these lands was captured a few days after entering these mountains and put to work at the plough - as soon as the King heard the news, he retaliated by arresting all the people of these parts [Bhutan] working in his kingdom

and threatened to punish them if his uncle was not released which they [the Bhutanese] were obliged to do.

This kingdom [of Bhutan] is a little over one month's journey from the kingdom of (Fol. 15) Tsaparang [Western Tibet] and since we've been here we have had news of the priests<sup>31</sup> who live there, not directly as it seems they do not know of our arrival in these parts, but through some lamas who came from there via other lamas who have gone that way, we have written to the priests three times, and I also sent them letters to be sent via Goa to Your Reverence.

The people here are white although it does not show because of their poor standard of cleanliness; they let their hair grow till it covers their ears and part of the forehead but do not normally grow beards, and around their necks they carry well made tweezers used to pluck out any unwanted hair; their arms are bare and they cover themselves with a woollen cloth from the neck to the knees, over which they wrap another cloth like a cape; they wear leather belts with very well made buckles - the bracelets normally worn on their arms and caskets for relics slung over their shoulders are also very well crafted; normally they go barefoot but they also wear leather boots or socks made of their cloth specially when they are travelling; their weapons are bow and arrow, short swords and daggers made from excellent iron, beautifully decorated in a rare design.

### **Shabdrung's Physical Appearance**

The lamas do not carry weapons and shave their heads; some, but not many let their beards grow; the King has a long one which reaches to his waist, and he normally keeps it wrapped in silk, except during festivals when it is uncovered as when we first met him; the hair on his head is nearly one and a half metres long; it seems he is very proud of it and wears it thus as a mark of greatness; however, he told us that he planned to cut it when he had a son who would be his successor, and that he would then go into retirement and



leave the world because he did not want death to come upon him while he had his hair long, as had happened to another King, his ancestor, who had caused a scandal for not having cut his hair before his death. The dress of the lamas is a short tunic which covers the chest leaving the arms bare; the rest of their body down to the feet is well covered with a large cloth over which is another cloth worn as a cape; they never wear anything else nor do they go about naked.

### **Prayer**

May it please God our Lord to look upon them all with His divine mercy and bring them to His divine knowledge such that they will take advantage of His mercy by knocking at His door to learn news of the Holy Gospel, and to this end I ask Your Reverence once more to ask the faithful in all your Province to continue their prayers and sacrifices; and I commend myself to the blessing of Your Reverence.

From this kingdom of Cambirasi [Bhutan] and house of the King, 4th October 1627.

Your son in Christ our Lord, Estevao Cacella.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup>East India - as opposed to the West Indies.
- <sup>2</sup>Bhotanta - Tibet which in this text includes Bhutan.
- <sup>3</sup>Cambirasi - a name for Bhutan used by the people of Koch Bihar.
- <sup>4</sup>Tanga - Bangladeshi 'taka' a denomination of coin which had been used over a vast extent of territory, including India.
- <sup>5</sup>Koch - in Assam; Hajo, its principal city, being situated east of Koch Bihar.
- <sup>6</sup>Kashgar - a town in the kingdom of Kashgar to the east of the Pamirs, north of Tibet.
- <sup>7</sup>Purification of our Lady - religious feast to honour the mother of Jesus.
- <sup>8</sup>Lent - 40 days of penance and fasting in the Catholic Church calendar.
- <sup>9</sup>Breviary - book containing a priest's daily office.
- <sup>10</sup>Five hundred thousand - an exaggerated guess; the 1969 census gives the figure of 63,032.
- <sup>11</sup>Eternal Word [God] - Feast of the Annunciation celebrates the day when the Archangel Gabriel announced that Mary would become the mother of Jesus, son of God, who would save all mankind.
- <sup>12</sup>Thurible - incense burner.
- <sup>13</sup>Retreat - reference to the three-year retreat at Cheri monastery.
- <sup>14</sup>Bone - a vertebra which was actually a relic of gTsang-pa rGya-ras (1161-1211) founder of the 'Brug-pa school, and a remote, though direct, ancestor of the Shabdrung. The relic is still kept in Punakha Dzong today.
- <sup>15</sup>Saint Ignatius Loyola - founder of the Society of Jesus - the Jesuit order.
- <sup>16</sup>Virgin Lady - Mary the mother of Jesus.
- <sup>17</sup>His master - lHa-dBang Blo-gros, the great astrological scholar.
- <sup>18</sup>First cousin of another lama - the first 'Brug sDe-srid, bsTan-'dzin ,Brug-rgyas.
- <sup>19</sup>Possibly a mandala.
- <sup>20</sup>Mother of God - Queen Maya from whose right side the Buddha Sakyamuni was born.
- <sup>21</sup>Holy Gospel - teachings of Christ.
- <sup>22</sup>King with 12 heads - a reference to the eleven-headed form of Avalokitesvara.
- <sup>23</sup>Silver casket - dNgul-'bum mChod-rten, containing the remains of the Shabdrung's father.
- <sup>24</sup>Holy Cross - the cross where Jesus was crucified.

<sup>25</sup>Pulls their hair - the ritual of 'pho-ba chen-po (transfer of consciousness).

<sup>26</sup>Catechism - book of instruction in Catholic religious doctrine.

<sup>27</sup>The Jesuits believed that the devil tempted the people to practice the wrong religion.

<sup>28</sup>Divine service - the Mass - a celebration in the Catholic Church of a ritual in which the worshipper is united to Christ by partaking of consecrated bread and wine.

<sup>29</sup>Province of Malabar - in writing to his superior at the headquarters of the Catholic Mission in India, Father Cacella is asking for their prayers and blessings.

<sup>30</sup>Blood of Jesus - reference to the suffering of Jesus on the cross.

<sup>31</sup>In 1627 there was a total of seven Jesuits in Tsaparang [Western Tibet] working in the Catholic Mission that had been founded there in 1626 by another Jesuit, Father Antonio de Andrade. The mission was closed in 1634.

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