

GYALSE TENZIN RABGYE AND THE FOUNDING OF TAKTSANG LHAKHANG

*John A. Ardussi**

It is an honour to have been invited to submit an article for the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Bhutan Studies*. I am certain that the Centre for Bhutan Studies will take its place next to the National Library and the National Museum, as an institution with a distinctive and important role to play in the exploration and documentation of Bhutanese history and culture.

As a small contribution for this occasion, I would like to offer a translation of that portion of the biography of the 4th Druk Desi Tenzin Rabgye (1638 - 96) which describes his visit to the sacred cave of Taktsang Pelphug during the Tshechu season of 1692, and his founding there of the temple devoted to Padma Sambhava known as *Gu-ru mTshan-brgyad Lhakhang* - 'The Temple of the Guru with Eight Names.' It is this elegant structure, situated high on the cliffs above the upper Paro valley, that has become the most universally recognized cultural icon of Bhutan. May its restoration be swift and successful!

I hope that those readers able to consult the original text will indulge any errors in the translation¹. There are still uncertainties in identifying place names, and several ambiguities in the text itself. However, in order not to overly disturb the story's flow, I have limited footnotes to the necessary minimum, and have adopted the modern spelling of familiar names. As this is only part of a larger project to

* John A. Ardussi is a member of the research team Equipe sur l'aire et l'environnement tibetan, (Centre Nationale de Recherche Scientifique, Paris). He wrote his doctorate thesis on *The History of Bhutan before 1763*, and many articles on Bhutan. He is an aeronautical engineer at ELDEC Corporation, USA and is presently completing an annotated translation of the biography of the 4th Druk Desi Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye (1638-96).

translate the entire biography, suggestions or criticisms will be most welcome.

Historical Background

The 4th Druk Desi Tenzin Rabgye (*bsTan-'dzin Rab-rgyas*) (1638-96) was one of the key figures in the early history of the Drukpa state. He was the first, and only successor of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (*Zhabs-drung Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal*) to fulfill the latter's vision that Bhutan should be ruled by male descendants of his own family, a branch of the ancient rGya clan of the hierarchs of Rwa-lung monastery stretching back to the founder of the Drukpa sect gTsang-pa rGya-ras (1161-1211). Even here, though, the principle had to be adapted to the reality that Tenzin Rabgye was not the Shabdrung's own son, who was found to be too sick to succeed², but rather a distant cousin from a collateral line descending from the 15th-century 'crazy saint' Drukpa Kunley. For two generations our subject's family had controlled the monastery of Tango (*rTa-mgo*)³. Founded in the 13th century by Pha-jo 'Brug-sgom zhig-po, this monastery was bestowed on the Shabdrung as a religious gift by Tenzin Rabgye's father. Almost from his date of birth, the Shabdrung saw this child as a potential successor, and relations between their two families remained close⁴. The title Gyalse (*rGyal-sras*) meaning 'Prince' came to be used of him to acknowledge his high-born status.

Tenzin Rabgye thus played a transitional role between the model of rulership envisioned by the Shabdrung and the system of reincarnate successors that he himself authorized in 1695, after he too failed to produce a male heir⁵. For although he had several wives during his lifetime, only one daughter survived to maturity, *Lha-lcam* Kun-legs (1681-1722/3) who became a nun and eventually the spiritual head of Tango Monastery⁶. After Tenzin Rabgye there came to be a clear distinction between the position of spiritual head of state and that of the Druk Desi (*'Brug sDe-srid*), the civil administrator. The two roles were seldom again filled

simultaneously by one individual during the more than 200 years that this system of governance endured, before its replacement in 1907 by the modern monarchy.

The times in which Tenzin Rabgye lived were a formative period for the Drukpa state. In 1678 Bhutan and Tibet had signed a treaty of peace, ending a long period of warfare. But relations between the two countries remained tense for many more decades. Bhutan's borders had only recently been extended as far east as Merak and Sakteng by the 3^d Druk Desi Minjur Tenpa (*Mi-'gyur brTan-pa*), and were still being pushed westwards towards Sikkim. As the only heir apparent in the Shabdrung's extended family⁷, Tenzin Rabgye's upbringing had been carefully watched over by the state authorities. As soon as he finished his early monastic education he began to serve in the capacity of spiritual chaplain to both Minjur Tenpa and his predecessor La-sngon-pa Tenzin Drukdra. In 1680, following Minjur Tenpa's retirement, Tenzin Rabgye was installed in a magnificent ceremony at Punakha as the *rGyal-tshab* or 'Representative' of Ngawang Namgyel, which meant that he had full temporal and spiritual authority over the state of Bhutan⁸.

From 1680 until his own retirement in 1694, Tenzin Rabgye seems to have perceived his principal mission as one of consolidating the authority of the Drukpa state in all areas of the country. This involved two principal activities, for which his reign was rightfully famous. The first was a dedication to the construction and restoration of numerous temples and monasteries, including the fabrication of statues and wall frescoes. Many of these monasteries were at that time still family hermitages. Yet his biography provides much detail on the state resources devoted to their restoration, in some cases enumerating the materials expended and the names of the chief artisans. One interesting architectural remnant of his reign is the fortified stone staircase connecting the north side of Jakar (*Bya-dkar*) Dzong to the deep well at the base of the hill, built to ensure a source of water during times of warfare⁹. Tenzin Rabgye's most ambitious architectural

project was his plan to recreate near Punakha the great *sKu-'bum* of Gyantse. Nyingmapa assistants were sent to Tibet to prepare sketches and measurements, but this monument never came to fruition¹⁰. Although much of the temple artwork which he sponsored may not have survived various fires and more recent restorations, only a thorough survey of the sites described in his biography can determine for sure.

The other distinctive activity which he pursued as head of state was to lead a near constant series of ceremonial tours about the country, for the purpose of meeting patrons, conducting Buddhist rituals and giving religious teachings. This was a traditional role that had once been filled by the hierarchs of Rwa-lung monastery in Tibet, and was continued in Bhutan by Ngawang Namgyel himself. It is interesting that in much of this activity he was accompanied by his sister *rJe-btsun Drung Rin-chen dPal-'dzom* (1634-1708), a respected and spiritually accomplished lady who often shared with him the dais of chief celebrant. Of particular note, however, was Tenzin Rabgye's introduction into these tours of elements appealing to the popular imagination, including the construction and display of massive appliqué Thongdröl hangings (*mthong-'grol*: 'which liberate on sight') and festivals of monastic dancing and folk dancing. Thongdröl hangings draped from monastery courtyard walls were a traditional art form that the Shabdrung had brought from Tibet, but they were extensively introduced into Bhutan by Tenzin Rabgye. The biography describes how unfurling of the first great hanging at Punakha during the spring of 1692 resulted in the miracle of restoring sight to three blind women brought from their homes many miles distant¹¹. As for the seasonal dance festivals of Tshechu (*Tshes-bcu*), 'Tenth Day', at least for western Bhutan the traditions as still practiced were first introduced and standardized by Tenzin Rabgye¹². At their core, however, lies a centuries-old religious service to Guru Rinpoche and the protective spirits of Buddhism.

The Foundation of Taktsang Lhakhang in 1692

It was during the course of one such tour of the Paro valley, in 1692, that Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye traveled to Taktsang Pelphug (*sTag-tshang dPal-phug*), the sacred cliff-side meditation cave connected by ancient tradition with Padma Sambhava. There within the cave and standing upon the cliff he led a famous celebration of Tshechu, and commanded that the foundation be laid for the temple dedicated to Guru Rinpoche called 'Temple of the Guru with Eight Names' (*gu ru mtshan brgyad lha-khang*).

The plan to create an edifice at this site was originally that of the Shabdrung Rinpoche himself. It was at Taktsang during the Tibetan war of 1644/46 that he and his Tibetan Nyingmapa teacher *gTer-ston* Rig-'dzin sNying-po first performed the *bka' brgyad dgongs 'dus* rituals associated with the celebrations of Tshechu, invoking Padma Sambhava and the protective deities to achieve victory over the invading armies¹³. In a meditative vision at that time, the local deity of Taktsang appeared to the Shabdrung in the form of a black man and offered Taktsang to him, saying that if he took it he would ensure that none could ever steal it away¹⁴. The Nyingmapa caretakers who had long held the site concurred, and gave him control. As it turned out, Bhutan's success in the war became a defining moment in the country's history, but the Shabdrung was never able to carry out his plan to build the celebratory temple. According to his biography, Tenzin Rabgye remembered participating in those events as a young monk in the Shabdrung's entourage, and chose this occasion at the peak of his productive years to fulfill his teacher's wish¹⁵.

The events recorded in our translation took place both inside and outside of Taktsang Pelphug cave. There is no mention of other buildings in the vicinity, and we must assume that any earlier hermitages on the immediate site had long since decayed. This also seems to have been its state when the Shabdrung first visited several decades earlier. But the much

older hermitages of Zangdo Pelri (*Zangs-mdog dPal-ri*) and Orgyen Tsemo (*Urgyan rTse-mo*) higher up the cliff apparently still existed, as they are mentioned in the last poem. The conclusion is that all of the construction presently found on the site of Taktsang Pelphug dates from this foundation in 1692 and later enlargements¹⁶.

The Biography of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye

The story of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye's visit to Taktsang in 1692, his decision to begin construction of the temple, and his dramatic enactment of the Tshechu rituals within the cave and while standing on the cliff, are to be found in his massive biography. Begun by several disciples, but completed in 1720 mainly by the 6th *rJe mKhan-po* Ngag-dbang Lhun-grub (1673-1730), this text is one of the most important sources for the study of 17th century Bhutanese history¹⁷. But it is also a beautifully written work of literature that deserves to be more widely known for its intrinsic value. The author has achieved an elegant blend of prose and poetry characteristic of the best examples of that genre of didactic writing loosely translated as "biography," but which is known in Choeke (or classical Tibetan) as *rnam-thar*. This term was once defined for me by a former teacher, the Sakya Deshung Rinpoche:

"A *rnam-thar* is the annalistic account of the life of the Buddha or of a Bodhisattva; the hearing of each (*rnam-pa*) word and its mental comprehension causes a seed of enlightenment (*thar-pa*) to be sown, which is why it is called *rnam-thar*. The lives of kings, ministers, ordinary men and women are referred to as annals (*lo-rgyus*) or tales (*sgrungs*), never as *rnam-thar*¹⁸."

Thus a well-written *rnam-thar* only applies to holy men of the Buddhist faith, and must be so written as to lead the reader to deeper spiritual insights, beyond the mere words or the events they describe. But it was also taken as a mark of the educated, polished author to be able to interweave elegant prose with inspired poetry, tidbits of Sanskrit, references to

Indian mythology, and citations from Buddhist scriptures. Ngag-dbang Lhun-grub rises to this standard on nearly every page, making extensive use of poetry to lend texture and substance to the narrative. The poems recap the essence of the story as well as focus on particular themes, sometimes exploiting clever word play as in poem (2) on the Buddhist concept of Illusion (*sgyu-ma*). At the biography's core, however, lies a historical thread clearly based upon factual information and personal knowledge. The skill with which this assemblage was created makes this text both a literary classic and an important historical document.

Tenzin Rabgye and the Miracles at Taktsang

The story, as we pick it up in Ch. 22, finds Tenzin Rabgye and his attendants travelling from Paro to Taktsang. Along the way, they stopped to visit many villages and hermitages where they met the inhabitants and exchanged gifts, and he bestowed teachings and initiations. Eventually they made the ascent to Taktsang, but not before taking a side trip to Drugyel Dzong at the head of the valley. Tenzin Rabgye, like other high Lamas, traveled in the company of an entourage that included bodyguards. It is an interesting comment on the era and social organization of the times that individual villages seem to have had their own militia which could serve as an honour guard for their chosen Lama.

The reader will observe two persistent themes in the selection translated here. The first is the Buddhist concept of impermanence (*mi rtag-pa*) of life and all material constructs. The second theme is the author's conviction that Tenzin Rabgye was one and the same as the 8th century saint Padma Sambhava. Indeed, one element of his literary art lies in a deliberate ambiguity, moving the reader back and forth between the centuries and blurring the distinction between the two men whom he saw as one and the same. Thus, he concludes, one need not feel nostalgic for the ancient times when Guru Rinpoche first visited Taktsang, for he has returned again, in the person of Tenzin Rabgye¹⁹.

As proof of this we are told the remarkable story of the miracles that attended the performance of Tshechu on the cliffs and inside the cave at Taktsang. Tenzin Rabgye was seen by his closest attendants to be simultaneously inside and outside of the cave. Small amounts of food became miraculously enough to feed all of the participants. Not one person in the crowd of worshippers was injured in a fall, although the stepways on the face of the cliff were narrow and dangerous. And lastly, the people of the entire Paro valley are said to have witnessed the appearance in the sky of various animal shapes and religious objects, including a rain of flowers which emerged and vanished into the atmosphere without touching the earth. These visions excited the religious faith of all those present, and must certainly have passed into the popular lore of Taktsang monastery.

And yet this biography is not without an intriguing human touch. For in certain, unguarded moments the author lets us glimpse another side of Tenzin Rabgye, the very human side of the man picked by destiny to fill the role of ruler of Bhutan. In the final poem, after having proven the identity of his subject and Guru Rinpoche, he inserts an enigmatic verse on a monk's fond remembrance of a beautiful girl, how her image persists in the heart and challenges the resolve of his belief in impermanence. Does this unexpected verse refer to the author himself, or as seems more likely to Tenzin Rabgye? Who was the beautiful girl? Could it have been Wangdi Lhamo, the consort from whom he separated in 1686 after the untimely death of their infant children, but who remained faithful until his death and whose jewelry was included in his tomb?²⁰ The answer is unclear. Here and elsewhere, the author provides only clues. For quickly he shifts to reflect upon a less personal love, likening his momentary poetic lapse to that of another "distracted meditator" (*rnam-par g.yo-ba'i bsam-gtan-pa*), the seer Agastya of Indian mythology.

It is clearly the author's intent that we, the readers, must independently ponder the deeper meaning of his poems and

solve their riddles. In so doing, I am certain, he hopes that the experience will cause a seed of enlightenment to be sown.

* * *

**Selection from Chapter 22:
Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye and the Miracles at Taktsang**

(f. 282.a) Now on the second celebration day of the white half of the full moon in the month of *Khrums* (i.e. the 17th of *khrums zla* or the 8th month), our wheel-turning Lord, whose stock of magical and meritorious powers far exceeded the innate strength and brilliance of the collection of jewels which symbolized his earthly dominion, such as his excellent horse or the gold ornamented elephant which led before him, set out with his retinue of followers to visit the Meditation Cave of the Guru of Orgyan, located at Taktsang. On the way up they came to Kyichu (*sKyer-chu*) Lhakhang, the great temple which "tames the border²¹." There he led the Ocean of Offerings service before the Jowo image²², with silk scarves (*snyan dar*), butter lamps, incense and the hundred-fold food offerings, (282.b) dedicating their prayers to enhance the welfare of the Dharma and of sentient beings.

Having then rested for a while at rDo-thu'i-tshal-kha, they reached gTsang-'gram Tshal-kha ('Riverbank Grove') near rGya-gar-thang where they ate lunch²³. There they were received most respectfully with a presentation of such entertainment as the Beguiling Goddess (*Lha mo yid 'phrog*) folk dance and were presented gifts by the headmen (*drung-pa*) and citizens of the five Lam-gong communities²⁴. He in turn bestowed upon them an initiation and recitation of the three-fold retinue of Mahakarunika²⁵ and a lecture on the values of charity. Now these people consisted of an inner and outer (group), a result of their having formerly organized into chief and follower patrons of Lama Lha-pa²⁶. But at this time, in accord with the universal petition of all the Lam-gong-pa patrons, he brought them into the corps of his servants [called] the Middle Circle militia (*Bar skor dpa' rtsal pa*), and

leading them as far as the Inner Circle patrons he permitted them to set up camps and homes without prejudice²⁷. Next he was escorted by the bTsan-gdong-pa militia, and at bTsan-gdong-myang-smad he was met by the Dzongpon's reception party offering quantities of beer and tea. From the rock face of Srin-po-grong²⁸ (283.a) he was accompanied by singers and dancers and by Lamas from the monastery, until they arrived at Drugyel ('Brug-rgyal) Dzong.

The next morning he led the communal circle of ritual expiation (*bskang gso tshogs kyi 'khor lo*) to mGon-po lCam-dral²⁹ and the other religious protectors, and the bestowal of silk scarves in admonition to uphold the Dharma. From across the valley, the militia demonstrated their shooting skills by firing guns which thundered through the place. Then he went into the great inner courtyard in front of the central tower, and from a highly decorated throne³⁰ he bestowed long life initiation upon all the villagers, along with the initiation and recitation for Chenrezig and other teachings. The Dzongpon Ngag-dbang sByin-pa and his people served him with faultless courtesy and bestowed upon him a tall pile of such gifts as gold, silver, horses, oxen, tea, clothing, silk, loads of butter, salt, and cotton cloth. To all of the bTsan-gdong patrons he gave horses and silver bowls, admonishing them of the need for even greater attention than before in their vigilant watch over the frontier and the protected stores inside the Dzong.

Then he started off for Taktsang, and in the company of the mTshan-ldan-sgor-mi bodyguard³¹ they arrived at Chu-'gyed-zam-pa, the 'Bridge at the Water Parting³². As he sent them back with prayers and gifts, all of the people young and old were saddened, immersed in pools of tears held back out of sorrow. But in the certainty that all gatherings will end, our Lord and his attendants (f. 283.b) looked upon them with love as they made their way to the self-originated cave which had been a residence of Guru Padma Sambhava, a ritual ground (*mandala*) for *Pawo* (*dpa'-'bo*) and *Khandroma* (*mkha'-'gro-ma*).

The Founding of Taktsang Lhakhang

The next morning began the celebration of Tshechu. With bead drum, bell and chant he performed the Seven-fold Prayer Rite called Flower Rosary of Pure Action³³. From the entrance to Pelphug cave the mists³⁴ swirled together with the sound of Jaling and Shawm horns into the depths of the skies, causing people's hair to stand up in reverence and impelling them to pray to Guru Padma Sambhava. Thereupon a rain of nectar manifested itself throughout the cave, while outside a triple rainbow arched across the clear blue skies, the countenance of the goddess sNgo-bsangs bu-mo³⁵. At the same time, various imaginary shapes appeared in the rainbow clouds, while a rain of flowers slowly fell like a snow flurry along the trace of light rays from the clear, mirror-like atmosphere. In the open sky before the place three eagles soared and wheeled in circles, while stretching from the southwest a five-colored rainbow cloud, like a silk sheet, (f. 284.a) seemed fixed in the sky just before the cave. These and countless other auspicious signs, never before seen or heard of, occurred at that time.

Who can fathom the limits to which extend (1)
These gratifying, illusory, auspicious signs,
Which shine along the trace of the youthful, rising sun,
And follow the squiggles writ by men's wandering thoughts?
The blessings and miracles of
That Wisdom Holder from Oddiyana
Command and hold the attention of all mankind,
Yet never for a moment does He waver, the Eye in the
Heavens.
The wind of His chant and music
Fans the fiery tongue of faith, burning ever brighter in our
hearts,
Until even the rock mountain, by nature hard and tough,
Cries out 'Enough! Please wet me with Thy cooling stream!'
Likewise, yet beyond description, is that stream of blessing
which we implore,
A mystical attainment, the three-fold secret of the Wisdom
Deity!³⁶

At that time most of the people of the Lho Paro region had assembled in a vast gathering, filling the valleys and hillsides. As if entranced by the boundless, miraculous signs of blessing from the Great Teacher [Padma Sambhava or Tenzin Rabgye], they all assumed a pose of concentration on the deity at their foreheads³⁷. (f. 284.b) Their enflamed minds were totally shaken by the power of faith, and they jumped up and pointed their arms towards the center of the skies. Their voices filled every direction with loud cries³⁸ and piercing chants to the *vajraguru* as they became absorbed in ecstatic joy³⁹, as if it were their good fortune to have reached the paradise of Lotus Light⁴⁰.

I am sure that this is all Illusion's doings! (2)
Though they do not comprehend it as Illusion,
These Illusion Bodies called human beings
Who have scaled the steep ladder of
The massive, stone mountain's rocky crags,
As if to measure its towering height
Within the pale blue skies above,
And there to enjoy Illusion's magical displays!⁴¹

At this time auspicious signs were everywhere, inside [the cave] and out. All of his attendants experienced the phenomenon of seeing imaginary forms of Wisdom Deities in the rainbow clouds, along with various hand symbols such as wheels, lotuses, and *dorje*, lucky symbols from paintings such as the vase, golden fish, parasol, and banner, and animal shapes such as lions and bulls. (f. 285.a) The people were talking loudly and wildly while pointing at these many imaginary figures, appearing here and there like the continuous flow of luminescent symbols which occur in the thousand-fold visions of yogins⁴². Then Norbu⁴³ went before our Lord [*sku-zhabs* = Tenzin Rabgye] and said, "Oh Lama Rinpoche! Everybody is carving figures in the rainbow clouds with their fingers, that are shaped like the ones in their imaginations. Because this is due to you, can you please come quickly?"

The Founding of Taktsang Lhakhang

Our Lord agreed to look and went to the entrance of the cave.

Now sometime later I [the author] heard this story from Umdze Gelong bsTan-pa, how earlier during the recitation rituals, when so many people were crowded together in the narrow confines of the cave, he was seated [outside] close to the presence of our Lord. And he, feeling confined, had decided that he needed to change to a more comfortable place and entered the cave. But there, seated upon his dais, our Lord's countenance was brighter even than before, and the glint in his eyes flashed, such that at the moment that he saw him [Tenzin Rabgye] he was transfixed by his great brightness, unable to either enter or leave the cave. Then the Gelong had thought to himself,

“My eyes are deceiving me! I thought that rJe Rinpoche was sitting outside. I saw him physically with my eyes. Yet here he is [inside]! What is going on?”

Upon returning outside the cave and looking, he again saw the rJe Rinpoche seated as before, surrounded by his attendants (f. 285.b). The realization that this was a magical display of our Lord stirred deep feelings of faith in the depths of his heart and limbs.

The reflection of His diamond body appears plainly (3)
In the stainless mirror of our perceptions;
This is the way of the Great Secret Vajrayana,
Undeniably, the highest path.
When auspicious signs appear to all, within and without,
As if competing with the sun, the child of the gods,
It is He, displaying from a distance His form
Within this Southern Land, the *mandala* of miraculous perception⁴⁴.

So now our Lord put on his robes of initiation, and to the accompaniment of music he began to perform the ritual initiations of the body, speech, mind, attributes and deeds of Guru Rinpoche. At that time the stone stepways along the

ledges of the frightening rock chasm were bad and dangerous. Even an agile and carefree boy would not venture along them. Yet though he had assembled such a large group of men and women, young and old, by their trust in him no injury occurred to even a single child, no matter how many times they passed back and forth across the cliff. This was because they trusted in the love and blessing of Guru Rinpoche⁴⁵. (f. 286.a) All who had gathered there were not only given the initiation, blessings, and nectar pills, but were also treated to a sumptuous and satisfying communal *tshogs-'khor* gathering with ritual offerings. In this way he performed the deed of transferring countless people onto the level of Wisdom Holders of the great assemblage⁴⁶.

The next morning, when our Lord threw the blood offering (*dmar gtor*) to the religious protectors, before it could fall to the ground a vulture carried it off into the skies. At the same time as this miracle, dual images of the sun appeared for the same length of time.

In former times, in the holy retreat of mChims-phu⁴⁷, (4)
The king and his retinue of twenty-five
Were blessed by Padma Sambhava.
Between then and now, but for the slight difference
Of time and place, I see not the slightest distinction
In the teaching of our Lord and His disciples.
The stories of His miracles, written in the hearts of the
believer,
Shall henceforth be told in this land⁴⁸.

Soon it was the very morning of Tshechu, the tenth day of the month, and the season for the ritual cutting of the (monks') hair. A rainbow completely filled the skies, and a rain of flowers fell in great profusion as if borne by wind from the wings of bees, emerging (f. 286.b) and dissolving right within the sky yet never touching the ground. Joyful to see this and similar miracles, [Tenzin Rabgye] threw the hair cuttings, wash water, and ritual offerings down from the heights and made this oath,

“I have promised⁴⁹ to quickly accomplish the command of my former lama Ngawang Namgyel, to fulfill his plan of erecting on this spot a temple to the Guru with Eight Names⁵⁰. I therefore pray for the blessing of unhindered success!”

Later, at the time of the evening vespers, I myself [the author] was contemplating the light of the butter lamps, and Penlop Phun-tshogs⁵¹, who was sitting beside His Holiness, said to him,

“I had thought that because so many people had gathered here, the food provisions would not be enough for the services⁵². But thanks to my precious Lama there was food left over. In fact, more than a load of sugar still remains.”

Our Lord, knowing that the practitioners had made do with whatever amount of foodstuffs for the services that there were, said,

“Did you distribute some to everyone?” To which, the governor (*spyi bla*) replied,

“Right before the three of us including myself, 'Brug Rabrgyas the steward (*mgron-gnyer*) and 'Brug Tshe-ring, every scrap of food for the services was distributed without any left over such as even a small boy could carry.”

(287.a) Then [Tenzin Rabgye] said, with great joy,

“Purity of intent is more important than the physical actuality. Hence, it is a good sign that though you thought the provisions were insufficient, in fact there was still some excess. In general, though it may be hard for ministers beneath him to carry out the will of their Lord, I did at this time order you to carry out my wish, and it is good that it was sufficient for all. For even those who only obtained a bit of the ritual food substance were satisfied.”

Now at this time, [Tenzin Rabgye] stated that he had a dream in which the local protective deity Brag-skyes⁵³ took the form of a young man and a group of his friends who approached him dressed in Bhutanese costume⁵⁴ and ornaments. They had prostrated before his feet, and bowing with much reverence the young man had taken the vows of a beginning monk, promising to carry out his every command. Whereupon they went away. The next morning, [our Lord] performed the full communal ritual service with burnt incense offerings to the host of protective deities. Then, while climbing above and below from this place a spring of water began to flow from a certain cave. (287.b) It came to be called “Our Precious Lord’s Miracle Spring”⁵⁵ and it is there even today.

Exalted field of the Buddha, Peak of U-rgyan, Glorious (5)
Copper Mountain miraculous in height and mass!⁵⁶
Self-originated Cave of Contemplative Achievement, Palace of
the Radiant Lotus, casting its waves of shining rays of five-
fold wisdom to the limits of appearance!
I believe that the host of *Pawo* and *Khandroma*, engaged in
the sport of sublime illusion therein, are identical to this
band of attendants,

And that the wisdom body of that omniscient Lotus King of
the Three Times, is one and the same as this our glorious
Lama.

From that sitar which is the voice of our wise elders, (6)
A song is brought forth and heard throughout the world,
Perfect in beauty and clarity,
Like nectar to the ears of all mankind.

Now in the [eighth] month called *Khrums*
The season to celebrate the Tenth Day arrived.
There within Pelphug, the Glorious Cave of Taktsang,
Before the feet of our Lama the Wisdom Holder
All men of good fate were gathered,
Impelled from throughout this Land of the South
By the force of their accumulated karma,

The Founding of Taktsang Lhakhang

Like bees swarming about the lotus⁵⁷.

Then from the Radiant Lotus Field
The host of *Pawo* and *Khandroma*
Danced a masquerade in the shape of rainbows
Along the broad pathway of the undying gods.
As a grand show of total love!
For there occurred a great wonder:
Flowers that appeared and disappeared
As if strewn in worshipful offering
By the haughty, Well-Painted Ones (the gods).

In order to encourage mankind to watch these miracles
They assembled to play in this one place,
Dressed in the costume of the greeting party,
To the accompaniment of the great drum *Dundubhi*
And his companion the *Dungchen* horn⁵⁸.
Their beauteous voices resounded through the skies
Awakening sentient beings from their deluded sleep,
Causing them to see the sublime display
Of those wondrous shapes,
Reflected on the face of the mirror-like skies.

That sight was like sprinkling the water of joy
Causing to bloom a thousand petaled (lotus flower) of faith.
May the bee of the mind,
Intoxicated by a drop of its sweet fragrance,
Hum forever that melody,
The prayer of remembrance of our Guru!

Similarly, before the very eyes of men
The stream of blessing from the snow mountains
Flowed down upon all creatures,
Melted by the fresh light rays of pure thought,
Carried thence by the chariot of love.
That stream of the Four Empowerments descended
And purified the stains of living beings,
Causing to ripen the seeds of the Four Bodies.

E-ma! Such was the good fate of that time and place
For the Lord and His followers gathered there;
Yet all, like magical projections of Illusion,
Did then disperse to their several ways.
What man of sight and clear of mind,
Saddened at heart to hear this thought,
Would never weep
A stream of renunciation's tears?

Kye-ma! It matters not,
That we did not witness those times, even in dream.
For now, once again it is a time of good fortune
That our Lord and His retinue are gathered here in person!

Kye-ma! Just so is there the image of a beautiful girl,
A mental residue drawn by the pen of nostalgia
In the pure mirror of my heart!
Over and over her questioning portrait
Appears clearly, day and night,
An ever-smiling continuum on which I contemplate.

But the distracted meditator
Now prays to be filled with that sweeter nectar,
The magical attainment of two-fold desire,
Ensnared by the far-reaching rays of love
Of that guide, the seer Agastya,
For the daughter of the long, pure river Ganges!^{59 60}

Later on, even the emanation of the Lopen (Padma Sambhava), Gantey Penlop Tulku⁶¹ was to describe the immeasurable joy of belief that he experienced upon realizing that the miraculous signs which appeared when rJe Rinpoche [Tenzin Rabgye] went to Taktsang were not exceeded even by those signs which appeared when Orgyan Padma himself went there in person, long ago. I heard it from others also, for Penlop Grags-pa rGya-mtsho, *Drung-yig* rTa-mgrin Dbang-rgyal⁶², and *'Tsho-mdzas*⁶³ Tshe-ring bSam-'grub were unanimous in mind and voice when they stated that however they thought about the body and deeds of rJe Rinpoche, they

The Founding of Taktsang Lhakhang

had for a very long time held the faithful conviction that he was indistinguishable from Lopen Chen-po [Padma Sambhava]. (289.a) Moreover, they had personally witnessed the unique nature of the miraculous signs which appeared inside the cave and out, on that morning of the Tenth Day at Taktsang. In this way they developed a deep and unshakeable faith that the same physical body of the one known as Padma Sambhava also belonged to this our Lord. Repeatedly they stated how fortunate they were to have been there, in the retinue of his attendants.

Meanwhile, our Lord gave instructions to Penlop Grags-pa rGya-mtsho⁶⁴ to erect a new temple at that place, according to the design which he laid out on the ground. Then, having stayed for two more days, he and his attendants departed to tour the various sites.

* * *

To complete our story, Tenzin Rabgye assigned his chief artisan Grags-pa rGya-mtsho (1646-1719) to supervise construction of Taktsang Lhakhang, its gilt cupola and interior artwork. A special appliqué hanging illustrating the eight forms of Padma Sambhava was also created for the temple under the direction of his personal attendant *sPrul-sku* 'Brug bsTan-'dzin, from select fabrics brought from Lahore⁶⁵. The work was begun during the 10th month of the Water Monkey year (1692) and was basically completed by 1694, when Tenzin Rabgye traveled there once again to perform the consecration ceremony⁶⁶. At that time, the tradition was inaugurated to conduct annual celebrations for the Tenth Day (Tshechu) of the fifth month.

Not long after this event, Tenzin Rabgye began to lose his eyesight and by autumn of that year he felt that his own death was near. Under mounting political pressure due to other stresses of the time, and increasingly ill, he resigned from office and retired to his ancestral hermitage of Tango⁶⁷. There he died during the 4th month of 1696, attended by his sister and daughter and a few close servants.

Notes

¹ For the benefit of interested readers, the original text of the poems has been included in footnotes. I wish to thank Françoise Pommaret for her useful comments on an earlier version of this translation.

² *Lho'i chos 'byung*, f. 54.b.

³ It is interesting that the hillside monastery of Tango, like Taktsang Pelphug, is also built around an ancient meditator's cave, beside the striking rock formation shaped like a horse's head from which it takes its name.

⁴ *SDE-SRID 4*, f. 23.a-26.b, 53.a-b.

⁵ *SDE-SRID 4*, f. 330.b-331.a.

⁶ *Lho'i chos 'byung*, f. 57.b-58.a. A line of reincarnations is said to have once derived from *Lha-Icam* Kun-legs. I am unsure if these are still recognized today.

⁷ Tenzin Rabgye also had a half-brother, sByin-pa rGyal-mtshan (d.1681), who served for many years as the Lama of Taktsang Pelphug, but we do not know if any other structure than the cave existed on the site at that time. His actual residences seem to have been 'Od-gsal-sgang on the peak above Taktsang and the old 'Brang-rgyas-kha monastery located in the valley (*Lho'i chos 'byung*, f. 55.a-57.b). For some reason, he was not perceived to be a suitable candidate to succeed the Shabdrung.

⁸ The whole of chapter 11 from his biography (*SDE-SRID 4*, ff. 121.a-132.b) is devoted to the description of his enthronement celebration.

⁹ *SDE-SRID 4*, f. 63.a-b.

¹⁰ *SDE-SRID 4*, ff. 236.a, 246.b-247.a. The monumental *sKu-'bum* of Gyantse was spared during the 'Great Cultural Revolution' and has been recently documented in Franco Rica & Erberto Lo Bue, *The Great Stupa of Gyantse*, London, Serindia Publications, 1993.

¹¹ The project of fabricating this hanging, which consumed three years and 300 large reams of precious cloth, is described in *SDE-SRID 4*, ff. 257.a-261.b and in *Grags-pa rGya-mtsho*, ff. 49.b-50.b. On the history of the Thongdröl art form in both Tibet and Bhutan, see *SDE-SRID 4*, ff. 188.b-191.a.

¹²On the introduction of Tshechu into Bhutan and its standardization under Tenzin Rabgye, see *SDE-SRID 4*, ff. 193.b-194.a, 237.b-241.b, *Lho'i chos 'byung*, ff. 42.b, 56.b; *Lho'i chos 'byung 2*, f. 121.a; *LNDRR, Nga*, f. 133.b. In 1687 Tenzin Rabgye sent one of his Nyingmapa assistants to Tibet specifically to study the Tshechu traditions at various monasteries, particularly at Gongdkar, sNe'u-dong, and Lho-brag. Upon his return a book was written on the dance, music and costumes, and the first full three-day

The Founding of Taktsang Lhakhang

performance of Tshechu dances took place at Tashichhodzong in 1690. It is possible that Tshechu traditions were independently introduced into central and eastern Bhutan at an earlier date.

¹³ *Lho'i chos 'byung*, f. 42.b; *LNDRR*, pt. *Nga*, ff. 133.b.

¹⁴ *SDE-SRID 4*, f. 312.a.

¹⁵ *SDE-SRID 4*, f. 30.b; *BSGM*, p. 163.

¹⁶ A thorough site survey and documentation of the Taktsang complex would be a most useful undertaking by the Bhutanese authorities. A brief summary of the various temples is available in Françoise Pommaret, *Bhutan the Himalayan Kingdom*, Passport Books, 1990 pp.123ff. The earliest published image of Taktsang Pelphug appears to have been J.C. White, *Sikkim and Bhutan*, N.Y. & London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1909, p. 219, later reprinted in the same author's article "Castles in the Air," *National Geographic*, April 1914, p. 430.

¹⁷ I wish to thank Dasho Tsewang Rixin and Lopen Pema for acquiring a copy of this text for me, and for help in other ways in my research on the life of Tenzin Rabgye.

¹⁸ "Bi mo ksha rnam thar sangs rgyas dang byang sems kyi rnam thar lo rgyus kyi tshig gi rnam pa de rna bas thos shing sems la go na thar pa'i sa bon thebs pa 'gyur bas rnam thar zer / rgyal po blon po skyes pa bud med kyi byung ba rnams la lo rgyus sam sgrungs zer ba las / rnam thar gtan nas zer mi rung ngo." (Oral notes taken during 1972).

¹⁹ During his own lifetime, Tenzin Rabgye resisted the well-meaning attempts of students to recognize for him a lineage of prior incarnations. Yet when such a lineage was finally created, or at least first published in the *rnam-thar* of his immediate rebirth *rGyal-sras* Mi-pham dBang-po (1709-1738), it did not include Padma Sambhava but rather his contemporary, king Khri Srong-lde-btsan of the Tibetan royal line (Shakya Rin-chen, *Sprul pa'i sku ngag dbang bstan 'dzin mi pham dbang po'i rnam par thar pa skal bzang sna rgyan*, f. 2.a, in the *Collected Works of Shakya Rin-chen*, vol. 2, Thimphu, 1976). Discussion of the reasons lies outside the scope of the present paper.

²⁰ On Wangdi Lhamo (*dBang-'dus Lha-mo*) and the events in question, see *SDE-SRID 4*, ff. 187.a-b, 348.a.

²¹ The mythology and history of this famous temple of 7th century Bhutan, one of several erected by king Srong-btsan-sgam-po to "tame the borders" (*mtha' 'dul*) of the Tibetan empire, are described in Michael Aris, *Bhutan. The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*. Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1979, pp. 3-42.

²² The Jowo (Tib. *Jo-bo*) is an image of Buddha Sakyamuni, which is still the principal shrine object inside the old temple at Kyichu (*sKyer-chu*) (see Michael Aris, *Ibid*, pp. 3-5).

²³ A village named Jyagarthang is shown on the W. bank of the Paro Chu, about five miles up from Paro, on the 1972 1:250,000 Survey of India map of Bhutan, and on the large map enclosed in Pradyumna Karan, *Bhutan*, Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1967.

²⁴ The five Lam-gong communities (*lam gong tsho lnga*) appear to have been a distinct population cluster inhabiting this district of the Paro valley during the period.

²⁵ *Thugs rje chen po gtso'khor gsum* – a set of teachings associated with Chenrezig (Skt. Avalokiteśvara), perhaps the *Thugs rje chen po'i chos skor* discovered by Sangs-rgyas Gling-pa, and contained in the collection *Rin chen gter mdzod*

²⁶ *ngo-rkang [du]*: an unattested phrase which I interpret as “chief and followers” (lit. “head and legs”), similar in structure to the phrase *ngo-'khor* (= *mi ngo gtso bo dang de'i rjes 'brang pa* [Zhang Yi-Sun, *Bod rGya Tshig-mdzod Chen-mo*, vol.1]). The Lha-pa or Lha-nang-pa Kagyupa sect had been the principal sectarian opponents of the Drukpa in Bhutan since the 13th century, and had only recently been defeated by the Shabdrung Rinpoche.

²⁷ *khong pa sngon bla ma lha pa'i sbyin bdag ngo rkang du gyur pa'i dbang las phyi nang zhig yod pa de skabs lam gong pa'i sbyin bdag spyi'i 'dod zhus bzhin bar skor dpa' rtsal pa'i phyag phyi'i sdebs la khong pa yang 'khrid de sbyin bdag nang skor la de tshun sgar chags gnas chags kyi bsnyen bsring med pa gnan*/. This difficult passage suggests that the Lam-gong-pa people had recently changed their religious allegiance from Lha-pa to the Drukpa, and were being permitted to travel, perhaps to move their homes, under escort into the territory of the “Inner Circle” (*nang-skor*) patrons. The names “Inner Circle” (*nang skor*), “Outer Circle” (*phyi-skor*), and “Middle Circle” (*bar-skor*) appear to be part of old village cluster names in the Paro valley. The *Bar-pa'i dpa'rtsal-pa* were perhaps a local militia connected with the village of Bar-pa'i-sa, a few miles NE of the Paro market. The historian Lopen Pema mentions in passing a village cluster called *sPa ro bar skor tsho drug* (*BSGM*, p. 188). Ethnographic identification of the traditional boundaries and alliances of these and many similar population clusters mentioned by Lopen Pema would be a highly useful project for local investigators.

²⁸ As you drive northward up the narrow roadway to the ruins of Drugyel Dzong, the dirt road more or less clings to the hillside on the left of the valley. This area of farmhouses may be the place meant.

The Founding of Taktsang Lhakhang

The bTsan-gdong people and their militia were yet another local community in the valley.

²⁹ This powerful protective deity is said to be a form of Mahakala (Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, The Hague, Mouton & Co., 1956, pp. 49-51).

³⁰ *sa rgyan gnam rgyan gyi bkod pas mdzes pa'i khri la....*; lit. "upon a throne adorned with patterns of earth and sky ornaments." The phrase is not found in the standard dictionaries.

³¹ The *mTshan-lدان sGor-mi* are a particular bodyguard who became attached to Tenzin Rabgye during an earlier trip to Chapcha in the south. The description of their behaviour elsewhere in this biography suggests that they were a particular ethnic subgroup of the district.

³² To reach Taktsang you must leave the road and cross to the east bank of the Paro River, where the climb begins.

³³ *las byang me tog 'phreng mdzes kyi gsung chog gsol 'debs le'u bdun ma.*

³⁴ *brag char* - unattested term.

³⁵ *sNgo-bsangs bu-mo* 'Daughter of the Blue Firmament' is an epithet of the protective deity *dPal-lدان-lha-mo*.

³⁶ *gang tshe kun gsal gzhon nu'i 'gram pa la // 'char ba'i dge mtshan gzugs brnyan 'dod dgu'i 'phrul // skye dgu'i kun rtog pir gyi rjes zhugs pas // de der snang ba'i pha mtha' su yis chod // 'on kyang o di ya na'i [o ddi ya na'i] rig 'dzin gyi // byin rlabs sgyu 'phrul chen po'i ngo mtshar gyis // 'gugs bzhin skye dgu'i yid dang 'dren byed mig // lhan cig nam mkha'i ngos las g.yo ma gyur // 'dzab dbyangs rol mo'i wa yus bskul ba bzhin // snying la dad pa'i me lce cher 'bar bas // sra mkhregs bem po'i rang bzhin brag ri yang // ma bzod zhu ba'i bsil rgyun 'thor byed na // ye shes lha yi gsang gsum dngos grub kyi // byin 'babs ngo mtshar tshul de smos ci dgos //*

³⁷ *thams cad gtsug tor 'khor lo sgyur ba'i lta stangs kyi rjes su zhugs te*/. I.e., they assumed a meditative pose of concentration upon the image of the teacher centered at their foreheads.

³⁸ *skad bsangs mthon por* - form not attested in the dictionaries (but compare Dayab: *skad gsang mtho = skad sgra chen po*).

³⁹ *nyams dga' bde la rtse bar byed do //*. It is clear from the language in this passage that the people of Paro had been seized by a kind of extatic passion in their joy and astonishment at the miracles they viewed.

⁴⁰ *padma 'od kyi zhing khams* is the heaven to which Padma Sambhava travelled upon leaving Tibet, and where he is believed to now reside, and to which many famous Nyingmapa *gter-ston* are said to have attained upon their death (see Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 520f).

⁴¹ *de tshe sngo bsangs nam mkha'i dbyings // mthon po'i tshad la 'jal ba bzhin // sa 'dzin ri bo lhun chags kyi // brag g.yang zar [read gzar] po'i them skas la // sgyu ma'i snang bar 'byams min yang // sgyu lus gdos bcas skye bo rnams // sgyu ma'i 'phrul 'khor ltar rtse ba // sgyu 'phrul chen po'i byin du nges //.*

⁴² *rnal'byor can gyi stong gzugs la rtags snang 'od gsal gyi rang mdangs (285.a) ma 'gags par 'char ba bzhin du gyur pa'i rnam pa de dang de dag mdzub brdas ston par byed pa'i ca co'i sgra chen po byung bar gyur pa de'i tshe .../.*

⁴³ This Norbu is probably Nor bu'i Drung, the personal attendant of Tenzin Rabgye who in 1688 had been appointed to head the project of constructing the three-storey temple at Tango (see *Lho'i chos 'byung 2*, f. 121.b).

⁴⁴ *rang rig dri ma'i g.ya' bral me long du // sku yi rdo rje'i gzugs brnyan 'gag med du // 'char 'di gsang chen rdo rje theg pa'i lugs // bla na med pa'i tshul la su yis bsnyon // gang tshe phyi nang kun tu dge ba'i ltas // 'gran pa'i tshul la lha'i bu nyi ma yang // ya mtshan rtog pa'i dkyil 'khor lho gling 'dir // ring zhid chags pa'i rnam 'gyur ston pa bzhin //.*

⁴⁵ ... *gnod par ma gyur pa ni slob dpon chen po'i thugs rje dang byin rlabs su 'khums so //.* The logic of the passage requires that 'khums be the verbal predicate of the nominal phrase *ma gyur pa*. Hence, I would have expected a reading of 'khums *pas so*, and have interpreted the passage that way.

⁴⁶ *tshogs chen rig 'dzin gyi sa la 'god pa'i 'phrin las rgya cher mdzad //;* that is, he initiated them into the *ma&oala* which transforms them into becoming one of the *Rig 'dzin* beings.

⁴⁷ It was at bSam-yas mChims-phu in Tibet that Padma Sambhava taught Buddhism to king Khri srong lde btsan and his followers. (See Dudjom Rinpoche & Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, I, p.512-521; Per K. Sørensen, *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography*, pp. 368-403).

⁴⁸ *sngon gyi dus tshe mchims phu'i dben gnas su // rje 'bangs nyer lnga'i tshogs rnams pad 'byung gis // smin par mdzad pa de dang 'di gnyis la // gnas dang dus kyi khyad par tsam nyid las // gzhan pa gtso dang 'khor la tha dad du // phye ba'i khyad chos 'ga' yang ma dmigs pa // dpyod ldan snying la bris pa'i ngo mtshar gtam // da dung 'jig rten 'di na snyan par grags //.*

⁴⁹ *g.yar dam 'bul ba yin pas.* The phrase *g.yar dam* is defined in S.C. Das (*Tibetan English Dictionary*) as "sometimes incorrectly written for *yal gam* to avow, promise, undertake.

⁵⁰ *'gu ru mtshan brgyad kyi lha khang.*

⁵¹ A local man of wealth, dKar-spe Brag-gong-pa Penlop Phun-tshogs was appointed governor (*spyi-bla*) of Paro Dzong in 1690 (*SDE-SRID*

4, f. 230.b), and served as principal host of Tenzin Rabgye throughout this tour of the Paro valley.

⁵² *da lam 'dir mi 'du tshogs shin tu che ba bcas tshogs kyi yo byad rnam kyis ldang bar mi 'gyur grang snyam pas /*. This sentence is written in rather colloquial language, including a verbal complement of doubt, *grang*, rare in the written language (on which see L.S. Dayab's definition [*Tibetan Dictionary*, Dharamsala 1966]: *grang = rung ba lta bu*).

⁵³ Brag-skyes and Jo-mo Lha-ri are twin mountains which stand at the head of the Paro valley, on the Tibetan border.

⁵⁴ *lho chas su byas pa* Lit. "wearing the clothing of a Southerner."

⁵⁵ *rJe rin-po-che'i grub-chu*. The location of the spring seems to have guided his selection of the temple site.

⁵⁶ Zangdo Pelri (*Zangs-mdog dPal-ri*) and Orgyen Tsemo (*U-rgyan rTse-mo*) are the names of paradises associated with Padma Sambhava, as well as the names of ancient hermitages on the cliffs above Taktsang monastery.

⁵⁷ That is, the Bhutanese disciples have gathered about Tenzin Rabgye, who is like Padma Sambhava "The Lotus Born."

⁵⁸ The *Dundubhi* is a Sanskrit term used by our author in several poems to refer to the large drum (*mchod-rnga, rnga-chen*) used in Buddhist ritual. The *Dung-chen* is the long brass horn customarily blown from the roof of the monastery to summon monks to worship.

⁵⁹ In Indian mythology, the goddess Ganga plays a dual role, as "the mother who both bestows prosperity (*sukha-da*), and secures salvation (*moksa-da*)" (H. Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, N.Y., Pantheon Books, 1946, p.110f). Her connection with the ancient Indian seer Agastya comes in the famous myth from the *Ramayana* relating how the Ganges river was brought from heaven down to earth, after that sage had swallowed the ocean to protect a band of hermits (*Ibid*, pp. 112f). Here, though, the author's intent seems to be Ganga as the goddess who purifies sin. I find no reference in mythology texts to her daughter, however.

⁶⁰ *rgyal ba'i zhing mchog ngo mtshar phung pos mngon par mtho ba'i zangs kyi mdog can dpal gyi ri de u rgyan rtse // ye shes lnga yi 'od snang mtha' yas rab 'bar 'dzum rlabs g.yo ba'i pho brang padma 'od de rang byung bsam 'grub phug // rab 'byams sgyu 'phrul dra ba'i rol rtsed rig 'dzin dpa' bo mkha' 'gro'i tshogs kyang gzhan min zhabs 'bring 'khor 'di dag / dus gsum kun mkhyen padma rgyal po ye shes sku de 'ang dpal ldan bla ma 'di nyid kho nar nges so snyam // blo ldan rgan po'i ngag gi rgyud mangs las // nyer drangs 'jig rten kun tu snyan pa'i dbyangs // grags pa'i dge mtshan rab gsal mthar rgyu bas // skye dgu'i rna ba'i bdud rtsi nyid du gyur // de slad khrums kyis nya ba yi // tshes bcu'i dga' ston dus kyi char // stag tshang*

*dpal gyi phug pa der // rig 'dzin bla ma'i zhabs drung du // skal bar
ldan pa'i lus can nmams // rang rang sngon bsags bsod nams kyis //
bskul ltar lho yi phyogs kun nas // bung ba padmar 'dus bzhin
tshogs // de tshe padma 'od zhing nas // rig 'dzin dpa' bo mkha'
'gro'i tshogs // 'ja' sprin gzugs su brdzu ba'i gar // 'chi med lha yi
lam yangs su // mam par brtse ba'i sgyu 'phrul che // 'char nub
byed pa'i ngo mtshar (288.a) de // legs bris tshogs kyis mngon
mthong nas // mchod pa'i me tog 'thor ba bzhin // de yi ya mtshan
skye dgu yis // lta bar bskul ba'i dung chen gyi // grogs su rnga
chen dundhubhi // 'ongs zlar bsu sna 'ang chas pa bzhin // de dag
lhan cig sar rtse ba'i // dbyangs snyan nam mkhar khol ba'i sgras //
lus can rmongs pa'i gnyid sad nas // snang ba mchog la bkod pa
bzhin // kun kyang nam mkha'i me long gi // ngos su 'char ba'i dge
mtshan gzugs // mthong ba'i dga' bas yid brlan nas // dad pa'i 'dab
stong rab rgyas par // gdung shugs zil dngar thigs pa yis // rab
myos yid kyi bhrPnga ra // 'gu ru dran pa'i gsol 'debs kyi //
dbyangs rta'i rgyu ba chad ma gyur // de tshul spyang gyi gzigs yul
du // mngon par 'bab pa'i 'gro nmams la // brtse ba'i shing rtas rab
drangs pa'i // lhag bsam nyi zer gzhon nu yis // byin rlabs gangs ri
bzhu ba'i rgyun // dbang bzhi'i chu bo legs phab pas // lus can dri
ma rab sbyangs te // sku bzhi'i sa bon smin par mdzad // e ma 'di
'dra'i bskal bzang gi // dus der 'dzom pa'i rje 'bangs nmams // kun
kyang sgyu ma'i 'phrul 'khor bzhin // so sor gyes pa'i snang tshul 'di
// thos pa'i snying yang skyo byed na // mig mthong yid gsal skye
bo nmams // nges par 'byung ba mchi ma'i rgyun // 'dren (288.b)
sbyed lam las su mi 'bab // kye ma da ni de 'dra'i dus // rmi lam na
yang mthong min na // mngon sum rje btsun sku 'khor bcas // 'dzom
pa'i skal ba nam zhig yod // kye ma de tshul mdzes ma'i gzugs //
rab dangs snying gi me long nang // dran pa'i pir gyi 'du byed kyis
// yang yang 'dri ba'i ri mo de // nyin mtshan kun tu gsal 'char bas
// rtog dpyod 'phro 'du'i rba rlabs 'dzum // rnam par g.yo ba'i bsam
gtan pa // dang[s] ring gang@'i bu mo la // rnam 'dren drang srong a
gasta'i [read: gastyai] // brtse ba'i zer zhags ring rkyong nas // rnam
gnyis 'dod pa'i dngos grub kyi // bdud rtsi'i mngal gyis gtams su gsol
/.*

⁶¹ The sGang-steng dpon-slob sprul-sku refers to bsTan-'dzin-legs-pa'i-don-grub (1645-1726), who was the abbot of sGang-steng monastery and the nominal head of the Nyingmapa establishment in Bhutan during this period.

⁶² *Drung-yig* rTa-mgrin dBang-rgyal (1646-1711) was a Tibetan monk who went to Bhutan at an early age in service to Shabdrung Rinpoche's biographer gTsang mKhan-chen. He became Bhutan's greatest scribe and negotiator of treaties during the wars with Tibet (SDE-SRID 4, ff. 369.b-371.a).

The Founding of Taktsang Lhakhang

⁶³ The title *'Tsho-mdzad* is the honorific of *'Tsho-byed* (Dagyab: *smān pa dang sman la*), i.e. “doctor, physician.” In fact, Tshe-ring bSam-'grub was one of the chief medical students of Tenzin Rabgye, who had also studied that art in his earlier years (*SDE-SRID* 4, f. 372.a).

⁶⁴ Grags-pa rGya-mtsho (1646-1719), who also went by the style Byang-chub-sems-dpa' ('Bodhisattva'), was a great monk artist on whom Tenzin Rabgye depended for numerous artistic projects during this era. His work at Taktsang is described in his autobiography (*Grags-pa rGya-mtsho*, ff. 54.a-b). A brief biography of him is to be found in *SDE-SRID* 4, ff. 368.b-369.b. His artistic skills appear to have earned him the honorary title of Penlop, normally reserved for one of the three lords of the fortresses of Wangdi Phodrang, Tashichhodzong and Punakha.

⁶⁵ A Thongdröl hanging of this type is illustrated in Schicklgruber & Pommaret, *Bhutan Mountain Fortress of the Gods*, Boston, Shambhala, 1998, p. 141.

⁶⁶ The construction activity and final consecration of the Taktsang temple is described in *SDE-SRID* 4, ff. 289.a, 301.a-302.b, 312.b, 319.a-b.

⁶⁷ See John Ardussi, “The House of 'Obs-mtsho” for further discussion of Tenzin Rabgye's later political difficulties.

Bibliography

Ardussi, John, “The House of 'Obs-mtsho – The History of a Bhutanese Gentry Family during the 13th – 20th Centuries,” in Elliot Sperling, ed., *Proceedings of the 8th International Association for Tibetan Studies*, (forthcoming).

BSGM = *sLob-dpon* Padma Tshedwang, *'Brug gi rgyal rabs slob dpon padma tshe dbang gis sbyar ba 'brug gsal ba'i sgron me* (History of Bhutan). Thimphu, 1994.

Grags-pa rGya-mtsho = (*Byang-chub-sems-dpa'*) Grags-pa rGya-mtsho, *Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa grags pa rgya mtsho'i rnam par thar pa dad pa'i sgo rab tu 'byed pa'i dge ba'i lde mig*. *Dpu-can* MS in ff. 107, reprinted in Kunsang Tobgay, *Autobiographies of Gtsoṣ Mkhanchen and Grags-pa-rgya-mtsho*, Thimphu, 1975.

Lho'i chos byung = *rJe mKhan-po X bsTan-'dzin chos-rgyal*, *Lho'i chos 'byung bstan pa rin po che'i 'phro mthud 'jam mgon smon mtha'i 'phreng ba* (History of Bhutan). 1731-1759. Woodblock print in ff.

Lho'i chos byung 2 = *sLob-dpon chen-po dGe-'dun Rin-chen* (b.1926), *Dpal ldan 'brug pa'i gdul zhing lho phyogs nags mo'i ljongs kyi chos 'byung blo gсар rna ba'i rgyan* (Revised History of Bhutan). Tango, Bhutan, 1972. Woodblock print in ff. 192.

LNDRR = *gTsang mKhan-chen 'Jam-dbyangs dPal-ldan-rgya-mtsho* (1610 - 1684), *Dpal ldan 'brug pa rin po che ngag dbang mam rgyal gyi rnam par thar pa rgyas pa chos ky sprin po'i dbyangs* (Life of *Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che* Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal in 5 parts *Ka - Ca*). Reprinted by Topden Tshering, Dolanji, H.P., 1974.

Rinpoche, Dudjom & Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje (trans. Gyurme Dorje, Matthew Kapstein), *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston, Wisdom Publications, 1991.

Schicklgruber, Christian & Françoise Pommaret, *Bhutan. Mountain Fortress of the Gods*, Boston, Shambhala, 1998.

SDE-SRID 4 = *rJe mKhan-po VI Ngag-dbang Lhun-grub* (1673-1733), *Mtshungs med chos kyi rgyal po rje rin po che'i rnam par thar pa bskal bzang legs bris 'dod pa'i re skong dpag bsam gyi snye ma* (The biography of Rgyal-sras bsTan-'dzin Rab-rgyas). Byang-chub-chos-gling, Bhutan, 1720. *Dbu-can* woodblock print, in ff. 383 (labeled *Ka* on recto left margin), plus one added folio (number is illegible).

Sørensen, Per K., *Tibetan Buddhist Historiography. The Mirror Illuminating the Royal Genealogies*. Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994.