

Hildegard Diemberger, Pasang Wangdu  
Marlies Kornfeld, Christian Jahoda

# FEAST OF MIRACLES

The Life and the Tradition of Bodong Chole Namgyal (1375/6-1451 A.D.)  
according to the Tibetan Texts "Feast of Miracles" and  
"The Lamp Illuminating the History of Bodong"



Porong Pema Chöding Editions

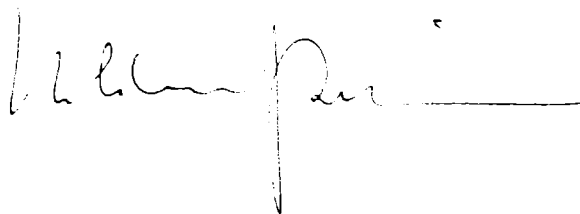
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*to Dale*

*with best wishes*

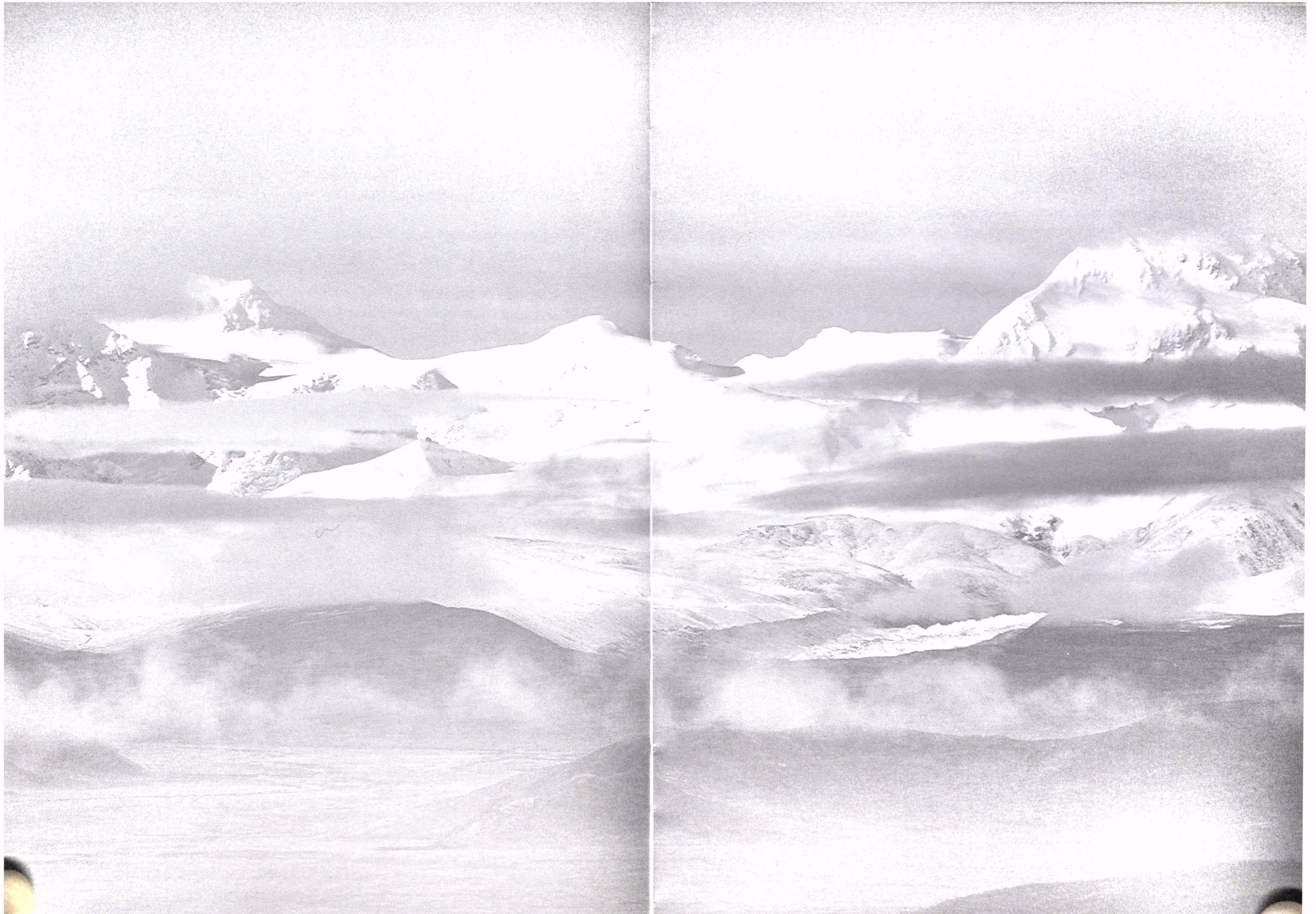


Porong Pema Chöding Editions



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>pag.</b>	<b>9</b>
Looking for Bodong Chole Namgyal, a Timeless Presence in the Land of Snow between Relics and Prophecies...		
<b>The Life of Bodong Chole Namgyal</b>	<b>pag.</b>	<b>41</b>
The “Feast of Miracles” by Jigme Bang		
<b>The History of Bodong</b>	<b>pag.</b>	<b>98</b>
The “Lamp Illuminating the History of Bodong” by Chime Öser		
<b>Map</b>	<b>pag.</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>pag.</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>pag.</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>Picture Credits</b>	<b>pag.</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>pag.</b>	<b>159</b>



*“...Like a peacock perceiving the spring  
My mind is longing for the remote hermitage.  
Like a bee entering the garden  
I feel at home in the remote hermitage.  
Like the king of geese flying to the lake  
Let us go quickly to the remote hermitage.  
Like small birds longing for water and hearing the sound of thunder  
I listen to the voice of remoteness, more pleasant than music...  
Like bees following the king of birds  
Those who seek liberation come with me.  
There is a glittering snow-white mountain range,  
The darkness of ignorance should be enlightened  
The brightness of the beautiful turquoise lake is shining,  
The obscurity of afflictions should be cleared.  
The woods are full of birds and bees  
The sound of the holy doctrine is like music of the gods  
The trees are full of flowers and fruits  
The flowers blossom brightly  
Like laughter from the depth of saṃsāra.  
Some flowers shine in a pleasant smile  
Like a display of happiness for spiritual accomplishment.  
Some drop their dew  
Like shedding tears at the sight of the faults and suffering of saṃsāra.  
The rivers flow murmuring  
Like presenting the nectar of sacred instructions to drink.  
The dissolving of water drops  
Raises faith in spiritual accomplishment...”*

From *De nyid 'dus pa chen po mdzad byang, Phyogs las rnam rgyal gsung 'bum*,  
(The Collected Works of Chole Namgyal), vol. 119, pp. 185-186.

## Chapter I

### ***Looking for Chole Namgyal, a Timeless Presence in the Land of Snow between Relics and Prophecies...***

“In Kyirong, the land of the ‘Village of Happiness’, I travelled everywhere seeking out the sites of the Great Bodongpa and meditating there. I really enjoyed that time in which I developed an awareness of being linked with him in some way. I spent most of my time in a locality called Dolpo and the local people used to call me the little crazy monk. I lived alone in that wilderness with the animals of the forest: monkeys, birds, snakes, wild cats, bears... local people were often threatened by attacks from bears and thus assumed that one day the little monk would disappear. Each time I went down to the village, they were surprised to see me. ‘He is still alive... he is still crazy’, but I did not care. I enjoyed my stay there, alone with all those animals, very much indeed. In the morning, when I used to go to fetch water from the spring, they would come and drink too, but they never threatened me. I lived in caves in Rangma, Senchen Phugpa, Worma... which were also the places of Milarepa and Guru Rinpoche.

The caves were in the forest where there were many wild fruits. Because Tibetans do not know much about fruits, they always fear that they might be poisonous, but I observed the monkeys and followed their lead. I thought that, if they did not die, I would survive too. Once I ate something wrong and was quite sick. I nearly died... In general, however, I lived well by eating fruits, nettles and a little barley flower (*tsampa*). Nettles can be dried and then used for soup in winter. The *tsampa* came from the village which I would visit when my food supply was finished. I would ask for alms and then leave again for the mountains. I lived in this way between the ages of 13 and 16. By leading such a life and practising meditation, I felt that I gradually acquired a strength which came from the very depths of my being...

Eventually I felt the desire to go back to Porong, but unknown to me the Red Guards had arrived there: in the mountains there is no radio and nobody can tell you the news. When I went down to the village I encountered some people from my homeland. They were amazed to see me and said: ‘Are you still alive? We thought that you must have died a long time ago as we neither saw nor heard anything of you for such a long time... where are you going now?’ I replied that I was going home to see my family. Distressed, they said: ‘Forget the idea, nobody is left there and if you go back you will be in danger...’. I could hardly believe it, but I decided to go to the main village of Kyirong instead, and there I found my family. Afterwards I proceeded to Nepal”.

Tshering smiles. Though his thin body is showing signs of progressive ill health, his expression is keen, reflecting the iron will and his unshakable faith, undiminished despite the difficulties encountered as an exile in Nepal and India, followed by thirty years of labour in a paper mill in Switzerland.

He is one of the last remaining upholders of the Bodongpa tradition, a faith to which he has in his special way dedicated his entire life. He is a living testimony to the boundless omnipresence of the great master of this tradition who seems to live on amidst the myriad of sacred objects: clothing, shoes, statues, hats which are preserved as revered relics in the ravaged Bodongpa monasteries of Tibet and the newly built one in Nepal.

“My father was from Bodong, my mother stemmed from a big family in the land blessed by Pha Dampa Sangye. She came from Surtsho and, specifically, from a locality close to Ngönga. Her family and relatives were subjects of Porong. I was born in Porong. At that time, my father used to take care of the residence of Jigdrag Rinpoche. When I was born the wife of the lord saw a rainbow over the shelter of my mother and sent some people to enquire. Afterwards I was taken to a great lama to receive my name in accordance with Tibetan custom. That lama said that I was the rebirth of a great Bodongpa master. My father kept those words in his heart and mentioned them to nobody. Later he met another great lama and asked him about me. That lama confirmed what my father had already heard and added that I had to become a monk in a Bodongpa monastery. As soon as the news was spread among my relatives in the monastery, the Porong Monastery started to insist that it had me there. My father, however, was not particularly keen to allow me to become a monk there because the lineage of Jigdrag Rinpoche had been broken. He wanted me to go to Bodong E Monastery instead. My mother, on the other hand, said that this was not possible. Finally, my father asked Naptra Rinpoche for advice and he said that I should go to Naptra Monastery, and then, as an adult, I could follow my destiny. I stayed at Naptra until I was 13. When I reached that age I used to reflect a lot on what my father had told me. Since I had heard a great deal about the monastery of Kyirong Samtenling, with which the people of Porong had many connections, I left for Kyirong. On the way, I stopped in Takartaso, the sanctuary which had been built on the spot where Milarepa had meditated. An uncle had told me that, as representatives of Porong, we would not be really welcome there, but I had replied that I was no longer a child and I would be able to explain myself to the people there. I stayed for several months in Takartaso, which was a very pleasant spot, then the thought of Jigdrag Rinpoche began to come to my mind again and again, and with increasing intensity, and so I moved on. I went to Rangmaphu where there was a holy cave of the venerable Milarepa. I



stayed there for three or four months and during the conversations with the people there I began to hear about Jigdrag Rinpoche. Rangma Lama told me something of the life of Jigdrag Rinpoche who had visited many places in Kyirong. During that time I had strange dreams and often thought about Jigdrag Rinpoche, to whom I was feeling more and more close, so I started to visit everywhere in Kyirong, keeping this thought in my heart, but I found no clear sign. Eventually I dreamt about Dolpo and Jigdrag Rinpoche. I made enquiries about such a place and was told that one had to cross the river and a high pass to reach it as it was quite distant and that there were just a few families there. I decided to go there with a companion. In the village, which comprised just four households and a small temple, we met a mother and a daughter who were very helpful and kind to us. Though we had never met before, they offered us yoghurt - which was a very auspicious sign - and invited us to their house where we were offered more yoghurt. We went to see the temple, the Dolpo Lhakhang, and we found nothing remarkable there: there was a statue of Guru Rinpoche, another of Chenresi, and others... Despite this, I had such strong feelings of the presence of Jigdrag Rinpoche. It was just like an encounter with him. I remained there for a long time, before returning with my companion to Kyirong, from whence my friend went home and I left for the mountains... To my mind, this feeling stemmed from a former life. In fact, this body is merely a link in the cycle of transmigrations from one life to the next. Should I successfully assist in preventing the demise of the Bodongpa tradition, it would be due to a karmic relatedness inherited from former lives in which we are all involved, not only Tibetans...

The Porong Gompa in Nepal was built by a community originating from my homeland. Thanks to the fact that I have been living in a developed country, I have been able to contribute to the construction of the residence of Jigdrag Rinpoche (i.e. the temple in which his statue of miracles is kept). But the monastery itself is not enough. The *dharma* must exist within it as well as a proper spiritual teacher who masters the practice of this tradition. This is still missing... but slowly, slowly by gathering all our efforts, studying the old books, speaking with learned lamas we are trying to revive the ancient skills. Chole Namgyal himself is said to have prophesied that he would return after five hundred years... My body is weak, but before I pass away I must accomplish some task which derives from my former lives, thereby making my contribution to the Bodongpa tradition”.

Scattered ruins, some small restored or newly built monasteries, a collection of precious relics skilfully preserved through the most troubled times, a few monks, traders and nomads who are striving to give new life to these symbols of past glory and are desperately trying to perceive an

ancient, yet vital, message from a myriad of difficult texts.... This is the Bodongpa tradition today.

With the words of a Tibetan master of the 18th century - Ngawang Kalden Gyatsho, the author of the History of Shekar (*Shel dkar chos 'byung*) - the Bodongpa could be defined as “eclectic”.<sup>1</sup> The Bodongpa were named after their main seat, the monastery of Bodong E which had been founded to the west of Shigatse in 1049 A.D.. This tradition was famous for its particular breadth of mind, its multi-faceted knowledge and its tolerance. These features particularly characterized its most outstanding personality: Bodong Chole Namgyal, alias Jigdrag Rinpoche. According to his biography he was born in the year of the fire-dragon (1376 A.D.)<sup>2</sup> to the north of the jagged holy mountain chain of Tsibri in a remote nomad area called Yigu. This was a place where “the mountains had the shape of gods, fresh and pure water flowed, green grass covered the earth, all kinds of flowers bloomed and birds and animals dwelt safely without harm...”. During his lifetime he acquired an incredible knowledge, mastered the arts, performed innumerable miracles and compiled a huge work - the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* - on all aspects of human life, on the traditional Tibetan sciences and Buddhism. The biography of Chole Namgyal narrates that the main work of this scholar was composed after Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen<sup>3</sup> had appeared to him in Kyirong. In the vision the great translator appeared with a train of seven elephants loaded with all the volumes of the holy doctrine. He gave teachings and empowerments to Chole Namgyal, omitting five volumes about which he felt less competent than his disciple. Then he invited him to start writing the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*. “He did it as follows: he would dictate to twenty amanuenses without mistake or confusion like a big river following its course slowly and constantly.... The masterpiece is structured in four parts:<sup>4</sup> concerning children, scholars, the *sūtra*, the *tantra*. The part concerning children comprises the education of body, speech and mind. The education of the body is subdivided in two: the period when the child is still in the mother’s womb, and the period following birth. The education of speech concerns reading and writing. The education of mind covers the science of the law of wordly existence<sup>5</sup> of kings, ministers and common people and the science of the examination<sup>6</sup> of animate beings and objects. The part with regard to scholars comprises arts and crafts, medicine, grammar, logic and philosophy. The part dedicated to the *sūtra* comprises the relevant doctrine in general as well as dwelling in particular upon descriptions of the Sautrāntika school, Vaibhāṣika school, Cittamātra school, Mādhyamika school. The part concerning the *tantra* presents them in general and in detail, expanding the aspects of the four classes of *tantra*...” (Biography of Bodong Chole Namgyal 223-227).

Several copies of this huge work - numbering in its detailed form one hundred and ten volumes, in its summarized version twenty, in its short form two and in its shortest state one volume - were made thanks to the support of certain lords and monasteries of that time. After completing his masterpiece, in the year of the iron-sheep (1451 A.D.) in his cell in Pemo Chöding,<sup>7</sup> Bodong Chole Namgyal went into deep meditation. He looked up at the sky, concluded his words in this world and passed away to heavenly spheres. For seven days the plain of the Lake Pekhü was covered with clouds which had descended from above, whilst the sky overhead remained a deep blue. Only the home of the master rose through the clouds which were illuminated by the sun and swathed in a variegated display of colour like the feathers of a peacock. The day after the demise of the master an immense light appeared above the great mountain to the south of the plain and it shone until the following morning. Then his body was cremated and a fire-offering ritual was performed by the great *yoginī* Chökyi Drönme - the princess of Gungthang - and some other disciples. This princess, who was considered to be the incarnation of the goddess Dorje Phamo (Vajravārāhi), is depicted, together with Chole Namgyal, his disciple Taglung Thangpa, the god Mañjuśri and the goddess Sarasvatī on the frontispiece of Chole Namgyal's Biography kept in the Bodong E Monastery. She initiated the most famous of the rare lines of female reincarnations - the Samding Dorje Phamo - and together with her descendants is given particular importance by the *Bo dong chos 'byung*, i.e. "the History of Bodong".

As abbesses of the monastery of Samding, they have been leading the monks of this monastery, situated close to the shore of the Lake Yamdrog, a soul-lake (*lamtsho*) of Tibet, up to the present day. An ancient prophecy says that this monastery keeps under control a demonic lake of negative forces. Should this monastery disappear, the whole of Tibet would be flooded and destroyed.

## **Introduction to the Biography of Bodong Chole Namgyal**

"Feast of Miracles"<sup>8</sup> is the definition given to the great biography of Bodong Chole Namgyal, alias Jigdrag Rinpoche, which was compiled in 1453 by one of his main disciples in the third year after his demise. The author of the biography is mentioned in the text by his second name Amoghasiddhi Jigme Bang (according to the Kathmandu edition he was called Könchog Bang). According to *Deb ther dmar po gсар ma* (p.58) the author was a lord of Yamdrog, residing in Nakartse, and belonged to the ruling family which actively supported Chole Namgyal. All its subjects

were therefore followers of the Bodongpa tradition. This family founded the Ngönga Chöde Monastery in Yamdrog. Also on the shore of Lake Yamdrog lies the monastery of Samding which has been headed right up to the present day by the descendants of the *yogini* disciple of Chole Namgyal, who have reincarnated from one generation to the next in the Samding Dorje Phamo.

According to the biography the author drew upon the text of a biography<sup>9</sup> of Chole Namgyal composed by his nephew Ngawang Gyaltsen who was abbot of Langkhor and Shekar Monasteries. Part of the material was drawn from oral accounts by holy lamas who had stayed with him. In particular, the author followed the notes of the secretary of Chole Namgyal, called Könchog Gyaltsen.

The biography is structured in twelve main parts, using thereby the Twelve Deeds of the Buddha as inspiration: 1. Birth; 2. Childhood; 3. Ordination as a monk; 4. Study of the *sūtra*; 5. Study of the *tantra*; 6. Mastering the sciences; 7. The vows of *bodhisattva*; 8. Detachment from the eight worldly concerns; 9. Development of the holy doctrine by teaching, debating and composing; 10. Fulfilling the qualities required to be a spiritual master (*geshe*, *kalyānamitra*); 11. Following the *tantra* and becoming a tantric master (*dorje lopön*, *vajrācārya*); 12. Entering the pure sphere of the *dharmadhātu*.

The narration presents the character of apology, typical of the traditional Tibetan biographies (*namthar*) in which the life of the saint is characterized by miraculous events, moral rectitude and spiritual achievement. However, thanks to the fact that the author was a contemporary of the saint, many events are vividly described, reporting even the conflicting emotions of the people involved. The narration therefore brings close to us a world of incredible geographic and historical remoteness, so that even the simple human aspects of a life dedicated to the highest spiritual achievements can be perceived. The biography is extremely rich in poetic passages which often reproduce, in a flowery language, events already mentioned in prose. In this first presentation of the life and the tradition of this great scholar, we concentrated on giving, in English, the thoughts, the people and the events of his life through an approach which, as far as possible, should be accessible to a non-specialized public. We left the detailed analysis of the rich poetic passages and the sophisticated philosophical debates for future specific study.

So far, three different ancient copies of this biography are known:

One is in Delhi and was reprinted by Tibet House in 1969 as Vol.1 of “*The Collected Works of Bo-doñ Pañ-chen Phyogs-las-rnam-rgyal*”. Another is a manuscript originating from Porong Pemo Chöding (or Pema Chöding), and preserved in Kathmandu by Khangkar Dondrup, who has

also provided a reprint. The third manuscript is still preserved at the Bodong E Monastery in Tibet. A further reprint of the biography was made in 1991 in Lhasa.

## Introduction to the History of Bodong

“The Lamp Illuminating the History of Bodong”,<sup>10</sup> alias *Bo dong chos ‘byung*, was compiled by a representative of the Bodongpa tradition called Chime Öser. He was a companion in religious practice of the Samding Dorje Phamo, called Urgyen Tshomo, born in 1543 A.D. (cf. Tashi Tshering 1993:39). The author mentions the Karmapa lineage and reports the ninth Karmapa, Wangchug Dorje (1556-1603 A.D.), as his contemporary. The text therefore goes back to the second half of the 16th century. The *Bo dong chos ‘byung* counts thirty-five folios. The manuscript translated here is currently kept in the monastery of Bodong E. According to the colophon, it was copied from the text borrowed from Tsomo Kesang Chogden of Samding, a reincarnation of Samding Dorje Phamo (1747/48-1774/75) (cf. Tashi Tshering 1993:40).

Following a traditional framework (mainly inspired by Butön), the text gives a concise account of the life of the Buddha and the later development of Buddhism in India. After many rebirths Śākyamuni incarnated as a prince in a country corresponding to southern Nepal. He led a youth of enjoyment, but the encounter with people afflicted by sickness, old age and death made him aware of the sorrowful and impermanent character of human life. After dedicating himself to spiritual research, he achieved the enlightenment which allowed him to gain insight into the ultimate truth, realize the deception of the conventional perception of reality and to transcend thereby the sorrow of the conditioned existence. He announced the twelfefold link of dependent origination (*pratityasamutpāda*) in which all phenomena are involved and interlinked in the cycle of transmigratory existence (*saṃsāra*) and proclaimed the possible liberation, the attainment of the *nirvāṇa*. In Sārṇāth, in the Deer Park close to Benares, he pronounced the Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, the truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Suffering could be overcome provided it was recognized as such and the relevant origin rooted in the deceitful attachment to phenomenal reality was given up.

The announcement of the Four Noble Truths was later defined as the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma (*dharmacakrapravartana*). The Second and the Third Turnings represent further development of the

message of Buddha. The Second Turning comprised the teachings of the Perfection of Wisdom, focusing on the emptiness of phenomena, i.e. Nāgārjuna's tradition called Madhyamaka, the "Middle-Way" between the extremes of existence and non-existence. The Third Turning focused upon the realization of the emptiness of the self and the innate potentiality of achieving Buddhahood, provided the mind by clear discrimination managed to overcome the obscuration caused by the distorted conventional perception of the world. This was Asaṅga's and Vasubhandu's tradition, the so-called Yogācāra, "Practice of Yoga", or Cittamātra, "Mind Only", school.

The *Bo dong chos 'byung* follows the common Tibetan perspective, maintaining that the direct disciples of the Buddha and the followers of the Hīnayāna (The Lesser Vehicle following the Path of the Lone Buddha) observed merely the First Turning of the Wheel, whereas the Mahāyāna tradition - which spread into Tibet - combined the subsequent Turnings of the Wheel and, on the basis of compassion towards all living beings, preached the universal liberation. On this basis the *Bo dong chos 'byung* briefly gives an account of differing versions concerning the main events in the history of Buddhism, such as the origin of the Buddhist Canon traditionally organized in three branches, the so-called Three Baskets (*tripiṭaka*) in which the scriptures were collected: the discourses (*sūtra*), the rules (*vinaya*) and the "Further Dharma" (*abhidharma*).<sup>11</sup>

In the *Bo dong chos 'byung* a concise account on the spread of Buddhism in Tibet follows the above mentioned narration, from the legendary first contacts to the first historical introduction at the time of the great Tibetan kings (6th/7th centuries) on to the persecution by King Langdarma in the 9th century and finally the subsequent new spread of the doctrine from the 10th/11th centuries onwards. The account of the following events reflects the perspective at the time of compilation, i.e. the politico-religious scene dominated by the Karmapa before the rise of the Gelugpa as religious and temporal rulers in the 17th century. Eventually, the history of the Bodongpa tradition is given in more detail, from the foundation of its main seat in Bodong E in 1049 A.D. to the deeds of the masters who founded the other related monasteries - among these was the monastery of Porong Pemo Chöding, founded by Chole Namgyal himself in the remote nomadic land of Porong.

Despite its brevity, the text gives an insight into the vicissitudes of the masters of this tradition - both the forerunners and the successors of Chole Namgyal - and into all the hardships they had to face in order to have the tradition of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* survive, and at times even prosper.

## The Monastery of Bodong and the Bodongpa Tradition

The Bodong E Monastery is the main seat of the Bodongpa tradition. The area of Bodong is located to the west of Shigatse, at some 80 km distance. Traditionally it lay on the route which led from Shigatse to Phuntsholing and Jonang.<sup>12</sup> This route proceeded further west along the Tsangpo River to Drongpagyang, then southwards to Sakya and Mangkhar Nyugulung and to the bifurcation leading to Southern Latö (towards south-west) and to Northern Latö (towards north-west).

Bodong was a locality of relevance within the ancient Tibetan kingdom and, in the surroundings, numerous tombs of that time were recently found. During the time of the Tibetan kingdom a minister called Shang Lhabsang Lupel is reported as having erected a temple at Bodong Chashong.<sup>13</sup> This minister<sup>14</sup> was a contemporary of Thride Songtsen (rl.800? - 815 A.D.) and belonged to the Tsepong clan - a clan which used to give queens to the Tibetan kings and whose male members bear, therefore, the title *shang*, meaning “maternal uncle” (of the king).

In the 9th century when Langdarma attacked Buddhism he failed to erase it completely from Tibetan soil. The Tibetan tradition - also followed by the *Bo dong chos 'byung* - narrates that three people residing in Chubori collected the *vinaya* texts and escaped with them to eastern Tibet. There they ordained a monk who became famous with the name of Gönpa Rabsel (also Gewa Rabsel). His disciples originated from Central Tibet and subsequently reintroduced Buddhism there. One of the three protagonists of the famous escape to Eastern Tibet was called Yo Gechung and stemmed from Bodong. In fact, he is mentioned by Butön as Bodongpa Yo Gechung.<sup>15</sup>

In 1049 A.D. a scholar called Geshe Mudrā Chenpo founded a small monastery in Bodong - the future great Bodong E Monastery. Shortly afterwards, this was presented to the great Indian scholar Bumthagsumpa (alias Sthirapāla) and became his seat during his stay in Tibet. This great scholar from Eastern India seems to have acquired this title as a consequence of his having memorized 300, 000 verses. He was particularly instrumental in the transmission of works by the Indian scholar Asaṅga, and was a teacher of the famous translator Loden Sherab, one of the fathers of Tibetan scholasticism (on this latter cf. Jackson 1994).

*mKas pa'i dga' ston* narrates that the Bodong E Monastery was founded by a follower of the *vinaya* and then offered to Bumthagsumpa, which is consistent with the account mentioned above. However this historical work also provides an alternative suggestion that the Indian scholar Bumthagsumpa was invited to “Budong” to consecrate a text of the

*Prajñāpāramitā* written in golden letters. On that occasion, he is said to have implied that there were certain drawbacks to the book and he sat down on it. Getting up, he realized that the whole of the writing had disappeared. Only after flowers had been thrown on the book did the writing appear again. This book became a religious symbol of great consequence and, around it, the “Budong” Monastery grew. This had the shape of a triangle and resembled the “place of birth”.<sup>16</sup> Because of this similarity, he called the place “Budong” - meaning literally “hole of girl” - or E.<sup>17</sup> After the arrival of the Indian scholar, this monastery developed greatly and was host to a multitude of scholars.

During the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries, famous scholars emanated from this monastery, having acted as abbot or having resided there for some time: Bodong Rinchen Tsemo,<sup>18</sup> the ancestors of Chole Namgyal: Pang Lotsāba, Changchub Tsemo and Dragpa Gyaltsen, Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen<sup>19</sup> who was ordained there, Bodong Chole Namgyal himself.

According to the *Bo dong chos 'byung*, at that time Bodong E and Sangphu were the greatest schools of philosophy. This statement seems to have been somewhat confirmed by the Blue Annals which reports (referring to the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*): “Most of the scholars residing at Bodong, the seat of Bumthragsumpa, became learned in this text. Though I did not succeed in finding the history of the lineage of the abbots of Bodong, there cannot be any doubt that this monastery had many learned men with an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures, Logic, *abhidharma*, *vinaya*, Sanskrit Grammar, Prosody, etc. This monastery has been a remarkable place!”<sup>20</sup>

Though Bodong Chole Namgyal was a famous scholar, well-known to the Tibetans for his achievements, his tradition failed to develop as others did. The Sakyapa ruled from the middle of the 13th to the middle of the 14th century when they lost power in favour of Phagmodrupa Changchub Gyaltsen. The Phagmodrupa lost power to the lords of Rinpung in the 15th century who in their turn were superseded by the rulers of Tsang in the 16th century. The Karmapa acquired great power supported by the rulers of Tsang, until the Gelugpa established their rule in 1642 A.D. and became the dominant religious and temporal power in Tibet after having defeated the ruler of Tsang with the help of the Mongols.

The Bodongpa tradition was probably not sufficiently intertwined with the political powers to obtain continuous material support. Besides, the fact that the lords of Rinpung and the king of Tsang were among its patrons probably had a negative influence on the further development of the Bodongpa tradition, in the same way as it had, to a larger extent, influenced the destiny of the Jonangpa tradition and affected the Karmapa as well.



When the Gelugpa established their rule and decided to transform a number of monasteries to the Gelugpa tradition, some Bodongpa monasteries were among them.<sup>21</sup> Both political and religious reasons brought about the often non-prosperous conditions of Bodongpa monasteries, which contributed to the marginalization and decline of this tradition through to recent times. Chole Namgyal considered the involvement in worldly affairs, the crowded places, even the rich material support by the lords as a potential threat to proper religious life. Rather, he preferred to establish his places of religious practice in remote areas, like the monastery of Porong Pemo Chöding, situated in the distant nomadic landscape of Porong, close to the salt lake called Pekhütsho. When asked about the reason for establishing a monastery in such a remote location he replied: “The *maṇḍala* of our landscape is filled with monasteries and lamas supported by wealthy patrons. As I consider this a hindrance to followers of religion, I prefer to establish my residence in a remote place”.

### **The Predecessors of Chole Namgyal: Tantric Ladies and Great Translators**

The line of previous reincarnations traces the spiritual descent of Chole Namgyal back to the time of Śākyamuni. This is mentioned by the biographical account reported in the *Shel dkar chos 'byung* (which draws from the biography written by the nephew of the great scholar):

“Innumerable lives before, Chole Namgyal was born into a beggar family at the time when the Tathāgata (the Buddha) came into the world. At that time he bought food with the money obtained by selling himself and offered it to the Buddha. Thus the thought of enlightenment was first born in him. How he acquired merits during an ocean of ages, promoted the doctrine and led many people to spiritual liberation, can hardly be mentioned... He became the disciple Mahākāśyapa<sup>22</sup> and, after the Buddha had passed to *nirvāṇa*, he took care of the doctrine and the monastic community. Then he was born as Candrakīrti<sup>23</sup> and made a clear approach to the *Madhyamaka*. Subsequently as the translator Vairocana,<sup>24</sup> he translated many *sūtra* and *tantra* and made the great flame of the doctrine burn in this land of Tibet. Eventually, for those who practised the *sūtra* and the *tantra* incorrectly and in order to let the fortunate people follow, he was born as the Great Bodongpa”.<sup>25</sup>

According to the biography of Chole Namgyal he descended paternally from the family of the Shama brothers and maternally from the family of Pang Lotsāba.

## Machig Shama, the great *yoginī* from Phadrug

Machig Shama was born in 1062 A.D., in Phadrug in Southern Latö, into a family devoted to religious practice. Her brother Shama Sengge Gyaltsen is famous for having translated Dignāga's work on logic into Tibetan. She is known to us from the account reported by the Blue Annals which gives the biography of this great *yoginī* disciple of Phadampa Sangye in the chapter dedicated to the "Path and Fruit" (*lam 'bras*) tradition (cf. *Deb ther sgnon po* pp. 271-294; Roerich 1988:220-240). She was considered the reincarnation of the Chinese wife of King Songtsen Gampo who was an emanation of the White Tārā. "When Machig had reached the age<sup>26</sup> of fourteen, she was given in marriage to a man of the locality named Aba Lhagyal. She felt disgusted with family life and said to (her husband): 'Husband! You should practise religion, and I shall also take it up!' As he was unwilling to listen (to her words), she simulated insanity and they separated. From the age of seventeen to twenty-two she acted as the Tantric assistant (*mudrā*) of Lama Ma. Ma taught her many *tantra* and *sādhana*". After Ma died, empoisoned, she was affected by seven calamities, which included some venereal diseases. She was cured by Dampa Sangye who diagnosed the reason for her problems as the transgression of vows made to her teacher Ma. Together with Dampa Sangye, she went to Nepal where they met numerous *yogin* and *siddha*.

"Then Machig herself attained spiritual realization and visited the twenty-four regions, the border country of Mön and Tibet, as well as numerous sacred places, and practised meditation. She evoked numerous visions in front of others ... Phagmodrupa had been a disciple of Machig. The *siddha* named 'Dzeng Dharmabodhi met Machig who had assumed the form of a dove. When Gö Khugpa Lhetse was presiding over a religious council of scholars expert in the *tripitaka* and numerous as the ocean, her female attendant debated with them and was able to refute (their theories). The learned men failed to defeat her. There could not be any question about (the learning) of Machig herself, who manifested to all the perfection of her learning in all the basic texts. She laboured extensively for the benefit of living beings and, at the age of 88, pretended to pass out (i.e. she was not dead in reality). After the cremation, no relics were left behind. In short (it must be said) that this Machig had been a divine manifestation. She had been the only eye of the followers of the Tantric Path of sexual practices..."

As many other great historical figures have done she has entered the local mythology of her native country. In Kharta, to the south of Phadrug, she is said to have dried up a lake, thereby making the landscape inhabitable and to have built the first Buddhist temple (cf. Diemberger and Hazod 1995).

The Bodongpa - in particular owing to the institution of the Samding Dorje Phamo - seem to have preserved the position of religious women which has disappeared in many other traditions. As commented by Lo Bue: "... it seems that the diminished prestige of the role of the yoginis... in the religious history of Tibet is connected to some extent with the establishment of a monastic power which devised political systems based on male descendancy, in the form of rule first by royal monks, as in western Tibet, then by princely abbots, as in southern Tibet, and later by reincarnated religious rulers, as in Central Tibet.

One is under the impression that the part played by religious women in 11th and 12th century Tibet was more important and widespread than in following centuries" (Lo Bue 1994:485).

### **The Lord of Scholars Pang Lodrö Tenba alias Pang Lotsāba (1276-1342 A.D.)**

Maternally Chole Namgyal descended from Pang Lotsāba. The transmission line went from maternal uncle to nephew. The uncles were great translators, their sisters who transmitted the descent line were *yogini*.

The family of Pang Lotsāba emanated from Surtsho in Southern Latö. Pang Lotsāba himself was particularly famous for his expertise in language. His biography appears in the Blue Annals (Roerich 1988:785-787), in the *'Brug pa chos 'byung* (pp. 314-316) and in a somewhat more detailed form in the *Shel dkar chos 'byung* (folio 35-40) which drew from his biography. This latter reports:

"Innumerable lives before, Pang Lotsāba was a *mahāpaṇḍita*, as he himself reported: 'having studied in former lives, the classes of the doctrine can be known as easily as playing in this life'. His birthplace was Gyam in Surtsho and he was born in the year of the fire-male-mouse (1276 A.D.). As he had been separated from his mother, he was brought up on sheep's milk. Again and again he used to complain that, had these foolish men given him cow's milk, this would have been good, whereas, since they had given him sheep's milk, half of his intelligence had been eclipsed.

One maternal aunt went to see Lama Urgyenpa,<sup>27</sup> told him that there was a boy with a disturbed mind and asked for a protective thread. The lama said that the boy was destined to become a great *geshe* and gave her his tea cup. When [the boy] was three or four he was called 'lamb-little monk' (*tsunchung lugu*)...". This problem child turned out to be exceptionally gifted in learning and daring in his travels to foreign countries. Already as a youth he showed an extraordinary expertise in mastering doctrinal treatises

and studied Sanskrit. Later, since he acted as translator for Lama Shithogpa, he was known as *lotsāba*, “the Translator”. “Then at the age of twenty-one he went to Nepal carrying gold coins (*srang*) and some clothing he had received from Togshingpa and from Chösang. Then, having travelled to Sakya in summer at the time of harvest, he translated the *Ka la’ pa* and thus the festival of good sayings in Tibet, this land of snow, became a marvellous event. In the appendix he wrote:

Having received the key of the good sayings from Shongtön,  
the treasure of the Sanskrit scriptures was opened.

Having received the jewels of all kinds of knowledge,  
the festival of good sayings was enjoyed.

At that time, as he needed patronage and support for his undertaking, he sent a poem of implicit request to Togshingpa.

Togshingpa!

Having moved the body to India and Nepal  
and having moved the mind (*lo*) for learning,  
having moved the voice for speaking Sanskrit,  
and holding the name of “always stable” (*tenba*),  
please listen to the one who speaks two languages.

Then, having received some silver, he returned to Nepal. In his spare time from learning, he used to produce religious paintings and to copy numerous texts...”. During his life he went a number of times to Nepal and on one of his trips to India he is said to have brought back with him the great protector of the Bodongpa tradition, as reported in the *Shel dkar chos ‘byung*: “It is reliably said that when he went to India one occasion the god Tashi Ömbar<sup>28</sup> entered his hat, followed him and promised to protect the doctrine...”. The renown of Pang Lotsāba spread far and wide and he was invited to visit even by the Emperor of China and by the kings of Yatshe, but he did not accept the invitations. Instead he preferred to dedicate himself to studying, practising and teaching the doctrine in the monastery of Nepoche which he had himself founded upon the request of the king of Gungthang. “... During the following twenty-five years, except for a few trips to Sakya, he stayed in Nepoche to explain the doctrine, write, translate and re-translate many texts... When teaching *abhidharma*, *pramāṇa*, and the Asaṅga’s works on levels of attainment he followed the Indian commentaries. However, the monks had some difficulty in understanding and requested him to write commentaries. Thus he began to compose. Afterwards he said that he wrote according to the request of his disciples”. For a short while he acted as abbot of Bodong E, the monastery of the great Indian scholar Bumthragsumpa. Meanwhile, he prophesied again that it would be good to build a school of philosophy in Gyalmo Ri (Shekar). He

finished translating the texts he had not managed to complete before. On the way to Ü he said: “May the texts increase the happiness of many monks.” In Lhasa, Samye, Gungthang, Taglung,<sup>29</sup> Chang Radeng,<sup>30</sup> and Sangphu Neuthog<sup>31</sup> he taught many doctrines and most spiritual masters of Ü listened to his teachings. After completing his religious activity in Sangphu he said: ‘Were I to die, I would not regret it.’ Afterwards he returned to Tsang and stayed at Narthang for a short while. Then he went to Bodong E and Sakya where he taught many doctrines. Among other works he wrote the *Tshogs gsum gsal ba*<sup>32</sup> and translated commentaries on the science of debate... From the age of seven up to sixty-seven he listened, taught and meditated on the holy doctrines. He wrote, translated and taught for the benefit of all living beings and for the benefit of the precious doctrine. Yet, with humility, he used to say: ‘I have been studying since I was seven until now, and I am over sixty, but I do not know anything.’ At the age of sixty-seven, during the evening of the 13th day of the 3rd month in the year of the water-male-horse (1342 A.D.) he passed away and it is said that - in accordance with his dreams - he went to Tuṣita”.

### **The Great Translator Changchub Tsemo**

Changchub Tsemo was the nephew of Pang Lotsāba and the great-uncle of Chole Namgyal. According to the *Shel dkar chos 'byung* which drew from his biography:<sup>33</sup> “He was born in Surtsho during the year of the wood-female-hare (1315 A.D.). (According to *Deb ther sngon po* water-female-hare corresponding to 1303 A.D).<sup>34</sup> His father was Shönnu Pelsang and his mother was Yeshe Menne, a sister of Pang Lotsāba ... He was ordained monk by Chökyongpal, a nephew of the Shong brothers.<sup>35</sup> At the age of sixteen, in the year of the iron-male-horse (1330 A.D.) he went to Gungthang Nepoche to study among other subjects *abhidharma* and *pramāṇa*. Later, in Denpathe, while he was explaining some elements of the *abhidharma*, a scholar in monk’s robe was listening from afar. When the religious activity was over Changchub Tsemo went to see Pang Lotsāba who recognized him at once and asked: ‘Are you the one who was teaching?’ He answered affirmatively and Pang Lotsāba added: ‘You are very expert in the holy doctrine’. Afterwards Pang Lotsāba was invited to Bodong E. At the age of twenty-three Changchub Tsemo was ordained *gelong*. Then Pang Lotsāba passed away.

Changchub Tsemo obtained many empowerments, precepts and advice from Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltshen and Butön.<sup>36</sup> ... Many people possessed by evil spirits and many dumb received great benefit from seeing his face.

from his blessing and from his holy spittle. He gave blessings beyond imagination, healing people suffering from eye sicknesses, making deaf people hear, liberating from their sickness people suffering from diseases of the arms and legs. He gave up completely all affairs of the outside world and in his interior spiritual existence he abandoned any clinging to his own self. At the age of seventy-seven, on the twenty-first day of the first month in the year of the iron-male-monkey (1394 A.D.), he passed away in Chumig<sup>37</sup> in Tsang. At that time, the people saw him passing to spiritual spheres”.

## The Great Translator Dragpa Gyaltsen

Dragpa Gyaltsen was the maternal uncle of Chole Namgyal. According to the *Shel dkar chos 'byung*, which drew from his biography:<sup>38</sup> “He was born at Chagchung in Chephu Senggeling in Latö Surtsho at an auspicious time in the year of the water-male-dragon (1352 A.D.) as the son of Chökyong Samdrub and Pelchenbum. During his youth he would absorb himself in deep meditation to compose his mind for perfect rest. He liked solitude, he had little attachment to anything, he was meek and had great compassion. He liked to make generous offerings and refrained from any childish vices. At the age of seven he was ordained by Changchub Tsemo and received the name of Dragpa Gyaltsen. He proceeded to Bodong E where he studied the basic texts for many years, while showing extreme respect to the *great paṇḍita* Changchub Tsemo. At the age of twenty he took the vows of fully ordained monk (*gelong*). He promised to observe the 253 rules. He confessed over and over even the slightest sin and said: “It is important to endeavour in the thought of enlightenment, which is to be full of love for others more than for oneself”. He persisted with his reading, studying, teaching, debating and writing. At the age of thirty he proceeded to the monastery of Bodong E and acted as abbot, succeeding Pang Lotsāba. By teaching the holy doctrine as well as sciences like poetry, metrics, explanation of terms and dramatic performance and promoting the ritual activity he strongly developed the monastery. Later he was appointed abbot also of a number of other monasteries such as Gyam and Sakya Drangmoche. In 1385 A.D., with the support of the lord of Southern Latö, Situ Chökyi Rinchen he established the monastery of Shekar according to the prophecies of Pang Lotsāba and Changchub Tsemo. In 1394 A.D., he established the monastery of Gungthang (alias Dzongkha Chöde) with the support of the kings of Gungthang.

Preaching the illusory character of the worldly phenomena and the self:

“He turned the wheel of the *dharma* innumerable times according to the mind of every converted person:

All exterior and interior things,  
are the mere illusion of one’s own clinging to things  
thus saying that there is no clinging to the self  
do not be attached to anything for even one single moment.”

After a while he handed over the leadership of the monasteries he was heading in order to dedicate himself to spiritual practice. He handed over the chair of Bodong E to Chole Namgyal. As Chökyi Rinchen had requested him to continue his guidance at Shekar until he passed away, he kept this chair until 1403 A.D. ... “When the great translator was in Shekar, the venerable Rendaba<sup>39</sup> was residing there too and great work was accomplished in teaching, debating and writing. Dragpa Gyaltsen did some of his last writing, such as a ritual text for the *vinaya*, there. Wishing to meet Lama Gyaltsen Öser, he went to the entrance of his retreat. When asked about their next meeting, and knowing the future, he said that they would not meet again. Then he proceeded to Gyam (in Surtsho). In the evening of the 8th day of the 7th month in the year of wood-female-bird (1405 A.D.) he made the ritual dough figures (*torma*) for the evocation of Hevajra, as well as the religious music, the *maṇḍala*, the prostrations and the ritual offerings. After this had been completed, and after showing many miracles and wonderful signs in order to increase the devotion of the converts, he passed away at the age of fifty-four...”.

The biography of Dragpa Gyaltsen was written by Chole Namgyal who was his nephew.

## **Chole Namgyal and His Time**

Chole Namgyal (1375/6-1451 A.D.) was born in the second half of the fourteenth century. The fourteenth century in Tibet was an extremely troubled period, marked by the decline and demise of the Sakyapa - who had first unified Tibet after the collapse of the ancient empire - and the rise of Phagmogrupa Changchub Gyaltsen, whose power however was not to last. The political and cultural scene was marked by local lords in rivalry and spinning alliances among themselves. In this context, the support of great religious deeds was endowed with a particular political connotation as it contributed to express the sacred power and legitimacy of a lord. This century marked by such power struggles produced great cultural achievement, with long-lasting effects: in the monastery of Narthang in 1310/20 A.D. the translations of the texts of the Buddhist Canon were

edited into what became famous as the Kanjur and the Tenjur. This huge work started to circulate among the most famous monasteries where it began to provide some kind of standard basis of scriptures among them (cf. Roerich 1988:338; Harrison 1994:308). It was then revised by the great Butön who, among others, had been a disciple of Pang Lotsāba, the great-great uncle of Chole Namgyal and teacher of Changchub Tsemo, the great-uncle of Chole Namgyal. After the flow of translations from India had ceased following the invasion of the homeland of Buddhism by the Moslems, all available translations were collected and collated, starting a period in which great all-encompassing works were created. Tsongkhapa (1357-1419 A.D.), born in this century, produced, among other writings, the famous *Lam rim chen mo* and *sNgags rim chen mo* which were to become standard works in the study of the *sūtra* and the *tantra* in succeeding centuries. He founded the Gelugpa tradition, the religious order which was to become dominant in Tibet.

The activity of Chole Namgyal, one of the greatest polygraphs in Tibet, developed against the background of the above-mentioned scenario. According to his biography, beyond writing a huge work regarding human life, the sciences, the *sūtra* and the *tantra* called the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* - "Collected Suchness" - he initiated the tradition of debating on more than ten subjects. It was in fact a period of intensive communication among monasteries, promoted also by the tradition of holding debates under the patronage of the local lords. For these latter, whether the spiritual masters they supported won or lost a debate was also a matter of personal and political prestige, as appears with particular evidence in the case of the debate held at Ngamring under the patronage of the lord of Northern Latö, Jamyang.

Chole Namgyal, thanks to his expertise in the Sanskrit language, had direct access to the original texts, which allowed him to explain the doctrine in the debates with great mastery and to write explanatory commentaries on doctrinal issues. Among his disciples were Gendündrub and Geleg Pelsangpo, chief disciples of Tsongkhapa, who were posthumously recognized as the First Dalai Lama and the First Pañchen Lama respectively.

Chole Namgyal was endowed with an exceptional expertise in all traditional sciences and having access to Indian sources, contributed to the clarification and organisation which were still needed. Concerning the field of Tibetan medicine, for example, his biography reports: "He became an expert in medical science, too. On this subject he studied numerous basic texts relating to Indian and Tibetan medical traditions. He mastered all the main principles of this subject and was very expert at making diagnoses by



means of examination, questioning and pulsology. He knew about medicines, both those to be administered internally and those for external application. At that time most Tibetan doctors had only a superficial knowledge of the text of *Yan lag brgyad*.<sup>40</sup> They used to read it, but they were not able to understand it properly. On the basis of this book, he, on the other hand, was able to acquire great expertise in regard to the various medicines deriving from plants, flowers, fruits, sap and animals, to know where these could be obtained and the effects they produced. He could tell in great detail where the medicinal plants grew. He knew, for example, which roots, stems, leaves, flowers and fruits could be found in the south.... Therefore, he became the most valued of all doctors...”.

Not only did his expertise encompass the fields of medicine, astronomy and astrology, arts and crafts, but it also included traditional Tibetan sports such as jumping, riding and wrestling. During his youth he took part in competitions and hence participated in the social gatherings which accompanied these. From his experiences he seems to have obtained a deep first-hand knowledge of civil life, though throughout his life he was essentially a scholar, familiar with monastery life and a follower of the *vinaya* rules. According to his biography: “If one wants to enter the path of liberation without hindrance, one has to follow all moral training according to the *vinaya*. That is to say that, in order to climb the high summit of the doctrine of Buddha, the first step is the act of becoming a monk and observing all the treasured rules. Chole Namgyal, therefore, gave up any interest in precious things such as gold, silver, silk and brocade clothing. He used to dress very simply in a monk’s habit. When he was invited by some of his patrons, to visit them, instead of accepting the comfortable and prestigious seat they had prepared for him, he used to lay his cloak on the floor and would sit on that to give his lecture. He enjoyed behaving like an apotheosis of virtue, even in regard to the smallest detail, and the devotees who sat around him followed his example”. From his deep knowledge of social conventions and from his religious practices, Chole Namgyal drew his somewhat unconventional behaviour, which often astonished his followers. His biography reports: “Both his disciples and his retinue were treated impartially, from the holy scholars and *mahasiddha* down to the lowly man. Once, a lama called Dülzün Ngawang said: ‘Some people in your retinue behave very rudely, so I suggest that you keep your distance from them and, instead, remain close to those who are pure, such as the scholars Khedrub Sangye Palden and Jangsem Gyaltshen Könchog’. Later, he commented on it, saying: ‘No matter what people do, I am not affected by any impurity’. When Dülzün Ngawang heard this, he realized that the mind of the great lama was beyond conventional judgements. An even

stronger faith was born in him and he thought that the followers themselves should keep a better control of their own attitudes. This was an example of the impartiality with which he was able to treat his retinue”. And further: “His attitude towards the rich offerings made to him by his people was like that of a man both blind and deaf. He was unwilling to either see or to hear anything of it. Once, in the monastery of Ngönga,<sup>41</sup> a *maṅḍal*<sup>42</sup> was offered to the statue of the Buddha. Someone added an offering of some earrings of precious pearls to the *maṅḍal*. After concluding the ceremony, the great scholar went back to his house of meditation, having shown no particular interest in the pearl earrings and merely commenting that, for the *maṅḍal*, an offering whether it be grain or pearls was one and the same. From his behaviour it can be concluded that he treated gain and loss impartially”. The author of the biography comments: “Since the behaviour of the great scholar was far removed from worldly convention, some in his retinue critically commented: ‘The great lord knows nothing of worldly behaviour’... In fact, the great scholar was very familiar with worldly conduct, but never behaved accordingly”.

In his way he was a scholarly monk who adhered to the ideal of the spiritually liberated *yogin*, free from any worldly concern, still acting in this world for the benefit of other living beings. He transmitted this typical Tibetan Buddhist ideal to the followers of his tradition and to his numerous disciples who went on to become great scholars of other traditions.

The Bodongpa tradition, which claimed direct descent from India, was characterized by its name deriving from its main seat, the adoption of the teachings contained in the huge masterpiece of the great scholar Chole Namgyal, a number of specific rituals particular to the tradition and by its divine protectors. However its theoretical approach, spiritual practice and universal aims are perfectly inscribed in the mainstream of Tibetan Buddhism. The *Bo dong chos ‘byung* reports: “The doctrine and the holders of the doctrine have eleven excellent characteristics: the excellent seat is the seat of India, the excellent lineage of the doctrine is that of Indian *paṇḍita* and *siddha*, the excellent sacred writings are the *dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus chen*, the excellent theory is the Union of Profoundness and Clarity, the excellent meditation is the Process of Generation<sup>43</sup> and the Process of Perfection,<sup>44</sup> the excellent way ... (words unreadable), the excellent behaviour is the very thought of enlightenment, the excellency of application is to benefit only others, the excellent holders of the doctrine are translators, scholars and incarnations, the excellent field is the land without borders and fixed directions, the excellent activity is to prosper everywhere without corruption”.

The *Bo dong chos ‘byung* says that the excellent view of the Bodongpa

is “the Union of Profoundness and Clarity”, *sabsel sunjug (zab gsal zung ‘jug)*. This union can be achieved through the spiritual practice of the deity *yoga* in which wisdom and means, form and emptiness, conventional and ultimate truth are experienced as one. His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso explained: “When viewed from the perspective of emptiness itself, there is no difference between the emptiness of a mundane external phenomenon, such as a sprout, and the emptiness of a deity, such as Vairocana. But viewed from the perspective of the object of emptiness, there is a vast difference. It is the wisdom that realizes this special type of emptiness, the emptiness of the deity, that eventually serves as the substantial cause for the omniscient mind of Buddhahood. This, in brief, is the essence of the deity *yoga*. Deity *yoga* encompasses the union of *clarity* - the visualization of the deity - and the *profound* - the realization of emptiness” (Tenzin Gyatso 1995:101).

*Sungjug (zung ‘jug)* translates into Tibetan the concept of *yuganaddha* which evinces the status of spiritual realization of the *yogin*: “‘The wise man continues in *saṃsāra*, but this *saṃsāra* is recognized as *nirvāṇa*’ (HVT, 34). This state of two-in-one is technically known as *yuganaddha*, ‘bound to the same yoke’, the image presumably being that of two oxen or horses, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, yoked side by side. Numerous descriptions of the perfect *yogin*, roaming the world in the absolute freedom of *yuganaddha*, are to be found in tantric literature...” (Kvaerne 1975:132). Some verses of Nāgārjuna’s *Pañcakrama* translated by Kvaerne outline the concept of *yuganaddha*:

“(2) When, avoiding the two notions of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, they are made one, then it is called *yuganaddha*.

(4) The *yogin* who wanders, having combined the notion of ‘form’ and ‘formless’, knows *yuganaddha*.

(5) When there is no dual concept of ‘object’ and ‘subject’, but only non-separation, then it is called *yuganaddha*.

(6) He who lives, having abandoned the two concepts of ‘eternity’ and ‘dissolution’, that wise one knows the Essence which is called *yuganaddha*.

(13) When, having known the relative and the absolute each by itself according to their division, there is a commingling of both, then it is called *yuganaddha*.

(16) For whom there at no time is contemplation or non-contemplation - that *yogin* remaining in *yuganaddha*, is free from existence and non-existence.

(23) The *yogin* who thus remains fixed in the state of *yuganaddha*, he is said to be omniscient, a seer of the Essence, sustainer of the universe.

(24) Fully seeing through the net of *māyā*, having crossed over the sea of

*samsāra*, having done what is to be done, the great *yogin* remains in the cessation of the two (modes of) truth” (Kvaerne 1975:132-133).

Having realized the ultimate truth, Chole Namgyal is described as the *bodhisattva* who strives to achieve his own liberation through the universal liberation of all living beings from the ignorance and suffering of the conditioned existence. He directed his life according to the Six Perfections: generosity, morality, patience, heroism, contemplation and wisdom. From his childhood, his extraordinary skills were accompanied by profound compassion. As a child he used to rescue and feed all kinds of living beings, even small insects; as a youth “...he used to reflect on worldly life: ‘Even the gods Brahmā and Indra are prisoners of this fearful worldly life. Though living conditions might appear perfect, one can hardly believe in them. The very signs of happiness are the root of suffering.’ Feeling sad at this, he would burst into tears.

‘Looking at worldly manifestations,  
everything gives reason to feel disheartened.

There is nothing the mind confides in.

For those foolish people without support I feel compassion’.

And so, compassion was aroused in him, not for just a few specific people but for all living beings”. Suffering caused by the distorted conventional perception of reality could only be eliminated by realizing the emptiness of all phenomenal existence.

Chole Namgyal held in particularly high esteem Candrakīrti, the Indian scholar of the 6th/7th centuries, follower of the tradition of Nāgārjuna and founder of the Mādhyamika-Prāsaṅgika school. This tradition was to become dominant in Tibet in the ensuing centuries. According to the explanation of His Holiness Tenzin Gyatsho “Although the proponents of the Prāsaṅgika view - the highest philosophical school of tenets - speak of phenomena as being empty and as having an empty nature, this is not to be misinterpreted as implying that phenomena do not exist at all. Rather, phenomena do not exist by themselves, in and of themselves, in their own right, or inherently. Because phenomena possess the characteristic of existing and occurring and are dependent on other factors - causes, conditions and so forth - they are, therefore, devoid of an independent nature. Consequently, they have the nature of being dependent. The very fact that they have this nature of dependence - being dependent on other factors - is an indication that they lack an independent status. When Madhyamaka-Prāsaṅgika proponents speak of emptiness, they speak of the empty nature of phenomena in terms of dependent origination. Therefore, an understanding of emptiness does not contradict the conventional reality of phenomena.

To establish the empty nature of phenomena, the Prasaṅgikas cite, as their ultimate and conclusive reason, the dependent nature of phenomena. They reason that because phenomena come into being and exist in dependence on other factors, they lack an independent nature. Hence, they are devoid of intrinsic reality and identity. This manner of coming to the view of emptiness through the reasoning of dependent origination is very profound, because it not only dispels the misconception of apprehending phenomena as inherently existent, but at the same time, it protects the person from falling into the extreme of nihilism.

In Nāgārjuna's own writings, we find statements that emptiness must be understood in terms of dependent origination. In his *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (*Fundamentals of the Middle Way*) Nāgārjuna says that in a system where emptiness is not possible, nothing is possible. In a system where emptiness is possible, everything is possible..." (Tenzin Gyatsho 1995:44-45).

Chole Namgyal was extremely devoted to Candrakīrti, to whom he dedicated a number of writings and he himself was even considered to be his reincarnation. He passionately defended his work, as was explicitly shown during the debate against Rongtön. "...Then Chole Namgyal disagreed with him further on the basis of *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* (*dBu ma rtsa ba*)<sup>45</sup> adding: 'You maintain that there is a mistake where there is none. Even the omniscient scholars can find nothing wrong in Candrakīrti'". Rongtön followed the school of the Mādhyamika-Svātantrika, like his teacher, Yag Mipham, who is also reported as having been defeated by Chole Namgyal in a debate held at Shekar. The starting point there was the concept of time in contradiction with the accomplished enlightenment. Past and future were denied by Yag and seen as purely non-intrinsically existent for Chole Namgyal i.e. dependently originated. "Discussing the Three Vehicles, Yag Mipham said: 'All conditioned phenomena are destined for destruction but there cannot be a time of complete destruction. In the same way all living beings are destined for enlightenment but there cannot be a time of complete accomplished enlightenment. All living beings are destined to be enlightened as they possess the 'seeds' (potential causes) of Buddhahood, they can remove all obscurations, they can find the favourable conditions in which to undertake the activities which can lead towards enlightenment. Yet there can be no time in which all living beings have accomplished enlightenment. In fact, they are still living beings because there is no common basis between the state of living being and the state of perfect Buddhahood. The *saṃsāra* has no limit because it cannot be completely emptied. If the *saṃsāra* could be emptied great evil would ensue in that the *saṃbhogakāya* (Body of Co-

Fruition) could then be separated from the five definite features of the *sambhogakāya* Buddha, the continuity of the *nirmanakaya* (Body of Transformation) could be interrupted, the activities towards enlightenment could be ceased...”. After having presented his argument in great detail the basic assertion was: “All living beings are destined to be enlightened, but there cannot be the already completed enlightenment”. The omniscient replied as follows: “Every seed generates a sprout, but what is already generated cannot yet be there. All living beings are destined to be enlightened, but there cannot be the already completed enlightenment. According to your assertion, people could reap no harvest. All the determining conditions for the sprout assembled can produce the sprout itself, all the determining conditions for Buddhahood can produce enlightenment. A conditioned phenomenon is condemned to destruction, but the time of its disappearance cannot be yet there, it is still a conditioned phenomenon because there is no common basis between the conditioned phenomenon and the state of its disappearance. A living being is a perfect Buddha, even if it cannot yet be enlightened, it is still a living being because there is no common basis between the state of living being and the state of perfect Buddhahood...”. Yag did not manage to find an appropriate argument to refute this. Furthermore, concerning the assertion that *samsāra* has no general limits but has particular limits, Chole Namgyal added: “You refute by rule each particular case. In fact, the *samsāra* in itself comprises and combines the particular with the general. When the *samsāra* can be emptied, then the *sambhogakāya* can be separated from the five definite features of the *sambhogakāya* Buddha, the continuity of incarnations can be interrupted, the activity on the path towards Buddhahood can cease...”. Thanks to his deep knowledge, the dawn of Chole Namgyal’s speech shone brighter and brighter spreading over all in a thousand of rays. Yag, his voice becoming like the buzz of a bee, closed his mouth like the water-lily (the flower which opens at the appearance of the moon and closes at its setting)”.

## **A Great Female Disciple, the Princess of Gungthang, and the Female Reincarnation Line of the Abbesses of Samding**

Chole Namgyal held women in high esteem, both as symbols of divinity and religious practitioners, and he was critical of misogynic attitudes which considered women as a mere source of lust and spiritual contamination. He focused instead upon the relevant human attitude and emotions: “Rejected like spittle by all women, all bodies dry out and, due to the vital energy

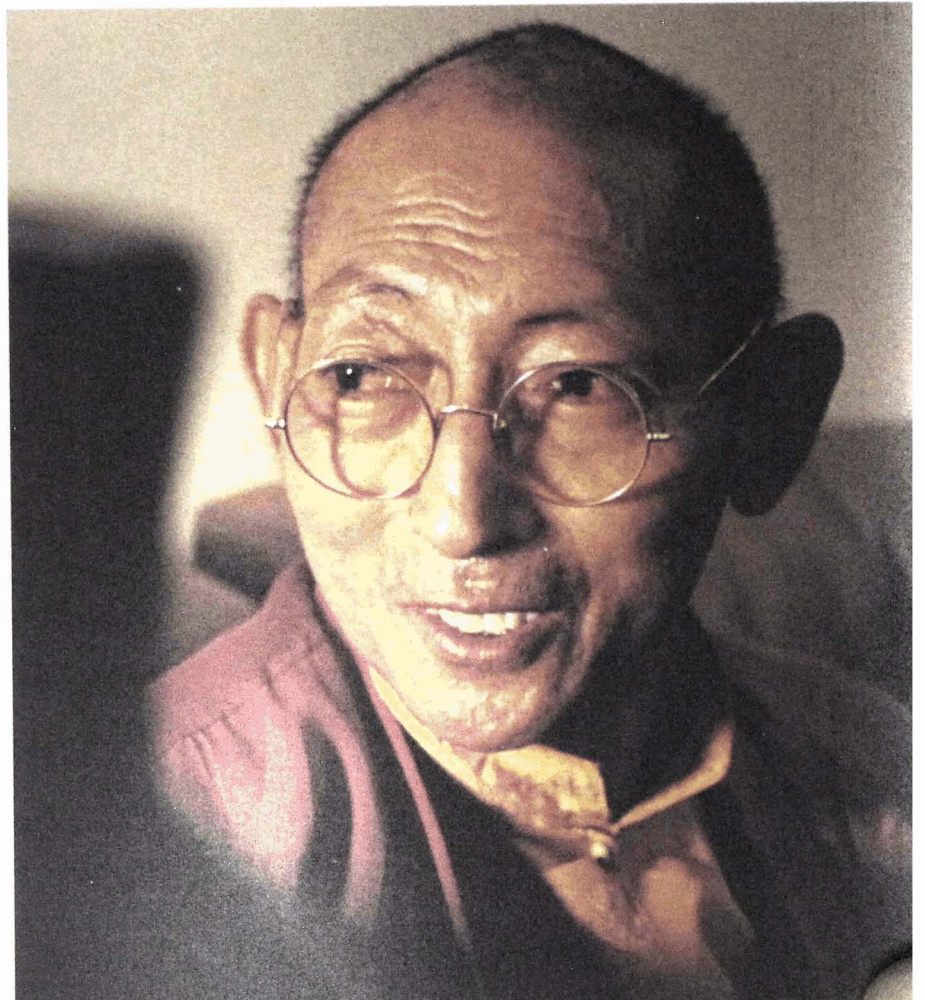


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1. Trakartaso, the sanctuary at the meditation place of Milarepa. From here Tshering Damchö started his search for Bodong Chole Namgyal.

2. Tsering Damchö.





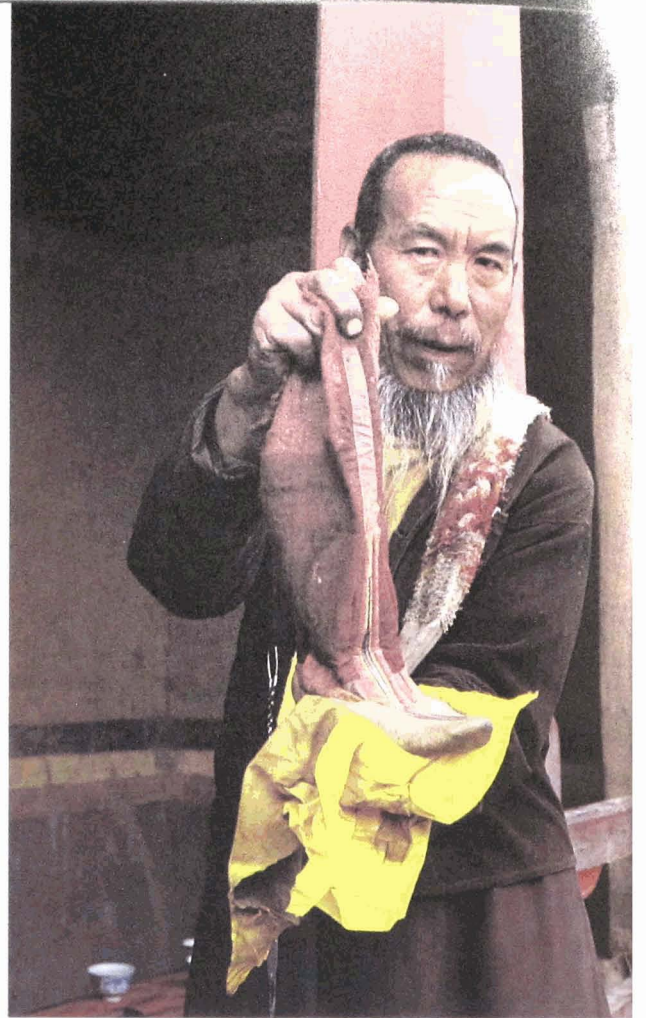
3. Manuscript of the biography of Bodong Chole Namgyal kept in the Bodong E Monastery. Above Chole Namgyal is depicted between Mañjuśrī and Sarasvatī. Below, are represented two of his main

disciples: to the right Taglung Thangpa and to the left Chökyi Drönme, the princes of Gungthang incarnation of the tantric goddess Vajravārahī;

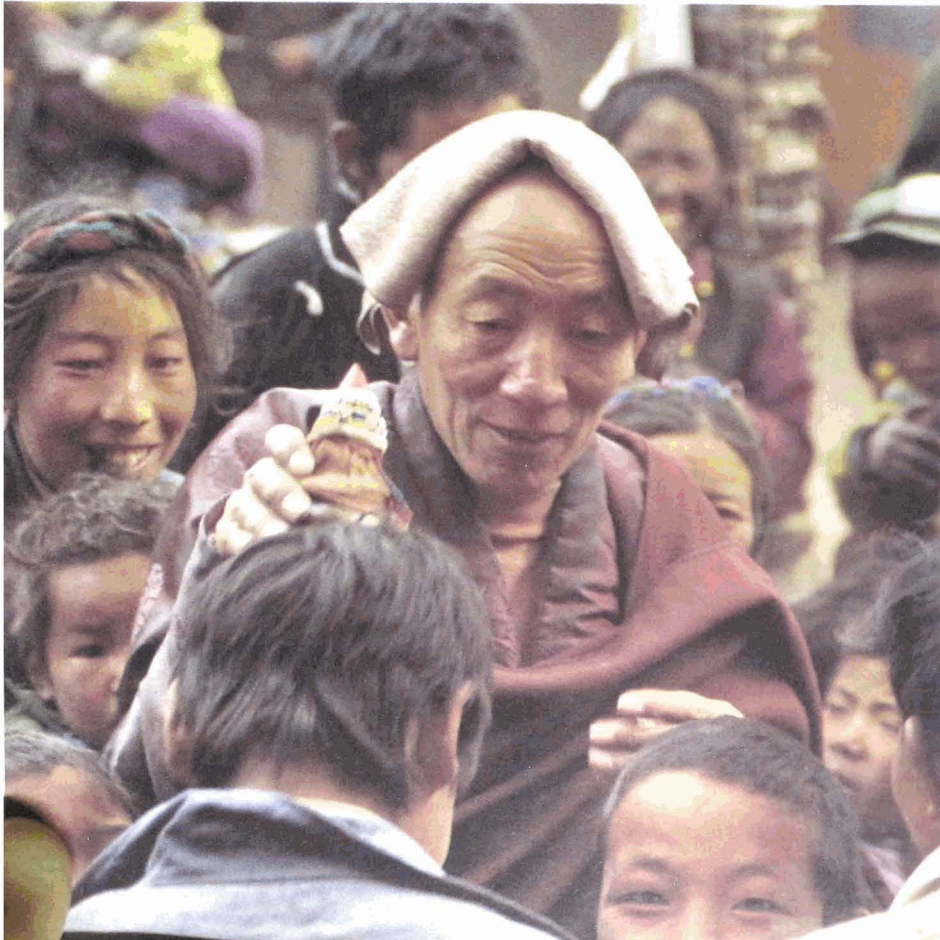




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4. The hat of Bodong Chole Namgyal kept at Porong Pemo Chöding in Tibet.

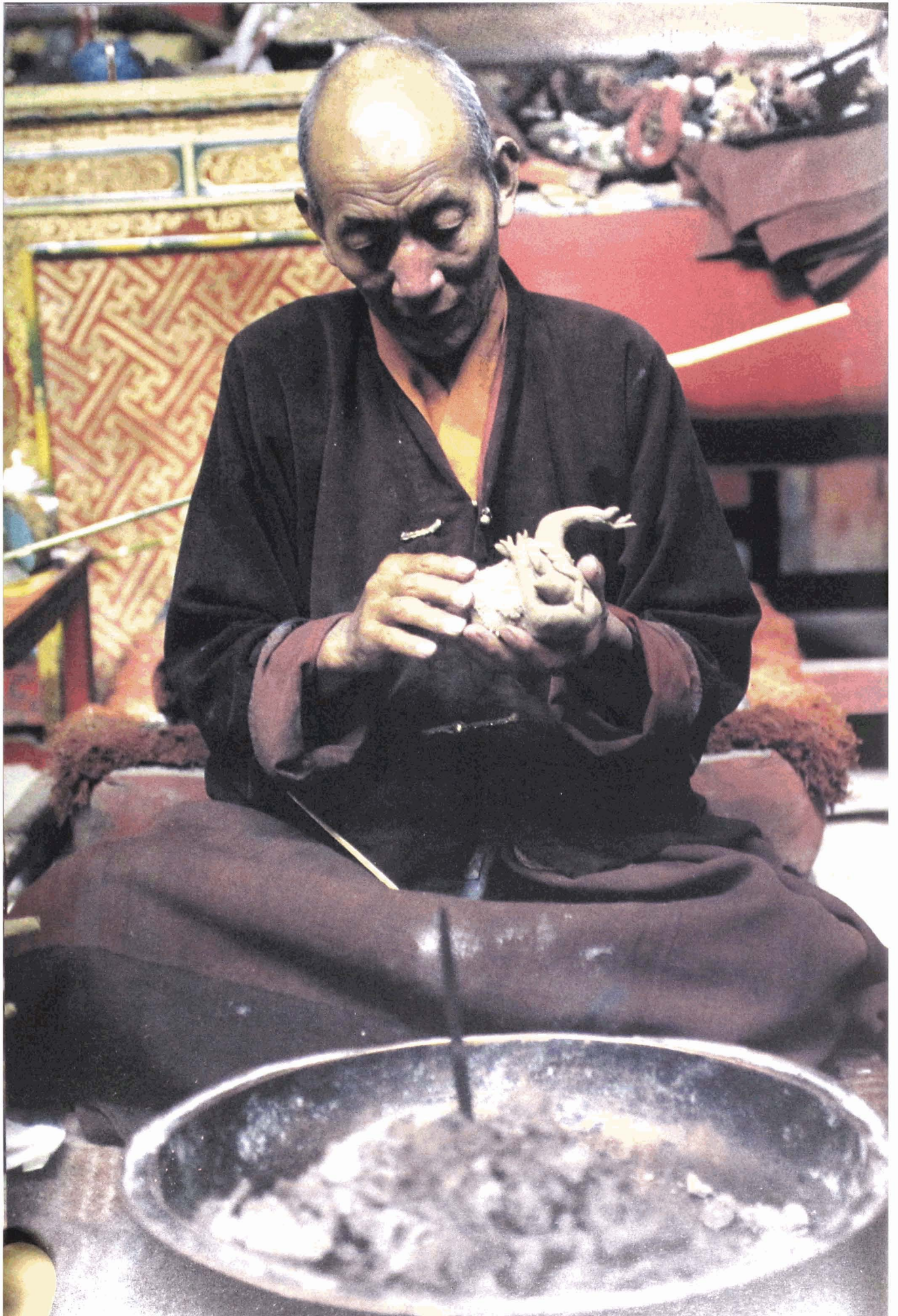
5. 6. 7. 8. Bodong E: The shoe of Bodong Chole Namgyal. The miraculous little statue made out of Bodong Chole Namgyal's ashes used as a relic for blessing. The monk's habit. The monastic community of the present day.



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9. Monk of Bodong E preparing a ritual.

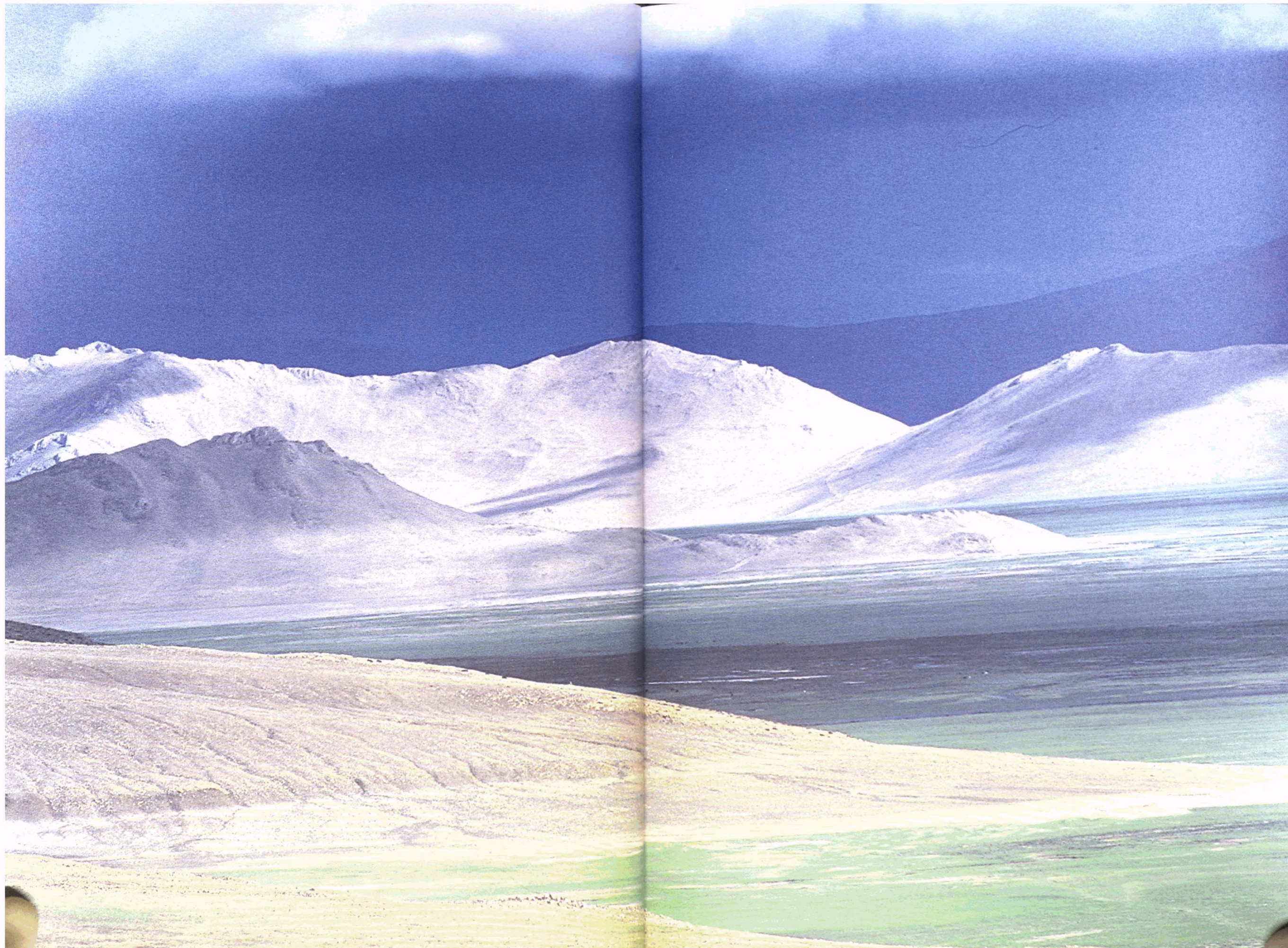
10. The landscape of Bodong.

11. The newly rebuilt monastery of Bodong E.

12 (overleaf). Lake Pekhü. This great salt lake is the soul-lake (lamtsho) of Porong where Bodong Chole Namgyal resided late in his life and passed away in 1451 A.D.









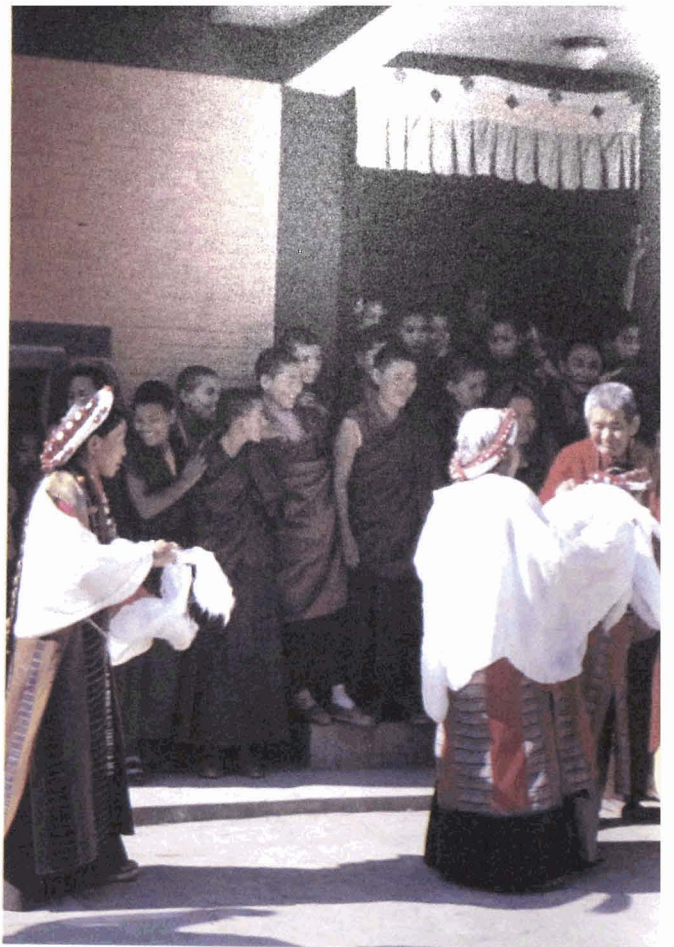
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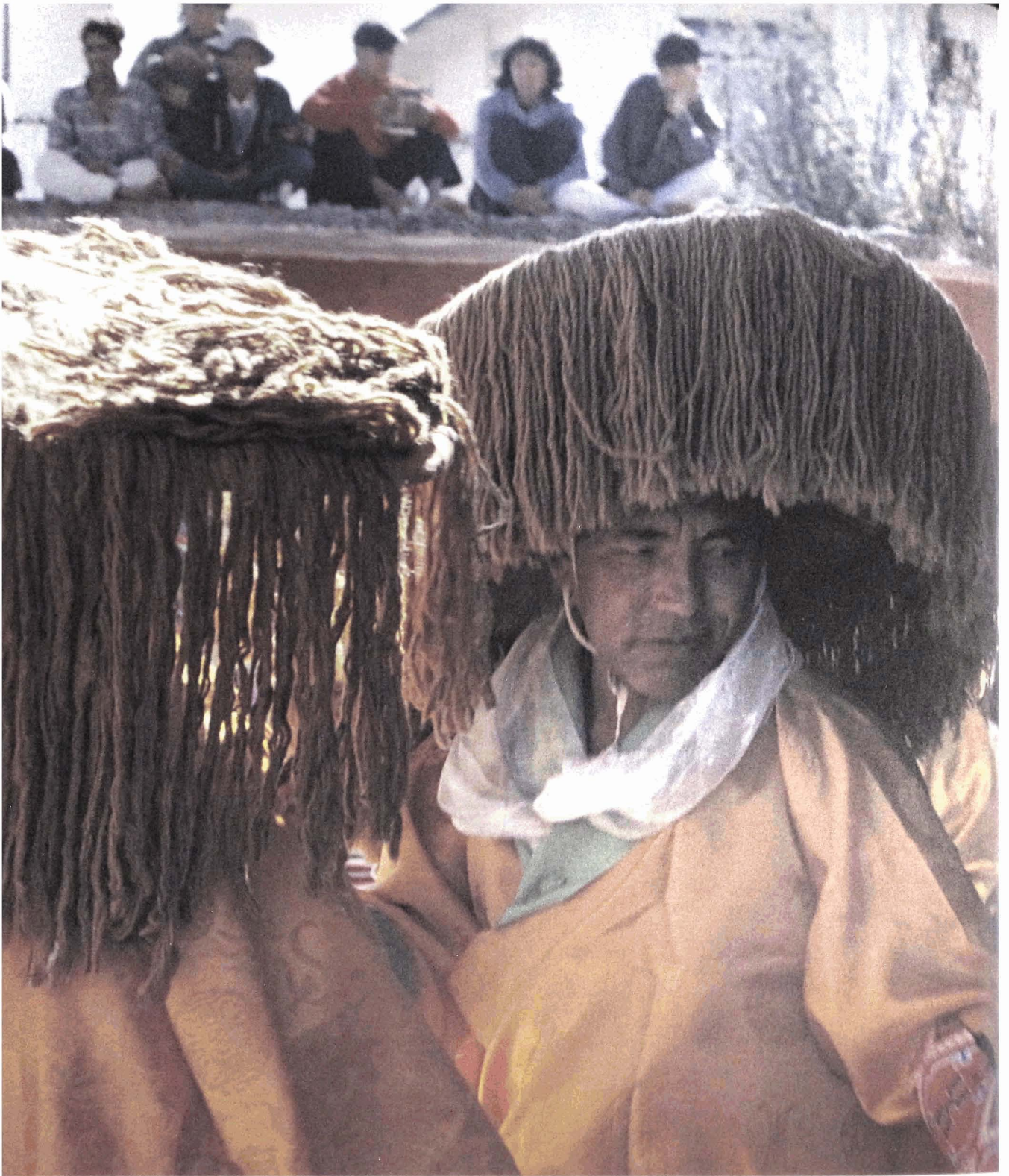


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23





19 (previous page). Porong nomads.

20 (previous page). Yak in Porong.

21 (previous page). Porong Pema Chöling (Pemo Chöding), the Bodongpa monastery built by the Porong community living in Kathmandu.

22.23.24. Traditional dances of the Porong community. A ritual scarf is offered to Popo Ngawang one of the leading religious figures of the community.

generated by the heart (*rnying rlung*), they follow every woman, roaming around like the vital energy (*rlung*) itself. However, if the pure spiritual practices of the beautiful Tara, Sarasvati, etc. are carried out correctly, all women are means and achievers of spiritual accomplishment (*sgrub byed*).<sup>46</sup>

The positive attitude towards women is concretely reflected by the relevance of the female representatives of the Bodongpa tradition.

Chökyi Drönme, the youngest daughter of the king of Gungthang Lhawang Gyaltsen (1404-1463/64 A.D.)<sup>47</sup> was a leading disciple of Chole Namgyal and is considered to be the first incarnation of the Goddess Dorje Phamo (Vajravārahī), residing at Samding. Retrospectively, however, a number of previous reincarnations were acknowledged, both in India and in Tibet: Lakṣmīkara, the *yogini* sister of King Indrabodhi, the consorts of Padmasambhava, Machig Labdrön who was the founder of the Chö tradition. These are mentioned, with some variations, in the versions emanating from different sources.<sup>48</sup> After these, there was Sönam Drenma, born to a rich family at Namshö, who became a follower of Phagmodrupa, then came Sönam Paldren who was born in Damshö, in the northern pasture lands. She was prophesied by Khandro Yeshe Tshogyal to be her mind-reincarnation and, miraculously, protected her people from a wild yak.

Chökyi Drönme is sometimes mentioned<sup>49</sup> as the third reincarnation of Dorje Phamo, but in fact it was she who first established the Bodong tradition in Samding where she founded a small meditation place in the iron-monkey year (1440 A.D.) with the support of the local lord, Namkha Gyaltsen. So she became famous as the First Samding Dorje Phamo. The biography of Chole Namgyal mentions her as one of his main disciples and she is depicted on the frontispiece of the manuscript kept in Bodong E. According to the *Bo dong chos 'byung*, Chole Namgyal himself prophesied to her: "Three rebirths of you will take place in the area of Tsari, in lower Ü, you shall perform great deeds for the living beings of the ten directions. You shall produce volumes of gold, silver and copper to benefit the living beings of the ten directions and you shall go to the realm of the *ḍakini*". In fact the holy mountain area of Tsari where Chökyi Drönme passed away has been linked to Vajravārahī (Dorje Phamo), as the tantric partner of Cakrasaṃvara, up to the present day. A number of relevant prophecies by *sutra* and *tantra* and by Kagyüpa masters are reported by the guide-texts to the holy sites of Tsari.<sup>49</sup> Chökyi Drönme visited many places in Ü and Tsang and met Siddha Thangtong Gyalpo (cf. Biography of Thangtong Gyalpo 281-282; cf. also Tashi Tshering 1993:25). The great *siddha* transmitted tantric teachings to her and prophetically revealed that the third reincarnation of Sönam Drenma was born as the daughter of a Tibetan king and was called Chökyi Drönme. The great *siddha* is said to have told her:

“If you will dwell in the upper regions (towards the west), you will enjoy a long life but you will have few followers. If you will dwell in the lower areas (towards the east), your life will not be a long one but you will have a great number of followers.” She replied: “I will benefit living beings”. Thangtong Gyalpo therefore instructed her: “In Kongpo, in the east, there is my monastery at Tsagong Palkyi Nesar. You should benefit the beings there”. She went there, as well as to Bodong and Yamdrog, and eventually she passed away at the age of thirty-four. Tangthong Gyalpo is also said to have recognized her following reincarnation (cf. Dorje Phamo and Thubten Namgyal 1995:25).

She was reborn at Sinmo Nyen in Kongpo as the daughter of the Siddha Chogden Dorje and her mother was Jomo Dröma. She was given the name Kunga Sangmo. According to the *Bo dong chos 'byung*, she was cared for by Chime Druba, the companion in religious practice of Chökyi Drönme. She promoted the diffusion of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*, founded numerous schools of philosophy and places of meditation with the support of the lords of that time, among whom were the Rinpungpa. She improved the meditation monastery of Samding with the support of the lords of Yamdrog and restored the monastery of Yasang. She passed away at the age of forty-four.

The third reincarnation (reckoning from Chökyi Drönme) was Nyendrag Sangmo who was born to father Pawo Lhundrub and mother Tashi Pelbar at Nyangrong. She was taken care of by Chime Pelsang who was the reincarnation of Chime Druba and she followed the teachings of numerous other masters such as Khedrub Geleg Pelsang (the disciple of Chole Namgyal and Tsongkhapa who was posthumously recognized as the First Pañchen Lama). She was first to establish the tradition of teaching philosophy at Samding. She passed away at the age of forty.

The fourth reincarnation was Urgyen Tshomo who was born to father Pelbo Chuden and mother *ḍākinī* Thaggo at Sobashi in Khams. She was the companion in religious practice of the author of the *Bo dong chos 'byung*. The following reincarnations are now given on the basis of the studies by Tashi Tshering (Tashi Tshering 1993:20-53) and Thubten Namgyal (cf. Dorje Phamo and Thubten Namgyal 1995:31-58).

The fifth incarnation was Khachö Pelmo, alias Yeshe Tshomo, who was born in Karma Drongsar in Kongpo. She promoted the doctrine of the Bodong tradition, was appointed abbot of the Shekar Monastery by the ruler of Tsang.<sup>50</sup> She passed away at the age of fifty-four.

The sixth incarnation was Tinley Tshomo who was born at Taglung Önsim in Yamdrog and passed away at the age of sixty-six.

The seventh incarnation was Chödrön Wangmo who was born at

Thonshi in Nyemo into a family descended from Thönmi Sambhoṭa, the famous minister of King Songtsen Gampo who first created Tibetan script. Das reports that when, in 1716, the army of the Dzungar Mongols invaded Tibet, killing monks and destroying monasteries, the Seventh Samding Dorje Phamo performed a famous miracle: she let the monks appear as pigs and herself as a sow. Frightened, the Dzungars did not dare to sack the place. When the members of the religious community regained their normal aspect, the invaders were filled with astonishment and veneration (Das 1988:139).

The eighth incarnation was Kesang Chogden Dechen Wangmo who was born at Shang Tashitse and was related by kin to the Sixth Paṅchen Lama, Palden Yeshe. She was the first of this reincarnation line to receive the honorific title of *ho thog thu* - the highest title of an incarnated lama under that of the Dalai Lama and the Paṅchen Lama. The title was conferred upon her by the Seventh Dalai Lama. She visited China and passed away at the age of forty-nine.

The ninth incarnation was Chöying Dechen Tshomo who was born into the illustrious Lhalu family, to which also the Eighth Dalai Lama and the Seventh Paṅchen Lama were born. She introduced ritual practices belonging to the Nyingma tradition. After passing away in Samye, her remains were brought as relics to the Samding Monastery.

The tenth incarnation was Ngawang Kunga Sangmo, of whom very little is known. She passed away at the Nenyng Monastery in Gyantse.

The eleventh incarnation was Thubten Choying Pelmo who was born in 1889 into the servant household called Monkyi Khangsar, which belonged to the prominent Lhalu family. Her father was Namgyal Dorje and her mother was Changchub Drönma. From the Thirteenth Dalai Lama she received the title of *ho thog thu*. She passed away at the age of forty-eight in 1936/7.

The twelfth reincarnation was Dechen Chökyi Drönme who was born in 1938. Her father was Rigden Gyalpo and her mother Sönam Drönma. At the age of six, she was recognized as the incarnation of Dorje Phamo. In 1949, she met the Italian scholar Giuseppe Tucci, who stopped at Samding on his way to Lhasa. In his diary he narrated: "We stopped for two days at Nangkartse (*sNan dkar rtse*), a dilapidated fort watching over the unruffled mirror of the Yamdrog (*Yar abrog*) lake and the surrounding flooded meadows. We had to change horses there, and I could not leave the place without seeing the Samding monastery, built by Potopa Chogle Namgyal (*P'yogs las rnam rgyal*). That convent is famous on the account of the incarnation of the goddess Dorjepamo (*rDo rje p'ag mo*), 'the hog-headed One', supposed to dwell there uninterruptedly changing her mortal form.

Never fear: the goddess' mortal mirror does not look that dreadful and was, at the time, a pretty girl of 13. The pilgrims were just gathering for the feast which was to take place within a few days (the 11th, 12th and 13th day of the fifth month)... The goddess, to whom I was presently introduced, received me very affably and, laying her hands on my head, bestowed her blessing upon me. We exchanged scarfs and gifts..." (Tucci 1987:85-86). In 1959, she escaped to India and later returned to Tibet where, in 1985, she started the restoration of the Samding Monastery. The Twelfth Dorje Phamo, now a mysterious but sweet looking elderly lady, recounted to us in Samding: "I was born in Lhasa. When I was a little girl, I was very sick and my parents asked for some divination. It turned out that my physical problems had some extraordinary divine reason. When I was about five, the oracle of a special protector of His Holiness was consulted and, according to this god and the oracle of the Golden Vase, I was recognized as the reincarnation of Dorje Phamo. I took refuge in the *dharma* and offered my hair to the Regent, Taktra. After the destruction of the Cultural Revolution, the Samding Monastery was partially restored and we are now trying to improve the training of the monks, by studying the scriptures of Chole Namgyal and reintroducing some of the ancient ritual customs. This year, after many decades, we are again observing the great rituals of the fifth Tibetan month, which culminate in two days of sacred dances. These dances are peculiar to the Bodongpa tradition and the great protector of this tradition, Tashi Ömbar, is one of the main characters..."

Dorje Phamo's training followed the Bodongpa tradition as well, but, unfortunately, she was not able to practise for a number of years and now it is difficult for her to perform the consecrations in a proper manner. The only lama of this tradition who has both the empowerments and the proper training lives in a small dependent monastery. However he is very old and is suffering of a tongue-disease and is unable to speak.

Despite these problems the commitment and determination of the Bodongpa is unshakable, in Samding like in Bodong E or in Pema Chöding or in the numerous little branches of this tradition. In the monastery of Samding there are currently 29 monks and the ritual life has started again. The monastery, which counted among the thirteen great monasteries of Tibet was devastated during the Cultural Revolution. Now it has been fairly well restored but very little of the ancient past is left. Recently Chole Namgyal, together with all the reincarnations of Dorje Phamo, has been depicted on the walls of one of the main chapels. The images were copied from the old mural paintings which can still be found in the monastery of Nyemo Chöde, founded in the 16th century by the third Samding Dorje Phamo called Nyendra Sangmo and her teacher Chime Pelsang: "Chime

Pelsang and Nyendra Sangmo established a school of philosophy in Nyemo Chekhar for the study of the *dPal de kho na nyid* [‘*dus pa*]. Here, a monastery was founded under the patronage of the lords of Nyemo. This was of immeasurable benefit to the doctrine of the Buddha in general and it became the life-tree of the doctrine of the *dPal kho na nyid* ‘*dus pa* in particular. It is said that, without this, the doctrine of the *dPal kho na nyid* ‘*dus pa* would have survived in name only and the keepers of the doctrine would have failed to perform their great deeds”. During the Cultural Revolution, this monastery was used as a granary and the mural paintings escaped destruction. Now, like in many other monasteries, the precious remains of ancient glory can be found amidst a distressing blend of ruins, tentative repainting and reconstructions, new ritual items... On the first floor, an ancient painting of the great blue-horsed protector, Tashi Ömbar, invites entry into a dim room used as a library and chapel for the old relics: a half-erased inscription mentioning the *dPal de kho na nyid* ‘*dus pa*, a pile of sheets of ancient manuscripts, a few old ritual items, a statue of Chole Namgyal... There, hidden by the new bookshelves, the images of the various Dorje Phamo, their sweet faces framed by long black hair, still cast glances at a future of hope.

## Notes

1. “*gzhung lugs kun don bsdu mdzad Bo dong pa*”. *Shel dkar chos* ‘*byung* f. 32. This text written in 1732 narrates the history of Southern Latö and of the Shekar Monastery which was founded by the uncle of Chole Namgyal and was headed by Chole Namgyal himself. Ngawang Kalden Gyatsho was a spiritual master of Shekar who was involved in the printing of the Buddhist Canon at Shekar under Pholhane as is reported by the colophon of the *Shel dkar chos* ‘*byung* itself. In fact the events reported by the *Shel dkar chos* ‘*byung* are mentioned also in the catalogue of the Buddhist Canon printed at Shekar and kept at Narthang, cf. Stein 1961:23.
2. The *Shel dkar chos* ‘*byung* and the Blue Annals (*Deb ther sngon po*), the great historical work written by Gö Lotsäba in the 15th century, give as the date of birth the year of the wood-hare, i.e. A.D. 1375. The above mentioned is the date reported by the biography.
3. Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen was a great scholar and translator who lived in the 13th century. He was famous for his studies on language and for having translated numerous important texts such as the *Kālacakratantra* and the *Bodhisattvavādanakalpalatā*. He was a disciple of Tagdeba who in his turn had been a disciple of Bodong Rinchen Tsemo and teacher of Pang Lotsäba, the great-great-uncle of Bodong Chole Namgyal, cf. *Deb ther sngon po* 918-919; Roerich 1988:784-785.
4. ‘*jug pa*’i sgo bzhi.
5. ‘*jig rten lugs kyi bstan bcos*.
6. *brtag pa*’i bstan bcos.

7. There are various forms of this name: Pema Chöding, Pema Chöling, Pemo Chöding. Pemo Chöding (dPal mo chos sdings) is the form used in the Biography. Pema Chöling/Chöding is currently used by the Porong community.
8. The full title is *Dpal ldan bla ma dam pa thams cad mkhyen pa phyogs las mam par rgyal ba'i zhabs kyi mam par thar pa ngo mtshar gyi dga' ston zhes bya ba*, lit. "Feast of Miracles, the Biography of the Glorious, Pure and Omniscient Lama, Chole Namgyal (Victorious in All Directions)".
9. This biography was called *rNam thar ngag dbang ma*, cf. Biography of Bodong Chole Namgyal p.414.
10. The full title is: *dPal de kho na nyid dus pa las bo dong chos 'byung gsal byed sgron me zhes bya ba thams cad mkhyen pa 'chi med 'od zer gyi mdzad pa* (From the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*: The Lamp Illuminating the Religious History of Bodong, Compiled by the Omniscient Chime Öser). In this case the name *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* refers in an extended way to the whole corpus of scriptures of the Bodongpa tradition.
11. From the historical point of view it seems that Buddha's teachings were first passed on orally and then put into writing around the first century B.C., cf. Klimburg-Salter 1995:29.
12. Cf. Ferrari 1958:156.
13. Cf. *Nelpa Paṇḍita's* chronicle in: *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga* p.29.
14. Cf. *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* p.412.
15. Cf. *Bu ston chos 'byung* p.193; Szerb 1990:55. *Yar lung jo bo'i chos 'byung* mentions him as Bo dong pa Yo Gechung (*Yar lung jo bo'i chos 'byung* p.88), as well. *Nelpa Paṇḍita* in a gloss reports him as rBo dong pa (*Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga* p. 32; Uebach 1987:120-121). Differing versions are given however by other historical sources, on this issue cf. Sørensen 1994:430.
16. *sKye gnas*.
17. Cf. *mKhas pa'i dga' ston* pp. 511-512.
18. Bodong Rinchen Tsemo was a disciple of Nyalshig who was in his turn one of the main disciples of Chapa Chökyi Sengge. He was the teacher of Tagdeba Sengge Gyaltsen, the main teacher of Pang Lotsäba.
19. Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen (1312-1375 A.D.), great Lama of Sakya, author of the *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, took the vows as fully ordained monk at Bodong E in 1331 A.D., cf. Sørensen 1994:30. He had close relations to the ancestors of Bodong Chole Namgyal.
20. *Deb ther sngon po* p. 420; Roerich 1988:345-346. In order to simplify the reading, the passages taken from Roerich's translation were adapted to the present text.
21. *Vaidūrya ser po* pp.401-402.
22. Mahākāśyapa was one of the main disciples of Buddha Śākyamuni. He is reported as one of the protagonists of the First Council and as the disciple who took care of the teachings concerning the *abhidharma*.
23. Indian scholar who founded the Mādhyamika-Prāsaṅgika school in the 6/7th centuries A.D..
24. Vairocana, born at Nyemo Chekhar, was an 8th century great translator. He was one of the first monks ordained in Tibet and a disciple of Padmasambhava.
25. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 44.
26. According to Tibetan traditional custom age is reckoned by including the year which is not yet completed. This means that somebody, who is said to be fourteen in Tibet, is considered to be thirteen according to Western custom.

27. Disciple and spiritual son of Gyalba Götshangpa, cf. *Deb ther sngon po* 816ff.; Roerich 1988:696ff.
28. This deity later became the main protector of the Bodongpa tradition and of the Shekar Monastery, cf. Hazod forthcoming.
29. Taglung was the main monastery of the Taglung Kagyüpa founded in 1180 A.D. by Taglung Thangpa Tashipel and located to the north of Lhasa.
30. Chang Radeng was the main monastery of the Kadampa, founded in 1057 A.D. by Dromtön to the north of Lhasa.
31. Sangphu was a monastery famous for its philosophical studies, located to the south of Lhasa, founded in 1073 A.D. by Ngog Legpe Sherab.
32. *Dag yig tshog gsum gsal ba*, a grammatical treatise on Tibetan orthography, cf. *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* 2293.
33. The biography of Changchub Tsemo is reported in the *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 40-41, on its basis a synthetic outline is provided here, cf. also *Deb ther sngon po* 921-923; Roerich 1988:787-788.
34. The date of birth given by the *Deb ther sngon po* seems more correct. In fact it also matches with the date of death at the age of seventy-seven in the year of the iron-male-monkey given in both sources. It can be concluded that the date of birth given by the *Shel dkar chos 'byung* is based on a mistake. The date given by Roerich in the translation of the *Deb ther sngon po*, 1243 A.D., is mistaken by one sixty-year cycle and is not compatible with the fact that Changchub Tsemo was the nephew of Pang Lotsäba and that this latter was already active during the childhood of Changchub Tsemo, cf. also Ferrari 1958:156.
35. Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen and his younger brother Shong Lodrö Tenba. See chapter I n. 3.
36. Butön Rinchendrub (1290-1364 A.D.), the great scholar, abbot of the Shalu Monastery, famous among others for his editing work on the Buddhist Canon and the compilation of the *Bu ston chos 'byung*.
37. Locality lying to the west of Shigatse. During the time of the Sakya rule, Chumig was one of the thirteen administrative units called *thrikhor* (*khri skor*).
38. The biography of Dragpa Gyaltsen is reported in the *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 41-44, on its basis a synthetic outline is provided here, cf. also *Deb ther sngon po* 923; Roerich 1988:788.
39. Rendaba Shönnu Lodrö was a famous scholar teacher of Tsongkhapa, cf. Roerich 1988:349, 1075.
40. *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasāmhita* (*Yan lag brgyad*) is a basic treatise on medical science composed by the Indian scholar Vāgbhata (cf. Meyer 1988:59).
41. Possibly the monastery of Ngönga located to the north of the holy mountain of Tsibri in Southern Latö.
42. Offering in the shape of a *maṅḍala*.
43. "In the ritual of evocation, through the process of self-generation, the practitioner first applies the Process of Generation to himself: he vividly visualizes himself as the deity... and becomes, in effect, the transformer through which the divine power can pass out of the realm of knowledge and into the world of events. Thus he next generates or evokes the same deity (occasionally a different deity) in front of him...and finally directs it into a ritual function..." (Beyer 1988:66).
44. "In the most profound of the high rituals, the self-generation ends with the special



visualization of the Process of Perfection, the 'gathering in and arising' that plunges the deity into a divine Emptiness and allows the now pure knowledge body to 'leap forth' from the Clear Light as the 'Innate Union of the Clear Light and Emptiness'" (Beyer 1988:130).

45. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* by Nāgārjuna. Engl. transl. by Streng F., *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning*, Nashville-New York, Abdingdon Press 1967; Inada K. *Nāgārjuna: A Translation of His Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Tokyo, Hokuseido Press 1970.
46. *De nyid 'dus pa chen po'i mdzad byang* (*Phyogs las mam rgyal gsung 'bum*, vol. 119, pp. 191-192).
47. Cf. *Gung thang gdung rabs* (*Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga* 124-125).
48. Cf. *Bo dong chos 'byung*, Tashi Tshering 1993:20-53; Dorje Phagmo & Thubten Namgyal 1995:31-53.
49. Cf. e.g. Tendzin Sangpo's guide-text concerning the holy white lake of Tsari published in *Bod kyi gnas yig bdams bsgrigs* 63-134. On Tsari cf. also Huber 1994:350-371.
50. Cf. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 54.

## Chapter II

### *The Life of Bodong Chole Namgyal*

The Feast of Miracles, the Biography of the Pure and Omniscient Lama Victorious In All Directions (Chole Namgyal).

The deeds of Bodong Chole Namgyal<sup>1</sup> can be narrated in twelve parts:

- 1) Birth: His birth, was heralded by thirteen sublime signs.
- 2) Childhood: He was endowed with an extraordinary body, and his speech, mind and knowledge were exceptional.
- 3) Religious ordination: Feeling an aversion for family life and worldly affairs he took religious ordination.
- 4) The study of the *sūtra*: After learning epistemology (*pramāṇa*), the main jewel of knowledge, he studied the *sūtra* in depth.
- 5) The study of the *tantra*: Plunging into the ocean of the *tantra* he studied them profoundly.
- 6) Through the study of most of the sciences of this world, and beyond, he became a master of knowledge.
- 7) He became a perfect monk through observing the rules and accumulating merits.
- 8) How he treated the eight worldly concerns with impartiality.
- 9) How he elevated the precious doctrine by debating.
- 10) How he elevated the precious doctrine by composing.
- 11) How he elevated the precious doctrine by preaching.
- 12) After having completed his task in this world he was received by “heroes” (*pawo*) and *yoginī* into the Pure Sphere of Dharma (*dharmadhātu*).

#### 1) Birth: His birth was heralded by thirteen sublime signs

The first sign: his birth was prophesied. In ancient times in the northern land surrounded by snow-capped mountains, Avalokiteśvara resided as a monk on a crystal mountain. At that time the monks of the Bodong E Monastery, which was an ocean of the holy doctrine, invited the illustrious Thogme<sup>2</sup> to become their abbot. Thogme replied: “I cannot take over the religious throne but I can prophesy that in future abbots even better than myself will come. Seven generations of one lineage<sup>3</sup> will benefit this monastery”. This great *bodhisattva* then went to meet Pang Lotsāba,<sup>4</sup> the jewel of those who can speak two languages, and begged him to agree to be abbot. The great lord Pang Lotsāba was delighted and said: “That religious

throne was not occupied even by my revered teacher Tagdeba Sengge Gyaltshe.<sup>5</sup> I will go there immediately”. He was on the throne of Pañchen Bumthragsumpa<sup>6</sup> for a long time and did much to expand the doctrine of the Buddha. Eventually, he handed over the throne to his nephew on his mother’s side, the great translator Changchub Tsemo<sup>7</sup> who continued to promote the growth of the holy doctrine. He, too, was followed by a nephew, the great translator Dragpa Gyaltshe<sup>8</sup> who became the best of scholars. Finally, the most exalted abbot of all, he who was known just as the sun and moon were known, acceded to this throne.

The second sign: his place of birth was excellent. Jambudvīpa<sup>9</sup> contains six areas: the Land of Aryans (India), Li yül (Khotan), Bö (Tibet), Hor (Mongolia), Kailāsa, Gangden.<sup>10</sup> From the centre of Jambudvīpa, Bodhgayā,<sup>11</sup> one hundred *pagtshé*<sup>12</sup> distant lies the Land of Snow (Tibet). According to prophecies, this land is surrounded by snow-capped mountains. There, pure, fresh river waters flow melodiously, many kinds of medicinal plants grow there and it is a source of precious minerals. It is the land where the doctrine would develop. It is subdivided into Ü and Tsang.<sup>13</sup> To the south of Rulag<sup>14</sup> in Tsang there is a holy mountain called Śrī ri<sup>15</sup> where knowledge-holders (*rindzin*), “heroes” (*pawo*) and *yoginī* would assemble. To the north of this mountain there is a beautiful mountain called Lagpa Gong whilst, nearby, is the nomad site called Yigu,<sup>16</sup> a place in which to lose one’s heart. There the mountains have the shape of gods. Fresh and pure water flows, green grass covers the earth and all kinds of flowers blossom. Birds and animals dwell out of harm’s way. This was the place of his birth.

The third, fourth and fifth signs: His ancestry, the lineage of his father and the kin of his mother were exceptional. He stemmed from a learned background: his father was a descendant of the Shama clan from which the translator Shama Sengge Gyalpo and Machig Shama<sup>17</sup> had come. Many great *paṇḍita* and *yogin* had come from his mother’s side.

The sixth sign: he had a brilliant father who was expert in subjects such as mechanics, medicine, poetry, astrology and astronomy without even having studied them and he stood out from his fellow beings. So he was given the name of Chöying Gyaltshe which means the Banner of Victory of the Pure Sphere of Dharma.

The seventh sign: he had a good mother. She was daughter to the brother of the great translator Changchub Tsemo, whose mother was the sister of

the great lord of the Doctrine Dragpa Gyaltsen. Spontaneously she had become a *yoginī* and, since her birth, with great faith she had taken refuge in the doctrine. She was so kind that, just by meeting her, even those wicked people possessed by jealousy were instantly liberated. Her whole behaviour as a *yoginī* was extraordinary. Later Chole Namgyal himself used to say that his mother was an exceptional woman.

The eighth sign: Even before his birth and whilst still in the womb there were extraordinary signs. His mother dreamt of these when his spirit entered her womb: one hundred rays of the moon dissolved into her navel; a large web of multi-coloured threads of light covered her body; a sound more melodious than any of the musical instruments in this world engulfed her; incense spread a scent more fragrant than sandal wood all around.

The ninth and tenth signs: The year and the time of his birth were very propitious. He was born in the year of the fire-male-dragon (1376 A.D.) which had abundant rain and an excellent harvest. The cattle grew very fat and healthy. All disputes and fights were settled and people could enjoy a time of peace. Autumn was harvest-time and could be enjoyed by everybody. Bodong Chole Namgyal was born at full moon, just as the moon was rising. He was born feet first and his mother suffered no pain.

The eleventh and twelfth signs: Just after his birth the baby was shown to a master of the Veda. This latter said that he had been born in a perfect manner and since he had entered the womb of his mother the family's cattle herds would multiply and there would be overall prosperity. He was named Yungdrung Sangye Kyi.

The thirteenth sign: His body was endowed with the marks of a Buddha.<sup>18</sup> His head was round like an umbrella. His forehead was wide. The eyebrows were well marked. His eyes were fresh as the new petals of the lotus flower. His arms were soft and supple and his whole body was pleasing to the eye.

## **2) Childhood: He was endowed with an extraordinary body, and his speech, mind and knowledge were exceptional**

When he was three years old, he was playing with his nurse beside the River Shelchag in Surtsho.<sup>19</sup> This was a very difficult river to cross even for adults so that when he suddenly disappeared, his nurse feared the worst as

she searched for him, before catching sight of him playing happily on the bank on the other side of the river. With great effort on the part of many people he was carried back. This was considered a very extraordinary event. Some said he had crossed the river swimming like the king of geese, some said that he had been flying with wings which had appeared on his body, some said that he had been invited by some powerful protectors of virtue. This event was also a sign of how he could cross the river of transmigratory worldly existence (*saṁsāra*) and reach the safe ground of spiritual liberation.

Already during his early childhood the influences of his former lives were reflected in his lack of interest in the games normally enjoyed by children. Instead he behaved like a *paṇḍita* standing in an elevated position as if he were preaching the doctrine. Once, during the turnip harvesting, he asked to be placed on top of a large heap of turnips as though it were his religious throne. Some older monks wondered whether this was just children's play or whether it was a sign that he was of an extraordinary descent. They sat him on the turnip heap and pretended to be listening to the doctrine. In Sanskrit he expounded on the doctrine. A great faith was born in the listeners and they considered this event to be an extraordinary sign.

When Bodong Chole Namgyal was five years old, as his mind had already been awakened by the experiences of innumerable former lives, he was attracted by the practice of concentration (*samādhi*) without allowing the mind to be distracted by anything. He viewed family life as a prison and was not attracted by it. Instead he preferred to seek isolation in remote places of retreat. Once, his father and mother were greatly worried because they had looked for him everywhere and could not find him. Eventually he was discovered in the yard of a big ruined house, sitting in the posture of Buddha Vairocana, in deep concentration, totally heedless of the strong summer rain. Once, when he had been watching an archery competition together with many other children, at the end of which each child returned to his own parents, his father and mother could not find him. His father searched everywhere and found him in the field where the archery competition had taken place, sitting in meditation. His father was quite upset and, taking him home, scolded him because he had to look for him so often. During his play with other children, he would rest in the meditation posture, motionless as a mountain. Evil-minded children, thinking that he was sleeping, used to make fun of him by throwing water on him or putting him in the snow to wake him up. Yet he was not disturbed by this.

On another occasion one summer night when it was raining heavily he

disappeared yet again. All the members of his family went to look for him, and found him completely naked, meditating in the middle of a plain. He was like a lotus flower on the water. His father got very angry at this sight, seized him and asked him where he had put his clothing. He pointed to some bushes in the distance. When his father went there he saw that the clothes were covering the bushes. As soon as he lifted them, he realized that, sheltering underneath, were many small animals which had been threatened by the heavy rain.

His father started to become worried about his whole behaviour which was so different from that of the other children and he feared that he might be ill and become dumb. So, he decided to take him to meet a good lama in the Dragnag Monastery in Surtsho. The lama prophesied that these were not the effects of illness, but were, instead the signs of good meditation. The parents were overjoyed. Remembering his peculiar behaviour in the past, great faith in their child was born in them.

When he was seven, he realized how living beings were oppressed by suffering and he would burst into tears in an ocean of compassion. Even when people were killing lice by gathering them and smashing them with a stone, his eyes would fill with tears. He used to buy back the lice in exchange for butter and molasses and would then offer them his own blood by letting them live on his own body. It is said that, for this reason, some lay people used to call him the lice breeder. This shows that he was a treasure of kindness and compassion.

That same year, he went to Samtenling Monastery in Gyam<sup>20</sup> to learn reading and writing. It was a place where many scholars used to assemble. On one occasion while he pretended to be learning to read and write, he spontaneously entered into deep *samādhi*. The teacher, thinking that he had fallen asleep, tried to rouse him with his iron stick, but without success. When of his own accord he spontaneously concluded his meditation, he recounted that he had seen a big A appearing on his forehead, innumerable words had emanated from this letter. They had covered the sky and dissolved into the syllable OM. This vision was a prophecy that in future he would open many doors to the holy doctrine.

### **3) Religious ordination: Feeling an aversion for family life and worldly affairs he took religious ordination**

When he was seven, he realized that leading a life with family and relatives was like being put in chains. So, he decided to take the “vow of individual liberation”,<sup>21</sup> since this was the precious path indicated by the

Buddha of the three ages (past, present and future), the foundation of all knowledge, the first door to the precious doctrine. He went therefore to Samtenling in Gyam and met his first teacher, his uncle the great *paṇḍita* Dragpa Gyaltshe. From him he received the name of Sanggye Gyaltshe (Buddha's Banner of Victory). Then he and his uncle were invited to Shekar,<sup>22</sup> by the patron of the doctrine Situ Chökyi Rinchen.<sup>23</sup> The latter was very illuminated and expert in his judgements as they related to civil and religious law. When he saw the boy, he immediately liked and praised him and requested: "Boy! Would you like to meditate a short while?" The boy immediately concentrated deeply and, despite the thin clothing he was wearing, was not affected by the freezing winter.

#### 4) The study of the *sūtra*

He went to Bodong E Monastery, which was one of the great religious centres of the Land of Snow. Chökyi Dorje who had mastered many branches of knowledge became his teacher. At first he started to learn epistemology (*pramāṇa*). He considered the *pramāṇavārttika* (Commentary on the Compendium of Valid Cognition), one of the Seven Treatises by Dharmakīrti,<sup>24</sup> to be the basis of study on this subject. He therefore studied this treatise and the relevant commentaries by Pang Lotsāba and Dragpa Gyaltshe very thoroughly. Subsequently, he visited the great monastery of Sakya<sup>25</sup> to study and, there, took part in debates<sup>26</sup> on epistemology. Sakya was the most important monastic community in the Land of Snow. There gathered many scholars and those who had achieved spiritual realization. It was from there that the precious Khön lineage<sup>27</sup> stemmed. Chole Namgyal was delighted to give speeches to the ocean of scholars at this monastery.

During this period of study he used to reflect on worldly life: "Even the gods Brahmā and Indra are prisoners of this fearful worldly life. Though living conditions might appear perfect, one can hardly believe in them. The very signs of happiness are the root of suffering". Feeling sad at this, he would burst into tears.

"Looking at worldly manifestations,  
everything gives reason to feel disheartened.

There is nothing the mind confides in,

For those foolish people without support I feel compassion".

And so, compassion was aroused in him, not for just a few specific people but for all living beings. As living beings are affected by three kinds of sin and suffering - large, medium and small - he used to pray accordingly for seven days without interruption. At such times his eyes would be full of

tears, his voice would wail and his mind would be full of deep compassion. He never sought anything for himself; his actions showed nothing but compassion for others. Even enemies who tried to kill him were treated as a mother treats her child. To benefit all living beings, he entered the flames of suffering as a goose dives into the lotus lake. Such compassion is at the very root of the whole Mahāyāna<sup>28</sup> doctrine.

At that time and with no apparent effort, Chole Namgyal began to excel at writing poetry. He wrote poems in praise of Śākyamuni, and of Mañjuśrī as well as a biographical apology of Shönnu Norsang. He wrote dictating the verses with their beautiful words and deep meaning without need for correction. These compositions were sheer nectar to the scholars.

At the age of sixteen, he was able to memorize words immediately without any effort. Lama Samrin who knew that he was able to learn a whole volume by heart in a single morning, made a wager with someone that the young scholar could memorize the *Abhidharmakośa*<sup>29</sup> in one morning. Starting at dawn, he managed to learn it by heart just before lunch and, therefore, Samrin won his wager. Likewise, in a morning he was able to learn the great commentary of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, consisting in fifteen folios, each one as long as an arrow. In one day he read the text of *Abhidharmasamuccaya*<sup>30</sup> three times and he could keep in mind the whole text. When he repeated the texts he had learned, his exposition was as clear and skillful as that of someone who had studied the volumes for long time. Later, he used to say that he could study in three ways: he could learn by heart, he could learn by having a deep understanding of the meaning, or he could learn jointly by heart and by having a perfect understanding of the meaning.

At that time he resided in a small house in the perimeter walls to the north-east of the Bodong E Monastery. Remaining in seclusion, he meditated following the method of the goddess Sarasvatī.<sup>31</sup> After completing one period of meditation in the evening, he would go to sleep. Soon afterwards he would be blessed by this goddess and awakened by the sound of religious musical instruments which was louder and more melodious than that of the guitar. From then on, he often had visions of the goddess and received many prophecies concerning numerous doctrines. Even children knew that he was blessed by her. He wrote a poem in praise of Sarasvatī (Yangchenma) and signed it as Yangchen Gaba since he considered himself blessed and inspired by her.

Later, whilst residing in the house of Pang Lotsāba, he dedicated himself to the study of numerous profound doctrines. He thought of the Madhyamaka<sup>32</sup> as the middle way, distant from both extremes of the doctrine. He decided therefore to start a study of this subject and the



relevant works composed by Nāgārjuna and his disciples. At first he spent eight days reading the first and second pages of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*dBu ma rtsa ba*).<sup>33</sup> Then it took him only fifteen days to understand the whole book. Also he studied numerous commentaries of the Madhyamaka composed by the disciples of Nāgārjuna, such as Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti of the Mādhyamika-Prāsaṅgika tradition, as well as the works by Bhavya and Jñānagarbha and their followers belonging to the Mādhyamika-Svātantrika tradition. The completion of his study took him slightly more than forty days.

During his youth whenever emptiness (*sūnyatā*) was mentioned, a great joy and faith would surge up within him. He considered the works by Candrakīrti particularly precious in his study of Madhyamaka, thus he developed a strong faith in this great Indian scholar.

His next task was to study the numerous treatises on epistemology including commentaries by Indian scholars such as Dignāga, Śākyanāga, Dharmottara. He understood very clearly which were the more correct philosophical positions and which the less. After this experience he could understand most doctrinal texts merely at a glance. He realized that he could understand the doctrines as easily as if they were a children's game and so he requested his abbot, Dragpa Gyaltsen, to let him go to Ü to take part in debates. Being quite sceptical because he had never seen him study the abbot asked: "On which subject would you like to debate?" Bodong Chole Namgyal replied: "I want to debate on thirteen basic treatises of the doctrine". The abbot was very surprised and said: "Which thirteen treatises? If you want to debate on *Prajñāpāramitā* and Madhyamaka you have to read the commentaries I composed, if you want to debate on *abhidharma* and *pramāṇa* you have to read the commentaries by Pang Lotsāba". Very respectfully he answered: "I do not like to follow the echo of other people, it is meaningless to repeat commentaries by Tibetan authors. I have studied the roots of the doctrine very thoroughly". The abbot, in doubt, commented: "Such big words have never been heard in Tibet, I will test you". Then he took the thirteen treatises and tested him on difficult passages. The youth answered all the questions correctly and in great detail. He could, in fact, explain clearly and correctly everything concerning the theory of the great Indian scholars with different views on the salient points of the doctrine, a great number of texts which had never been translated into Tibetan, and the texts by Tibetan scholars, which presented both correct and erroneous explanations. The abbot and the youth remained in seclusion for seven days whilst they discussed all these points. After this test, the wisdom of the youth shone as bright as the light of the sun and illuminated the darkness of doubt within the abbot. The abbot was very pleased with the knowledge

possessed by the youth and he praised him: “My nephew, the young *paṇḍita*, has mastered the whole knowledge: he represents the virtue of Tibet. He likes the Indian scholars such as Vasubhandu<sup>34</sup> and Candragomin<sup>35</sup> and he has acquired great knowledge without the help of teachers”. He thought to himself: “Would it not be desirable that many scholars could listen to his teachings?” and he immediately allowed him to go to take part in the debates at the great teaching colleges in Ü.

He would give the nectar of teaching to other scholars,  
just like the peacock erecting and spreading its tail  
when it hears the thunder resounding from amidst the clouds.

Before leaving for Ü, Bodong Chole Namgyal went into retreat, in Shekar Monastery for three months and in Samtenling Monastery in Gyam for seven months, in order to study the doctrinal treatises thoroughly. In particular, he studied *Prajñāpāramitā*, *vinaya*, *abhidharma*, *pramāṇa*.

At the age of twenty-three, the young scholar together with twenty-five gifted students, left for Ü from the Bodong E Monastery. On the way, he chatted with some scholars and wrote a poem called “Expectation” (“*yid kyi shing rta*”, lit. “the vehicle of mind”). Scholars travelling with him reproached him: “Somebody who wants to take part in the debates has to study very hard day and night. How is it that you intend to debate on thirteen volumes of the doctrine and yet we have never seen you study for even one morning? Please do not behave in this way”. He answered: “Do not worry, I can do everything very easily”.

To start with, he visited the important teaching college (*shedra*) of Tsethang.<sup>36</sup> Rumours had already spread that a descendant of Pang Lotsāba who had mastered meditation at birth, was gifted with great compassion and had possessed a deep knowledge of the doctrine from his youth was due to arrive. On the second day, he was invited to sit on a throne whilst he was surrounded by thousands of scholars. Totally lacking any fear or shyness and intrepid as a lion, he gave a speech, his voice resounding everywhere. He went on to explain the thirteen volumes on which he had planned to debate, i.e. *Pramāṇavārttika*,<sup>37</sup> *Prajñāpāramitā*,<sup>38</sup> *Vinayamūlasūtra*,<sup>39</sup> *Abhidharmasamuccaya*,<sup>40</sup> *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhaṅga*, *Uttaratantra*,<sup>41</sup> *rTsa shes*,<sup>42</sup> ‘*Jug pa*,<sup>43</sup> *bZhi brgya pa*,<sup>44</sup> *sNying po*,<sup>45</sup> *bDen gnyis rang ‘grel*,<sup>46</sup> *Bodhicaryāvatāra*<sup>47</sup> as well as *Rig gter*<sup>48</sup> and *dBu ma rgyan*,<sup>49</sup> altogether fifteen. He spent one day explaining the entire *Pramāṇavārttika*. Some of the scholars listening commented: “It is very difficult to explain this subject. This young teacher is the best this monastery has ever had”. Other listeners said: “You are very expert in the

whole knowledge, you are able to explain everything in great detail, but, this way, it will take you a long time and it will be very hard on you. So, please, explain more by summarizing”.

Afterwards he gave a perfect synthesis of every volume according to its nature.

He was invited to the great palace of Nedong by Gongma Dragpa Gyaltsen<sup>50</sup> where he was received with great honours. As Dragpa Gyaltsen knew that he was an excellent poet, he asked him to write a poem about the palace and its surroundings. Within a short while, the young scholar had complied and Dragpa Gyaltsen, overjoyed, paid him further respect. While he was residing in Tsethang he had discussions about the doctrine with numerous scholars and visited holy places such as Thandrug<sup>51</sup> and Densathel<sup>52</sup> in Yarlung. Then he proceeded to Kyishö and visited the great college of Sangphu Neuthog<sup>53</sup> where many scholars used to gather. The main teacher, Kongpo, together with fifteen of his disciples and holding incense welcomed him on the pass of Sangla. There sitting on the throne of Loden Sherab<sup>54</sup> he was acknowledged by all the scholars. At that time, the jewel of scholars of the Land of Snow, Yag Mipham,<sup>55</sup> happened to be in this monastery along with his disciples. On that occasion he said to the young scholar: “I am sure that you came here in order to take part in the debates on the various volumes of the doctrine, didn’t you? On which subject would you like to debate? Would you like to debate on the *Rig gter*?” Bodong Chole Namgyal answered: “I will take part in debates on fifteen volumes of the doctrine. I also would like to debate on the *Rig gter*”. “Yag Mipham, with great delight and respect, replied: “Wonderful! From the lineage of the great translators, an excellent scholar without a rival has arrived”. Then he praised him further, saying that he was able to debate on the same number of volumes as the years of his age. They debated some points of the *Rig gter* which prompted Yag Mipham to feel great reverence for the young scholar. The scholar could also very competently explain the above-mentioned volumes of the doctrine, in particular the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Some very old scholars commented that they had received the gift of a long life in order to be able to attend his teachings. It was at that time that he received one of his numerous names, Jigme Dragpa. He also visited the monasteries of Debachen and Chökhoring<sup>56</sup> where he preached on the same volumes of the doctrine as before. He went there with some scholars of Sangphu who used to assist him and these said that instruction from this teacher increased their understanding of the doctrine far more than anyone else was able to. He was the first person to introduce the custom of debating on more than ten volumes of the doctrine.

Since the lineage of Pang Lotsāba used to have close relations with the

abbots of the seat of Taglung Thangpa,<sup>57</sup> the young scholar visited Taglung via Phenyul<sup>58</sup> and met the Religious Lord Tashipeltseg (abbot of Taglung). The abbot eagerly commented: “You resemble Changchub Tsemo. This is a perfect lineage!”. At that time in Taglung there was a translator called Śākya Sangpo. When he heard that the nephew of the great translators (Pang Lotsāba, Changchub Tsemo and Dragpa Gyaltsen) had arrived at the monastery, he was overjoyed and invited Bodong Chole Namgyal to his residence. Due to his considerable age, he was unable to go outside to receive him, but, when the young scholar entered the house, he stood up in great respect. They had a pleasant conversation. During his stay in this monastery, the young scholar composed two works in verse called *sTag mo lus sbyin rtogs brjod* and *Byang chub sems dpa’ rtag tu ngu rtogs brjod*.<sup>59</sup> Scholars used to consider these works as unique compared to any other work in Tibet or India.

He proceeded from Ü to the great college of Shekar. Here he was ordained as a full monk (*gelong*) by Abbot Dragpa Gyaltsen, Lepön Rendaba Shonnu Lodrö<sup>60</sup> and Sanglob Lama Samrin.<sup>61</sup> There were many monks there, who adhered very strictly to their vows. Though he was already a master of the doctrine of the Buddha, he liked to listen to other teachers from whom he could hear the most famous treatises on the doctrine. From the renowned translator Namkha Sangpo he heard grammatical treatises such as the *Kalāpa* and the *Candrapa*.<sup>62</sup> Later, he succeeded Dragpa Gyaltsen on the lion throne in the Bodong E Monastery which had been blessed by having been headed by a series of scholars since the time of Pañchen Bumthragsumpa. Because of his superior learning in all branches of knowledge, he inherited this as a natural course and without pressure on the part of the appointing body. For three years, he continued to give teachings on various doctrinal subjects. Due to his strong faith in the deeds of the Buddha and as a thanksgiving he composed a great commentary on the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and some further commentaries on *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Pramāṇavārttika*, *dBu ma rgyan*, *bDen pa gnyis*, *Tshad ma rig gter* and he wrote numerous verses of praise as well. These latter were dedicated to the Bodong E Monastery, Buddha Śākyamuni, Atiśa,<sup>63</sup> emptiness, *yoga*, observance of vows etc. Next, invited by Situ Chökyi Rinchen,<sup>64</sup> he resided for one year in Shekar Monastery where he preached the doctrine. One hundred monks who achieved the degree of *kabchuba*<sup>65</sup> and numerous learned monks (*kabshiba*, *phartsheba*)<sup>66</sup> were blessed by his teachings. The king of Ngari Thrigyal Sönam De,<sup>67</sup> who was descended from the ancient Tibetan Religious Kings, invited him to the Gungthang Monastery.<sup>68</sup> With a flow of doctrines he satisfied all his listeners.

## 5) The study of the *tantra*: Plunging into the ocean of the *tantra* he studied them profoundly

The first entrance to the path of Vajrayāna is represented by empowerment (*wang*). The transmission line of empowerment in the four stages of the *tantra* which were very widespread at that time derived mainly from the great Sakyapa<sup>69</sup> and Butön Rinchendrub.<sup>70</sup> In fact Changchub Tsemo received empowerment from Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen and Butön Rinchendrub. The great translator Dragpa Gyaltsen received it from him. It was he who guided the young scholar Chole Namgyal to the *maṇḍala* of Action Tantra (*kriyā-tantra*), Performance Tantra (*caryā-tantra*), Yoga Tantra, Supreme Yoga Tantra (*anuttarayoga-tantra*) and satisfied him with the blessing of the empowerments.

Next he received empowerments on Dorje Phurba (Vajrakīla) from Khön Sönam Yönten according to the Sakya tradition. He listened to numerous dissertations on the *tantra* from Dragpa Gyaltsen and what could not be taught by him he learned from other teachers. He heard the tantric teachings of many lamas.<sup>71</sup> Rinpoche Dragpa was asked by one of the learned monks to listen to doctrines such as the *Ṣaḍāṅgayoga*<sup>72</sup> together with the young scholar. The teacher replied ironically: “He has practised meditation since he was born and every day shows signs of *samādhi*. Can you do the same?”

The teacher of the Path and Fruit system,<sup>73</sup> Lobsang Karmo, was a tantric master and a *mahāsiddha*. When the young scholar went to meet him he was in retreat at Sekharchung to practise meditation. He asked: “Please can you give me teachings on the whole tantric doctrines within twenty-three days?” The teacher of the Path and Fruit system replied: “I am delighted to teach you, but various *ḍākiṇī* could hinder us. Once before, I taught these doctrines within one month and both I and my disciple encountered obstacles, such as health problems”. The young scholar insisted and it was impossible to refuse. He was taught the entire tantric doctrines within twenty-three days. Despite the brevity of his involvement an extraordinary understanding of the Mahāmudrā<sup>74</sup> was born in him with nothing to cause him difficulties. Later he heard the Six Doctrines of the Shangpa Kagyü tradition stemming from Khandro Niguma.<sup>75</sup>

On one occasion, he was invited by Lhatsen Kyab<sup>76</sup> to take over the throne at Langkhor<sup>77</sup> Monastery, which had been the residence of Phadampa Sangye. Whilst reading the books of the Shije<sup>78</sup> doctrine, it seemed to him that it did not correspond to the original concepts of Buddhism. He doubted their authenticity and therefore decided to write a paper which would question the concepts of such a doctrine. As soon as he started the first

pages he began to have many bad omens. He thought that these were deterrents brought about by the jealousy of a powerful protector of this tradition. He performed *dogpa* rituals<sup>79</sup> in an effort to avert them, but the problems intensified. His neck became swollen and he could hardly speak. He started to think that maybe he was mistaken in refuting this doctrine and he set out to study all the relevant volumes in great detail in order to understand the thoughts of Phadampa Sangye. Finally, he realized that this doctrine fitted perfectly with some hidden meaning of the *sūtra* and the *tantra* and thus relinquished his plan. Whereupon he immediately recovered from his sickness. He went to the main temple of the Langkhor Monastery in order to ask for forgiveness and, joining the palms of his hands in great faith in front of the statue of Phadampa Sangye, he burst into tears.

### **6) Through the study of most of the sciences of this world, and beyond, he became a Master of Knowledge**

Since he was possessed with a very rare expertise he mastered a great number of disciplines. He was expert at athletic activities such as horseriding, jumping and wrestling. He was able to read and write in numerous languages such as Lentsha, Bhadrana, Nagara, Kashmiri, Nepali, Mongolian and was expert at various forms of written Tibetan. Once, an expert in calligraphy wished to compete with him in this subject, but upon seeing a short text written by the young scholars, the daring challenger was awestruck and gave up. He could also keep in his mind all skills concerning worldly things derived from the *sūtra*. He mastered the art of analysis and interpretation of external and interior manifestations derived from the doctrines of the *sūtra* and the *tantra*: analysis of the human body, analysis of birth and death, analysis of the twelve links of dependent origination, analysis of sun, moon, planets, stars, shooting stars, clouds, lightening, rainbows, the sound of thunder, wind, rain, the colours of sunrise and sunset, mirages. He was also able to divine and avert unauspicious signs in accordance with the relevant texts of the *sūtra* and the *tantra*, such as those of Śāntideva and Maitreya.

Studying the five major sciences, he dedicated himself first of all to numerous treatises on grammar such as *Kalāpa* and *Candrapa*. Since these works, composed by ancient scholars in ancient times, were complicated and not clearly subdivided, it took him a great deal of time to study them. He wrote one treaty on this subject which simplified studies of the works and thereby greatly benefitted the doctrine and the disciples of future generations.

As an expert in numerous languages, he studied thoroughly the *sūtra* and the *tantra* and relevant commentaries. He revised the translations of the *rDo rje 'phreng ba*<sup>80</sup> and *dPal yang dag par sbyor ba*<sup>81</sup> and made new ones. In particular he translated very accurately some difficult passages of the doctrine which could not be properly dealt with by former translators. He managed to complete this work easily without any great effort.

Later when he proceeded to Nyangtö<sup>82</sup> he was invited to Tsechen<sup>83</sup> by its religious lord, who welcomed him with great respect and asked him some questions on the doctrine. In particular he requested the young scholar to translate a text of ritual formulas (*mantra*) of Vajrapāṇi into Tibetan. Two Indian scholars had already been asked to carry out this work, but had been unsuccessful. Bodong Chole Namgyal agreed saying: “I can do this, without any major difficulty”. In the time between two cups of tea while discussions were in course, he managed to complete the work. Greatly surprised, the lord of Tsechen praised him: “Up to now even Indian *paṇḍita* could not translate this work. You managed to do it in a moment”. This is just an example to show how skilfully and quickly he was able to translate.

Chole Namgyal had also a great mastery of basic non-Buddhist traditions of thought such as the *Veda*, the Vaiśeṣika, the Sāṃkhya and the Mīmāṃsā.<sup>84</sup>

He was a supreme master of epistemology having a perfect knowledge of *Pramāṇasamuccaya* by Dignāga and the Seven Treatises on *pramāṇa* by Dharmakīrti and the relevant commentaries. This enabled him to defeat all Buddhists and non-Buddhists who debated with him.

Art and crafts<sup>85</sup> which were an important part of knowledge were subdivided into two branches: major art and common crafts. Bodong Chole Namgyal was very knowledgeable about the texts on this topic and he was very expert in making symbols of body, speech and mind using a variety of techniques: these included statues created by carving or by pouring melted metal into a clay mould. In particular he mastered particularly the skill of painting, preparing both the design and the measurements as well as doing the painting itself. He produced wonderful paintings of the Buddha, Sarasvatī etc. in the Indian style as well as monkeys playing, peacocks singing in the trees, pigeons flying in the sky according to the Chinese style. It was difficult to conceive that anybody, even after having studied for a lifetime could achieve such results.

He became an expert in medical science, too. On this subject he studied numerous basic texts belonging to the Indian and the Tibetan medical traditions. He mastered all the main principles of this subject and was very expert at making diagnoses by means of examination, questioning and pulsology. He knew about medicines, both those to be administered

internally and those for external physical application. At that time most Tibetan doctors had only a superficial knowledge of the text of the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasāmhita*.<sup>86</sup> They used to read it but they were not able to understand it properly. On the basis of this book he, on the other hand, was able to acquire great expertise in the regard to the various medicines deriving from plants, flowers, fruits, sap and animals, to know where these could be obtained and the effects they produced. He could tell in great detail where the medicinal plants grew. He knew, for example, which roots, stems, leaves, flowers and fruits could be found in the south, in the country called Odebhesha. Therefore, he became the most precious of all doctors. He mastered also metrics<sup>87</sup> by studying the relevant basic texts such as the *Chandoratnakāra*<sup>88</sup> and he composed some hymns to the gods in accordance with its principles.

In his youth he had mastered poetry. There are scholars who like to discuss poetry and yet have great difficulty in composing it themselves. He was extraordinarily gifted in both theory and composition: according to the subdivision in “main body” and “ornament”;<sup>89</sup> the further subdivision of the “ornament” in ornament by meaning, by sound and by riddle etc. When he dedicated himself to great poetic works such as the *Kāvyaḍarśa* by Daṇḍin,<sup>90</sup> *Jātakamālā* by Āryaśūra,<sup>91</sup> the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* by the great poet Kṣemendra,<sup>92</sup> the *Megadhūta* by Kālidāsa,<sup>93</sup> he could understand and keep them in mind very easily. He composed detailed notes on the *Megadhūta*, requested by the Religious Lord Namgyal Dragpa,<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, he composed numerous poems on the former lives of the Buddha, in praise of holy places, in praise of scholars and so on. He satisfied all the wishes of learned people who had great faith in him.

He was also very learned in the science of synonyms and explanation of words on the basis of relevant texts such as the *Amarakośa*<sup>95</sup> and the *sNa tshogs gsal ba*. This made him an expert on epithets and synonyms concerning *buddha*, *bodhisattva*, *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, gods and demons, birds, human beings, protectors of the cardinal directions, planets, stars, clouds, trees, flowers, fruits, the four elements, precious things, medicines, time, king and ministers, man and woman, boy and girl, androgynous beings, market, soldiers and troops, weapons, war, all kinds of animals, cycle of rebirth and much more.

He studied very thoroughly the basic texts of dance and dramatic performance such as *Bha ra ta*, *Klu rab tu dga' ba*, *gZugs kyi snye ma*.<sup>96</sup> Accordingly he mastered all the skills of recitation, body postures and sound of voice. He himself composed two works on dramatic performance, called *dByangs can gyi mgul rgyan* and *Rol snyed ma'i zlos gar*, which had great success among scholars and even among children. He was also very



learned in astronomy and astrology according to the *Kalacakratantra*,<sup>97</sup> and an expert in the relevant calculations. He could establish the time of the rising and setting of sun and moon, the appearance and disappearance of comets, the subdivision of time according to sun, moon and the constellations of the ecliptic (*gyukar*),<sup>98</sup> the eclipses of sun and moon.

## **7) He became a perfect monk by observing the rules and accumulating merits**

If one wants to enter the path of liberation without hindrance, one has to follow all moral training according to the *vinaya*. That is to say that in order to climb the high summit of the doctrine of Buddha, the first step is the act of becoming a monk and observing all the precious rules. Chole Namgyal, therefore, gave up any interest in precious things such as gold, silver, silk and brocade clothing. He used to dress very simply in a monk's habit. When he was invited to visit by some of his patrons, instead of accepting the comfortable and prestigious seat they had prepared for him, he used to lay his cloak on the floor and would sit on that to give his lecture. He enjoyed behaving like an apotheosis of virtue, even in regard to the smallest detail and the devotees who sat around him followed his example. It is reported that a pleasant fragrance of sandalwood enveloped him and the scent also emanated from anything with which he had been in contact.

Whilst residing at Shekar, he taught the monks that they must follow the moral training of the *vinaya*. Since he insisted upon a strict observance of the rules, someone asked him: "This area is very cold. A little bit of *chang*<sup>99</sup> is like the nectar of the gods. According to Mahāyāna principles, the inner taming of the mind is more important than the exterior observance of regulations. As you are the master of all doctrines of Buddha, would you mind drinking a little *chang* in a bowl of gold and see."<sup>100</sup> This would be a blessing for all followers". Somebody else said: "The former abbots, masters of knowledge and meditation, used to dress in precious clothing and enjoyed gold and silver objects, but our great abbot dresses in a very simple way and eats common food in damaged crockery". Chole Namgyal did not care at all about these comments. He thought that, in such a degenerate age, if one behaved as a *bodhisattva* one had to use the means of Vajrayāna. If one knew all the reasons for saṃsāric suffering, one could not act all on one's own. It was necessary that the relevant intention be awakened and that one became a monk in order to obtain liberation and complete enlightenment. This is the very essence of becoming a monk. The very essence of the concept of ordination (*rabchung*) is the freedom from

worldly matters and even if it entails sacrificing one's life one should not perform sinful deeds. On the other hand, if one gives up food and clothing and remains naked, this state is closely related to misery and sin. So, one must reject ascetic practices which create impediments for body and life. What should be done instead? One has to be free from both extremes concerning the sensual pleasures of food, clothing and the like and avoid any sinful deed. For example, if someone steals delicious food from you, your mind should refrain from any attachment to it and from any hatred towards that person. If such emotions are provoked for one moment, they must be rejected immediately.

When someone criticized him groundlessly, Chole Namgyal was never affected by any feeling of wrath. Instead he displayed great compassion. When he was poisoned on three occasions at the hand of evil-minded people and he suffered a great deal because of it, he just prayed to Avalokiteśvara, and practised deep meditation. After Avalokiteśvara had appeared to him in a vision, he saw how the sickness was transformed into a multicoloured ray of light and evaporated from his thumb. Then a snake wound itself around the arm of Avalokiteśvara, sucked it completely freeing him from the illness. The two people who had poisoned him appeared, standing in front of him in great shame. Later, when he saw these two people in reality, he was overwhelmed by great compassion for them. While he was residing at the hermitage of Chöding,<sup>101</sup> robbers and thieves stole from the monastery on several occasions. His mind was not shaken by these events. Some of his assistants and the great Taglung Thangpa,<sup>102</sup> greatly worried, asked him to move somewhere else. He simply replied that, for the practice of Mahāyāna, equanimity of mind and concentration were the most important things. Then they requested him to perform rituals against the robbers. His reaction was merely to joke and threaten the robbers, without hatred, that if they came again he would invoke his protector Damchen Gyatsho<sup>103</sup> to help him.

After having crossed the threshold of the *tantra*, the great scholar also mastered all precepts and the training of Vajrayāna. Asaṅga<sup>104</sup> taught that there are four doors which lead to moral fall: ignorance, disrespect, idleness, excess of delusion. A person seeking happiness has to rigorously avoid these portals.

The first door to moral downfall is ignorance. That is to say, not knowing how sins are committed and how they can be avoided. In the Land of Snow some people think to be enough just to repeat ritual formulas (*mantra*), such as *samaya*<sup>105</sup> one hundred thousand times. They consider it too hard to practise all the teachings of the *tantra*. Some people confuse elements of instruction between the upper *tantra* and the lower *tantra*. In

brief, these people are too tired to study and to understand the various precepts and doctrines of the four classes of *tantra*. Their mode of study recalls a blind man proceeding along the edge of a precipice. The great scholar, possessed with great devotion and blessings from the Buddhas, achieved the extraordinary wisdom of omniscience concerning the ocean of the *sūtra* and the *tantra*. He became therefore the best of all knowledge-holders (*rindzin*).

The second door to moral downfall is disrespect towards lama, friends and doctrinal instructions. When the great scholar was born, the almighty lamp of the Buddhist faith was lit simultaneously. The greatest faith immediately rose within him, whenever he remembered even small parts of the deeds of the Buddha. He used to pray with great faith particularly in front of the statue of Phagpawati of Kyirong,<sup>106</sup> Dampa Sangye of Langkhor,<sup>107</sup> Avalokiteśvara of the Bodong E Monastery. He considered faith as the essence of prayer. In particular, he had received all teachings of the holy doctrine through the kindness of the Great Translator Dragpa Gyaltsen. Therefore, he always remembered the benefit he had received from his teacher and never violated his injunctions. Having little concern for food and clothing, he was satisfied with very simple food such as *tsampa*. Whenever he was reproached by his lama, he did not react by losing his faith in him as would normally have happened in a youth of his age. Instead he thought that the reproach came from the heart of his teacher and was a sign of great kindness and concern. When he was about to take the vow of fully ordained monk, he decided to request that Rendaba Shönnu Lodrö,<sup>108</sup> the great scholar, be one of his teachers. Somebody reported that, without permission from Dragpa Gyaltsen, Chole Namgyal had established *dharma* relationships with others. On the basis of this account, Dragpa Gyaltsen thought that he had already been instructed in the teaching tradition of Rendaba and that this was a great fault on his part.<sup>109</sup> Chole Namgyal, however, wondered how it could be believed that he had established *dharma* relationships with others without having asked the permission of the lama and he supposed that somebody must have reported something incorrectly. He decided, therefore, that, as soon as he had the chance, he would clear any doubt in the mind of his lama. When he heard that Rendaba had come to visit Dragpa Gyaltsen, he considered this a suitable occasion. Dragpa Gyaltsen told Chole Namgyal to welcome Rendaba with incense upon his arrival. But this latter suggested that somebody else should be sent and that he preferred to stay and wait with him. Rendaba when he arrived, prostrated himself as a mark of great respect for Dragpa Gyaltsen. Chole Namgyal received only a blessing by touching foreheads. When Dragpa Gyaltsen saw this, he realized that the account he

had received was not reliable and he gladly told Chole Namgyal that this was a good chance to request Rendaba to act as his master of ritual. From that time on, he always followed the instruction of Dragpa Gyaltshen and became a precious pupil in his eyes. He established *dharma* relations with other holy lamas and showed great devotion. He composed religious verses, called '*Dod pa 'jo ba*, in praise of Rendaba.

When he read the autobiographies of some of the holy lamas great faith rose in him on account of the great deeds they performed for the benefit of their followers. Even if he considered some elements as contradicting the principles of the holy doctrine, he never criticized them altogether. Instead he analyzed those points in great detail before giving his comments on them. Furthermore, he could clearly discern between what he considered valid and what needed to be criticized. He was extremely tolerant and his faith was far removed from both extremes. In his great faith he never showed disrespect towards his lama or others.

The third door to moral downfall can be avoided by refraining from idleness. The great scholar studied and practised the *tripitaka*<sup>110</sup> and the four classes of *tantra* day and night, without distracting his mind. He rejected all disturbances as though he were merely spitting them out.

The fourth door to moral downfall is the excess of delusions, which can be avoided by practising meditation. Needless to say Chole Namgyal was a master of Mahāyāna. Already when he was young, and still residing with his mother, he was aware that he had to reject any thought which produced delusion. So, he used to meditate on the Supreme Yoga Tantra and he became a master of the *maṇḍala* of Body, Speech and Mind of Vajrasattva. He had visions of "heroes" (*pawo*) and *yoginī* and was blessed by them. He received precious help from his protectors as well.

## **8) How he treated the eight worldly concerns with equanimity**

There are eight worldly concerns: gain and loss, fame and infamy, praise and slander, happiness and misery. The great scholar used to treat them with equanimity. Even though he had gained great wealth like Vaiśravaṇa<sup>111</sup> no feeling of pleasure arose in him. Should he lose something precious, he would not be affected by any feeling of sadness. At that time, great wealth and honours were often heaped upon holy men. However, though the great scholar was offered the wealth and honour which were his due by the local population, while he was residing at Bodong, Langkhor, Shekar, Gungthang, Gyam, Phure it was of no interest to him. Once an abbot called Döndrubpel asked him: "Can you tell me the reason why you built a

monastery in Pelthang?”<sup>112</sup> he replied: “The *maṇḍala* of our landscape<sup>113</sup> is filled with monasteries and lamas supported by wealthy patrons. As I consider this a hindrance to followers of religion, I prefer to establish my residence in a remote place”. These words sounded very reasonable.

His disciples and his retinue were also treated in like manner, from the holy scholars and *mahāsiddha* to the lowly man. Once, a lama called Düldzin Ngawang said: “Some people in your retinue behave very rudely, so I suggest that you keep your distance from them and, instead remain close to those who are pure, such as the scholars Khedrub Sangye Palden and Changsem Gyaltsen Könchog. Later he commented on it saying: ‘No matter what people do, I am not affected by any impurity’. When Düldzin Ngawang heard this, he realized that the mind of the great lama was beyond conventional judgements. An even stronger faith was born in him and he thought that the followers themselves should keep better control of their own attitudes”. This was an example of the equanimity with which he was able to treat his retinue.

He was never concerned with material belongings, precious or worthless, great or small, and anybody could share his property. Those who lived close to him in particular used to take everything without the slightest fear. He had towards his own property the same detached attitude as he had towards the dry grass at the crossroads. Furthermore, on one occasion someone happened to steal gold belonging to him, there was an attempt by some of his retinue to punish the thief in accordance to the civil law. However the great scholar protected the thief in many ways. Once, a person called Künsang had stolen a lot of gold. Most people of Chöding were very upset and punished him, even trying to kill him. The scholar, with great compassion, saved his life. This shows how his infinite compassion was extended towards even the most miserable people.

His attitude towards the rich offerings made to him by his people was like that of a man both blind and deaf. He was unwilling to either see or to hear anything of it. Once, in the monastery of Ngönga,<sup>114</sup> a *maṇḍal*<sup>115</sup> was offered to the statue of Buddha. Someone added an offering of some earrings of precious pearls to the *maṇḍal*. After concluding the ceremony, the great scholar went back to his house of meditation having shown no particular interest in the pearl earrings and merely commenting that for the *maṇḍal*, an offering whether it be grain or pearls was one and the same. From his behaviour it can be concluded that he treated gain and loss impartially.

The great scholar received apt recognition. He was revered and praised by learned people, saints, spiritual masters, as well as kings, ministers and subjects. Yet, unlike a more worldly person, he attached scant importance to the homage shown to him. It did not therefore become a hindrance to his

study of the holy doctrine and his practice of meditation. When he took an oath to pray and meditate day and night, even the power of a god like Viṣṇu could not distract his mind. The encumbrance of substantial offerings from rich patrons could not bind him. All those around him could bear witness to that.

Even when he suffered some serious illnesses he was able to keep his mind in peace. While he was staying in Northern Latö, he suffered of a bad haemorrhage from the nose which also developed into a disease of the pneuma (*lung*).<sup>116</sup> He was so weak that, if he stood up, he would immediately fall. Even in such a condition he persisted in his thought of benefitting all living beings, in his prayers and meditation. When he performed his morning prostrations, some people of his retinue, considering the weakness of his body, requested him to: “Please, prostrate only with your mind”. He replied: “If I throw my body to the ground, it has some meaning...”. Once, while prostrating, he collapsed to the ground and was unable to speak. After a while he stood up and said: “This is a good sign, my nose bleed will stop very soon”. Another time when some disputes occurred in Southern Rulag<sup>117</sup> between the lord and his retinue, the great scholar acted as arbitrator and both parties accepted his wise words. Once, having accepted invitations to visit certain places he suffered from a problem with his foot on the evening prior to his departure. He said: “This is not a good sign at this time. First I must cure my foot and then I will be able to dedicate myself to the benefit of living beings”. He remained in Chöding until his foot had healed. Not long after he had recovered from this illness he went to Southern Latö at the wish of the lord and his retinue. Just after his arrival at the monastery of Phure, he suffered from another nose bleed which lasted for nine days. The ground around him was red with blood. His retinue was desperate. On the eighth day, he was lying with his secretary Könchog Gyaltshen<sup>118</sup> in the garden of the monastery and looking up at the sky when he said to Könchog Gyaltshen: “Have you seen the pretty turquoise girl?”. The secretary answered: “No, I haven’t”. “I saw a vision of a pretty turquoise girl. She told me that the sickness was just a deception of the senses, I believe that she was an incarnation of Tārā, so this illness is not a serious matter”. That night his nose stopped bleeding and he returned to health without taking any medicines. All this shows that, even when he was sick, Chole Namgyal persisted in his dedication to others and did not care for himself. His tutelary deity (*yidam*) was always with him and he had the good fortune to hear her words. Furthermore, if he became sick while meditating, writing or being engaged in other activities, he never manifested signs of his suffering and instead looked as though he were drinking the nectar of the gods.

He was never attracted by worldly fame. Whenever anybody in his retinue relayed to him the tributes which had been heard, he was totally unreceptive from the depths of his mind. Once, he was ordered by Dragpa Gyaltsen of Nedong<sup>119</sup> to go there. Anybody else would have behaved like the birds longing for rain when they hear the sound of thunder. Instead the great scholar replied by merely sending a letter in which he explained that he would have liked to go to Ü to pray and to make offerings to Jobo Śākya<sup>120</sup> as well as to meet the great lord, but that he had to complete the construction of a monastery and finish some texts he was writing. So, he apologized for not being able to go. Later, when somebody asked the teacher Shiba Lodrö: “Which scholar is gifted with the broadest mind?”, he was told: “Bodong Chögyal, because, even when he was invited by the lord of Nedong, he showed no attachment to the idea. Anybody else who had received even the smallest hint would have gone there immediately”. Once, a great scholar called Dragpa Chungne sent a letter containing many verses of praise and an invitation to visit. Chole Namgyal replied only to the effect that if he had the chance he would go in the future. He was not flattered by the verses. He was deaf to all tributes except for those dedicated to the benefit of the holy doctrine.

Once, while he was residing at Chöding with his retinue, some of the army from Surtsho<sup>121</sup> passed through the monastery. They robbed and insulted the monks. Some of the monks reported this situation and wanted to fight. Chole Namgyal replied: “We cannot commit any belligerent action, let them take whatever they need”. This behaviour shows that in such circumstances he felt as though he were giving up no more than a small needle.

Once he ordered several hundred monks of Shekar and Dzongka<sup>122</sup> to construct a channel in Pemo Ganden. The monks worked very hard and the great scholar often went with his little tent to the construction site to direct and organize the work. One day, when the monks had gone to have their mid-morning food, a flood washed away the whole construction. The monks were upset by the destruction of their work which had cost the monks and the great scholar a lot of effort. However, he told them: “*Samsāra* is impermanent, so it is obvious that this also is impermanent. Such things are just like dreams and teach us all to dedicate ourselves to meditation in retreat in order to attain holiness through religious devotion”.

He treated praise and blame with equanimity. Even if someone came before him each day with praises, he showed no particular pleasure. If evil people blamed him either to his face or behind his back, he retained a peaceful mind and did not react. If all religious scholars had behaved in such a way, this would have been an age of good fortune. Since the

behaviour of the great scholar was far removed from worldly convention, some in his retinue critically commented: “The great lord knows nothing of worldly behaviour”.

Once, when he had proceeded to the region of Shang,<sup>123</sup> he was invited to Tagnag. There he was requested to reside for some time, but he did not stay. He went instead to Segshing at the invitation of Namgyal Lingpa.<sup>124</sup> There he and his retinue faced some hardship. The secretary commented: “Our Rinpoche must have had some conflicts with butter and meat. From affluent Tagnag we came here to this miserable country”. In fact, the great scholar was very familiar with worldly conduct, but never behaved accordingly.

### **9) How he elevated the precious doctrine by debating**

There are three fundamental activities of a scholar: teaching, debating and composing.

The Great Scholar Chole Namgyal greatly benefitted the holy doctrine by practising these three activities as follows:

In early times Padmasambhava ordered the Twelve Tenma goddesses,<sup>125</sup> to defend the Pure Land (Tibet) against sustainers of non-Buddhist thought (*mutegpa*). This was a great blessing for Tibet. Still, in the case that debates with great teachers of non-Buddhist traditions took place, a scholar had to master not only logic but also the whole ocean of holy doctrines. Otherwise, he could have been tempted into non-Buddhist thought.

The great scholar was very strong in debate. He had a perfect mastery of all treatises on the holy doctrine, the high gods were always with him, he could compose his mind in perfect rest for meditation and he possessed the faculty of prescience. Once, the great lord of Southern Rulag, Lhatsen Kyab, invited the famous scholar Yag Mipham,<sup>126</sup> who was a great master of philosophy, together with his disciples, to be his guests. At that time the great scholar Chole Namgyal was residing in a hermitage close to Shekar where he spent his time writing in great serenity. King Lhatsen Kyab sent a message saying: “The leading scholar of our Land of Kailasa, Yag Mipham, is here and has expressed his desire of entering into a debate with your great abbot. He also requested the necessary arrangements be made. Would you dare to take part in such a debate? If so, this would give me great happiness”. Chole Namgyal replied: “Of course. This will not be difficult for me. I will follow your wish”. The king rejoiced. A prominent disciple of the great scholar, named Thugchepel, greatly worried when he heard that his teacher had agreed, went to meet him and respectfully said: “I heard that



you will take part in a debate with Yag Mipham. I believe that your mastery of all the treatises of the holy doctrine is such that nobody can compete even to a small degree with your knowledge. But, these days, some people attracted by the words, spend all their lives acquiring great expertise in all rhetorical skills. So, please, postpone this debate”. The great scholar told his disciple: “I have heard of Yag Mipham’s work. If a debate aims at discussing doctrinal treatises, the very Buddhist doctrine is witness itself and I will win the debate, so I have no fear of being defeated in this sacred debate which is so very different from all worldly debates”. The disciple was very pleased with this reply and his mind was placed at ease.

The scholars, like the sun and the moon, met in the main temple of Shekar, close to the palace of the king. In the middle was the lion throne surmounted by a canopy as beautiful as the wings of a peacock. On it was the master of the doctrine, Chole Namgyal, “Victorious In All Directions”. Toward the right hand pillar, there was the throne where the great preacher of the doctrine, Yag, was sitting. To the left was the throne of the king. Around them a crowd of scholars was witnessing and evaluating the debate.

To commence, the king showing great respect, joined his palms and touched his own forehead to the forehead of the scholars. He said: “Two great *paṇḍita*, like sun and moon, meet here to discuss the holy doctrine. This is a great blessing for the doctrine and I hope it will satisfy all the expectations of their followers. The wish is that the debate be kept within the bounds of the subject”. Then Chole Namgyal said to Yag Mipham: “Do you agree with all the works you composed on the *Prajñāpāramitā*?”. Yag Mipham replied: “All the while I have not attained Buddhahood, my wisdom is developing every single moment so I cannot promise to agree with every word I wrote in the past”. Chole Namgyal replied: “In that case, if the later thought rejects the former one, the disciples of your teaching tradition have no fundamental principle to hold on to. Your teaching tradition would have no disciple. In fact if you do not agree with your own treatises your subsequent thought does not agree with the former thought, so that after you die no disciple will be able to succeed you in the teaching tradition”. Yag Mipham thought: “Now in front of this scholar I have had to relinquish my works which are the result of a lifetime of efforts. I really think that he is the supreme lord of the doctrine”.

Chole Namgyal asked: “According to the teaching tradition of the Five Treatises of Maitreya, *śrāvaka*<sup>127</sup> and *pratyekabuddha*<sup>128</sup> - in the Hīnayāna tradition - really understand the concept of selflessness of phenomena (*nairātmya*)?”.<sup>129</sup> Yag Mipham answered: “Yes, they do”. Chole Namgyal refuted: “This knowable thing, this matter...”. Yag Mipham immediately interrupted: “What does ‘this’ mean in your sentence? Does ‘this’ indicate



25. Thangka with the spiritual masters of the Sakyapa and the Bodongpa tradition. In the right corner Tashi Ömbar, the protector of the Bodongpa tradition, is represented together with Palden Lhamo and Mahakala.

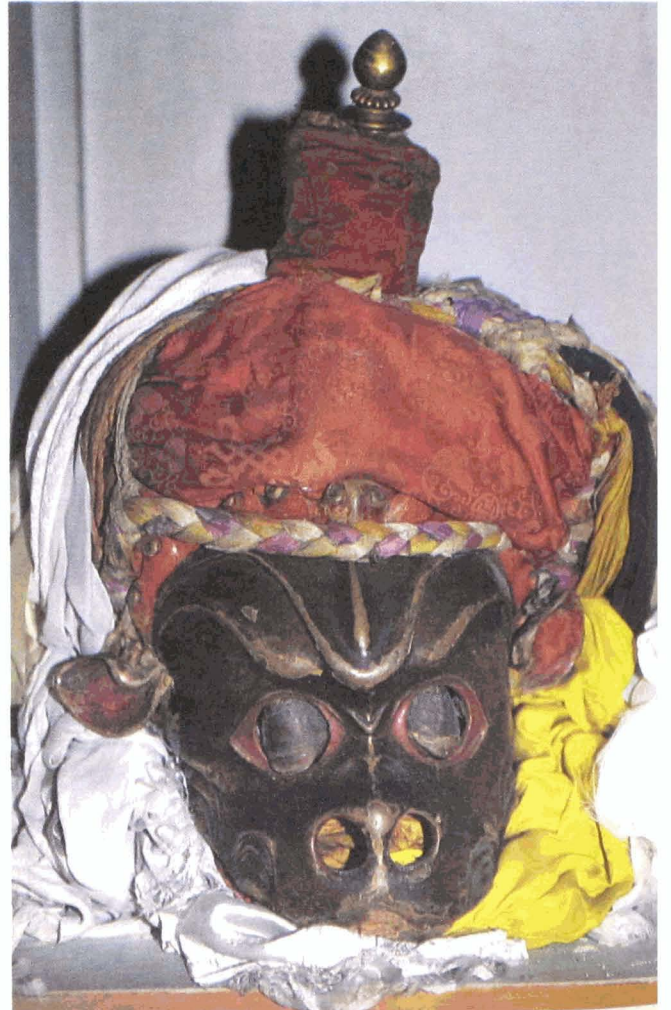


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26. The shrine of Tashi Ömbar among the ruins of Porong Pemo Chöding.

27. Little statue of Bodong Chole Namgyal kept at Porong Pemo Chöding.

28. The monkey-shaped mask of Tashi Ömbar traditionally used during ritual dances. At present kept at Porong Pema Chöling, Kathmandu.

29. The Lords of Southern Latö, patrons of the Chole Namgyal and his predecessors, resided on the hill of Shekar. The ruins of their palace can still be seen.

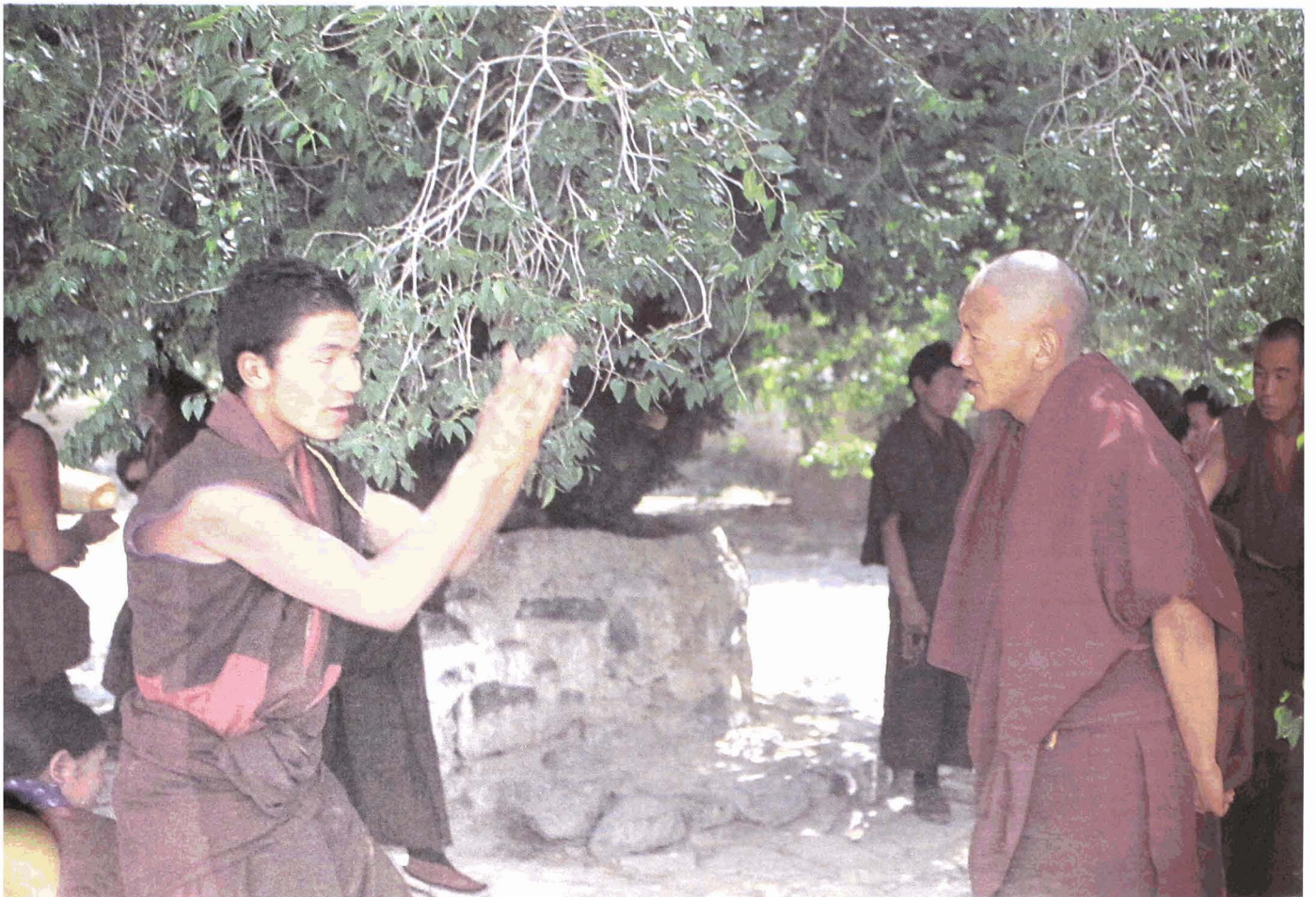
30. The Great Translator Dragpa Gyaltsen, uncle and teacher of Bodong Chole Namgyal, founded in 1385 A.D. the Shekar Monastery which was subsequently headed by Chole Namgyal himself.





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31. Ngamring was the seat of the Lords of Northern Latö where Chole Namgyal participated in various ritual debates.

32. The art of debate is still practised today in Tibetan monasteries.

33. Jobo Yullha. The sacred ancestral mountain protecting the area of Dzonka, the ancient Gungthang.

34. Dzonka Chöde was founded by Dragpa Gyaltshen with the patronage of the King of Gungthang.

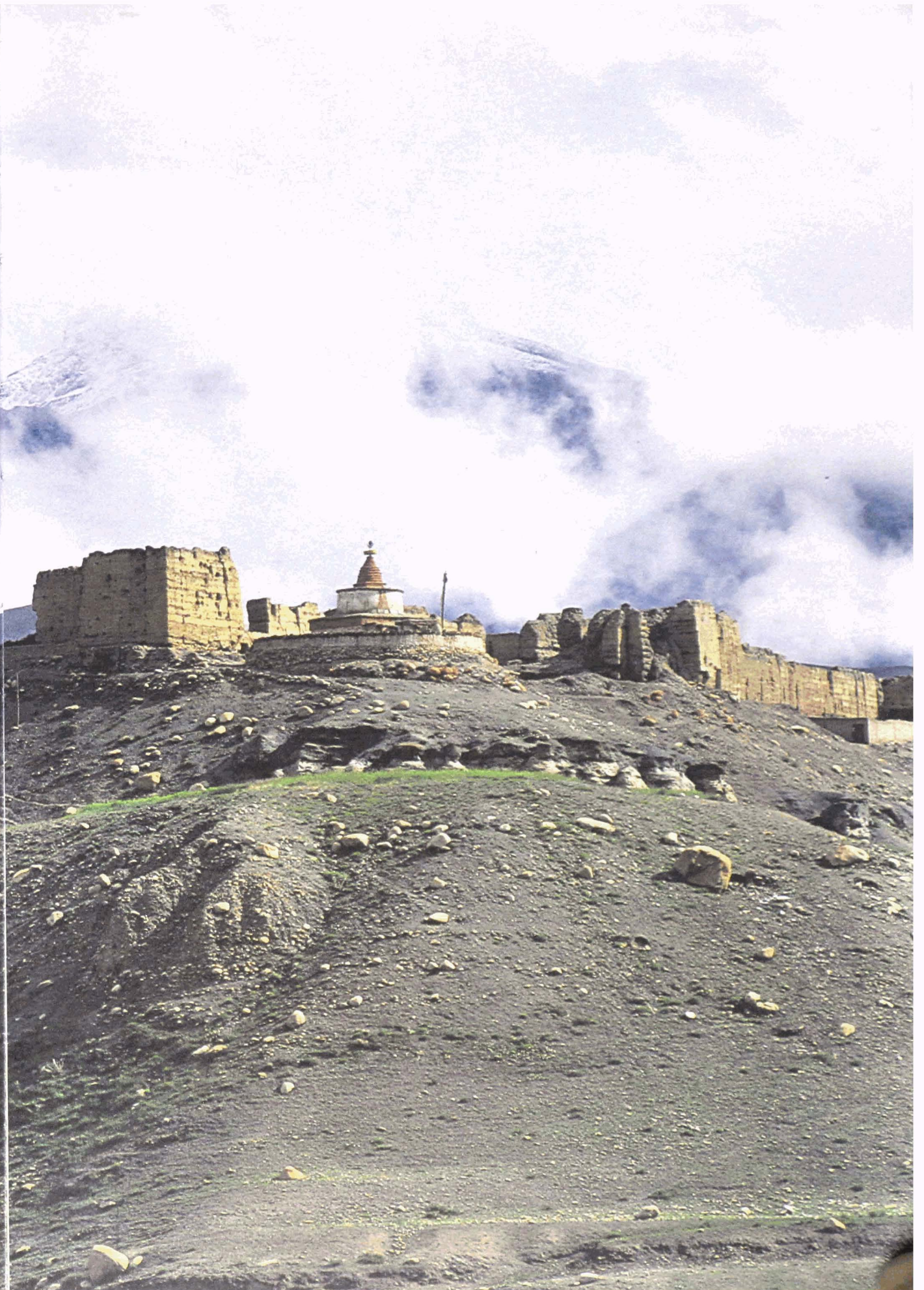
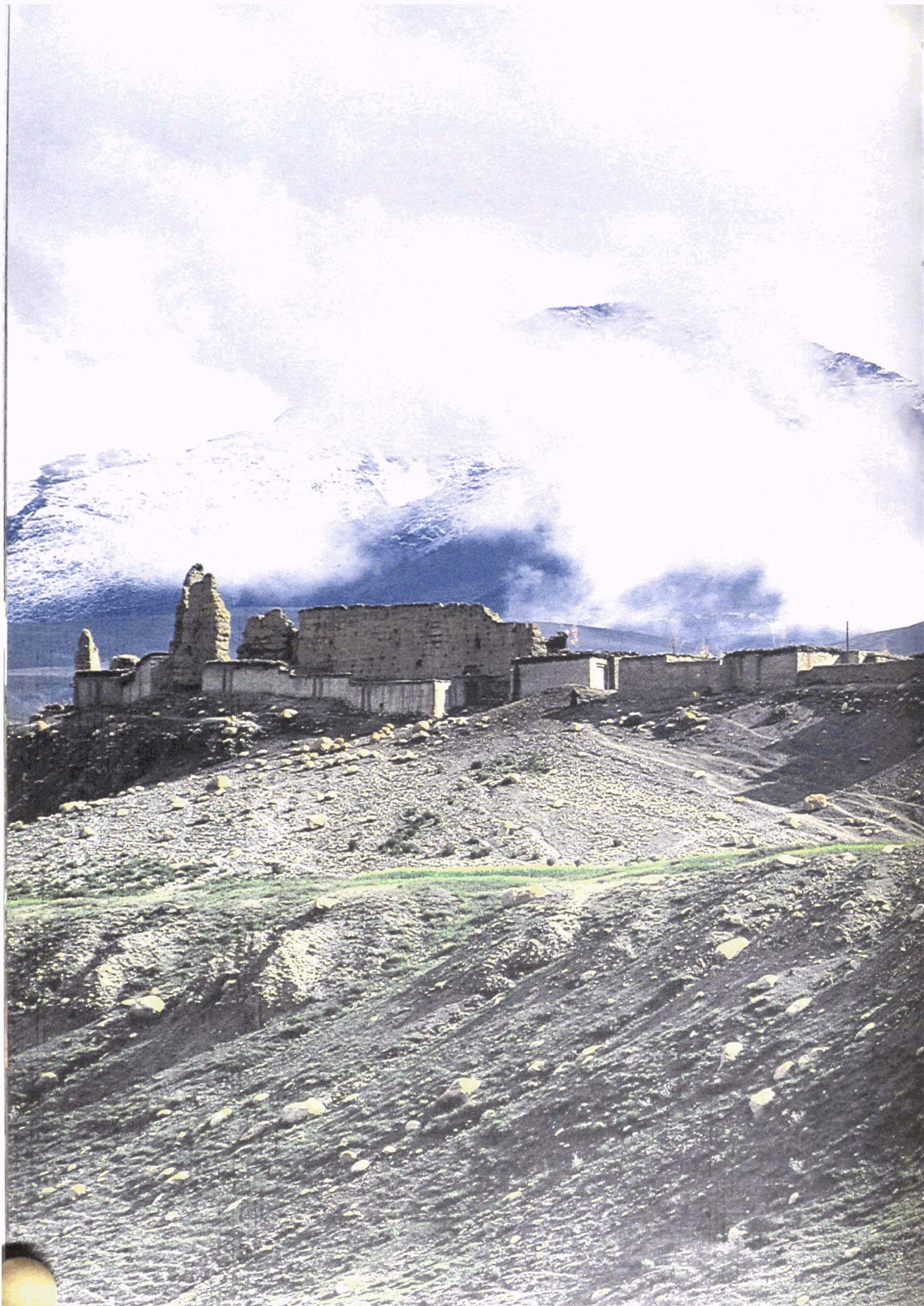
35 (overleaf). The Kings of Gungthang descendants of the ancient Kings of Tibet, were great patrons of Chole Namgyal. The ruins of the ancient royal palace can still be seen in Dzonka.



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36. The goddess Vajravārāhī (also Vajrayoginī) in a recent painting at Samding.

37. Chökyi Drönme, Princess of Gungthang, was one of the main disciples of Chole Namgyal and was considered an incarnation of the tantric goddess Vajravārāhī (Dorje Phamo). She founded the female reincarnation line of the Samding Dorje Phamo. This is a recent painting, to be seen in the Samding Monastery.

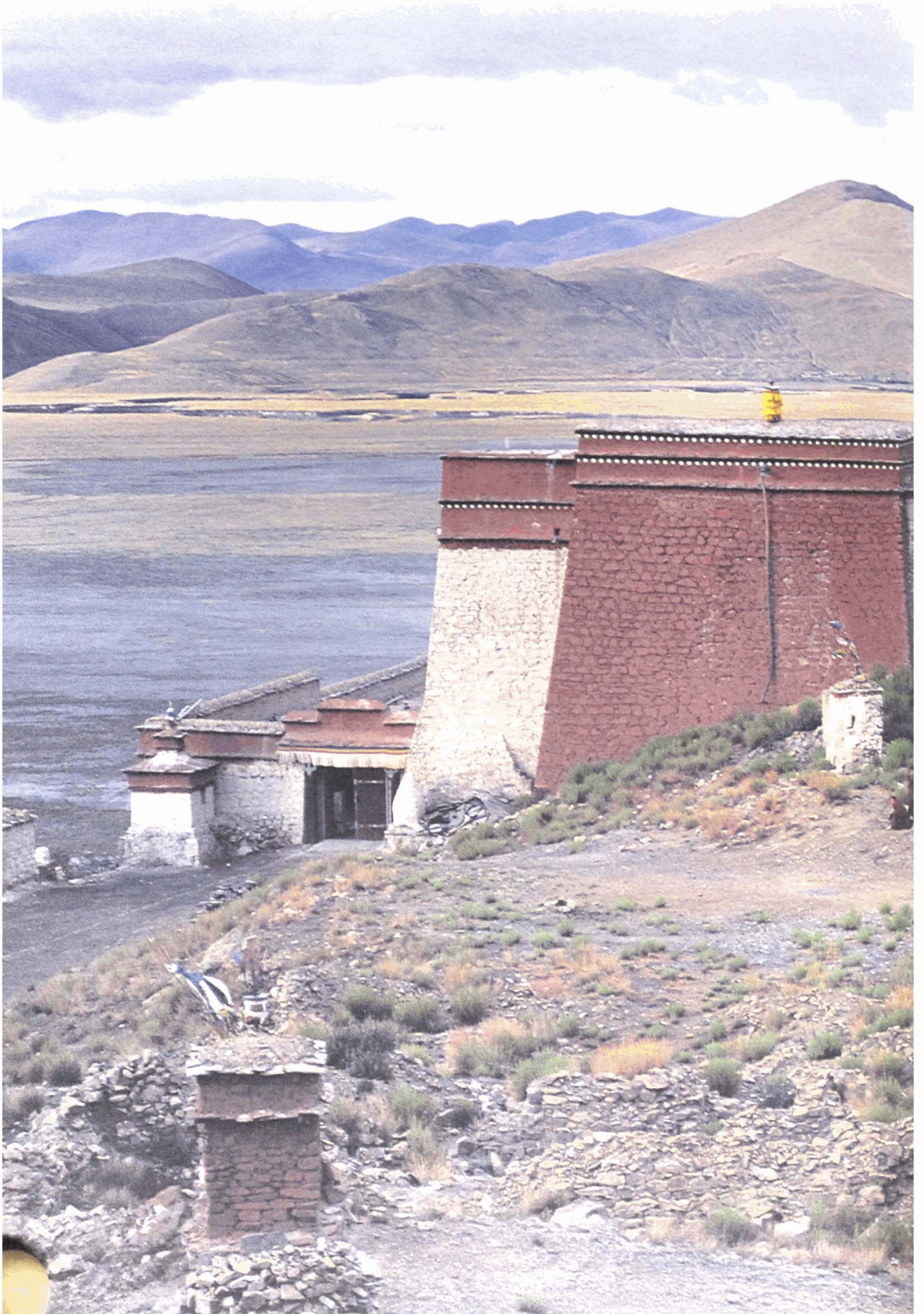
38. The twelfth Dorje Phamo.

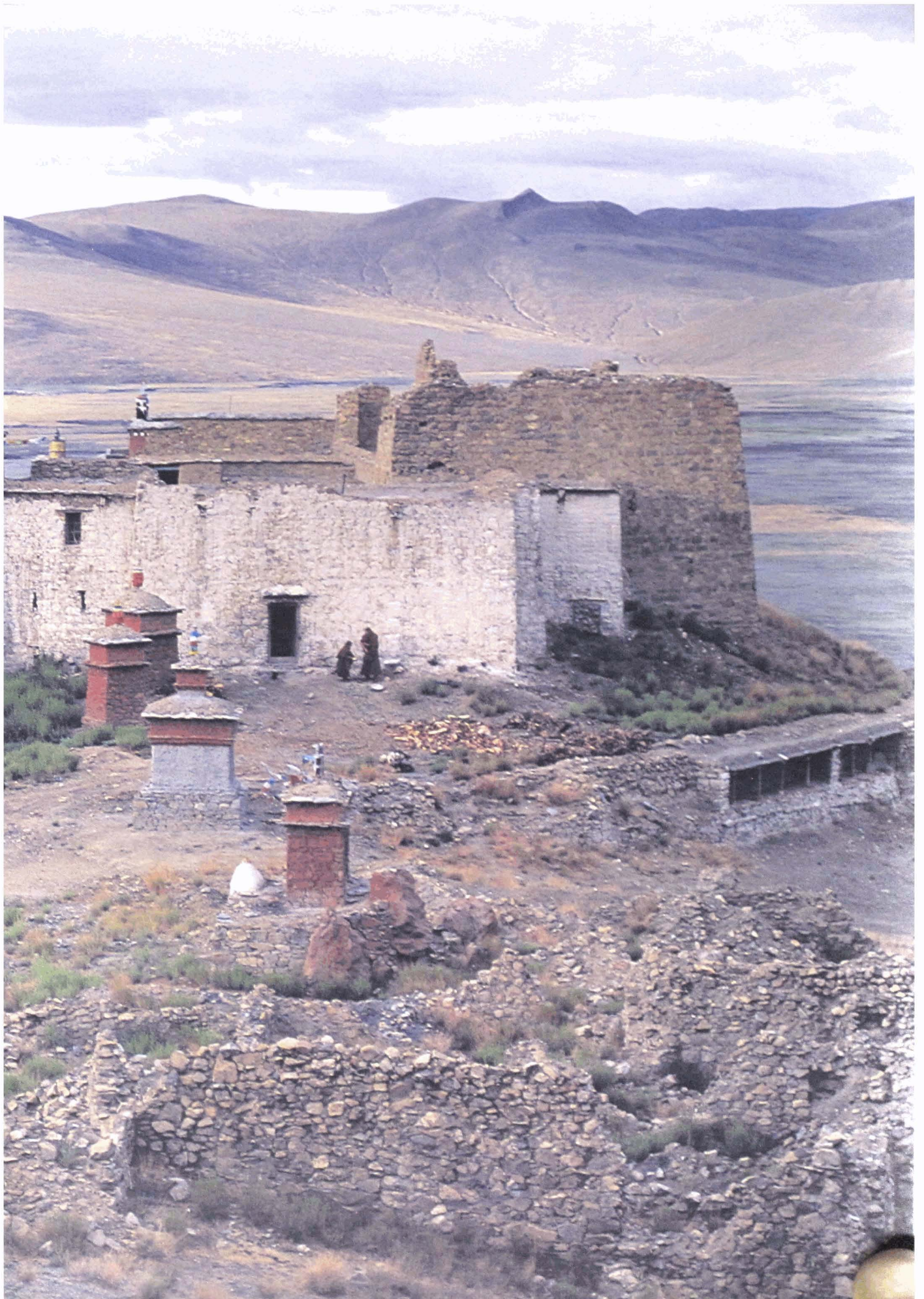
40 (overleaf). The monastery of Samding, founded in the vicinity of Lake Yamdrog is the seat of the Samding Dorje Phamo. Restored after suffering severe damage during the Cultural Revolution, it now hosts 29 monks.















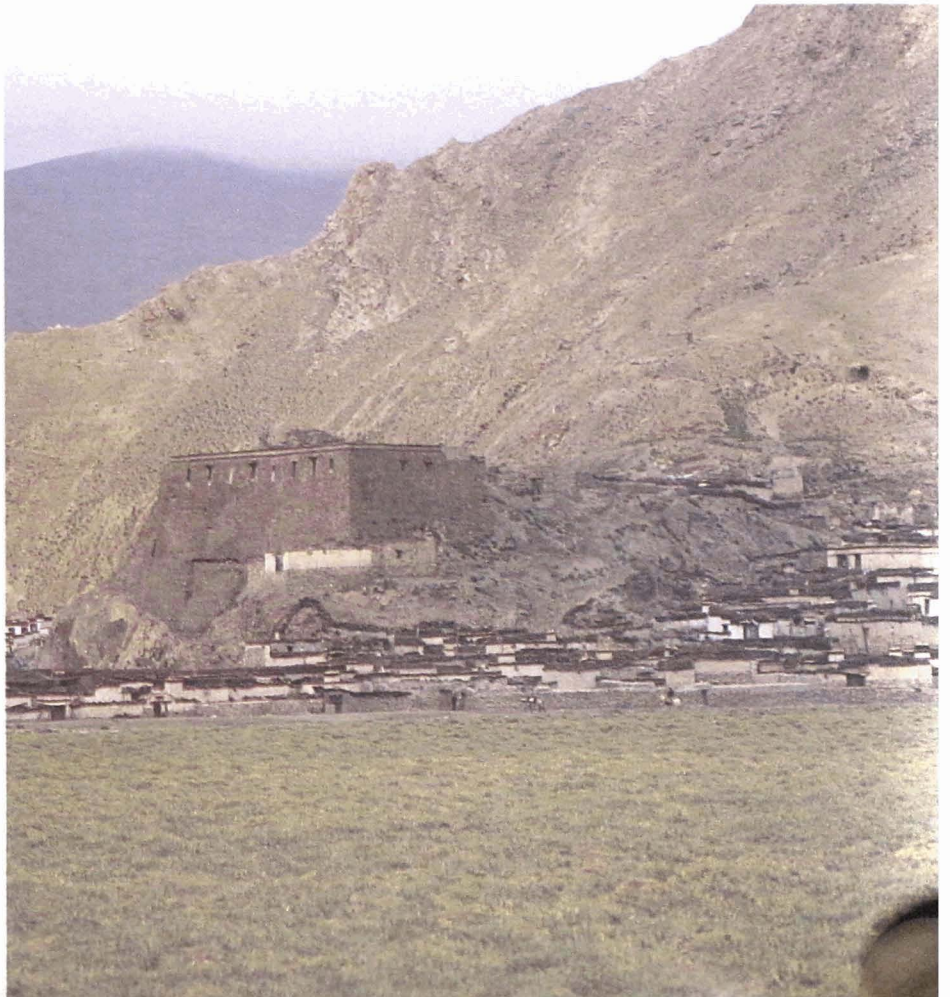
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41. Lake Yamdrog a soul-lake (lamtsho) of Tibet.

42. The demonic lake (dümotsho) which is considered to be tamed and controlled by the Samding Monastery. Should the Samding Monastery disappear, the whole of Tibet would be flooded.

43. Nakartse. Ruins of the palace of the ancient Lords who were patrons of the Bodongpa tradition. The author of the "Feast of Miracles" was a member of this family.





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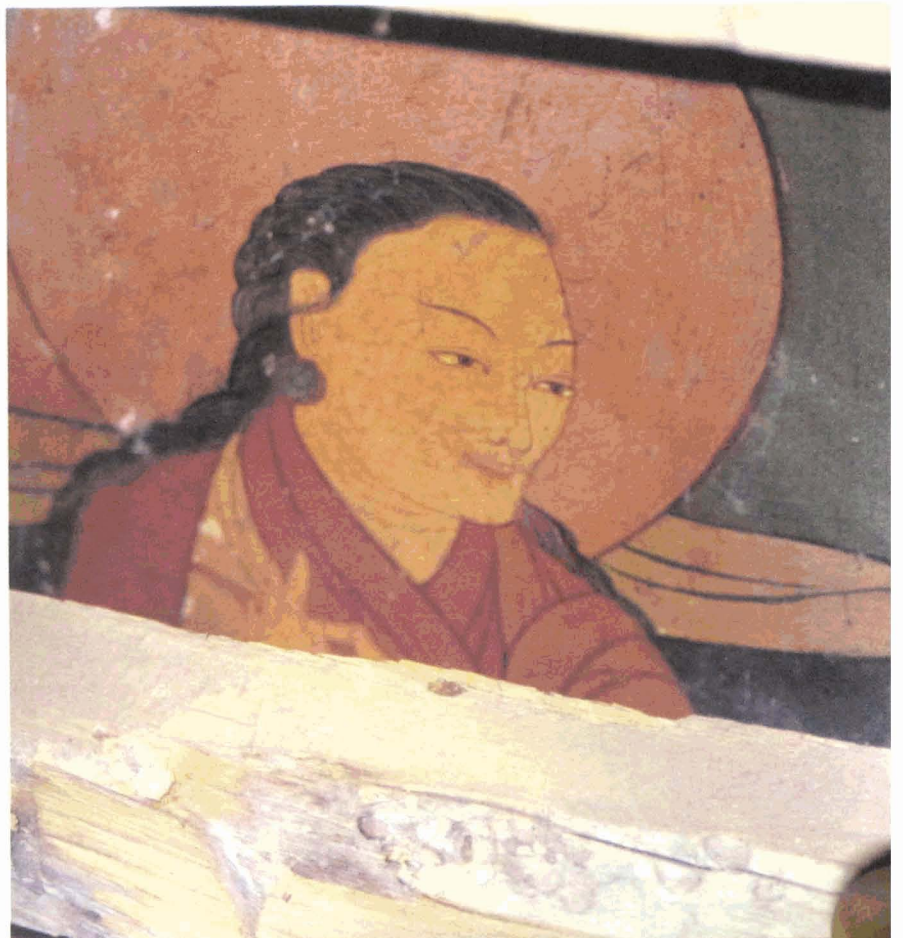
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44. Nyemo Chöde founded in the 16th century by the Chime Pelsang and Nyendra Sangmo, the Third Samding Dorje Phamo.

45. 46. Chime Pelsang, the founder of Nyemo Chöde, with the 3rd Samding Dorje Phamo. His footprint is worshipped as a relic in the monastery.

47. 48. 49. Nyemo Chöde: the statue of Bodong Chole Namgyal; the ancient painting of Tashi Ömbar; the painting of the various Dorje Phamo behind bookshelves.





50. 51. Bodong Chole Namgyal is still a timeless presence in song and rituals of the communities in his homeland.





something such as this man in front of you or this ground under your feet? According to the theory of the *Pramāṇavārttika*, both contenders must have a common basis on which to be able to debate”. Chole Namgyal replied: “If the debate is to take place correctly, as was also the wish of the king at the beginning, such questions are not suitable. I do not want to take part in a debate on a subject different from that which was agreed upon”. Yagde Mipham shouted: “One who debates with me has to know the subject of the debate”. Then Chole Namgyal quoted a few words from the *Pramāṇavārttika*: “In the *Pramāṇavārttika* it is said: ‘If clarified, this being becomes clear’.<sup>130</sup> Here does ‘this being’ mean the man in front of you or the ground under your feet?”. Yag Mipham remained silent.

Chole Namgyal added: “According to your point of view, the path of the Mahāyāna is not superior to that of the Hinayāna because you assert that *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* really understand the selflessness of phenomena. They recall even some non-Buddhists (*mutegpa*) who conceive all conditioned phenomena as impermanent”. This remark did not get any reply.

Discussing about the Three Vehicles, Yag Mipham said: “All conditioned phenomena are destined for destruction but there cannot be a time of accomplished complete destruction. In the same way all living beings are destined to be enlightened but there cannot be a time of accomplished complete enlightenment. All living beings are destined to be enlightened as they possess the ‘seeds’ (potential causes) of Buddhahood, they can remove all obscurations, they can find the favourable conditions in which to undertake the activities towards enlightenment. Yet there cannot be the time in which all living beings have accomplished enlightenment. In fact they are still living beings because there is no common basis between the state of living being and the state of perfect Buddhahood. The *samsāra* has no limit because it cannot be completely emptied. If the *samsāra* could be emptied great evil would ensue in that the *sambhogakāya* (Body of Co-Fruition) could be separated from the five definite features of the *sambhogakāya* Buddha, the continuity of the *nirmāṇakāya* (Body of Transformation) could be interrupted, the activities towards enlightenment could be ceased...”. After having presented his argument in great detail the basic assertion was: “All living beings are destined to be enlightened, but there cannot be the already completed enlightenment”. The omniscient replied as follows: “Every seed generates a sprout, but what it is already generated cannot be there. All living beings are destined to enlightenment, but there cannot be the already completed enlightenment. According to your assertion the people could not get any harvest. All the potential causing conditions of the sprout assembled can produce the sprout itself, all the

potential causing conditions of Buddhahood can produce enlightenment. A conditioned phenomenon is condemned to destruction, but the time of its disappearance cannot be yet there, still it is a conditioned phenomenon because there is no common basis with the state of disappearance. A living being is a perfect Buddha, even if it cannot be enlightened yet, it is still a living being because there is no common basis with the state of perfect Buddhahood...”. Yag did not manage to find any appropriate refutation. Furthermore, concerning the assertion that *saṃsāra* has no general limits but has particular limits, Chole Namgyal added: “You refute by rule every particular case. In fact the *saṃsāra* in itself comprises and combines the particular with the general. When the *saṃsāra* can be emptied then the *sambhogakāya* can be separated from the five definite qualities of the *sambhogakāya* Buddha, the continuity of the *nirmāṇakāya* (Body of Transformation) can be interrupted, the activity on the path towards Buddhahood can cease...”. Thanks to his deep knowledge, the dawn of Chole Namgyal’s speech was shining brighter and brighter in thousands of rays spreading everywhere. Yag with the voice becoming like the buzz of a bee closed his mouth like the water-lily (the flower which opens at the appearance of the moon and closes at its setting)”.

The two scholars continued their doctrinal discussion, referring to the basic treatises of the Buddhist doctrine. When their points of view differed, they consulted the sacred books. Yet, Yag Mipham said: “There is no need to open the book, the whole text is in my mind”, and he started reciting it perfectly by heart. Chole Namgyal did the same. Thus great faith was established in all those attending to the debate, from scholars to the most ignorant among them. When Chole Namgyal explained some difficult parts of the doctrine, Yag Mipham praised him greatly. When Yag Mipham made some excellent discourse, Chole Namgyal praised him, too.

Once the debate was over, the two scholars entertained each other with jokes. Yag Mipham said: “A scholar must know the reason why the nails grow on the top and not on the under side of the tips of the fingers. Should they grow on the under side they would be very useful for tailoring activities. Nobody knows this reason, so in Tibet there are no scholars”. While talking, he kept turning his hand. Some time later Yag Mipham said: “The tradition of the four Tibetan scholars is...”. Chole Namgyal immediately interrupted him: “Do you know the reason why the nails of these four Tibetan scholars grow on the top and not on the under side of the tips of their fingers?”. Yag Mipham did not give an answer. Then Yag Mipham closed his canopy, so that the folds of cloth were like joined palms and its top was pointing to Chole Namgyal as if it were prostrating itself in great respect. Chole Namgyal smiled and said, jokingly: “Even your

possessions prostrate themselves in front of me, as witness to the fact that my point of view is correct...”. At that time talk about the defeat of Yag Mipham went something like this: “Not even one text of the doctrine was of help, the protecting god turned his back on him, the debate was lost”.

Once, Chole Namgyal visited northern Yeru (Northern Latö). At that time, this northern area was ruled by a lord called Jamyang, who was also a monk. He was very proud of his skill in ruling in accordance with religious and civil laws. He had listened to many deceitful and malevolent conversations without enquiring about their reliability. These asserted that Chole Namgyal usually denied the philosophical position of Sakya Paṇḍita.<sup>131</sup> This ruler would therefore slander Chole Namgyal. When he heard that he was coming to Northern Latö, he tried to humiliate him. He gathered all the scholars of his country and, in particular, he secretly sent a messenger to invite a scholar called Geshe Sönam Kyab who was the sharpest, just like the top point of a banner. The lord said to all the scholars: “Now the insignificant abbot of Southern Latö who argues against the venerable Mañjuśrī (Sakya Paṇḍita) will come. His opposition to Sakya Paṇḍita is a great mistake, so we have to put an end to the controversy. We have to pluck him like a hoopoe. If you carry out this task and win I will reward you handsomely. To do this, you will have to study the ocean of doctrinal treatises and, in particular, the *Rig gter* by Sakya Paṇḍita in great detail. Then the great scholar was invited to Ngamring<sup>132</sup> where the lord resided. With the lord suitably seated, he was placed in an elevated position with the scholars sitting around them both. To start with, the famous scholar Sönam Kyab stood up and said: “Some scholars may criticize others on the basis of the Seven Treatises of Dharmakīrti and impose their own points of view; yet, this is not to be done by foolish people”. Pronouncing these last words, he pointed his finger at Chole Namgyal. Then he continued: “To assert that in the *Rig gter* there are some contradictions is to talk purely at random, and you are the one who maintains that there are some contradictions in the revered Mañjuśrī (Sakya Paṇḍita)”. Chole Namgyal replied: “You assert that I oppose *Rig gter*. How could I do this? This tradition was founded by the great pioneer of epistemological studies and no other scholar dared to do this. I consider it extremely precious. I just have some doubts about certain points which are not very clear to me. Now I ask you: the *Rang 'grel* commentary (written by Sakya Paṇḍita himself)<sup>133</sup> on *Rig gter*, was it written by Sakya Paṇḍita?” Sönam Kyab answered: “This commentary was not written by Sakya Paṇḍita himself because there are numerous contradictions in it”. He mentioned some examples. Chole Namgyal continued: “Well then, the basic text of *Rig gter* was not written by Sakya Paṇḍita because there are contradictions in it. For example, ‘the

definition of object is awareness by mind’ and ‘the definition of mind is awareness’. Awareness finds itself in this to and fro and this is not correct. Furthermore ‘the evaluated object is self-defined only’ and ‘have to analyze existence and non-existence of a self-defined phenomenon’. ‘Whatever is there, is perishable like the vase’. These assertions disagree with the Seven Treatises on *pramāṇa*...”.<sup>134</sup> He mentioned twenty-five examples like these. Sönam Kyab, in great surprise, was unable to reply. However, after a short while, he began to act as though he had recovered his senses and said: “I do not think that I have the ability to debate with you, but it was not mine to decide.” In the evening he went secretly to meet Chole Namgyal, paid homage to him and asked for forgiveness. He said: “Today I behaved with great arrogance. I said all that I knew but I should never have dared to say what I just faintly remembered because you are like Dharmakīrti in person. Please, forget my foolish arrogance and bestow upon me your blessing in order that I may suffer no consequences as a result of my conduct”. While pronouncing these words he burst into tears of remorse. Chole Namgyal said: “Oh! Do not worry. Today I just talked in accordance with the principles of the holy doctrine, not especially against you. You had no power to choose and I have no bad feelings towards you”. When he heard these words great faith arose in him and said to himself: “Today the true Dharmakīrti came and gave flawless teachings on the holy doctrine”. He then fled to a remote place in order to avoid being shamed by the lay people.

The cruel and hypocritical lord was extremely upset with Sönam Kyab for having disappointed his expectations. He made another attempt to dishonour the great scholar by gathering all the monks of the Ngamring Monastery and ordering them as follows: “You must pluck the liar abbot like a hoopoe. Prepare yourselves thoroughly and restrict the discussion to the Seven Treatises on *pramāṇa*. Otherwise, go away!”. And so the great scholar (Chole Namgyal), some ministers from the northern area as well as numerous monks gathered once again in the palace of Ngamring Shalserma. A scholar stood up first of all and said to Chole Namgyal: “At this perfect moment, you, precious abbot have come here. You are expert in all aspects of knowledge and, in particular, you are a master of wisdom. Our Ngamring Monastery also has a good tradition in teaching the doctrine and it has produced many scholars”. Then a scholar called Geleg Pel.<sup>135</sup> the best among them, raised a question about the two truths: the conventional truth and the ultimate truth, to which the great scholar, the lion of rhetoric, gave an extensive and detailed explanation. His words were pleasing to the ear: clear and harmonious, and easy to understand. For the listeners, the words of the great scholar enlightened the darkness of ignorance, indicated the

path of wisdom and cut the web of doubt. Great faith in the correct interpretation was aroused in them. No contender could lift his head and refute what he was saying. By the end, the great scholar had succeeded in bringing even the evil lord to the path of benefit and happiness through his preaching.

The northern area was later ruled by a famous lord called Namgyal Dragpa Sangpo.<sup>136</sup> At that time a prominent scholar named Rongtön Shecha Künrig<sup>137</sup> arrived there together with his disciples at the invitation of the lord. While talking together, the lord praised Chole Namgyal. Irritated, Rongtön hit the floor with his hand and shouted: “He knows just a little poetry. He has not the ability to master the holy doctrine!”. Since the lord had great faith in Chole Namgyal, these words proved detrimental to their establishing a good patron-priest relationship. The lord allowed him to remain in Sangden but in a very ordinary position. Rongtön would preach the doctrine and sometimes would include bad words against Chole Namgyal. The lord decided therefore to try to arrange a debate between the two scholars and sent an invitation to Chole Namgyal. In fact, deep in his heart, Rongtön recognized Chole Namgyal as a great and holy personage and would have liked to drink the nectar of his teachings on the *sūtra* and the *tantra*. However, his retinue, out of jealousy, would say that their teacher and the great scholar were on the same level. And so, Rongtön was prevented from drinking the nectar of his teachings. Furthermore, he was none too eager to meet him because, in addition to the envy of his retinue, he himself had spoken ill of him and he considered a debate with him as hard toil. The lord thought that Rongtön had behaved arrogantly and it would have been of great benefit if he had listened to the preaching of Chole Namgyal with his exceptional mastery of the doctrine. The lord sent an invitation to Rongtön through his minister Palden Sangpo, a very clever man. The minister was aware of the secret feelings of Rongtön and avoided mentioning that Chole Namgyal had arrived. He just invited Rongtön and his disciples to attend a religious ceremony. Rongtön was delighted to be invited by the lord and said: “Of course. We will come; the lord is extremely kind, the tea is very tasty, the talks are very interesting”. The minister immediately sent a messenger back to the lord advising him that the scholar would come. Rongtön and his disciples left for Ngamring along with the minister. On the way, they stopped for the night. A disciple called Rongpo Gyalsang talked to Rongtön in Rong dialect,<sup>138</sup> whereupon Rongtön opened his eyes wide to observe the minister whilst answering the disciple in a whisper. He eventually told the minister that he had changed his plans because he was required to listen to teachings on the doctrine by another scholar and that he had to meet some patrons from Ü. The minister said to

him: “You have already given a positive answer and now if you cannot come it will make matters very difficult for me...”. Having decided to reveal the true facts, the minister continued: “The great scholar Chole Namgyal is at the palace, aren’t you ashamed that you do not dare to meet him?” When Rongtön heard these words, he immediately agreed to go. Rongpo Gyalsang said to the minister: “If our teacher goes to the palace he should stay there for only three days, he should be given a seat equivalent to that of the great abbot and he should receive the same degree of service”. They then continued their journey towards the palace, on horseback. Along the way however, Rongtön began to think that the minister might reveal all that had happened on the way, should he reach the palace ahead of the rest of the party. Since his horse seemed somewhat weaker than that of the minister, he asked him to exchange horses. The minister agreed and Rongtön was assured of arriving first.

When the minister arrived at the palace he was disturbed to see that the seat of Chole Namgyal was a magnificent one situated right in the middle of the hall, that of the lord was in keeping with his position, but the seat prepared for Rongtön consisted of nothing but a simple square cushion. He told the lord of the three conditions imposed by Rongpo Gyalsang, the disciple of Rongtön. The lord retorted that it was impossible to agree to their demands but the seat of Rongtön was somewhat improved and was set higher than it had been before. Rongtön asked the lord: “On how many *maṇḍala*<sup>139</sup> does your great scholar agree to discuss?”. The lord sent somebody to report the question to Chole Namgyal and the reply came back: “I agree upon ten thousand *maṇḍala*”. The king, fearing that Rongtön would not accept, took it upon himself to reduce the number given and said: “He agrees upon five thousand *maṇḍala*”. When Rongtön heard these words he felt very angry and reluctant. He shouted: “Such a large number of *maṇḍala* had never been introduced into Tibet. What kind of tradition is this?”. The next day at sunrise all the scholars gathered in the hall of the royal palace Tashitse. When they met, Chole Namgyal and Rongtön removed their hats and touched foreheads in a sign of respect. Each went to his respective place. At first Rongtön raised some interesting questions for discussion upon: “How many different systems of the *maṇḍala* of Mañjuśrī are there?” Chole Namgyal replied: “There are sixty-four”. Rongtön, though feeling great respect deep in his heart for the great scholar, merely commented: “Maybe, maybe... since you assert the existence of ten thousand *maṇḍala*...” and dropped the topic.

Then they talked about some of the masters (*ācārya*) of the Mādhyamika-Svātantrika<sup>140</sup> in India. Chole Namgyal asked: “Well, how many *ācārya* are there in this tradition?” Rongtön just mentioned some four

names. Chole Namgyal told him the name of twenty-five *ācārya* and gave a very detailed explanation concerning the basis (*shi*), the path (*lam*) and the fruit (*drebu*)<sup>141</sup> of each teaching tradition. Rongtön listened attentively. Later, when Rongtön resided in Changchubling in Ü, he told a scholar called Tanag Rabjangpa: “The great abbot of Bodong, who is a nephew of my teacher, is coming to Ü. I want to welcome him, but I do not want to prostrate before him. He is very strong. In Northern Latö we discussed the *ācārya*. I mentioned the names only of Legdenje (Bhavya), Yeshe Nyingpo (Jñānagarbha), Shiwatsho (Śāntarakṣita), Kamalaśīla.<sup>142</sup> He, on the other hand, could name five hundred in one breath”.

Chole Namgyal asked Rongtön: “I heard you criticize Candrakīrti<sup>143</sup> saying that there are some contradictions in his texts. Is this true?” Rongtön answered: “Candrakīrti was born in India. This fact as such does not mean that he is perfect. His texts are a jumble of contradictions and I do not think that his words have any meaning. He said: ‘Also the world does not agree that these are the same’. This sentence implicitly means that beyond the world there are other living beings (“being with the quality of being born”). In fact, there are no other living beings anywhere but in the world...”.

Chole Namgyal refuted Rongtön arguments: “How can Candrakīrti be wrong, as you say he is? He mainly refers to the fact that worldly beings do not always share the point of view that cause and effect are of the same nature.<sup>144</sup> Some worldly beings think that cause and effect have the same nature. Others think that cause and effect have a different nature. There is no contradiction in saying this”. Then Chole Namgyal disagreed with him further on the basis of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*dBu ma rtsa ba*)<sup>145</sup> adding: “You maintain that there is a mistake where there is none. Even the omniscient scholars can find nothing wrong in Candrakīrti”.

Chole Namgyal questioned someone from the Rongtön retinue who was considered to be very expert in the Seven Treatises on *pramāṇa*. He was able to say but a few words in reply. Chole Namgyal asked him to read *Rig gter* in Sanskrit, but he was unable to do this. Consequently Chole Namgyal said: “When asked any question about the basic doctrine, you are unable to answer. You are considered an expert on *pramāṇa* but you cannot read Sanskrit. Aren’t you ashamed? Though you know nothing you pretend to be an expert. You retain single words of the doctrine but fail to understand the full meaning of the whole. You find fault with others without having a clear point of view of your own. You condemn other teaching traditions without knowing them. You are full of prejudice. You must know that these five faults are signs of the disintegration of the doctrine”. Later, when Rongtön was with his retinue, he used to tell the story of what had happened in the palace of Northern Latö. He described how any time he put a question to

Chole Namgyal he would receive an answer like the falling of endless rain and he felt ashamed. However he never mentioned which questions he had been asked.

## 10) How he elevated the precious doctrine by composing

In ancient India if scholars and great saints composed works to explain the doctrine of the Buddha they had to fulfill three requirements: They had to master the five sciences, they needed the proper teaching transmission-line passing from the Buddha to their holy lamas, they needed visions of their tutelary deities (*yidam*) and they had to hear the proper words from them.

If somebody fulfilled one of these requirements he was able to compose. If someone met all three conditions he would be considered a master. This was the case of Chole Namgyal. As already mentioned, he was proficient in the five sciences in the tradition of Shongtön and Pang Lotsāba who were like sun and moon. The lineage of his lamas followed two lines: one was the transmission-line of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the other was that of the *tantra*. As regards the first, there exists the line of the theoretical view and that of the practical. As for the *tantra*, there are numerous traditions including Action Tantra (*kriyā-tantra*), Performance Tantra (*caryā-tantra*), Yoga Tantra, Supreme Yoga Tantra (*anuttarayoga-tantra*). In particular the line which originated from Vajradhara and was transmitted to numerous scholars ending with Changchub Tsemo eventually extended to Chole Namgyal. He used to have visions of Sarasvatī as well as visions of Nāgārjuna and Virūpa and these would teach him. Relations with his tutelary deities have been mentioned already and we will recount some miraculous stories on this topic further on.

As we already know, when he was thirty years old, Chole Namgyal felt the desire to compose works which would explain the doctrine of the Buddha. In the Land of Snow, it was usual to find many erroneous or dubious explanations of the *sūtra* and *tantra*: the profound view, the great deeds, experiences and insight, the essence of the *tathāgata*. Therefore, through this pervasive obscurity people were left to roam the paths of error and doubt. Thanks to *paṇḍita* and scholars, numerous treatises on the *tantra* were introduced into the Land of Snow and a tradition of preaching and practising some of them was established. It is said that most of them lacked the transmission-line for the proper empowerment which restricted further teaching. They lay idle purely as ritual objects in the altar library.

The great scholar felt a wish to compose his own commentaries on the



*tantra* for the sake of his followers. He aimed at clarifying the obscure passages, rectifying the mistakes and arranging in a proper order what had been confused. Once, he had a vision of Vajrayogini, the mother of all Buddhas, appearing in the sky and shining like the rays of the sun. She told him: “You should begin to compose the *dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus pa*”<sup>146</sup> and she blessed him. Another time he saw in a dream the great abbot Dragpa Gyaltsen who told him: “You can criticize my work if there are any mistakes and you must compose the *dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus pa*, a commentary on the whole doctrine including the Vajrayāna”. This was a great honour for Chole Namgyal. One night Butön Rinpoche<sup>147</sup> appeared in his dreams in the form of a youth dressed as a *paṇḍita*. He too said: “It is delightful to compose commentaries on the doctrine. As soon as possible, you should write the *dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus pa*”. Later, when he once stayed in the middle of a forest at Mendong in Mangyul Kyirong,<sup>148</sup> he had the vision of the great *paṇḍita* Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen, who was dressed like an Indian *paṇḍita* and was in the company of seven elephants which were carrying the volumes of the doctrine. Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen was sitting on a throne at a fork in the road and was explaining Sanskrit treatises to him. He set aside five treatises saying: “On these you are more expert than I; you do not need my teaching”. By this vision he felt that Shongtön had transmitted to him all doctrinal precepts, and he should act in future as a lord of the doctrine, in both his teaching and meditation. So, he started composing the *dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus pa*. He would dictate to twenty amanuenses without mistake or confusion, like a great river flowing slowly and constantly along its course. There has never been anyone in this world who could compare with him. Whenever he felt a desire to write commentaries on difficult parts of the doctrine, he was always blessed by Buddhas, Vajrayoginī, *bodhisattva*. This was the manner in which he put together his great works on all aspects of the doctrine. His great work (*dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus pa*) was structured in four parts:<sup>149</sup> children, scholars, *sūtra*, *tantra*.

The part dedicated to children comprised the training of the body, the training of speech, the training of the mind. The training of the body was subdivided into two: when the child is in the mother’s womb and following birth. The training of speech comprised reading and writing. The education of the mind concerns the science of the law of the worldly existence<sup>150</sup> of kings, ministers and common people and the science of the examination<sup>151</sup> of animate beings and objects. The part on the scholars includes arts and crafts, medicine, grammar, logic, philosophy.

That part of his work devoted to the *sūtra* includes the doctrine in general and the specific elaborations in detail. The part on the doctrine in

general describes the basic schools: Sautrāntika, Vaibhāṣika, Cittamātra, Mādhyamika.

The section on the *tantra* presents them in general and in detail. The part on the *tantra* in particular describes the four classes of *tantra*: Action Tantra, Performance Tantra, Yoga Tantra, Supreme Yoga Tantra. The empowerment rituals of their *maṇḍala* and the relevant universal ascertainments, the clear understanding and the relevant universal ascertainments, the account on the own background, the outer activities and the instructions concerning inner meditation are mentioned as well.

The whole work in its detailed form constituted one hundred and ten volumes of five hundred pages each. The medium form comprised twenty volumes, the summary counted two volumes and the concise summary one small volume. The whole work contained twenty-one thousand and six hundred chapters, seventy-two thousand instructions, eighty-four thousand paragraphs.

Nobody else could have managed to write so much. Simply to read his works requires great effort. Since the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha no scholar in India or Tibet had ever managed to write so much. His work therefore was an extraordinary achievement peculiar only to him. Once, while he was residing at Sakya in Southern Latō<sup>152</sup> to compose he caught a serious cold. One day he went on to the roof of the house where he was staying. Looking at the sky and with great fervour, he performed gestures of deep devotion, then immediately asked his retinue to prepare a ritual offering. Suddenly rainbows appeared in the sky, a shower of white flowers fell and light rain started though there were no clouds. He drank a few drops of this rain, feeling that it was the tastiest thing he had ever drunk and he thought that this was nectar of the gods. In that moment a vision of the venerable Maphamba with many other gods appeared to him and he was immediately healed. It was as if the Buddhas and *bodhisattva* had performed a religious service for him and through this, while he was composing he was protected by gods and misfortunes passed him by. Later, in gratitude, he wrote a huge text of praise to the gods.

## 11) How he elevated the holy doctrine by preaching

Only the storerooms of the royal palace can satisfy the desire of people who long for wealth. The common man cannot have this. In a similar way a few volumes of the doctrine cannot satisfy the hopes of living beings, each longing to share in the doctrine. The great scholar mastered all treatises of the doctrine, so that he could satisfy all their hopes without fear. The one

who is sitting on a teaching throne and is preaching the doctrine has to correspond to the definition of teacher. Chole Namgyal was a perfect teacher: he possessed a pure body, thanks to a pure morality; he was an expert in the precepts and the learning attributed to a sage, thanks to a pure wisdom, he benefitted others, thanks to a pure and resolute intention. Most of his followers fulfilled the requirements of disciples: they were possessed with natural intelligence, with the wish to learn by endeavour, with a faithful respect for their teacher.

While he was teaching he would sit in the Buddha posture. He never stretched his legs, he always remained upright and did not lean. His teaching was never prolix, never included repetitions, his voice was never too low nor too high and was always melodious and pleasant to the ear. In this way he spread a rain of doctrines. His manner of preaching presented the general meaning of the subject very clearly, and the details were in a form which was very easy to comprehend. He committed none of the usual teaching-errors, where the general meaning is not clear and difficult to remember, the details are explained in a form both complicated and hard to understand, there are too many details and the general meaning gets lost, the teaching does not agree with the basic doctrine. His teaching could be easily understood without doubts, by the listeners, he did not skip any difficult part, avoided explaining what was not needed, followed the proper order avoiding confusion between what should come first and what later...

If, whilst he was preaching, some disciples displayed a lack of proper interest for the doctrine, he managed to lead them back on to the path by explaining the suffering of *samsāra*. Those who had the chance to listen to him acquired great merits.

He used to teach the doctrine in different ways according to his hearers. For those gifted with a superior intellect, his teaching was very deep and extensive. For those possessed only of limited faculties, his teaching was made easy and enjoyable. In both cases, while teaching he never needed to use the texts because he knew everything by heart. For those who wanted intensive teaching, he could explain difficult points in great detail for days and days. Once, at Ngari Gungthang while he was teaching *Guhyasamāja*, he explained the *mantra Om A' Hum* for half a month according to the text of *Vajrāvali*. His instruction immediately produced astonishing results in his listeners. When he spoke about giving offerings even covetous people immediately felt like cutting off a part of their own bodies to offer to others. When he spoke about compassion the listener was immediately overwhelmed by a desire to share the suffering of others. When he was teaching Madhyamaka the listener instantly became aware of the impermanence of everything: the mountains, the home, the family. When he

taught the practice of concentration (*samadhi*), the listener felt as though he were the sky; when he taught the Process of Generation (*utpattikrama*) the listener immediately had visions of the gods: when he taught the Process of Perfection (*sampannakrama*)<sup>153</sup> the listener would feel great mystic heat coming from the pneuma (*lung*).

Once, he was invited to visit Situ Rabten at Gyantse.<sup>154</sup> On the way he preached the doctrine to a large crowd of people in a village called Düchung.<sup>155</sup> Whilst he did so, showers of flowers fell: white as pearls, red as rubies, blue as sapphires. It was considered an extremely miraculous sign. At Nyangtö, in the Pelkhor Dechen Monastery, he turned the wheel of the doctrine, teaching the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* to a large assembly, among whom was the abbot and important personages such as the Situ. Since Taglung Thangpa Ngawang Dragpa<sup>156</sup> had had great faith in Chole Namgyal from the very beginning, he came to stay with him at that time and to offer him his services. From then on, by virtue of his presence, he had opportunities to listen to many teachings. When he visited the monastery of Ngönga<sup>157</sup> he established a religious service encompassing the practice of over thirty *maṇḍala* of the four classes of *tantra*. During the teaching on the Process of Generation of the *Guhyasamāja* flowers floated down from the sky and beautiful rainbows appeared taking the shape of a great tent. Each time he taught flowers would cascade down. Most listeners in great surprise uttered: “*A la la*” and considered this as an extraordinary sign. An abbot named Küngyal, a disciple of Chole Namgyal, explained: “We do not need such showers of flowers, it seems instead like a sign that our teacher will soon pass away”. Chole Namgyal spent five months in Ngönga preaching the doctrine. Due to his blessing, this area from then on was always very peaceful and the crops were plentiful. In particular, in the very year of his sojourn, the harvest was so exceptional that nobody could remember a comparable one. He was therefore greatly respected even by the humblest of the villagers.

He was invited to Tsangrong<sup>158</sup> by the lord of Rinpung Norbu Sangpo<sup>159</sup> who had great faith in him. There he visited the monastery, home to the great Maitreya<sup>160</sup> statue, and he consecrated the temple in which it was lodged. He preached the doctrine to the lord and to numerous scholars who had gathered there, then proceeded to Nubchölung<sup>161</sup> where he stayed for seven months. Whilst there, he met a lama called Chöje Rongpo and conversed with him. He preached the doctrine extensively to the delight of everyone. Finally, having visited the Shang area<sup>162</sup> he returned home. On his way he stayed in Shabme<sup>163</sup> with the great lord Dragpa Lodrö<sup>164</sup> who heard numerous doctrines from him. In fact Chole Namgyal also felt great devotion for the Sakyapa and some time before on his way to Nyangtö he

had already met the great lord Dragpa Lodrö who at that time had heard numerous sermons by him. Later when he was talking about the Sakyapa with his disciples, he used to say: “This Sakyapa lineage is really different from any other. The manners and the magnificent clothing of the great lords are very majestic”. One disciple commented, without proper respect: “You say this. However, now, the great lord has great honour but little land”. Chole Namgyal, somewhat displeased, countered: “Do not speak at random! Choose your words! The Sakyapa lineage is like the sliver of moon of the eighth day (of the lunar month). Though small, it eclipses the light of all other stars”. Then he arrived at the Bodong E Monastery in Bodong. There he established a tradition of holding yearly religious service to practise the *maṇḍala* of the four classes of *tantra*. Then he proceeded to Chöding and was invited to Lo<sup>165</sup> by the ruler Agön. There he preached the doctrine and met the great scholar called Palden Sangyepa.

While travelling in Ü, Tsang and Lo, he was given many riches by the various patrons. In order to return the kindness of the Buddha and to avoid wasting the wealth he had received, he agreed to many symbols of the holy doctrine being erected. As a symbol of the body he had a life-sized statue of Guhyasamāja with consort made and adorned with many precious jewels. As a symbol of speech, he produced the great work *dPal yongs su 'dus pa chen po* (*dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*),<sup>166</sup> which is an extensive commentary on the doctrines of the *sūtra* and the *tantra*, and this was blessed by the Buddha. As a symbol of the mind he supported around fifty meditators in their practice. Also he allowed a great *stūpa* to be built<sup>167</sup> following the *Kālacakra* tradition. This was five and a half storeys high. The first floor was decorated with paintings depicting Hevajra as the main deity among many other tantric deities. On the second floor were the gods of the *Kālacakra* as main deities accompanied by many other tantric deities. On the third floor *Cakrasamvara* was depicted as main deity together with other deities of the “mother” *tantra* tradition. All these paintings were beautifully executed and were adorned with ornaments of pure gold.

The base and the top of the *stūpa* were gilded. The shape was perfect, the materials were excellent and it looked magnificent. Five hundred scrolls (*thangkha*) showing *maṇḍala* were also painted. He was able to produce so many symbols of the holy doctrine, which even the wealthiest patrons would have found impossible to do. Such beautiful religious symbols had never been produced nor heard of before in Tibet. These deeds alone were of great help in spreading the doctrine.

During his sermons Chole Namgyal performed many miracles for his listeners, bringing them good fortune. For example when Ngaggi Wangpo<sup>168</sup> of Langkhor received the initiation of Vajrabhairava he saw the body of his

teacher appear as Vajrabhairava. Other people saw him as Avalokiteśvara. When the lama of Lolo Chölung Monastery,<sup>169</sup> Legpa Sangpo requested teachings on Mahāmudrā and Madhyamaka he saw Chole Namgyal seated on the throne looking like the young Mañjuśrī, dressed in silk and brocade. His faith in him grew. Later, he would say: “Other people practise meditation based on Mañjuśrī, I go to meet the real Mañjuśrī”. Once, Chole Namgyal received an invitation from the Kharteng Monastery in Lo. In this area, at that time, many people were engaged in meditation. One night one of them had a dream wherein someone knocked at the door of his shelter and said: “Tomorrow an incarnation of Mañjuśrī will come to preach the doctrine. Interrupt your meditation to listen to his teaching”. He thought this to be just a dream and, consequently, forfeited the chance to listen to the teaching of a holy lama who was the embodiment of Mañjuśrī. He looked upon this as an unfavourable omen.

Next morning someone came to his door and said to him: “The great lord of religion Chole Namgyal will come and bestow initiations on Künrig (Vairocana) and give teaching on the generation of the thought of enlightenment (*semkye, cittotpāda*). This is a unique chance to meet such a holy lama”. He was delighted that he had this chance and felt that his dream was coming true.

Chole Namgyal performed many miracles such as these and his disciples could tell more and more. During his lifetime he had a multitude of disciples, among whom were the most prominent personalities of his time. He had twenty-three direct disciples, such as Namgyal Dragpa Sangpo<sup>170</sup> who was particularly expert in medicine, Palden Sangpo an expert in poetry, Samten Gyaltshen, Sönam Namgyal,<sup>171</sup> Langkhor Ngawang Gyaltshen.<sup>172</sup> Besides them there were three main disciples from the Sakya Khön lineage: Dagchen Dragpa Lodrö,<sup>173</sup> the great teacher Dragpa Dorje and Deleg Tashi Gyaltshen Pelsangpo.<sup>174</sup> Also two scholars who were like the sun and the moon: Khedrub Geleg Pelsang,<sup>175</sup> a master of all the doctrines of the *sūtra* and the *tantra* and an expert in the three skills essential to a scholar, preaching, debating, composing; Lodrö Tenba who was considered the reincarnation of Pang Lotsāba. There were three “eyes of the world” (translators): the great translator Sönam Sangpo,<sup>176</sup> the great translator Dorje Gyaltshen, the great translator Thugjepel, as well as six scholars “victorious over all directions”. One of them, Gendündrub<sup>177</sup> from the Narthang Monastery, was called the sun of the doctrine. In addition there were thirteen experts on the *sūtra* and the *tantra*; sixteen “head ornaments”; four philosophers, four holders of the banner of meditation, fifty *mahasiddha*, one of them called Chökyi Drönme. She was a great *yoginī* and an emanation of Vajravārāhī (Dorje Phamo).<sup>178</sup> Her former

incarnations were Lakṣmī, the sister of King Indrabodhi of Urgyen, and Mandārawā, the tantric partner (*mudrā*) of Padmasambhava. Besides these there were thousands of disciples who were experts in the ten volumes (*kabchuba*) or in the four volumes (*kabshiba*) of the doctrine.

In such a way Chole Namgyal mastered the three skills of the scholar - teaching, debating and composing - and greatly benefitted the spread of the doctrine. He practised the essence of the doctrine as follows: He was never attached to gifts and services offered to him out of respect. The banner of jealousy and the spirit of competition were always kept at bay. Bearing in mind the impermanence of all things, he despised wealth, even royal treasures. He practised meditation constantly from his childhood until he passed away. His form of meditation was so unique that even those who went into retreat for months or for years could not be compared with him.

The first step in the ascent through the various stages of the vehicle of the *sūtra* and the *tantra* entails being attended by a teacher. The numerous teachers he followed were already mentioned above. He practised the Six Perfections (*pāramitā*) as follows:

-Perfection of Giving: he practised in a faultless way the perfection of wealth, perfection of the doctrine, perfection of kindness, perfection of fearlessness. As perfection of wealth he used to dispense with what he owned with no worry of remaining without. Everybody, regardless of his status, could hope to benefit like the bees in the hive freely partaking of the honey. When handing out those gifts his expression was very benign, he spoke pleasant words and fostered warm feelings. As regards perfection of the doctrine, perfection of kindness and perfection of fearlessness much has already been mentioned in previous chapters.

-Perfection of Morality: He strictly observed the three moralities of the *bodhisattva*: abstention from misbehaviour, integrating virtues, morality for the welfare of other living beings. All this has been mentioned already in Chapter Seven.

-Perfection of Patience: He possessed the patience not to retaliate against someone who harms you, the patience to willingly endure suffering, the patience of discriminative awareness of the *dharma*. An example of his patience of non-retaliation: he felt no hatred towards those who during the course of his life insulted him, injured him with weapons and even poisoned him. His pleasant expression, his good words, his peaceful mind were unshakable.

-Perfection of Effort: in order to hear, reflect upon and practise the ocean of the doctrine, he never took particular care of his body. He was free from any attachment to gifts, assistance, praise, food, drink, sleep. He never

considered his efforts tiring nor did he care whether it was day or night, hot or cold or whether he was inside or outside. He only aimed at being a *bodhisattva* for the benefit of all living beings. Thinking of all the statues and paintings of the symbols of the holy doctrine which he produced, one feels that during his lifetime he did nothing else but that. Thinking about all his commentaries and translations of the holy doctrine, one feels that during his lifetime he did nothing but that. Thinking about all his works concerning the five major sciences, one feels that during his lifetime he did nothing else. Thinking about how he received secret precepts from holy lamas, one feels that he did nothing else in his life but that. Thinking how he learned by heart the volumes of the *sūtra* and the *tantra*, one feels that he did nothing else in his life but that. In such a way he attained perfection of effort.

-Perfection of Concentration: He had practised deep meditation since his childhood and throughout his life, he possessed a concentrated mind as stable as a mountain.

-Perfection of Wisdom: first one must master all five major sciences for, if one does not succeed in doing so even the most able person never manages to reach omniscience. How Chole Namgyal mastered these sciences has been described already. Chole Namgyal possessed all the qualities which correspond to the definition of spiritual master (*geshe*). He assiduously preserved his religious vows, he kept his equanimity and remained free from all affliction of mind, he was very expert in all doctrinal texts, he received abundant instruction and was a very skilled preacher. Chole Namgyal was also endowed with all the attributes to fulfill the definition of lama in keeping with the tantric tradition and without faults such as lack of compassion, wrath, arrogance or cunning. He had a firm faith, intelligence, patience and an upright character. He used to say that, thanks to the blessing of the Buddha, he had the good fortune to drink the nectar of the tantric doctrine. He practised the Process of Generation (*utpattikrama*) flawlessly and had many visions of Buddhas, *bodhisattva* and protecting deities. This has already been mentioned before, but, to it can now be added the following: while he resided in Gungthang he once meditated on the wrathful Miyoba.<sup>179</sup> On that occasion from the roof of his place of meditation he saw in the sky to the east, the wrathful god wonderfully dressed and appearing in the centre of a sea of white clouds which resembled elephants. At first he had some doubts, but then he realized that the dress of the god corresponded exactly to the description given in the tantric scriptures. He also heard a voice from the sky saying: “Why do you have doubts? You must compose a work in praise of Miyoba”. He did so.



While residing in Lo on one occasion he had promised the abbot, Nyirin, that he would give empowerments on the twelve *maṇḍala* of the Performance Tantra (*caryā-tantra*). That night, his nose started to bleed. The doctors did not manage to stop it, nor had the religious service performed by the six hundred monks of the Lungtö Monastery in Lo any positive effect. In the evening of the sixth day he was in a small room at the top of the temple with his secretary, Könchog Gyaltsen. Despite having given the impression that he had fallen asleep, he suddenly asked: “Did you give me a crystal rosary?”. The secretary replied: “No, I did not”. “I have just felt somebody give me this, perhaps it was an apparition of some *bodhisattva* and my health might improve rapidly now”. In fact, he soon recovered.

Once while he was preaching the doctrine at Kyirong in Mangyul,<sup>180</sup> he had a vision of the Buddha and his disciples. He was so deeply moved that he burst into tears and was unable to continue his preaching. Somebody from his retinue prayed him to continue, but he said: “The Buddha is on the lion throne, to his right is Mañjuśrī, to his left Vajrapāṇi, behind him Maitreya and in the front there is Tārā”. Then the scholar joined his palms and prayed to them for the sake of all living beings before fainting.

In Shekar, he bestowed a life-empowerment (*tshewang*)<sup>181</sup> on the lord of Southern Latö Lhatsen Kyab. It was winter at that time and a very cold day, but the twig in the vase had blue, green and yellow leaves and flowers blossomed from it. All those who attended the ceremony, such as Langkhor Rinpoche, could see this. Lhatsen Kyab had the longest life of all the lords of Southern Latö and never suffered any illnesses, possibly thanks to this life-empowerment.

Once while he resided in Lo, the Lord Ame Pal Dzung asked Chole Namgyal to perform a ritual to subdue the demon which was controlling a hill called Kyiri. Together with one hundred monks he performed the rituals, made *chabtor* and *lutor*<sup>182</sup> and blessed the area and all the cardinal directions. Then the lord wanted to build a temple there and asked Chole Namgyal: “In Dolpo<sup>183</sup> there is an old abandoned temple which has very good wood that I would like to use for this temple, but the site is controlled by a powerful *shibdag*.<sup>184</sup> Would you mind sending him a message?”. At first Chole Namgyal did not agree, but then a member of the lord’s retinue insisted saying: “Please send the message. If the wood has to come from the lower areas, this will create a lot of hardship for many people”. Finally satisfied that this was for the benefit of many living beings he agreed and sent the following message: “The precepts of Vajradhara sent to the *shibdag* of the temple of Dolpo. The temple is in ruins and no ritual offering is performed. The wood is of no use to anybody. Here a virtuous lord wishes to build a temple using your wood, he will perform all the relevant ritual

offerings and provide good service. Please do not harm anybody who comes to take the wood, I will offer *torma* and prepare a place of worship for you. If you do not listen to this message I will have to perform some violent tantric rituals”. He sent this message with those who went to collect the wood whilst numerous monks performed the *torma* ritual and read the message at the corner of the old temple. They were able to take all the wood.

Once, in Kyirong, a brother of the ruler (*ngadag*) called Neba was harmed by a powerful *asura* who had affected his heart. He was taken away to all kinds of places but he was unable to eat because any food he took would get stuck in his throat. In addition, he possessed superhuman strength so that he could not be controlled. His relatives had already lost all hope of his recovery, until they at last invited Chole Namgyal to give some blessing. The great scholar put his right foot on the heart of the possessed and pronounced some powerful *mantra* whilst assuming a wild attitude. Immediately the man recovered. Later, when he became possessed yet again, the great scholar was asked to bestow a further blessing and eventually there was a full recovery.

The great scholar also faultlessly practised the Process of Perfection (*sampannakrama*)<sup>185</sup> while staying in a locality called Chamchen. Once he asked his disciple Taglung Thangpa:<sup>186</sup> “Have you had any obscure troubled dreams?” The disciple replied: “Yes, I have, but there were no bad omens in them”. The great scholar continued: “I would not like to have ordinary dreams which one could not remember, or those with bad omens. I have never had such dreams and I could always dream what I wished, but now I have neither ordinary dreams nor the dreams I wish”. From these words, the disciple assumed that his teacher had never experienced ordinary dreams and that he possessed high spiritual realization.

He possessed a supreme mastery of the practices concerning the pneuma (*lung*) and therefore could control any smell. For example, if he ate something with a strong smell like garlic, he did not smell afterwards. It was confirmed by Langkhor Rinpoche<sup>187</sup> who spent a long time with him. The great scholar himself also stated: “It is said that the great translator Pang Lotsāba used to eat garlic but that he smelled like the blue lotus flower. This is not so in my case, even if I am able to avoid any bad smell”.

Chole Namgyal was also expert in rituals and ritual acts, such as creating *maṇḍala*, making ritual hand gestures (*mudrā*), reciting *mantra*, invoking the gods, performing fire-rituals (*homa*) according to the Yoga Tantra. He was an expert at making the pattern and colours of the different kinds of *maṇḍala* (tridimensional *maṇḍala*, *maṇḍala* painted on scrolls, *maṇḍala* made of coloured sand). The *maṇḍala* made by him later became

very holy sacred symbols. It is said that butter lamps lit in front of them would last a very long time. When he made some *mudra* he immediately evoked in his disciple the relevant god. He knew perfectly the proper time, the number, the relevant ritual gestures, the way of pronouncing the *mantra*. He mastered all the steps to invoke the gods. He was expert both in internal and external fire rituals.

He was very capable at making *torma* rituals, external, internal and secret. When he performed such rituals he assumed a potent, wild attitude. Once, one of his patrons called Kunga Gyaltsen who was the lord of Tshamda, became possessed by evil spirits and nearly died. Chole Namgyal performed the *torma* ritual called *drugchuma*,<sup>188</sup> which controlled the wind in all directions. Bad omens such as all the dogs barking simultaneously immediately disappeared. The lord was liberated from his sickness and had great faith in him.

Once, while he was residing in Kyirong, the Religious Lord Ngawang Dragpa of Chang Taglung Monastery sent somebody to ask him if he would perform the *torma* ritual called *drugchuma* as a religious service for the sake of his health. The great scholar took the matter very seriously and performed the ritual in a small temple where Sakya Paṇḍita had resided. Ngawang Dragpa was immediately healed and there was no recurrence of his illness.

At that time the envoys from Chang Taglung and Yamdrog (on their way to Chöding) used to be robbed of their horses by the people of Menkhab.<sup>189</sup> The retinue of the great scholar was very upset by this and feeling that such behaviour could no longer be tolerated, they asked him to perform some powerful *torma* rituals in order to punish the robbers. He refused, saying that his followers being people who had acquired spiritual freedom were very fortunate. Those others had not had the chance to do so and persisted in committing evil deeds. Punishment would not benefit them at all. All these deeds are mentioned for the virtuous delight of the followers, however they are but a few, selected from among the many he performed.

During his lifetime he wrote numerous works. Once, one of his amanuenses complained: "It seems that this work is endless. Nobody will print it or read it. Why persist in it? Isn't it better purely to practise meditation? It is time to show signs of supreme spiritual realization beyond anything the ordinary person can imagine". The great scholar replied: "Do not be afraid of this work. The work on the great text (his most important work, the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*) has to be completed. This is also a good deed, a sign of spiritual realization".

This answer was appropriate and, in fact, the work was reproduced with

the support of various patrons in a number of places: the original document, one complete set of the extensive version, was made in Bodong: copies were produced as follows: one in Rinpung, with the support of the Lord Norbu Sangpo, one with the support of Lhatsen Kyab (lord of Southern Latö), one with the support of Namgyal Dragpa (lord of Northern Latö), one with the support of Pel Kadrugpa (Taglung Thangpa). Summarized versions were also produced with the support of Situ Rabten in Gyantse, Namgyal Lingpa (in Shang), the Shekar Monastery, the Ngari (Gungthang) Monastery etc.

Chole Namgyal possessed the faculty of prescience. Once, in Gyam, a religious service was performed which included many offerings. He suddenly ordered the lama: “Gather up everything and go out!” The people unwillingly left. They had just done so when the house collapsed. The people later recounted how it was thanks to him that they had not perished.

Another time Mahāsiddha Chang Sung, who was his disciple at that time asked him for leave of absence to go to Ü, but he was not granted permission. Because he insisted, Chole Namgyal said: “If you absolutely want to go it is better that you stay in Tsang for one year and go to Ü only after that. If you do not do so you will encounter difficulties”. The disciple did not follow the advice given to him. He stayed in Tsang only a few months and then went. In Ü the gold and the turquoise he had taken with him to cover the travel expenses were stolen. Later he heard that the thief returned to Kham after one year. His retinue reports that he often foretold the arrival of people and let the proper food and drinks be prepared.

When the abbot of the Langkhor Monastery died, Chole Namgyal was asked to designate the successor choosing between two candidates. Though the elder was very expert in the doctrine, Chole Namgyal chose the younger. Soon after this, the elder died.

Once, somebody called Sangye Dorje was going to Nepal and assumed that the best route to follow was by way of Kyirong. However he asked advice from the great scholar who replied: “Go by way of Kyirong but return by way of Nyanang”.<sup>190</sup> Though he thought it would have been best to travel each way via Kyirong, he followed the instructions and came back through Nyanang, arriving at Chöding. No sooner had he arrived than he heard there had been troubles in Kyirong and many travellers had been killed. So, he was very famous for his faculty of prescience.

When people died he used to guide them with prayers so that they were not reborn into the lower realms. Once, he performed a ritual of empowerment after the death of Pema, a great lady in Gyantse.<sup>191</sup> She was reborn, as a girl, to a common family in Nyingro.<sup>192</sup> Situ Rinchen Phag,<sup>193</sup> after his death at Tsechen,<sup>194</sup> thanks to the prayers of Chole Namgyal, was

reborn as a boy in a family in Yamdrog Taglung.<sup>195</sup> Later he could remember his previous life and recognize people from his retinue. During a war between Nyangtö and Southern Latö many people from Southern Latö were killed. One lady, called Tsencham, who was a patron of Chole Namgyal, asked him to pray for the sake of somebody who had died in the war. Chole Namgyal told her that the person had not died and there was no reason to worry. Later, it turned out that, in fact, he had been only wounded. and therefore Tsencham felt even stronger faith in the great scholar. In such ways he benefitted a great many people.

## **12) After having completed his task in this world he was received by 'heroes' (*pawo*) and *yoginī* into the Pure Sphere of Dharma (*dharmadhatu*)**

Four years before his death, in a year called “*rnam 'byung*” (earth-dragon, 1448 A.D.) Chole Namgyal's disciple Taglung Thangpa Ngawang Dragpa sent a messenger to invite him “to turn the wheel of *dharmā*” - to preach. The letter of invitation delivered by the messenger said: “In ancient times, Buddha blessed living beings thanks to his great efforts. Despite the hardships of the trip, please come for the sake of all living beings and the spread of the doctrine”. In his reply the great scholar who knew the duration of his life-span said: “In my lineage the great Changchub Tsemo had the longest life. Already it is some years since I passed his age. Due to the *karma* of the former lives I have suffered a number of illnesses. I have grown old and my lifetime has already run out. It is only thanks to the blessings of the Buddha that I have not yet died, but I will soon pass away. Therefore, I cannot go far”. When I (author) came to know that the great Chole Namgyal would not remain in this world much longer and that possibly I would not be able to meet him and hear his teachings, I immediately felt the urge to set off to see him. On my journey (from Yamdrog to Chöding) I met with no difficulties or delays. As soon as I met him he said happily: “It is very good that with great faith you came to see your lama and you arrived here safely”. At that time many rainbows in the shape of a tent appeared in the sky above the monastery of Chöding. Everybody knew that this was a sign that he was invited to another sphere and there was no use in praying that he could stay longer. Yet, he accepted that the monks from the hermitages performed a religious service for him. He also agreed to take some medicines at the request of his disciples. It seemed as though his condition had improved, his eyes could see better, his ears could hear like those of a youth. Then I insisted with great persuasion that he set out for Ü to spread the holy doctrine. Chole Namgyal replied: “I

have grown old and sick. I have reached the culmination of my life, I do not think that it is useful to go to Ü. However, I will accompany you, lord and servants, up to Shekar”. Then in the year of the snake (1449 A.D.) on my way back (to Yamdrog) I went to Shekar with the great scholar. The route at that time was beset by robbers from Lo<sup>196</sup> but they caused us no trouble thanks to the blessing of the great scholar. When we parted I asked my holy lama to pray that we would be able to meet again in future lives. For the whole winter of that year he stayed in Shekar where he preached the holy doctrine to the monks and to the patron *ta’ situ*. At that time he told of many signs which predicted his death. Once, in Shekar, he said to one of his disciples: “I will go to heavenly spheres. The purest heaven is the Akaniṣṭha Buddha Field where I will go”. One day he said that he saw the sky covered with the volumes of the doctrine. He also used to say that he wanted to go back to Chöding which had been founded by him. In the horse year (1450 A.D.) he completed the construction of the great *stūpa* in Chöding. In the autumn of that year he performed a magnificent ritual of consecration.

At the beginning of the year of the sheep (1451 A.D.) he had a vision of the Buddha who said: “You have to complete your task because in other fields great deeds are waiting for you”. Afterwards he organized around thirty people to write his volumes. Thanks to his blessing even the slowest could complete thirty pages a day and, in this way, his great work, the *dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus pa*, could be completed.

One day a big earthquake occurred and the sound of thunder roared in the sky. Chole Namgyal felt this was a sign that he would soon drift on to *nirvāṇa*. He said he believed that after five days a great storm would occur and if that really happened it would signify that he would pass away very quickly. His followers were extremely worried and begged him not to abandon them by going to another sphere. After five days a great storm blew up from the Pekhü. It lasted for five days. The great Chole Namgyal said: “I will not stay any longer (in this world). My quarters will be destroyed too. During these five days of storms many *asura* have appeared and visited me”. Then he had another vision: he was riding a brilliant white horse, four *ḍākinī* held the four legs of the horse and reached the summit of a high mountain. There they found a large palace where the great scholar received offerings from gods and goddesses.

Once he said to his retinue: “Today many guests will come, perform a good ritual offering here and then leave us”. When he was met by some followers a short time later, he told them: “The one hundred-faced Vajrabhairava came and prostrated himself to me many times and he said: ‘You are of the same nature as the Buddhas of the three times (past, present and future). You should go quickly now’”. After this vision had vanished

he felt very tired. One day he said: “I saw a black man who had the appearance of a *gönpo* (protecting deity). He lit a big fire, burnt all my clothing and nearly burnt down my house. He said: ‘You should go quickly; there is a multitude of living beings waiting for you and they are suffering’”. One day, despite his age and his condition he repeated a song again and again, danced and said: “The destiny of being born is death, the destiny of all that has gathered is to be scattered, the destiny of what has developed and prospered is to decline. This is the rule of the world”.

Seeing and hearing all these signs his followers became more and more worried and requested him: “Please have compassion on us and take your medicines”. But he replied: “If you wish I can take them, but, whether I take the medicines or not, is all the same”. The king of Ngari Gungthang<sup>197</sup> came to see him and, in great sorrow at his condition, prayed: “Thinking about your followers and living beings in general, please stay a little longer... If you can no longer take care of us, please tell us which sphere you will pass to and we will pray that we too may ultimately reach that sphere”. To this, Chole Namgyal replied: “The spheres of Buddha are not like a locality which can be easily indicated. They fill the sky and cannot be accommodated in the minds of everybody, so I shall not try to tell you. When I am gone there should be no mourning. Behave normally and this will make me happy”. He also said: “The illnesses which have so often attacked this body of mine and given me so much suffering are now powerless since I am soon to pass away”. He was about to enter the state of eternal peace when Loden, a religious expert in prolonging life, saw him and, in great sorrow at seeing him in this state, tears filled his eyes and he said: “Thanks to our *karma* relation, I have been able to serve you for a long time in this life, but, now that you are leaving it, what shall I do?”. Although he was already in deep meditation, Chole Namgyal felt compassion for Loden and returned to him. He preached some of the doctrines of *guru-yoga* and said: “In answer to your prayers, I shall stay three more days”. From this we know that he had complete control over his life and death.

He said to his retinue: “During my numerous lives I have prayed, meditated, recited *mantra*, performed ritual worship for the jewels [of Buddhism]. I have prayed for all those people to whom I have been related and have had the chance to see, to hear, to remember, to touch, prayed that they would not go to hell. Should my prayers have been ineffectual, the sin is mine only. Then on the 29th sliver of the moon of the third month at dawn, there was a loud crow of a cock in the stillness. Chole Namgyal asked a disciple: “Did you hear that sound? Now I must go quickly”. The disciple, in great sorrow, replied: “I heard”. Then the great scholar

continued: “Now is not the time to be sad. Be happy!” On the day of the new moon he spoke his last words to his followers: “During the morning of the day following my death, cremate my bones. The smoke will bring blessings to many living beings”. On the day of Saturn (Wednesday), the 30th of the third month of the iron-sheep year (1451 A.D.), at the age of seventy-six he went into deep meditation in his cell Simchung Peldzom,<sup>198</sup> looked at the sky and drew his last breath. Like all the disciples of the Buddha he passed to a higher celestial sphere. It is said the clouds descended from the sky and covered the Pekhü Plain. The sky was a cloudless deep blue for seven days. Only his house at Sangag Dechenling rose through the clouds which were illuminated by the sun and swathed in a variegated display of colour like the feathers on the neck of a peacock. These clouds, were offered like flowers by *ḍāka* and *ḍākinī*. On the second evening of the fourth month an immense light appeared above the great mountain to the south of the Pekhü Plain and shone until the following morning.

On the first day of the fourth month his body was cremated by performing a fire-offering. The great abbot of Langkhor Monastery named Künga Gyaltshe, as well as a senior disciple called Gyaltshe Könchog, and the great *yoginī* Dröma Chödrön<sup>199</sup> performed this task. When the body started to burn, the head caught light only after much effort. Many *ringsef*<sup>200</sup> with images of gods originated from his bones. Most disciples could keep one of these relics. At that time I was in Yamdrog and heard a loud sound in the west. After the morning food a wheel of rainbows appeared in the sky. In the centre of the wheel a sun was shining. Lama Kabchuba said: “I have never seen such a rainbow except in a *thangka* of Changchub Tsemo referring to the moment when Changchub Tsemo passed away. How is Chole Namgyal doing now?” Later I came to know that at that precise moment Chole Namgyal had passed away.

Many monks gathered to perform important ritual offerings for the great scholar under the guidance of the great abbot Chökyije who had been appointed successor of Chole Namgyal.

Amoghasiddhi, alias Jigme Bang (also Könchog Bang), disciple of the great omniscient scholar, composed this biography in the third year following his decease. The writing was accomplished in the water-bird year (1453 A.D.) at Nakartse, close to the Yumtsho Chugmo (Lake Yamdrog) which was the abode of the great protectress of Buddhism Tshomen Gyalmo.



## Notes

1. This scholar is also known as Jigme Dragpa ('Jigs med grags pa), Jigdrel ('Jigs bral), Chökyi Gyaltsen (Chos kyi rgyal mtshan), the Great Bodongpa, Bodong Pañchen. In order to standardize and simplify the approach here we use the form Bodong Chole Namgyal, the most famous one - except for a few cases in which other names given in the original are particularly significant.
2. Gyalse Thogme Sangpopel (1295-1369), a lama belonging to the Sakya tradition.
3. The seven generations refer to the abbot-lineage of Bodong from Pang Lotsäba up to Jamyang Dönyö Namgyal. These were also called the "Seven Jamyang" and their line was transmitted from uncle to nephew. The *Shel dkar chos 'byung* mentions them, i.e. Pang Lotsäba, Changchub Tsemo, Dragpa Gyaltsen, Chole Namgyal, Ngawang Gyaltsen, Gyalwe Wangpo, Lodrö Gyaltsen, Jamyang Dönyö Namgyal (cf. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 49), cf. also *Bo dong chos 'byung* f. 30.
4. Pang Lotsäba (1276-1342 A.D.) was a famous translator, he acted as abbot of Bodong E Monastery and is considered to have been the first abbot of the Shekar Monastery, cf. Introduction.
5. Tagdeba Sengge Gyaltsen (1212-1294 A.D.) was a teacher of Pang Lotsäba and Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen, cf. *Deb ther sngon po* (II) 1985:917-920; Roerich 1988:783ff.
6. Bumthragsumpa was an Indian scholar who lived in the 11th century and was a teacher of Ngog Loden Sherab. He was invited to the Bodong E Monastery where he gave teachings and from then on the monastery gained great fame, cf. Introduction.
7. Changchub Tsemo (1303-1380 A.D.) was a famous translator, nephew of Pang Lotsäba. He succeeded Pang Lotsäba to the abbot's seat at the Bodong E Monastery, cf. Introduction.
8. Dragpa Gyaltsen (1352-1405A.D.) was a great translator, nephew of Changchub Tsemo. He acted as abbot of the Bodong E Monastery and founded the Shekar Monastery in 1385 A.D., cf. Introduction.
9. According to Indo-Tibetan cosmology Jambudvīpa was the continent situated to the south of the cosmic mountain Meru and was inhabited by human beings.
10. Gangden (Gangs ldan), referring to a land covered by snow.
11. Bodhgayā is the holy place in India where the Buddha reached enlightenment.
12. *Pagtshe* (*dpag tshad*) is a traditional unit of linear measure frequently used in Indo-Tibetan cosmology and mythological geography, cf. Schuh 1970:170ff.; 1973:48-49.
13. Ü is the area in Central Tibet including the basin of the Lhasa river and the Yarlung valley; Tsang is the area to the west of Ü where Shigatse and Sakya as well as Bodong are located.
14. Rulag was one of the four great administrative units into which the area of Ü-Tsang was subdivided during the ancient Tibetan kingdom (cf. Uray 1960). After the fall of the monarchy, in the 9th century, this name continued to define an area located in south-western Tsang which included the area of Dingri and Shekar.
15. Śrī ri alias Tsibri is a holy mountain located to the west of Shekar.
16. Yigu is a locality to the north of Tsibri.
17. Machig Shama (1062-1149 A.D.) was a great *yoginī* from Phadrug. She was the younger sister of Shama Sengge Gyaltsen who translated Dignāga's

*Pramāṇasamuccaya* into Tibetan, cf. Introduction.

18. This refers to the eighty marks of a Buddha (*dpe byad bzang po brgyad cu*) regarding his appearance.
19. Surtsho is an area to the north-west of Dingri where Pang Lotsāba, Changchub Tsemo, Dragpa Gyaltsen were born.
20. Gyam, the birthplace of Pang Lotsāba, located in Surtsho.
21. The vows of *Prātimokṣa* (*so thar gyi sdom pa*) refer to the commitment to self-liberation from bad rebirth and *saṃsāra*. It can concern lay people as well as monks. In this context it indicates the first ordination as a monk.
22. At that time Shekar was the capital of Southern Latö. The Shekar Monastery was founded by Dragpa Gyaltsen, the uncle of Bodong Chole Namgyal, in 1385 A.D..
23. Situ Chökyi Rinchen was the famous ruler of Southern Latö (died in 1402 A.D.) who provided the material support for the construction of the Shekar Monastery and invited Dragpa Gyaltsen to become its abbot, cf. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 24, 42.
24. Dharmakīrti (c. 600-660 A.D.) was an Indian scholar famous for his works on epistemology.
25. Sakya, located in Tsang, was one of the most famous monasteries in Tibet. From the middle of the 13th century to the middle of the 14th century the Sakyapa had also the political control over Tibet.
26. After completing philosophical studies, a scholar used to take part in debates on philosophical subjects both in his own and in other monasteries.
27. Khön was the name of an ancient Tibetan lineage. Khön Könchog Gyalpo founded the Sakya Monastery in 1073 A.D.. From that time onwards the rulers of Sakya stemmed from this lineage.
28. Compassion towards all living beings is one of the basic elements which characterizes the Mahāyāna Buddhism. The *bodhisattva* operates in this world seeking spiritual liberation for all living beings and postpones therefore the own final enlightenment which he has already reached potentially.
29. *Abhidharmakośa* (*mNgon pa'i mdzod*) is one of the main texts by Vasubandhu concerning *abhidharma*.
30. *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (*mNgon pa kun btus*) is one of the main texts by Asaṅga concerning *abhidharma*.
31. Sarasvatī (Yangchenma) is the goddess of divine melody and wisdom. Since Chole Namgyal had particular faith in this goddess and composed works in her honour he was also called Yangchen Gaba.
32. Mādhyamika, the important tradition of Buddhism founded by Nāgārjuna, asserts emptiness as being free from two extremes - the extreme of existence and the extreme of non-existence.
33. *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā*, a fundamental text on Mādhyamika by Nāgārjuna.
34. Vasubandhu was one of the eight great Indian masters who were called in Tibet "The six ornaments and the two excellencies" (*rgyan drug mchog gnyis*). He lived in the 5th century, was brother to Asaṅga and was particularly expert in the *abhidharma*. He is considered one of the founders of the "Mind Only" school.
35. Candragomin was an Indian scholar of the 7th century particularly expert in Sanskrit grammar.
36. *Shedra* (*bshad grwa*) indicates the teaching place of a monastery. Usually the main subjects studied here are called "the Five Volumes of the *sutra*" and comprise:

- Madhyamaka, *Prajñāpāramitā*, *pramāṇa*, *vinaya*, *abhidharma*. The Tsethang Monastery was founded by Phagmogrūpa Changchub Gyaltsen in 1351 in the Yarlung area.
37. One of the Seven Treatises by Dharmakīrti.
  38. Generically basic text on the “Perfection of Wisdom”.
  39. *Vinayamūlasūtra* (‘*Dul ba mdo rtsa*) by Ācārya Guṇaprabha.
  40. Text on *abhidharma* by Asaṅga.
  41. *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhaṅga* and *Uttaratantra* are three of the five treatises considered to have been inspired by Maitreya to Asaṅga (*Byams chos sde lnga*).
  42. [*dBu ma*] *rtsa [ba] shes [rab]* (*Mulamādhyamakakārikā*), one of the six texts by Nāgārjuna on Madhyamaka.
  43. [*dBu ma la*] ‘*jug pa* (*Madhyamakāvātāra*) by Candrakīrti.
  44. [*dBu ma*] *bzhi brgya pa* (*Catuhśataka*), text on Madhyamaka by the Indian scholar Āryadeva.
  45. Probably [*dBu ma*] *snying po*, one text on *Madhyamaka* by the Indian scholar Bhavya.
  46. Commentary on both the conventional and the ultimate truth.
  47. *Bodhicaryāvātāra* is a fundamental text of Mahāyāna Buddhism by Śāntideva (8th century).
  48. Famous text on *pramāṇa* by the Tibetan scholar Sakya Paṇḍita (13th century).
  49. A text on Madhyamaka composed by the Indian scholar Śāntarakṣita.
  50. Dragpa Gyaltsen was the fifth ruler stemming from the Phagmodrupa. These rulers used to bear the title *gongma* (the highest, superior). Nedong was the residence of the Phagmodrupa government in Lhokha.
  51. Ancient Tibetan temple founded in the 7th century in Yarlung.
  52. The main monastery of the Phagmodrupa Kagyüpa tradition in Lhokha. It was founded by Phagmodrupa in 1158 A.D..
  53. The Sangphu Neuthog Monastery was founded close to Lhasa by Ngog Legpe Sherab, disciple of Atiśa, in 1073 A.D.. Before the foundation of the great Gelugpa monasteries, this was the most famous of the six monasteries specializing in philosophical studies.
  54. Ngog Loden Sherab (1059-1109 A.D.), nephew of Ngog Legpe Sherab, was a famous scholar and translator who resided at the Sangphu Monastery where he taught philosophy in particular.
  55. Yag Mipham alias Yagthrug Sangyepel was a famous scholar of the 14/15th centuries stemming from Sangphu. Later he resided in the Sakya Ganden Monastery, cf. *Deb ther sngon po* 412-413 (Roerich 1988:339). He was an expert on the *Prajñāpāramitā*, on which he composed numerous commentaries and a follower of the Mādhyamika-Svātantrika school together with his disciple Rongtön.
  56. Ratö Debachen in Nyethang close to Lhasa, was a monastery famous for philosophical studies. Chökhörling was a college of Tshal Monastery in the eastern suburbs of Lhasa.
  57. Taglung was the main monastery of the Taglung Kagyüpa located to the north of Lhasa. It was founded in 1180 by Taglung Thangpa Tashipel.
  58. Area to the north of Lhasa situated between Lhasa and Taglung.
  59. These two works were inspired by well-known stories of Buddha Śākyamuni’s previous lives (collected in the *Jātaka* and *Avadāna* texts) such as when Buddha offered his body to a hungry tigress.
  60. Rendaba Shönnu Lodrö (1349-1412 A.D.) was a famous scholar of Sakya and a teacher

- of Tsongkhapa.
61. Lama Samrin was a teacher of Bodong Chole Namgyal. When a monk takes the ordination as *gelong* three teachers are required. These are called Principal (*khenpo*), Moral Preceptor (*lepön*), Esoteric Teacher (*sanglob*).
  62. *Candrapa* by the Indian scholar Candragomin and *Kalāpa* are texts on grammar (*sgra*).
  63. Atiśa (982-1054 A.D.) was the famous Indian scholar who went to western Tibet in 1042 A.D.. Together with his disciples he founded the Kadampa tradition.
  64. See chapter II n. 23.
  65. *Kabchuba* (*bka' bcu pa*) indicates a master of the ten basic doctrinal subjects.
  66. *Kabshiba* (*bka' bzhi pa*) indicates a master of four basic doctrinal subjects, *phartseba* (*phar tshad pa*) indicates a master of *Prajñāpāramitā* and *pramāṇa*.
  67. Thrigyal Sönam De (1371-1404 A.D.) was an important king of Gungthang (Ngari Me) who invited many scholars and saints such as Dragpa Gyaltsen, Rindzin Gödem, Rendaba Shönnu Lodrö, cf. *Gung thang gdung rabs* (*Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag Inga* pp.118-120).
  68. Gungthang Chöde, alias Dzungka Chöde, alias Ngari Chöde, was founded by Dragpa Gyaltsen with the support of the king of Gungthang Thrigyal Sönam De. According to Kathog Rindzin Tshewang Norbu, this monastery was founded in the iron-horse year (1390 A.D.) by Dragpa Gyaltsen who also acted as first abbot, cf. *Gung thang gdung rabs* in: *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag Inga* p.121. This monastery was later transformed into Gelugpa.
  69. Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen (1312-1375 A.D.), see chapter I n.19.
  70. Butön Rinchendrub (1290-1364 A.D.), see chapter I n.36.
  71. The text mentions them in detail: *Zla gsang thig le*, *Thig le skor gsum* and the *Hevajra-tantra* from Lobsang Karmo. From Nyagphuba Changchub Gönpö he heard the *Don zhags, mKha' 'gro rgya mtsho, bDen bzhi, Phur ba rtsa dum* and early translations of *gSang ba snying po*. From Champa Yöntenö he heard the *gTsong tor mam rgyal, rNam 'joms, gZung phran, rDo rje mchu, Rig pa mchog, rNam snang mngon byang* and the *Mañjuśrīmūlatantra*. From Rinpoche Dragpa he received many stages of instructions on the Supreme Yoga Tantra, the Five Stages of the *Guhyasamāja*, the Six Treatises of Nārōpa, the Five Stages of the Cakrasamvara, the *Lam 'bras* and the *Ṣaḍāṅgayoga*.
  72. *sByor ba yan lag drug*, the Six Yoga of the *Kalacakra-tantra*.
  73. The "Path and Fruit" (*Lam 'bras*) system of teachings characteristic of the Sakyapa tradition.
  74. Mahāmudrā, the Great Seal of Emptiness, implies an exalted meditation on the nature of the mind and is particularly associated with the Kagyüpa tradition.
  75. Niguma was Nārōpa's sister. The Tibetan scholar Khyungpo Naljor in the 11th century obtained the holy precepts from her on which basis he founded the Shangpa Kagyü tradition.
  76. Lhatsen Kyab, son of Situ Chökyi Rinchen, was a ruler of Southern Latö in the 15th century and a patron of Chole Namgyal.
  77. The monastery of Langkhor was an important monastery in the area of Dingri. This locality was also the seat of the great Indian *yogin* Pha Dampa Sangye.
  78. Shije (Zhi byed) is the mystical tradition called the "Alleviation of Suffering" ([sDug bsgal] zhi byed), founded by Dampa Sangye who came from India to Tibet at the beginning of the 12th century and resided in the area of Dingri.
  79. *Dogpa* (*zlog pa*) are rituals performed to avert various kinds of evil and hindrances.

80. *Vajravalināmaṇḍalāsadhana* (*Tg.*, *rGyud*, n. 3140).
81. Text on the correct practice of *yoga*.
82. The area of the upper basin of the Nyang River in Tsang. Gyantse is located in this area.
83. Locality close to Gyantse.
84. Ancient Indian non-Buddhist traditions: the *Veda* were ancient collections of hymns (c. 15th century B.C.) at the root of the classical Sanskrit *dharma* expressing a cosmic order in which the human being is integrated, the *Vaiśeṣika* (c. 6th century B.C.) affirmed an atomistic theory of matter comprising five basic elements: earth, water, fire, air, space; the *Sāṃkhya* (c. 6th century B.C.) proposed an analysis of the world organized in twenty-five categories.
85. Arts and crafts (*bsa ba rig pa*) is one of the so-called “five major sciences”, the others being medicine (*gso ba rig pa*), grammar (*sgra rig pa*), logic (*gtan tshig rig pa*), philosophy.
86. *Aṣṭāṅghṛdayasāhita* (*Yan lag brgyad*), see chapter I n. 40.
87. Metrics (*deb sbyor*) is one of the so-called five lesser sciences (*rig gnas chung ba lnga*), the others being the science of synonyms (*mngon brjod*), poetry (*snyan ngag*), dramatic performance (*zlos gar*), astronomy and astrology (*rtsis*).
88. *Chandoratnakāra* (*Rin chen 'byung ldan*) is a basic text of metrics and was composed by the Indian scholar Ratnākaraśānti.
89. *Lü* (*lus*) and *gyen* (*rgyan*).
90. A fundamental and popular work on poetry translated into Tibetan by Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen.
91. Praise on the former lives of the Buddha.
92. A poetical work written by Kṣemendra on the exploits and glories of the Buddha translated into Tibetan by Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen.
93. “The Messenger of the Clouds”, Indian renowned poem on impermanence translated into Tibetan in the 13th century.
94. Namgyal Dragpa was a ruler of Northern Latö during Chole Namgyal’s time. He was a great patron of religious activity.
95. *Amarakośa* (*'Chi med mdzod*) is a basic text on the science of synonyms composed by the Indian scholar Chime Sengge.
96. Indian plays.
97. The *Kālacakra* system was also a basis for calculations concerning astronomy and the subdivisions of time (cf. Schuh 1973).
98. The *gyukar* (*rgyu skar*) are the twenty-eight constellations located on the ecliptic. These constituted an important element for astronomic calculations concerning the time reckoning system.
99. *Chang* is a Tibetan alcoholic drink. According to *vinaya* rules monks are not allowed to consume it.
100. *See* (*gzi*) is a precious stone traditionally considered by the Tibetans to be endowed with magic power as well.
101. This is the monastery of Pemo Chöding founded by Chole Namgyal in the area of Porong in the vicinity of the salt lake Pekhütsho. Chole Namgyal particularly liked to reside in this monastery late in his life and here he died in 1451.
102. Taglung Ngawang Dragpa (1427-? A.D.) was a scholar abbot of the Taglung Monastery and a disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal.

103. This is a protecting deity whose name indicated that he was submitted, bound by oath and transformed into a protector of Buddhism.
104. Asaṅga was one of the eight great Indian masters who were called in Tibet “The Six Ornaments and the Two Excellencies” (*rgyan drug mchog gnyis*). He lived in the 5th century A.D. and was - together with his brother Vasubandhu - the founder of the Cittamātra (Mind Only) school. He is particularly famous for having composed the Treatises on the Level of Attainments (*Sa sde Inga*) and for revealing the Five Works of Maitreya (*Byams chos sde Inga*).
105. *Samaya* is a Sanskrit term (translated into Tibetan as “*dam tshig*”) which is used among others as a powerful *mantra*. It indicates the “coming together” of the divinity with the image which represents him, the sacrificial offering or the *yogin* (cf. Snellgrove 1987:165-166).
106. The famous statue of Avalokiteśvara kept in the Phagpa Temple in Kyirong which emerged miraculously together with other statues out of one log of timber.
107. See chapter II n. 77, 78.
108. See chapter I n. 39.
109. This seems to refer to the fact that the authorization of one’s own “Root-Lama” is required before entering into *dharma* relations with somebody else.
110. The famous “Three Baskets” containing Buddha’s teachings: *vinaya*, *sūtra* and *abhidharma*.
111. Vaiśravaṇa is a god, dispenser of wealth and treasures, cf. Nebesky-Wojkowitz: 1993:68ff.
112. Pelthang is the plain to the south of Lake Pekhü in Porong. In this area Chole Namgyal founded the monastery of Pemo Chöding where he often used to reside.
113. Tibetans often conceive sacred space as a *maṇḍala*. This not only applies to rituals but also to architectural and geographical space in general.
114. Possibly the monastery of Ngönga located to the north of the holy mountain of Tsibri in Southern Latö.
115. Offering in the shape of a *maṇḍala*. Cf. Beyer 1988:167ff.
116. According to Tibetan medical theory *lung* (*rlung*) is one of the three humours presiding over the functions of the human body. The imbalance among these humours produces disease, cf. Meyer 1988:133ff.
117. See chapter II n. 14.
118. The secretary who spent a long time together with Chole Namgyal.
119. See chapter II n. 50.
120. The famous holy statue of Buddha Śākyamuni situated in the Lhasa Tsuglagkhang.
121. See chapter II n. 19.
122. Dzongka at that time was the capital of the kings of Gungthang.
123. Shang is an area in Tsang situated to the north of Shigatse and the Tsangpo River.
124. A local headman.
125. The Twelve Tenma (*bstan ma bcu gnyis*) are considered famous ancient Tibetan goddesses who challenged Padmasambhava when he first came to Tibet. They were subdued by him and transformed into protectors of Buddhism and Tibet. Cf. Roerich 1988:43; Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993:181ff.
126. See chapter II n. 55.
127. *Śrāvaka* are the disciples of Buddha who actually listened to Buddha’s teachings.
128. *Pratyekabuddha* indicates the Hinayāna practitioner who works only for his own

liberation from cyclic existence.

129. The view of the lack of an identity of independently existing phenomenon.
130. “[*gal te gsal ba ma grub kyang*] *gsal na 'gro 'di gsal bar 'gyur*” (translating the Sanskrit: “*vyaktyasiddhav api viaktam yadi vyaktam idam jaga*”) is the last verse of the third chapter cf. *Pramānavārttika-kārikā* (ed Y. Miyasaka) p.113 v.541.
131. Sakya Paṇḍita Kūnga Gyaltsen (1182-1251 A.D.) was one of the great masters of the Sakya tradition.
132. Ngamring was the capital of Northern Latö. Here is located the monastery of Ngamring Chöde founded by the great scholar Künkhyen Sherab Gyaltsen of the Jonang tradition.
133. *Rang 'grel* means autocommentary.
134. This refers to the fundamental Seven Treatises on *pramāṇa* by Dharmakīrti.
135. Kedrub Geleg Pelsangpo (1385-1438 A.D.) was a famous scholar. At the time of this debate he was still very young. Later he became disciple of Tsongkhapa and was posthumously recognized as the First Pañchen Lama.
136. Namgyal Dragpa Sangpo was a ruler of Northern Latö. His mother Bumkyong Gyalmo was a daughter of the ruler of Southern Latö called Situ Chökyi Rinchen and therefore was a sister to Lhatsen Kyab. Namgyal Dragpa Sangpo's elder sister, Tsencham, married Lhatsen Kyab and gave birth to the ruler of Southern Latö called Namkha Tsewang Tashi (cf. *dPal ldan g.yas ru byang pa'i gdung rabs* f. 8). The rulers of Northern Latö and those of Southern Latö were tightly intertwined by kinship relations and were important patrons of Bodong Chole Namgyal and his tradition.
137. Rongtön Shecha Künrig was a famous scholar disciple of Yag Mipham alias Yagthrug Sangyepel, cf. Roerich 1988:339-340.
138. The Tibetan dialect of Gyalmo Tshabarong in eastern Tibet. This was the native place of Rongtön. This latter during his youth had moved to Sangphu in order to study the holy doctrine and philosophy in particular.
139. *Maṇḍala*, as the ritual sacred “circle”, refers here to the various forms of the realization of deities in tantric rituals.
140. A sub-school of the Mādhyamika followed a.o. by Rongtön himself.
141. The basis indicates the approach and the relevant theoretical basis, the path indicates the application and the progress, the fruit indicates the accomplished spiritual result.
142. Four Indian scholars, masters of the Mādhyamika-Svātantrika philosophical school.
143. Candrakīrti was a 6th/7th centuries Indian scholar founder of the Mādhyamika-Prāsaṅgika philosophical school, cf. Introduction.
144. The nature of cause and effect is discussed in detail in Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvātāra*.
145. A fundamental work by Nāgārjuna on Madhyamaka, cf. Introduction.
146. According to this biography and the *Bo dong chos 'byung*, the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* (“Collected Suchness”) was the fundamental work by Chole Namgyal. Later this work also became the basis of the tradition which stemmed from this great scholar and therefore its name defined the whole corpus of scriptures compiled by the Bodongpa scholars.
147. See chapter I n. 36.
148. Mangyul together with Gungthang used to be called Ngari Me. The main centres were respectively Kyirong and Dzongka. From the 10th to the 17th century this was a small kingdom ruled by some descendants of the ancient Tibetan kings.

149. *'jug pa'i sgo bzhi*.
150. *'jig rten lugs kyi bstan bcos*.
151. *brtag pa'i bstan bcos*.
152. Sakya is usually considered near but not within Southern Latö.
153. The Process of Generation and the Process of Perfection are practices of meditation in which the deity is visualized and the practitioner is able to realize Emptiness, see chapter I n. 43, 44.
154. Rabten Künsang Phag was a famous lord of Gyantse in the 15th century. He founded the Gyantse Kumbum and the temple called Pelkhor Dechen Tsuglagkhang.
155. Düchung is a small village between Gyantse and Shigatse.
156. See chapter II n. 102.
157. This seems to refer to the Ngönga Monastery located in the area of Yamdrog.
158. Tsangrong alias Rinpung is a locality to the east of Shigatse and to the south of the Tsangpo River.
159. Norbu Sangpo was a lord of Rinpung and a main minister of Nedong Gongma. He founded the monastery of Chamchen Chöde. He died in 1466 A.D. (cf. *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* p. 83).
160. This is a famous statue of large size which was constructed with the support of the Rinpung family.
161. Nubchölung was a monastery in the area of Rinpung.
162. See chapter II n. 123.
163. Shab is an area to west of Shigatse.
164. One abbot of the Sakya Monastery. The Sakya abbot used to bear the title *dagchen*.
165. Lo corresponds to the area in north-western Nepal currently called Mustang. At that time it belonged to Ngari Me Gungthang.
166. The masterpiece of Bodong Chole Namgyal.
167. This *stüpa* was built in Pemo Chöding.
168. Ngaggi Wangpo was a nephew of Chole Namgyal and succeeded him as abbot of the monasteries of Shekar and Langkhor. He composed a biography of Chole Namgyal called *rNam thar ngag dbang ma*. He passed away before Chole Namgyal (cf. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 46-47).
169. Monastery located to the east of Shekar.
170. See chapter II n. 94.
171. A scholar belonging to the Tsethang Monastery.
172. See chapter II n. 168.
173. See chapter II n. 164.
174. This was a nephew of the great lama of Sakya Thegchen Chögyal.
175. See chapter II n. 135.
176. A translator belonging to the Bodong E Monastery.
177. Gedündrub (1391-1474 A.D.) was the disciple of Tsongkhapa who founded the Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse and was later recognized as the First Dalai Lama.
178. She was a daughter of the king of Gungthang Thri Lhawang Gyaltshen (son of Thrigyal Sönam De) who was a great patron of Chole Namgyal. She initiated the famous lineage of female reincarnations who were the heads of the Samding Monastery in the area of Yamdrog, cf. *Gung thang rgyal rabs* in *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga* p.125, cf. Introduction.
179. A wrathful protecting deity.



180. See chapter II n.148.
181. Ritual of empowerment performed in order to increase the life-span and vital energy.
182. *Chabtor* (*chab gtor*, “water *torma*”) and *lutor* (*klu gtor*, “*torma* for the *lu*”) are rituals for the spirits of the water and the underground implying the offering of dough figures (*torma*) in order to avert sicknesses and any kind of hindrances caused by these deities. Some dough figures are thrown into the water.
183. Dolpo is an area in north-western Nepal inhabited by people of Tibetan culture. At the time of Chole Namgyal it used to be under the political influence of the kings of Gungthang. There is however another Dolpo in the vicinity of Kyirong in Mangyul.
184. *Shibdag* (*gzhi bdag*) is a deity “owning” and protecting a certain place, a kind of “genius loci”.
185. See chapter I n. 44.
186. See chapter II n. 102.
187. See chapter II n. 168.
188. *Torma* ritual for the protectors of all directions.
189. Menkhab is a locality to the north-west of Dingri. Conflicts between the people of this area and the monastery of Porong Pemo Chöding were frequent.
190. Locality situated in the vicinity of the border with Nepal. The way through Nyanang was a traditional main way of communication between Tibet and Nepal, the other being that through Kyirong.
191. According to this text this lady was the wife of the lord of Gyantse.
192. Locality to the south-east of Gyantse.
193. Probably this is another name for Situ Rabten Künsang Phag, see chapter II n. 154.
194. See chapter II n. 83.
195. A locality in the area of Yamdrog, different from the above-mentioned Chang Taglung, seat of Taglung Thangpa.
196. See chapter II n. 165.
197. Thri Namgyal De (1422-1502 A.D.) was the brother of Chökyi Drönme, a main disciple of Chole Namgyal.
198. His place of residence in the monastery of Pemo Chöding.
199. Chökyi Drönme, princess of Gunthang, cf. chapter II n. 178.
200. Glittering particles originating from the mortal remains of holy lamas.



## Chapter III

### *The History of Bodong*

**From the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*: The Lamp Illuminating the History of Bodong, by the Omniscient Chime Öser.**

Your perfect body was adorned with excellent signs  
so that one might never tire of admiring it,  
let the pride of handsome youth fade.

Your speech possessed the sixty features of melodic voice  
and woke all living beings from their sleep of ignorance  
in its teaching of the doctrine.

Your mind was completely free from worldly sorrows  
and cared for all living beings as if they were your own,  
with great compassion.

Seeing, hearing, remembering (your deeds)  
the suffering of the four states of existence<sup>1</sup> vanishes.  
I bow to Chole Namgyal,  
“Victorious in All Directions”.

The history of the holy doctrine is given as follows:

How the extraordinary teacher Buddha came; how the holy doctrine spread; how living beings benefitted.

#### **Firstly, how the extraordinary teacher Buddha came**

According to the *Bhadrakalpikasūtra* (*mDo bskal pa bzang po*), *Lalitavistara* (*rGya cher rol pa*), and the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarika* (*sNying rje pad ma dkar po*),<sup>2</sup> the way in which the Buddha came reaches beyond the human intellect. The *Bhadrakalpikasūtra* tells that one thousand Buddhas came during the era of good fortune. For this let thanks be given.

The brief history of our teacher, the king of the Śākya, is as follows:

The son of Śuddhodana<sup>3</sup> had in a previous life been born into a potter's family who offered shoes to the Buddha (of that time).

In the beginning, he generated the thought of enlightenment despite the difficulty which this entailed. Next he accumulated merits during three incommensurable times<sup>4</sup> despite the hardships he had to face in acquiring

them. During the first incommensurable time [seventy-]five thousand Buddhas came, during the second incommensurable time seventy-six thousand Buddhas came, and during the third incommensurable time seventy-seven thousand Buddhas came. During those times he performed ritual offerings to them through which he attained merits and wisdom so that eventually he was born as god's son with the name of Śvetaketu in Tuṣita Heaven and he turned the wheel of the doctrine beyond the reach of human intellect. From there he saw the beings of Jambudvīpa,<sup>5</sup> made the five preliminary observations (as to family, country, time, race, woman) and entered the womb of his mother in Rājagṛha.<sup>6</sup> He was born in the gardens of Lumbinī.<sup>7</sup> Eight wet-nurses fed him. During his youth he used to play with descendants of the Śākya lineage. Then he married with Gopā<sup>8</sup> in Kapilavastu. Having witnessed the suffering at the four gates of the town, he cut his hair at a perfectly pure sanctuary and practised austerity for six years near the river Nairāñjanā. He subdued the demons of evil<sup>9</sup> at the Bodhi tree, practised meditation at midnight and became fully enlightened at dawn. For this let thanks be given.

## **Secondly, how the holy doctrine spread**

A brief account of how Buddha turned the wheel of *dharma* three times<sup>10</sup> is as follows:

-First of all he turned the wheel of the doctrine of the four noble truths at Vārāṇasī for the early disciples (*śrāvaka*),<sup>11</sup> such as the first five followers,<sup>12</sup> and the Lone Buddhas (*pratyekabuddha*).<sup>13</sup>

-The second time he turned the wheel of the doctrine of the Perfection of Wisdom<sup>14</sup> for the disciples of Mahāyāna at the Vulture Peak (Gṛdhrakūṭa).

-The third time he turned the wheel of the doctrine of Clear Discrimination<sup>15</sup> for all kinds of followers at Vaiśālī.

He converted his disciples by leading them along the three paths. For this let thanks be given.

## **Thirdly, how the living beings were benefitted**

After the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha, three councils were held. The brief account of who took part is as follows:

According to the Mahāyāna tradition, after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha one million of his spiritual sons gathered on the hill called Vimalasvabhāva to the south of Rājagṛha. The *abhidharma* was collected by Mañjuśrī, the

*vinaya* by Maitreya, the *sūtra* by Vajrapāṇi.

According to the Hīnayāna tradition the *abhidharma* was collected by Mahākāśyapa, the *vinaya* by Upāli, the *sūtra* by Ānanda.<sup>16</sup> According to the Vehicles of the *śrāvaka* and of the *pratyekabuddha* and the Common Vehicle, the first council<sup>17</sup> took place in a Nyagrodha tree<sup>18</sup> during the first summer after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha. King Ajātaśatru was the patron. Ānanda, Mahākāśyapa and Upāli, together with five hundred *arhat*, participated in the council. The second council took place one hundred and ten years after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha. Seven hundred *arhat* gathered and King Aśoka was the patron. The third council<sup>19</sup> took place three hundred years after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha. Five hundred *bodhisattva* such as Vasumitra, five hundred *arhat* and five hundred *pañḍita* gathered in a Kashmiri Monastery, at Jālandara. King Kaniṣka was the patron. They rectified all incorrect beliefs and mistakes. For this let thanks be given.

Then for the sake of the worldly beings came Nāgārjuna and his spiritual son Āryadeva who were experts of Madhyamaka, Asaṅga and his brother Vasubhandu who were experts of *abhidharma*, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti who reached the summit of pure wisdom; Guṇaprabha and Śākyaprabha who were experts of *vinaya*. For “the Six Ornaments and the Two Excellencies”<sup>20</sup> let thanks be given.

Concerning the land surrounded by white snow-covered mountains, and inhabited by the Tibetans: During the time of Lhathothori Nyanshel,<sup>21</sup> twenty-five royal generations after King Nyathri Tsenpo,<sup>22</sup> the *sūtra* called *sPang skong phyag rgya [pa'i mdo]* and the *sūtra* called *Za ma tog bkod pa (Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra)* descended from heaven onto the roof of the temple Umbu Lhakhar (Yumbu Lhagang).<sup>23</sup> This was the first contact with the holy doctrine.

During the time of Songtsen Gampo<sup>24</sup> the temples of Rasa Thrulnang (Tsuglagkhang) and Ramoche<sup>25</sup> were founded. This was the introduction of the holy doctrine. During the time of Thrisong Detsen and Ralpachen the temples of Samye and Öjangdo<sup>26</sup> were founded. This was the spread and prosperity of the holy doctrine. For these ancestral religious kings, emanations of Rigsum Gönpö,<sup>27</sup> as well as of their holy teachers, *pañḍita* and *siddha*, the abbot *bodhisattva* (Śāntarakṣita), Ngagchang (Padmasāmbhava) and the teacher Kamalaśīla,<sup>28</sup> let thanks be given.

During the “middle spread”<sup>29</sup> of the doctrine, after it had been destroyed by the King Langdarma,<sup>30</sup> ten scholars of Ü-Tsang, including Lume, took the spark of the holy doctrine from Do-Kham (to Central Tibet).<sup>31</sup> They practised and developed the *vinaya*, which is the essential core of the doctrine. Lume founded Thangpoche Monastery. For this let thanks be given.

During the “later spread” of the doctrine, Lha Lama<sup>32</sup> and his nephew invited the wishfulfilling gem Atiśa<sup>33</sup> to come from India and founded the Tholing<sup>34</sup> Golden Temple. Atiśa led eminent personages such the great translator Rinchen Sangpo,<sup>35</sup> Khu, Ngog, Drom<sup>36</sup> to the path of spiritual liberation. For this let thanks be given.

During the degenerate age, may we be thankful for the pure doctrine of the Sakya tradition.<sup>37</sup>

The translator Loden Sherab<sup>38</sup> collected the whole knowledge of western India, western Li<sup>39</sup> and Nepal in his mind and benefitted all the scholars studying philosophy in Tibet. For this let thanks be given.

For the sake of the noble tradition concerning the lineage of meditation practice the King of Translators, Marpa,<sup>40</sup> went to India, the Aryan country. He attended one hundred and eight *siddha*, such as Nārōpa, and Maitripā,<sup>41</sup> and received comprehensive instructions on the oral transmission line. He led his disciples experts in the “four volumes” such as Milarepa<sup>42</sup> to the path of spiritual liberation. For this let thanks be given.

May thanks be extended especially to parents without defect, to abbots and teachers who indicated the correct path, to the lamas who introduced the doctrine, to the friends who inspired virtuous deeds.

The account on how the holy doctrine was introduced into Tibet, the Land of Snow:

After fifteen (twenty-seven) royal generations from Nyathri Tsenpo, King Lhathothori Nyenshel,<sup>43</sup> who was an emanation of the *bodhisattva* Samantabhadra, came to the throne. At that time, the *Kāraṇḍavyūhasūtra* (*mDo za ma tog bkod pa*), the *sūtra* called *sPang skong phyag brgya pa*, the *Hṛdaya Śaḍakṣarī* (*rNying po yi ge drug ma*), some terracotta images with *cintāmaṇi*-jewels, a *mudrā* of pearls and a *stūpa* of crystal descended from heaven onto the roof of the Ombu Lhakhar (Yumbu Lhagang).<sup>44</sup> This is known as the very beginning of the holy doctrine. After five further royal generations, the Religious King Songtsen Gampo,<sup>45</sup> who was an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, was born. During the time of his father, Namri Songtsen,<sup>46</sup> salt was discovered; then, during the time of Songtsen Gampo, the minister Thönmi<sup>47</sup> was sent to India where he studied many languages, such as Lentsha. Upon his return to Tibet he created the thirty Tibetan letters. Before this there was no writing in Tibet. The king and the ministers learned this writing.

The minister Gar,<sup>48</sup> acting as envoy, invited the queens Thritsün and Kongjo<sup>49</sup> to become wives of the king. At that time the difference between the honorific and the common was established.<sup>50</sup> One hundred and eight

temples, such as that of Lhasa (Tsongkhag), were built. The law of the ten virtues which had not existed before, was created. Everyone was obliged to observe this law. This is known as the introduction of the holy doctrine.

The next king, Thrisong Detsen,<sup>51</sup> was also a religious man and an emanation of Mañjuśrī. During his reign, one hundred temples, such as that of Samye, were built. Numerous scholars and *siddha* such as the abbot Śāntarakṣita, the teacher (Padmasambhava), the *paṇḍita* Vimalamitra were invited to come from India.<sup>52</sup> The monastic communities were founded. The Bon religion<sup>53</sup> waned. The holy doctrine spread and prospered. At that time a number of tantric treatises were translated and these are called the Ancient Tantra.<sup>54</sup> The teacher Padmasambhava hid many doctrinal treatises for the sake of future living beings.<sup>55</sup> He lived in Tibet for one hundred and eleven years. However some say that this is not true and that he lived in Samye for only seven months before going to India.

After Thrisong Detsen came King Thri Ralpachen, who was succeeded by king Langdarma.<sup>56</sup> At the time of Thri Ralpachen, the temple Öjangdo<sup>57</sup> was built, numerous Indian scholars and *siddha*, such as Dānaśīla and Jinamitra,<sup>58</sup> were invited to stay and monastic communities were founded. The custom was that the second of three sons had to enter the door of the holy doctrine and one monk had to be supported by every seven families. It was also established that should anyone show disrespect to a monk his tongue would be cut out, and if someone looked critically at a monk his eyes would be taken out. The king allowed monks and tantrists to be seated on the silk strip which adorned his head.<sup>59</sup> Numerous translators such as Ka, Chog, Shang<sup>60</sup> translated many doctrinal treatises. The king, who was an emanation of Vajrapāṇi, was possessed with special magic powers and ruled over two thirds of the world (Jambudvīpa). The holy doctrine spread and prospered. Later, when Jobo Atiśa heard how widely diffused it was, he said that there had never been such a good support to the doctrine even in India. King Thri Ralpachen as a result of the effect of *karma* from his former lives, was killed by King Thri Langdarma and demon ministers. Everything which happened before that event is called the “early spread of the doctrine”.<sup>61</sup> At that time all subjects enjoyed a period of happiness. But it was not to last, for Thri Langdarma desecrated the monastic community, destroying its temples. The centre of Ü-Tsang was deprived of the holy doctrine for sixty years. During that time in Ngari there existed only a few semi-monks who would perform religious ceremonies for the living and rituals for the dead. There were a few monastic communities in Kham. This period is called the “middle spread of the doctrine”.<sup>62</sup> According to the omniscient Butön<sup>63</sup> no doctrine was taught in central Tibet throughout that

time. Translators, scholars, *siddha* did not go there. No religious services were held. Only a few *ngagpa*<sup>64</sup> belonging to the ancient tantric tradition remained. When Langdarma destroyed the doctrine, a group of monks, among whom were Yo Gejung, Tsang Rabsel, escaped to Kham.<sup>65</sup> Lhalung Palgyi Dorje,<sup>66</sup> who was an emanation of Vajrapāṇi, killed King Langdarma with an arrow while this latter was reading an inscription on a pillar. Then he too escaped to Kham. In Kham, Yo Gechung and Tsang Rabsel ordained Mu (a son of a Bonpo called Musu Salbar) and named him Rabsel.<sup>67</sup> Later he was called Gönpa Rabsel (“clearest mind”) because of his vast knowledge. He ordained numerous monks of Central Tibet, such as Lume, who after returning to Central Tibet, built one hundred and eight temples, founded monastic communities and preached the *tripiṭaka*. This was the dawn of the holy doctrine in Central Tibet. At the same time, the great translator Rinchen Sangpo from Ngari Tö established the doctrine of *sūtra* and *tantra* which evolved like the rising sun.<sup>68</sup> This is defined as “taking the spark of the doctrine from Me (Eastern Tibet), igniting the fire of the doctrine in Tö (Western Tibet)”. This was the beginning of the ensuing “late spread of the doctrine”.<sup>69</sup>

At that time King Lha Lama Yeshe Ö<sup>70</sup> of Ngari Tö in order to benefit the doctrine gave up his own life when prisoner of the king of Garlog.<sup>71</sup> Lhatsün Changchub Ö sent the translator Nagtsho,<sup>72</sup> with seven hundred golden *srang*, to invite Jobo Atiśa to visit Tibet and so, the doctrine received new life. There were *düntshig*<sup>73</sup> rituals for the dead, prayers for the living, consecrations of statues, offerings to lay men, vows and rules for the monks. Atiśa and the great translator Rinchen Sangpo practised *tantra*. From the time of Rinchen Sangpo on the *tantra* have been called the New Tantra.<sup>74</sup>

Atiśa had three disciples: Khu, Ngog, Drom.<sup>75</sup> Khu and Ngog preached the treatises of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, Drom<sup>76</sup> practised meditation upon instructions from Atiśa. Drom had three spiritual sons: Potoba<sup>77</sup> who was an expert in the six treatises of the Kadampa tradition, Chennngaba<sup>78</sup> who received complete instruction, Phuchungba<sup>79</sup> who practised mainly meditation. Through them the Kadampa tradition developed and prospered like the Sakyapa and the Kagyüpa. The Kadampa tradition flourished for five hundred years, then waned.<sup>80</sup> After the arrival of Atiśa, the doctrine of the Buddha in Tibet, the Land of Snow, grew bright, like the rising sun. In Tibet there were two teaching traditions: philosophy and the tantric vehicle.<sup>81</sup>

As regards the philosophical tradition: the translator Ngog Legpe Sherab<sup>82</sup> founded Sangphu Monastery, where teachings of the *tripiṭaka* spread and prospered greatly. His nephew, the translator Ngog Loden



Sherab,<sup>83</sup> went to India and studied the whole *pramāṇa* from Muteg Kalden Sangpo.<sup>84</sup> He founded the teaching traditions of *Pramāṇaviniścaya* and *Pramāṇavārttika*.<sup>85</sup> His disciple was Chapa Chökyi Sengge<sup>86</sup> who, in his turn, had eight *paṇḍita*, including Tsangnagpa,<sup>87</sup> as his disciples. Through them a number of disciples multiplied beyond all imagination and from then on they became the life-tree of the holy doctrine. Meanwhile, the great Indian *paṇḍita* Bumthagsumpa<sup>88</sup> went to Bodong and introduced the teaching tradition of the *sūtra* concentrating on subjects such as the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and the four 'outer' sciences<sup>89</sup> of the five sciences of knowledge. A multitude of disciples like the stars in the sky, preserved and diffused this tradition. The translator Loden Sherab studied the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* with Bumthagsumpa. At that time, there were just two people with the title of 'Lord' (*jobo*): Jobo Atiśa and Jobo Bumthagsumpa. Likewise, there were just two monasteries which were described as 'great monastic community':<sup>90</sup> Sangphu and Bodong E. Twenty-five years after the foundation of Bodong (in 1049 A.D.), the Sakya temple was established (in 1073 A.D.) by Khön Könchog Gyalpo.<sup>91</sup> After five generations of the lama-lineage appeared the religious lord Sakya Paṇḍita<sup>92</sup> who was a master of the five sciences. He defeated a non-Buddhist scholar called Throgche and diligently studied and preached epistemological treatises such as the *Pramāṇavārttika* before going on to China and becoming the lama [of the Emperor] of China.<sup>93</sup> He was succeeded as Lama [of the Emperor] of China by the religious lord Lama Phagpa who had been a disciple of Sakya Paṇḍita himself and had become a master of thirteen volumes of the Sakya tradition. Sakya ruled over Tibet for seventy-three years.<sup>94</sup> At that time a scholar called Chomden Rigpe Raldri<sup>95</sup> came to Narthang. He preached the *tripitaka* tradition and this prospered well. He edited the volumes of the Kanjur and the Tenjur. He also separated from them works such as the *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* and the *gSo rig rgyud bzhi*. He let the doctrine shine to the greatest brightness. Two generations after Phagpa Rinpoche, Palden Lama Sönam Gyaltsen<sup>96</sup> developed the teaching tradition. He was expert in the five sciences of knowledge. At the same time, the omniscient Jonangpa<sup>97</sup> came. He possessed a vast knowledge in general, and in particular, he mastered and explained the treatises concerning the ultimate truth, mainly the *Prajñāpāramitā*. He was joined by the omniscient Butön. From the conventional to the ultimate truth, there was nothing he ignored. He was like a second Buddha and became master of the teaching tradition of the *tripitaka*. During that time the translator Pang Lotsāba mastered the *maṇḍala* of infinite knowledge and developed the relevant teaching tradition. Of all the scholars who were expert in teaching the doctrine, he became the jewel in the crown. His nephew, the translator Changchub

Tsemo, was an expert in the five sciences of knowledge and became a master of the *abhidharma*. He developed the teaching tradition of the doctrine in general, and *abhidharma*, grammar and epistemology in particular. The translator Dragpa Gyaltshen was the great-nephew of the illustrious translator Pang Lotsāba. He was an authority on all areas of knowledge and in particular he developed the teaching traditions of *Prajñāpāramitā* and *abhidharma*.

The philosophical teaching tradition stemming from these three translators continued later on for a long time and became the root of the holy doctrine. At the same time the lord of scholars, Rendaba Shönnu Lodrö, came. He mastered every treatise of the doctrine, in particular those concerning Madhyamaka and he extended the teaching of the *Prajñāpāramitā*. Meanwhile his disciple, the lord of religion, Lobsang Dragpa<sup>98</sup> came. He was possessed of incredible knowledge, both innate and that acquired through learning. He was a particular expert in Madhyamaka and *vinaya*. As though Buddha had returned to this world he made the doctrine shine like the sun in a cloudless sky. At the same time Yagthrug Sangyepel and his disciple Rongtön Shecha Künrig came. Their knowledge was vast. In particular they were experts in the Mādhyamika Svātantrika school. They developed the teaching tradition of the *Prajñāpāramitā*.

Of the tantric teachings: the traditions of Sakya and Ngog acquired great fame. In Sakya there were numerous tantric teaching traditions, though mainly the *Gur stag pa gsum* (?) was studied. The transmission line of the *Hevajratantra* came from Sakya Künga Nyingpo<sup>99</sup> to Thegchen Rinpoche.<sup>100</sup> There were two disciples of Thegchen Rinpoche, called, respectively, Künga Sangpo and Künga Gyaltshen. Künga Sangpo founded the Ngor Monastery<sup>101</sup> and introduced the teaching tradition of the secret tantric precepts. The Religious Lord Künga Gyaltshen introduced the teaching tradition of the secret tantric precepts into the Labrang Dzongchung of Sakya. This was known as the Ngor-Dzong tradition. The omniscient Butön also studied and taught widely the basic texts and secret precepts of the *tantra*. In particular, he concentrated on all the *yoga* traditions. Künkhyen Jonangpa<sup>102</sup> taught mainly the *Kālacakra* tradition. The omniscient Lobsang Dragpa and his spiritual sons were all experts in the basic texts and the secret precepts of the *tantra*. They focused predominantly on the *Guhyasamāja* and *Cakrasamvara*. Later the monks of the Ribo Ganden tradition (Gelugpa) became especially expert on philosophical studies. These all belonged to the tantric teaching tradition of Sakya. The followers of Sakya and Butön were expert not only in the above-mentioned teachings but also in ritual dancing and drawing.

As regards the Ngog tradition; it seems that, in early times, the tradition prospered, but, now, little is heard about it.

In its history, Bodong has doctrinal traditions of teaching and of meditation practice which stem from the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* (the main work of Bodong Chole Namgyal). With regard to the teaching tradition, the main seat, the lamas and the development of the doctrine were as follows:

The foremost of all seats was the Palden Bodong E Monastery in which a multitude of scholars had great faith. The history of this monastery is as follows: The translator Nyen Darma Drag<sup>103</sup> went to India to study the doctrine and to acquire translation skills. He mastered the five sciences of knowledge in general and he became particularly expert in grammar. He also learned the language of a remote area close to the sea. When he was about to return to Tibet, he thought: "I am an expert in all branches of knowledge, I even know the language of a remote place close to the sea. So in Tibet I need somebody who shares my knowledge and can be of benefit to Tibet as well as to me". He decided therefore to invite one *paṇḍita* to Tibet and he forwarded the relevant request to the king of the country in eastern India where he had resided. The king gathered over three thousand *paṇḍita* from his region and, out of all of them, selected the great *paṇḍita* Bumthragsumpa, the jewel in the crown, to accompany him to Tibet. The *paṇḍita* did not want to go, but by practising meditation on *sGrol ma yid kyī lcag kyu*,<sup>104</sup> the translator managed to capture his mind. One night the *paṇḍita* got up at midnight and said: "Let's go, let's go to Tibet". And this is how the translator invited the *paṇḍita* to Tibet. After their arrival in Tibet, they greatly benefitted the people of Tsang. At that time a spiritual master called Mudrā Chenpo,<sup>105</sup> who had founded a small monastery in Bodong, became a follower of the *paṇḍita* who one day pointed to the monastery asking: "To whom does this monastery belong"? The spiritual master answered: "This small monastery is mine". The *paṇḍita* said: "This is not a small monastery. It will become great in the future". The spiritual master added: "If you wish, it can be offered to you". The *paṇḍita* accepted and introduced many teaching traditions such as the *abhidharma*. A multitude of monks gathered there and therefore, the monastery became a great monastic community. There were twenty abbots after that, before the religious lord and translator Pang Lodrö Tenba<sup>106</sup> came. He was born in Latö Surtsho. By the time he was seven he already knew by heart the basic treatises of the *vinaya*. He had studied the *sūtra* and the *tantra* in depth at Sakya. He went to Nepal three times where many *paṇḍita* from India listened to the doctrine from him. Famous Tibetan lamas such as the omniscient Jonangpa, Gyalse Thogme, Butön from Shalu, Lama Dampa

Sönam Gyaltsen, Jamyang Dogyen, the religious lord of Taglung called Ratnākara, the twenty-second religious lord of Drigung, Tasitu Changchub Gyaltsen, became his disciples. Becoming famous for being learned, pure and wise, he was invited to China by the emperor, but he did not accept because he rejected all worldly matters. He studied and taught the *sūtra* and the *tantra* in an excellent way and he composed commentaries on the basic treatises of the doctrine such as those on *pramāṇa*. He passed away in Bodong itself. Afterwards Namkha Dorje<sup>107</sup> and Namkha Könchog<sup>108</sup> occupied the seat of abbot in Bodong. The great translator Changchub Tsemo, nephew of the translator Pang Lotsāba, had studied grammar, epistemology and the whole *tripitaka* from his youth. In particular, he had received the secret precepts from his uncle Pang Lodrö Tenba, the omniscient Butön, the religious lord Gyalse Thogme, and Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen. Changchub Tsemo cultivated a vast knowledge and became a great scholar. He turned the wheel of *dharma* to a great extent in Bodong, the seat of Pang Lotsāba. He founded Ngari Chöde<sup>109</sup> and performed rituals to subdue the land for the foundation of the Shekar Monastery.<sup>110</sup> He was invited to Ü by Chennga Dragpa Changchub<sup>111</sup> and turned the wheel of the doctrine for the benefit of all beings, both those endowed with great cleverness as well as those of limited intellectual means. He visited most sites and monasteries in Yoru and Uru.<sup>112</sup> It is said that there had never been a lama from Tsang to Ü who had performed greater deeds than he. He also composed numerous texts on the *sūtra* and the *tantra*. He had the signs of accomplished meditation, such as prescience. He also became the lama of numerous great monks, such as Thegchen Chöje.<sup>113</sup> He was famous for being learned, pure and wise and this corresponded to truth. Eventually he passed away in Chumig.<sup>114</sup> His nephew was the great translator Dragpa Gyaltsen who, from his youth, was expert in all branches of knowledge. He studied the whole doctrine of the *sūtra* and the *tantra* with the great translator Changchub Tsemo. He occupied the seat of abbot at Bodong, Drangmoche,<sup>115</sup> Ngari Gungthang and founded the Shekar Monastery. There he introduced the teaching tradition of the *sūtra* and the *tantra* and composed multifarious works. He showed the signs of accomplished meditation and became the lama of numerous Tibetan scholars and monks such as Yag<sup>116</sup> and Rong.<sup>117</sup> He had the doctrine of the Buddha shine in all its glory. Eventually he passed away at Samtenling.<sup>118</sup>

The Bodongpa (Chole Namgyal), king of religion of the Three Realms, was born at Yigu<sup>119</sup> of Śrī Lagpa Gong in Southern Latö. He was the son of Chöying Gyaltsen and his mother was Changchub Dröma. Just after his birth he displayed auspicious signs like keeping his body in the meditation posture. He was given the name Yungdrung Sangye Kyi. At the age of

seven he was ordained. He would have visions of Avalokiteśvara, Sarasvati, Phamo Karpo, the Buddha and the Sixteen *arhat*. He participated in ritual debates on fifteen volumes of the doctrine in Tsethang, Sangphu, Debachen, Chökhörling etc. He was a scholar of renown and his fame spread throughout the land. After leaving Dragpa Gyaltsen he occupied the seat of abbot at Bodong when he was only twenty-six. He went on to occupy the seats of Shekar and Ngari (Gungthang) also. He studied the four external sciences of knowledge, the *tripiṭaka* and the four classes of *tantra* with the great translator Dragpa Gyaltsen and numerous other holy men. He became an illustrious scholar and his fame spread not only in the Land of Snow but also in India, the country of the Aryans. When he was thirty-five he had a vision of the Buddha transformed into Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen. He was carrying the volumes of the doctrine with the help of seven elephants and transmitted them to him. He further said: "You must be master of the teaching and the meditation practices of the doctrine".

In a dream he received instructions from the venerable Dragpa Gyaltsen of Sakya and Butön of Shalu to compose the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*. In a vision he also received analogous instructions from Vajrasattva and Vajrayoginī.

The detailed version of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* comprised four main parts. These included the five major sciences of knowledge, three hundred and sixty subdivisions, seventy-two thousand instructions, twenty-one thousand six hundred chapters, eighty-four thousand paragraphs, all together one hundred and twelve volumes. Of this work there was a detailed summary. A more concise summary counted twenty volumes, an even shorter summary comprised two volumes and the shortest summary consisted of just one volume.

The omniscient religious lord resided in the Bodong Monastery and the other seats where he turned the wheel of the doctrine of the *sūtra* and the *tantra*. All the spiritual masters from Central Tibet and from the border areas gathered to study and practise meditation with him. They were all free of worldly concerns and had no retinue and servants of any kind. The omniscient religious lord had turned his back on worldly pleasures and practised deep meditation in Pemo Chöding which was extremely remote and hardly accessible. The rulers of Tibet, Dragpa Gyaltsen and Dragpa Jungne invited him to the palace of Nedong<sup>120</sup> three times but he did not accept. There were also many accounts of how he benefitted the doctrine and living beings without caring for his own life. In brief, there were no doctrinal treatises introduced into Tibet which he did not study. Nobody could compete with him in the debates. The respected Tibetan scholars Yag Mipham, Rongtön Śākya Gyaltsen, Khedrub Geleg Pel, Sönam Kyab all

lost their pride before him. Since the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha, there had never been a custodian of the doctrine like the omniscient Bodongpa, king of religion. In the Land of Snow the jewel of the doctrine shone with a brightness of one hundred thousand suns thanks to his teaching, debating and composing.

The successive hierarchs<sup>121</sup> of the doctrine: His nephew,<sup>122</sup> who was expert in the *sūtra* and the *tantra* according to the three disciplines,<sup>123</sup> occupied the seat of abbot at Bodong and spread the holy doctrine with philosophical teachings and through the practice of meditation. The great Bodongpa bestowed empowerments on his successors: the venerable Chökyi Drönme,<sup>124</sup> a nun (*bhikṣuṇī*) emanation of Vajravārāhī, and Palden Chime Druba, an emanation of Cakrasaṃvara. According to the secret biography the venerable Chödrön received the following instructions (from Bodong Chole Namgyal):

“Three rebirth of you will take place in the area of Tsari<sup>125</sup> in lower Ü, you shall perform great deeds for the living beings of the ten directions. You shall produce volumes of gold, silver and copper to benefit the living beings of the ten directions and you shall go to the realm of the *ḍākinī*”<sup>126</sup>

Palden Chime Druba received the following instructions:

“You shall master the holy secret precepts called *dPal Idan ‘chi med grub pa*”.

The sacred songs of this great *siddha* recount:

“At first I took Dharmadza (Bodongpa) as my teacher, then I became a master of empowerments and in instructing on the *sūtra* and the *tantra*”.

In this way the great Bodongpa appointed his successors and when he had completed the deeds for living beings in this world, he thought to benefit the beings of another realm. After living for seventy-six years in the Land of Snow, he went to *nirvāṇa* in Pemo Chöding. At present he has become an emanation of King Rigden<sup>127</sup> and is turning the wheel of *dharma* in Śambhala.

The deeds of the successors of the omniscient lord of religion Chökyi Drönme and Chime Druba were as follows:

In ancient times, Vajravārāhī was born as Lakṣmīṅkarā, sister of King Indrabhūti in Uḍḍiyāna.<sup>128</sup> She was known as Bhikṣuṇj Lakṣmī and her deeds were beyond human imagination. She led her own brother to the land of spiritual realization. Next she was born as Mandaravā,<sup>129</sup> daughter of King Indrabhūti “the Middle” also called Chenme Jorden, in Zahor. She possessed the signs of accomplished spiritual realization. She became a *mudrā* of the great teacher (Padmasaṃbhava). In Tibet, she was incarnated as the *ḍākinī* Sönam Drenma and became a *mudrā* of Phagmodrupa<sup>130</sup> at

Phagmodru. Then she incarnated as the *ḍākinī* Sönam Paldren at Damshö in Kham and used to stay in retreat and perform deeds for the benefit of living beings. Then she was born as daughter of the king of Ngari Gungthang, Khri Lhawang Gyaltsen and Dodelha Gyalmo. She was called Könchog Gyalmo, the chief of the *ḍākinī*. Later she was ordained and became known as Jetsun Chödrön.

Palden Chime Druba lived at the time of Indrabodhi who was a brother of Lakṣmī, then at the time of the father of Mandāravā, then at the time of Chennga Tshülthrim Bar,<sup>131</sup> a disciple of Dromtönpa, then at the time of Khampa Dorje Gyalbo<sup>132</sup> who was one of the three Khampa disciples of Dagpo Lhaje,<sup>133</sup> then at the time of Chögyal Nasathrö of Sulphu,<sup>134</sup> then at the time of the heroine of Kham Rinchenpel and Sönam Paldren (the above-mentioned).<sup>135</sup>

They benefitted the doctrine and performed deeds for the living beings as follows: After the venerable omniscient (Bodong Chole Namgyal) had passed away, Chökyi Drönme took care of his funeral rites. Then she went to Tsagong, a holy place in Kongpo,<sup>136</sup> and resided there. Following the example of her lama, she meditated deeply on the thought of the enlightenment of Mahāyāna. She passed away at the age of thirty-four in Bogong Menmogang where, for the benefit of all living beings, a *stūpa* was built in which her skull was placed as a sacred relic.

Palden Chime Druba was born in Ngari Gungthang. He was ordained during his youth and went to Sangphu in order to study philosophy. He debated on about ten volumes of the doctrine. He became famous as Kabchupa Dhamapel. He was also expert in the tantric tradition of Ribo Gandenpa (Gelugpa). Later, with Jetsun Chödrön he became a follower of Jigdrel Bodongpa (Bodong Chole Namgyal). He received all his teachings and instruction and this tradition was entrusted to him. After the omniscient Jigdrel had passed away, he went with Jetsun Chödrön to Tsagong in Kongpo and offered his services to her. After Jetsun Chödrön had passed away, he devoted himself to meditation for three years and showed signs of accomplished spiritual realization such as leaving footprints on rock.

Jetsun Künga Sangmo was a reincarnation of Jetsun Chödrön. She was born close to Sinmo Nyen in Kongpo as the daughter of *siddha* Chogden Dorje and Jomo Drön. She was cared for by Chime Druba and together they went to Loro,<sup>137</sup> Lhodrag<sup>138</sup> and Yamdrog<sup>139</sup> where they organized a great gathering and established the holy doctrine. In the three districts of Ngari<sup>140</sup> and in the area of Tö-Hor<sup>141</sup> she also performed great deeds which were beyond the grasp of the human mind. In particular, thanks to her instructions, the army of Hor did not come to Tibet. Jetsun Künga Sangmo and Palden Chime Druba went on to visit numerous places from Tö-Hor to

Do-Kham (Eastern Tibet). The lords of Ü-Tsang, such as the king of Ngari Me, the ruler of Nedong Tshenyi Rinpoche and Garba Dönyö Dorje, all became patrons and followers of theirs and they performed deeds limitless like the infinity of the sky. Palden Chime Druba practised mainly meditation and composed numerous works such as the *Zab gsal mkha'* 'gro snying thig.<sup>142</sup> He had a multitude of disciples in Ngari, Dagpo, and Do-Kham. Eventually he passed away at the age of fifty-nine at Kodrag kyar in Mar Kham.

Jetsun Künga Sangmo received plentiful offerings from Do-Kham and she used them to build *stūpa* of gold and copper in Yamdrog, as well as to reproduce the detailed version of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* which was written in gold and silver letters. She established numerous teaching and meditation schools<sup>143</sup> with the support of numerous patrons such as the Rinlungpa,<sup>144</sup> the Shika Dragkarba, the Yargyabne Pönsa Thagchöma, the Pönsa Dönyöpel, and the Pönsa Tashijong.<sup>145</sup> She founded the Char Chöde Monastery<sup>146</sup> with the support of Tashi Dargye, the lord of Char. In Yamdrog she improved the Samding meditation monastery<sup>147</sup> with the support of both Lhundrub Tashi, son of the lord of Yamdrog, and the Lady Tshebum Gyalmo. She took care also of the Yasang<sup>148</sup> Monastery with the support of Sönam Dorje, lord of Yar-Tö (upper Yarlung). Desi Gongma<sup>149</sup> offered Yarlung Sheldrag<sup>150</sup> to her. In this way she founded new monasteries as well as taking care of the old ones. At that time in Tibet, the Land of Snow, there were no lama greater than she and Karma Chödrag Gyatsho.<sup>151</sup> There was no difference between them. When they had the chance to meet, Karmapa used to sit to the right, Künga Sangmo to the left on identical thrones and they each received equal attention. In brief, Künga Sangmo contributed enormously to the prosperity of the doctrine of *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*. At the age of forty-four she passed away in Lasso (Latö?) Riboche.<sup>152</sup>

The omniscient Chime Pelsang was an incarnation of Palden Chime Druba. He was born as the son of Shönnu Gyaltsen, his father, and *ḍākinī* Tshogdag Karmo, his mother, at Ronggur, close to Taglung<sup>153</sup> in Ü. At the age of seven, he was ordained and given the name Chime Pelsangpo by Taglung Ngawang Dragpa.<sup>154</sup> He recognized some objects which had belonged to Chime Druba such as the vase for empowerment, and a painted scroll of Vajrabhairava. He went to Dreyul Kyetshel to study philosophy. He learned by heart about fourteen doctrinal treatises. He adopted numerous learned people and *siddha* as his teachers among whom were Taglung Rinpoche (Ngawang Dragpa), the Lord Phagchog, Shangpa Sönam Chogyur, and Kushang Künga Nyingpo. He possessed great expertise in the treatises of the *sūtra* and the *tantra*, as well as in grammar and



epistemology. He composed a number of doctrinal treatises, such as the *Kyee rDo rje'i nam bshad zab gsal gnas kyi lde mig*.<sup>155</sup> He took Hevajra as protector of the doctrine. He possessed therefore the power to destroy from their very roots all enemies of the doctrine and the lamas. He could do this immediately without having to take months or years over the process.

Jetsun Nyendrag Sangmo was the reincarnation of Jetsun Künga Sangmo. She was born as daughter to Pawo Lhundrub, her father, and Tashi Pelbar, her mother, at Damshö in Kham. She was taken care of by Chime Pelsang. She performed great deeds from Kongpo to Ngari. Both teacher and disciple (Chime Pelsang and Nyendrag Sangmo) established a school of philosophy for the study of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* at Nyemo Chekhar.<sup>156</sup> Later, a monastery was founded under the patronage of the lord of Nyemo. This was of immeasurable benefit to the doctrine of the Buddha in general and it became the life-tree of the doctrine of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* in particular. It is said that, without this, the doctrine of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* would have survived in name only and the keepers of the doctrine would have failed to perform their great deeds. Furthermore, Chödzung was founded and strongly supported in order to protect Pemo Chöding from the threat of border armies. In general she took care of all monastic communities practising the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* just as a mother would care for her children. Once the doctrine of Buddha suffered severely at the hands of people coming from upper Ngari, with keepers of the doctrine being killed, monasteries and religious symbols destroyed leading to the doctrine surviving in name only. In that occasion she took care of the lamas and of the surviving keepers of the doctrine as if they were her sons, following both religious and civil laws. She restored all the doctrines which had decayed and received support from lay lords and protectors of religion. In brief, to the doctrine she was a grace beyond human imagination. Eventually, she passed away, at the age of forty at Samding in Yamdrog.

The incarnation of Jetsun Nyendrag Sangmo is the present Jetsun Urgyen Tsomo. Her father was Pawo Chüden, her mother *ḍākinī* Thaggo and she was born at Sobo Soshi in Kham. At the age of five, she was taken care of and served by the omniscient Chime Pelsang. This latter incarnation was a blessing for the doctrine and was as great as Jigdreel Rinpoche (Bodong Chole Namgyal) himself. He performed great deeds and had numerous disciples following the *tripitaka* tradition and practised *mantra*. She attained the age of seventy-one. Thanks to her blessing, the doctrine of the Bodongpa spread, both in Ü and in the remote places. She passed away at Daki Samding.

Jetsun Urgyen Tsomo, despite her youth took excellent care of the

funeral arrangements and the construction of religious memorials for the omniscient deceased (Chime Pelsang). At the age of twenty-four she went with me (author) to southern Kongpo to benefit the good of all living beings. Her activities spread as far as the horizon. Later, following the wish of Chime Pelsang to build a tantric college, she was able, with the support of the religious lords of Nakartse,<sup>157</sup> to found a college in Gya. Then, free from any attachment to worldly matters, I went from place to place with no fixed direction. I did not care for material wealth and devoted myself exclusively to the holy doctrine. I also took devoted care of my disciples and the patrons who had faith in me, in monasteries from Kongpo to Ngari. Wherever I went lords and local people, monastic communities and spiritual teachers trusted me. Towards those who harmed me my attitude was not the same. I would not stay in places where there was jealousy. The purpose of my travels was to benefit the doctrine. I preached the principle of the *sūtra* and the *tantra* to all the disciples according to their intellectual capabilities. I preached and bestowed empowerments in the monasteries of Bodong, Ngönga, Champaling, Chang Taglung. I practised meditation in mountain retreats such as those on Gang Tise; I guided many disciples in following the *tripitaka*, and had patrons everywhere from Kongpo in the east to Ngari in the west. Thanks to the relations established through *karma* and prayer, I had numerous patrons, from the king of Mön<sup>158</sup> in the south to Hor Karmapel<sup>159</sup> in the north. Despite limited wealth as a result of my scant ability in worldly affairs, I managed to found the school of meditation at Pemo Chöding and Samten Chöding with the support of the wealthy Kharogpa. A school of philosophy was founded close to Yargyab Dzong.<sup>160</sup> I never spent more than one year in the same place and I never transgressed the vows on the precepts of individual liberation. Since my body and my entire life have been dedicated to the benefit of all living beings, I was not affected by attempts to harm me, such as when I was given poison or attacked by the use of black magic. Wherever I went, I remained free from harm thanks to the grace of *lama*, *yidam* and *khandro*.<sup>161</sup>

The doctrine of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* was taught and practised, developing both philosophy and the *tantra*. Concerning the development of philosophy: As the omniscient Bodong Chole Namgyal used to teach in the monasteries where he resided, he had a multitude of followers like the stars in the sky. There were many learned disciples, such as Menkhampa Dragpa Sangpo,<sup>162</sup> Dolpo Gyaltshen Dragpa,<sup>163</sup> Khedrub Geleg Pelsang,<sup>164</sup> Lodrö Tenba “the fourth”<sup>165</sup> of Bodong, Kabchuba Namkha Pelsang,<sup>166</sup> Changpa Sangye Sengge,<sup>167</sup> Khedrub Palden Sengge. After Chole Namgyal himself had turned the wheel of the doctrine at Bodong, Lodrö Tenba “the fourth”

helped the tradition to evolve by teaching the *sūtra* and founding a college. Menkhampa Dragpa Sangpo and Dolpo Gyaltsen Dragpa also founded a school of philosophy. Kabchuba Namkha Pelsang taught at the school of Tshorpoling in Pemo Chöding. Khedrub Palden Sangye taught in Ngari and composed works on *pramāṇa*, *vinaya* and *Madhyamaka*. Changpa Sangye Sengge taught in Northern Latö and composed works on *pramāṇa* and *Madhyamaka*. Kabchuba Namkha Pelsang composed works on *pramāṇa* which became very widespread for a certain time. Once, however, he heard that the omniscient scholar had said to Ngawang Dragpa of Taglung: “Given the brevity of human life in this degenerate age, after completing all the efforts in teaching and practising the doctrine, it is better to turn to the stark religion of death”. When the teacher Kabchuba Namkha Pelsang heard this he gave up his teaching activities and dedicated himself exclusively to meditation. Then other teaching traditions of the *dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus pa* waned as well until only a few survived. The scholar Namkha Pelrin went to Bodong, the seat of the great *paṇḍita* Lodrö Tenba “the fourth” and kept the teaching tradition of the *dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus pa* alive. He turned the wheel of *dharma* throughout Ü-Tsang. After he passed away, the teaching tradition almost disappeared. At that time, the *arhat* Sönam Rinchen taught in Pemo Chöding, but, due to the high altitude and the cold climate, the tradition did not manage to prosper significantly. It had also to endure the threat from the army of the Mongols of Western Tibet on several occasions. Eventually, Sönam Rinchen gave up his teaching activities and left for Yolmogang<sup>168</sup> to practise meditation. At the same time the omniscient Chime Pelsang and Nyendrag Sangmo went to Lhasa to perform ritual offerings and prayers and both were invited to Bodong, where they were told of the need for a very learned scholar. Chime Pelsang said: “If you are able to send an invitation, we can found the college”. So, a college was founded in Yamdrog Ngönga where numerous monks gathered. They sent an invitation to the teacher Sönam Rinchen which met him on the way to Yolmogang. Sönam Rinchen agreed to go there for the benefit of the doctrine. There his teaching activity prospered greatly. He composed works on *Prajñāpāramitā* and *pramāṇa* and founded a monastery at Nyemo Chekhar. Under him, Sangye Lhundrub, the sun of the doctrine in the world, appeared. Over five hundred scholars who had reached the degree of *kabchuba* and *rabjampa* gathered and they were all very learned and wise and the doctrine of the *dPal de kho na nyid ‘dus pa* became like the rising sun. A school of philosophy, a branch of Nyemo, was established at Thragtse in Latö for some years. Then this was abandoned to decay because of a war.<sup>169</sup> Later when I was eighteen and had become a teacher, I established a school of philosophy and founded a monastery close to

Ngabshö Dzong where *rabjampa* Sönam Gyaltshen was appointed as teacher. Another monastery was founded where one year before, Namkha Rinchen<sup>170</sup> the great abbot of the Shekar Monastery in Southern Latö had founded a school of philosophy. At the same time a school of philosophy had been established at Yoldong in Latö and the scholar *rabjampa* Paljor Lhundrub was invited as teacher from Bodong Drangmoche. Both had excellent conditions for studying and there the doctrine prospered greatly.

As regards the tantric teachings, the Omniscient (Bodong Chole Namgyal) himself bestowed empowerments and taught the *tantra*. According to the treatises of the four classes of *tantra*, he practised rituals, dance, the creation of *maṇḍala* as well as ritual music and choir. He did this in Bodong, Shekar, Langkhor, Pemo Chöding, Ngari Chöde. Furthermore he visited many places from Ngari to Yamdrog where he bestowed empowerments and taught the *tantra*. He developed the doctrine of Vajrayāna greatly. Afterwards the scholar Palden Sangye founded the Ngönga Monastery in Ngari where he taught the *tantra*. Some other monasteries were founded in the Ngari area where the teaching and the practice of the *tantra* developed greatly.

In Southern Latö the scholar Lodrö Gyaltshen<sup>171</sup> who later succeeded to his seat founded the tantric school of Phutshorling where he taught and practised the *tantra*. He also founded the meditation place Samtenling.<sup>172</sup> Yol Chögyal Sangpo founded Gomo Chöding.<sup>173</sup> *Rabjampa* Shönnu Sangpo founded the Cha Dzong Monastery. From these monasteries stemmed numerous branches where the teaching and the practice of the *tantra* increased very much. In Northern Latö, the *tantra* tradition was established in numerous monasteries, such as Ngamring Chöde.<sup>174</sup> The tantric master *rabjampa* Jamdrag taught the *tantra* and practised numerous *drubchö*<sup>175</sup> rituals at the Ngönga Monastery in Yamdrog. In many branches of this monastery, the practice of these rituals grew most satisfactorily. Kushang Jamyang Dragpa established the teaching tradition of the *tantra* and the practice of the *drubchö* rituals at Mönkhar Chöding in Nyemo.<sup>176</sup> Phagchog Yonten Gyatsho helped the tantric rituals to prosper well in Yagde Pelri Chöding<sup>177</sup> and Char Chöde.<sup>178</sup> The above-mentioned form the very root of the doctrine (of the Bodongpa). Further monasteries and keepers of the *dPal de kho na nyid dus pa* doctrine are too numerous to mention. Later on the two former venerable masters sent Tanbe Drönme, the great *paṇḍita* expert in all treatises of the *tantra* to Loro<sup>179</sup> where he established the tradition of the *drubchö* rituals concerning the four classes of *tantra*. In this way, the doctrine prospered triumphantly everywhere.

With regard to the future development of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* doctrine, the omniscient Chole Namgyal used to say: “The jewel of the doctrine, *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*, will prosper abundantly in every direction”. Another time he said: “My doctrine will spread to the eastern sea”. Up to now the line of those who have held the seat of abbot has had no interruption. The lineage of reincarnations has continued the tradition of study.

Seven succeeding abbots were called “the seven Mañjuśrī”: the religious lord Pang Lotsāba Lodrö Tenba, the great translator Changchub Tsemo, the great *paṇḍita* Dragpa Gyaltshen, the omniscient Chole Namgyal, the great abbot Jigme,<sup>180</sup> the spiritual master Lodrö Gyaltshen, Jamyang Dönyö Namgyal.

The reincarnations were as follows: Though there have been numerous incarnations of the “great mother” (*gyalyum*) Vajravārāhī (Dorje Phamo), just three reincarnations of Jetsun Chödrön were upholders of the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* tradition. These were the venerable Künga Sangmo, Nyendrag Sangmo and Urgyen Tsomo. With regard to Chime Druba, there were no prophecies of numerous reincarnations for the future. It is said that there was a prophecy to the effect that when reincarnations of Jetsun Chödrön ceased to occur an incarnation of the “great mother” (*gyalba yumchen*) Changchub Drön would appear.

The doctrine and the holders of the doctrine have eleven particular excellencies:<sup>181</sup> the excellent seat is the seat of India, the excellent lineage of the doctrine is that of Indian *paṇḍita* and *siddha*, the excellent sacred writings are the *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus chen*, the excellent theory is the Union of Profoundness and Clarity,<sup>182</sup> the excellent meditation is the Process of Generation and the Process of Perfection, the excellent way ... (words unclear), the excellent behaviour is the very thought of enlightenment, the excellency of application is to benefit only others, the excellent holders of the doctrine are translators, scholars and incarnations, the excellent field is the land without borders and fixed directions, the excellent activity is to prosper everywhere without corruption.

He who has faith in this doctrine (*dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa*), even if this faith is as thin as a hair and he is not expert in the doctrine itself, will just by hearing the name of Jigdrel Chole Namgyal, avoid being reborn in to the lower realms. The great master said: “I heard, thought, remembered, meditated innumerable times during my many former lives. I promise that also those who have seen, heard, remembered, touched me during this life will not fall into the lower realms. If this does not come true, it will be my sin alone and not the fault of anybody else”.

All that is mentioned above narrates, in brief, the tradition of studying the *sūtra* and the *tantra* with particular concern for Bodong.

The lineages of practice of meditation in Tibet were as follows:

From Dampa Sangye stemmed the Shije<sup>183</sup> tradition, from Gayādhara stemmed the Lamdre<sup>184</sup> tradition. From the Indian Vajrapāṇi stemmed the Thrö Kagyüpa tradition. From Khedrub Khyungpo stemmed the Shangpa Kagyüpa tradition.<sup>185</sup> From the Lord Dagpo Lhaje stemmed the Dagpo Kagyüpa tradition. From Lama Shang the Tshelpa Kagyüpa stemmed from.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, the oral transmission line of the Shije followed the teachings of Chö.<sup>187</sup> At present there is just one lineage, which is barely surviving without performing great deeds. The followers of the Gayādhara tradition are exclusively the Sakyapa. The tradition stemming from the Indian Vajrapāṇi has disappeared at present. The tradition of Shangpa Kagyüpa stemming from Khedrub Kyungpo did not avoid fusion with other traditions. However the deeds of the followers of the Shangpa Nigu tradition<sup>188</sup> have prospered greatly up to now. The Dagpo Kagyüpa of Lord Gampopa<sup>189</sup> has so many followers as to defy human imagination. Among them are the Three Khampa. Khampa Useba was the Lord Düsum Khyenba.<sup>190</sup> His incarnation was Karma Pakśiba.<sup>191</sup> He achieved particular spiritual realization and became lama in Jang<sup>192</sup> and China. His incarnation was Karma Rangchung Dorje. His incarnation was Karma Rolpe Dorje. His incarnation was Chöje Deshinshegpa. His incarnation was Dorje Thongba Dönden. His incarnation was Karma Chödrag Gyatsho.<sup>193</sup> These were called the seven generations of Karmapa. The incarnation of Chödrag Gyatsho was Chöje Mikyo Dorje. His incarnation was the lord Wangchug Dorje.<sup>194</sup> Though he was a *siddha* he did not concentrate on meditation and he went from place to place and established a wide network of relations. Khampa Dorje Gyalbo alias Phagmodruba, was one of the Three Khampa.<sup>195</sup> He had eight disciples who all had gained spiritual realization. He also had four disciples called “the Four Disciples of Greatness”: Taglungpa who founded the Taglung Monastery<sup>196</sup> was the greatest in devotion, Drigungpa who founded the Drigungthel Monastery<sup>197</sup> was greatest in being unchangeable, Lingrepa who founded the Nabu Chölung Monastery<sup>198</sup> was the greatest in insight, Parphuba who founded the Parphu Monastery<sup>199</sup> was the greatest in morality. From them a multitude of disciples stemmed and these covered the earth. The disciple of Lingrepa was Tsangpa Gyare.<sup>200</sup> He founded monasteries in Drug, Ralung, Dongkar, Chödzung. His disciple Götshangpa<sup>201</sup> developed the Tö Drug tradition in Latö. Nine people bearing the name Sengge, such as Dharma Sengge belonged to the Bar Drug tradition. The Me Drug tradition was developed by Gyalba Lore.<sup>202</sup>

Concerning the Tshelpa Kagyüpa: at the time of Lama Shang the religious and worldly deeds increased beyond human imagination. He was considered like a god and became the lord of Ü. He founded the temple of Gungthang and allowed a big statue of Lhachen Pelbar be made. His service to Lhasa was immense. After he had passed away, his tradition did not prosper for a long time. At the same time Jigten Gönpö of Drigung<sup>203</sup> gathered one hundred eighty thousand disciples. These disciples were then sent to occupy Gang Tise, Labchi, Chubar, Kongpo Tsari. The Drigungpa became lords of both religious and civil laws. During the eighteen years they were in power over the Land of Snow, they became strong beyond any imagination. Then the Sakyapa invited the army from China, the Drigung Monastery<sup>204</sup> was burnt down and they seized power. Drigung Jigten Gönpö had succeeded Phagmodrupa to the abbot's seat at Densathel.<sup>205</sup> Chennga Dragpa Jungne<sup>206</sup> followed him. His nephew was the head of myriarchy Dorje Pel.<sup>207</sup> At that time Phagpa<sup>208</sup> had organized the administration of Tibet into thirteen districts called myriarchies:<sup>209</sup> Lho, Chang, Gung, Chu, Shal, Gur were called the six myriarchies of Tö. Ya, Phag, Tag, Gya, Bri, Tsal were called the six myriarchies of Me. Yamdrog was called the myriarchy of the middle. The area of Nedong was also called the myriarchy of Phagmodru and Tasitu Changchub Gyaltsen became its lord. Since he did not obey the rulers of Sakya, they tried to destroy him. However, he managed to win Lama Dampa<sup>210</sup> over to his side, fought against Sakya and, gaining control of the other twelve myriarchies he became ruler of Tibet. He made a law in Tibet that everything good had to be respected, bad actions had to be punished. This law was impartial and he ensured that it was properly observed. He performed only good deeds, such as respecting lamas and spiritual masters, paid service to the monastic communities and performed ritual offerings to the religious symbols. He ruled his subjects according to both religious and civil laws. He never transgressed the rules. His whole lineage was constituted by monks who were lords of both the religious and civil laws. The religious lord received titles from China and up to now they have been the rulers of Tibet. The religious people dedicate themselves to religious activities, the lay people are happy and prosper. The officials<sup>211</sup> of Nedong were in charge one after another of Densathel. Since the Kagyüpa are the jewels of the crown, here they were written about more extensively. Among all *yogin* Milarepa was the greatest, among all spiritual masters Gyalse Thogme<sup>212</sup> was the best, the Sakyapa gained the greatest fame, Phagpa obtained the greatest power, Lama Shang<sup>213</sup> possessed the greatest wealth, Phagpa performed the greatest deeds, Loden Sherab<sup>214</sup> and his spiritual sons produced the greatest benefit to the doctrine, Sakya was the most powerful monastery, the *siddha* Thangtong Gyalpo<sup>215</sup> produced the

greatest benefit for all living beings, both monks and laity, since he had built boats and bridges. The most perfectly learned, pure and wise was the venerable Bodongpa who composed such works as nobody else had done. The life of Tsongkhapa was the purest and his followers have kept up his tradition to the present day. The best at occupying deserted areas and founding hermitages were the Drugpa. The most powerful camps are those of the Karmapa. The most suited to worldly affairs are the Nyingmapa,<sup>216</sup> in fact one *tertönpa*<sup>217</sup> can easily gather a multitude of people and is able to perform rituals to avert war. Those who have studied the doctrines of the *sūtra* and the *tantra* can perform the greatest deeds. The lords of the world love material wealth, the spiritual masters have faith in learning.

In the sky of the innate state free from both extremes  
the sun and the moon of omniscient mercy have raised,  
may the lord who indicated the path of liberation  
the omniscient Jigme Dragpa<sup>218</sup> protect me.  
Maṅgalam

### Colophon:

The text above is taken from Tsomo Kelsang Chogden<sup>219</sup> in Samding and was copied in the third month of the earth-pig year (1779?). This copy was made at Yamdrog Tshering Gön.

## Notes

1. The four states of existence: birth state, life state, death state, intermediate state.
2. These are texts of *sūtra* concerning the Buddhas of the various ages, the prophecies and the life of Buddha Śākyamuni which were used as main reference also by Butön.
3. The king who was the father of Prince Siddhārtha, the future Buddha Śākyamuni.
4. *Kelpa drangme sum* (*sKal pa grangs med gsum*), three extremely long periods of time lasting a number of years of sixty figures.
5. According to traditional Indo-Tibetan cosmology the “southern continent” (to the south of the cosmic mountain) which is inhabited by human beings.
6. Rājagṛha is situated in modern Bihar not far from Bodhgaya.
7. Lumbinī, the birthplace of Śākyamuni, is located in southern Nepal close to the border with India.
8. Gopā was one of the two main wives of Śākyamuni, the other being Yaśodharā.
9. Māra, the Evil One, and his host. He embodies death and attachment.
10. Turning the wheel of *dharma* (*dharmacakrapravartana*) is the technical term for the



Buddha's teaching act. Three such turnings were later recognized by followers of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

11. The "hearers", originally those disciples of Buddha who actually listened to Buddha's teachings.
12. The first five disciples who listened to the teaching of the Buddha and achieved spiritual realization as *arhat*.
13. According to the Mahāyāna definition, the Hinayāna practitioner concentrates on the own liberation from transmigratory existence.
14. This became the basis for the Mādhyamika philosophical school, cf. Introduction.
15. This became the basis for the Cittamātra philosophical school, cf. Introduction.
16. The text follows Butön in an extremely summarized form and gives the diverging versions: According to the Hinayāna tradition the *tripiṭaka* was collected by the disciples, whereas according to the Mahāyāna tradition this was done by *bodhisattva* (cf. *Bu ston chos 'byung* 134; Obermiller 1931:101ff.). From the historical point of view it seems that the teachings of the Buddha were first put into writing in the first century B.C. after having been passed on orally for several generations (cf. e.g. Klimburg-Salter 1995:29).
17. As first council is here indicated the first gathering of Śākyamuni's disciples at Rājagṛha, just after he had passed to *nirvāṇa*. They gathered in order to prevent the disappearance and corruption of Buddha's teachings by reciting them. The three traditional councils are mentioned here according to the scheme given by Butön (cf. *Bu ston chos 'byung* 117ff.; Obermiller 1931:73ff.) which however presents a number of historical incongruencies (cf. Snellgrove 1987:45-46).
18. "...Thus they assembled, the king having ordered to prepare seats, couches, and other requisites in the hollow of a Nyagrodha tree" (Obermiller 1931:77; *Bu ston chos 'byung* p. 120).
19. *Bu ston chos 'byung* reports the existing discordant versions among which is the here mentioned Sarvāstivādin account maintaining that the council was held three hundred years after the *nirvāṇa* of Buddha with the support of King Kaṇiṣka (*Bu ston chos 'byung* p. 138).
20. Nāgārjuna and the following seven Indian scholars were great masters of Buddhism and shaped the traditions which were later on introduced into Tibet. In Tibetan they are known as the "Six Ornaments and Two Excellencies" (*rgyan drug mchog gnyis*).
21. Lhathothori is traditionally considered the 27th Tibetan king. This king on the border between myth and history probably lived around the 4th or 5th century A.D..
22. Nyathri Tsenpo is considered as the royal progenitor from whom stemmed the Tibetan kings.
23. These *sūtra* were among the six sacred articles reported to be obtained from heaven during the reign of the Tibetan king Lhathothori. These are said to have descended from heaven on the Yumbu Lhagang, the ancient palace situated in Yarlung. This widespread account on the mythical origin of the first contacts with Buddhism is explained by Nelpa Paṇḍita as inspired by Bönpo beliefs in which heaven is worshiped as sacred (Nelpa Paṇḍita's Chronicle in: *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga* pp.14-15, Uebach 1987:85-87; Roerich 1988:38). On this issue cf. Sørensen 1994:534-535.
24. Songtsen Gampo (died 649/650 A.D.) was the great Tibetan king who founded and organized the Tibetan rmpire in the 6th/7th centuries.
25. Thrulnang (Tsuglagkhang) and Ramoche are famous ancient temples in Lhasa. They

- are traditionally considered to have been built respectively by the Nepalese and Chinese consort of the king but these legendary accounts present numerous dubious elements from the historical point of view, cf. e.g. Sørensen 1994:27.
26. Thrisong Detsen (742-797 A.D.) was the famous Tibetan king who had the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet, namely that of Samye, built. Ralpachen (alias Thritysug Detsen), ruling from 815 to 841 A.D., was extremely devoted to Buddhism and founded the Öjangdo (also called Ushangdo) temple in the vicinity of Lhasa.
  27. According to the Tibetan tradition the three famous kings Songtsen Gampo, Thrisong Detsen and Ralpachen were emanations respectively of Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuḥṣa and Vajrapāṇi (this triad is called Rigsum Gönpö).
  28. During the time of Thrisong Detsen the Indian scholar Śāntarakṣita (who became the first abbot of Samye), the tantric master Padmasāmbhava and the Indian scholar Kamalaśīla were invited to Tibet.
  29. The concept of a “middle spread” (used by Rig Ral) as separated from the “later spread” of the doctrine is criticized by Butön (cf. *Bu ston chos 'byung* p. 200; Obermiller 1931:14ff.). Most Tibetan sources simply mention an “early spread” and a “later spread” of the doctrine.
  30. Langdarma, assassinated in the middle of the 9th century, was the last Tibetan king ruling over the empire. He is famous for his persecution of Buddhism and the consequent fall of the empire.
  31. After Buddhism had been annihilated in the middle of the 9th century in Central Tibet some scholars from Ü and Tsang went to Eastern Tibet where Buddhism had survived, they were ordained by Gönpa Rabsel and reintroduced Buddhism into Central Tibet. Lume was among them and together with his disciples he founded numerous religious buildings such as the Thangpoche Monastery in Yarlung and other temples (cf. Ferrari 1958:129). According to Butön and Gö Lotsāba these events happened at the very beginning of the “later spread” of Buddhism in Tibet from the 10th/11th centuries onwards (cf. Obermiller 1931:201ff.; Roerich 1988:77ff.; cf. also Sørensen 1994:444ff.).
  32. Lha Lama Yeshe Ö and his nephew Changchub Ö were kings of Guge in the 10th/11th centuries.
  33. Atiśa (982-1054 A.D.) was the great Indian scholar who came to Western Tibet in 1042 A.D., founded the Kadampa tradition and passed away in Nyethang (close to Lhasa).
  34. Tholing was a famous monastery in Guge founded by Lha Lama Yeshe Ö towards the end of the 10th century. Atiśa visited this monastery where he met the great Tibetan translator Rinchen Sangpo.
  35. Rinchen Sangpo (958-1055 A.D.) was one of the most famous translators in Tibetan history. The tantric texts translated before him are called the “Old Tantra”, from his times onwards the tantric texts translated into Tibetan are called the “New Tantra”.
  36. Khutön Tsondrü Yungdrung, Ngog Legpe Sherab, Dromtön Gyalbe Jungne were three main Tibetan disciples of Atiśa.
  37. The Sakyapa tradition is one of the major traditions of Tibetan Buddhism established by Khön Könchog Gyalbo who founded the Sakya Monastery in 1073 A.D..
  38. Ngog Loden Sherab (1059-1109 A.D.), nephew of Ngog Legpe Sherab, was a great Tibetan translator. He is one of the main fathers of Tibetan scholasticism and resided in the Sangphu Monastery.
  39. Li corresponds to Khotan. However sometimes Li is erroneously used by Tibetan

- authors to indicate Nepal. In this context it is not very clear which locality is effectively referred to.
40. Marpa Chökyi Lodrö (1012-1097 A.D.) was a great Tibetan translator and a great *yogin*. He is particularly famous as the teacher of Milarepa and founder of the Kagyüpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.
  41. Nāropa (c. 956-1040 A.D.) was a great Indian scholar who obtained the highest tantric teachings from Tilopa. He was teacher of Marpa who took those teachings to Tibet and propagated the doctrine. Maitripā was one of the Indian teachers of Marpa.
  42. Milarepa (1040-1123 A.D.), disciple of Marpa, was a great *yogin* and poet. He is one of the most well-known characters of Tibetan Buddhism and he is particularly famous for the “One-Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa” which were later put into writing by Tsangnyön Heruka. Milarepa, Tshurtön Wangnge, Ngogtön Chödor and Metön Tshönpo were called “disciples of the four volumes (*bka’ bzhi*)”.
  43. See chapter III n. 21.
  44. See chapter III n. 23.
  45. See chapter III n. 24.
  46. Namri Songtsen, the father of Songtsen Gampo, was an ancient Tibetan king assassinated in 627 A.D. who started the foundation of the Tibetan empire. Mythological accounts attribute the discovery of salt in northern Tibet to his time.
  47. Thönmi Sambhoṭa was the minister of Songtsen Gampo who was sent to India, studied the languages used there and on their basis created the Tibetan script in the 7th century.
  48. Gar Tongtsen was a famous Tibetan prime minister during the time of Songtsen Gampo and that of his grand-son Mangsong Mangtsen (ruling 650-667 A.D.).
  49. Thrītsün and Kongjo are traditionally considered respectively the Nepalese and the Chinese wife of Songtsen Gampo.
  50. “*Shes sa dang che khyad bcod*” refers to the ranking difference expressed by language and behaviour which was codified together with the laws introduced by Songtsen Gampo.
  51. See chapter III n. 26.
  52. Vimalamitra is considered a great 8th century Indian master of Dzogchen who went to Tibet at the time of King Thrisong Detsen.
  53. As generally in Tibetan later sources, the concept of Bon religion defines the ensemble of pre-Buddhist indigenous Tibetan beliefs and cults in contrast to Buddhism. However there is no evidence of the existence of an organized Bon religion in ancient sources (cf. Macdonald 1971). With the introduction of Buddhism the ancient indigenous cults after a number of conflicts definitively lost their influence. Yet a whole range of syncretistic forms originated among which was the systematized Bon religion which survived up to the present day.
  54. *Sangngag nyingma* (*gSang sngag snying ma*).
  55. The belief that Padmasambhava hid a number of holy texts, ritual items and even sacred places to be revealed at the proper time is the basis of the idea of *terma* (spiritual “treasures”) and hidden countries (*beyül, belung*). These were revealed by the “treasure-finder” (*tertönpa*) according to prophecies and visions. *Terma* texts constitute an important part of the holy scriptures of the Nyingmapa tradition.
  56. See chapter III n. 30.
  57. See chapter III n. 26.
  58. Dānaśīla and Jinamitra were Indian scholars and translators of the 9th century. They

- cooperated with Tibetan translators in the translation of doctrinal treatises into Tibetan and in revising the criteria of translation.
59. The king used to wear a turban made of a long silk strip. The head and the relevant turban expressed honour and thus the act of letting the religious people be seated on the head ornament symbolized the extreme respect payed to them, cf. Sørensen 1994:413.
  60. Kaba Paltseg, Chogro Lü Gyaltshen and Shang Yeshede were three famous Tibetan translators of the 9th century.
  61. *Tenba ngadar (bstan pa snga dar)*.
  62. *Tenba bardar (bstan pa bar dar)*.
  63. See chapter III n. 29.
  64. *Ngagpa* are lay tantric priests.
  65. In fact he is usually reported as having escaped to Do Me (Eastern Tibet).
  66. Lhalung Palgyi Dorje was a famous *siddha* of the Yerpa hermitage. Tibetan tradition maintains that King Langdarma was killed by him while he was reading the inscription in front of the Lhasa Tsuglagkhang Temple, cf. *Bu ston chos 'byung* p. 192; Obermiller 1931:139.
  67. The Tibetan tradition tells that after Langdarma had destroyed Buddhism, three people - Yo Gejung, Tsang Rabsel, Mar Śākya - escaped to Eastern Tibet. They took with them the texts of the *vinaya* and ordained Musu Salbar. This latter became famous as Gönpa Rabsel and ordained some scholars from Central Tibet. Then these came back to Central Tibet, reintroduced Buddhism there. (cf. e.g. *Bu ston chos 'byung* p. 193; *Deb ther dmar mo* p. 41).
  68. See chapter III n.35.
  69. *Tenba chidar (bstan pa phyi dar)*.
  70. See chapter III n. 32.
  71. The text gives here a hint regarding the famous story concerning the martyrdom of this king: When Lha Lama Yeshe Ö was taken prisoner by the Garlog tribe and a big amount of gold was asked for his release, he suggested that the same amount of gold should rather be used to invite Buddhist scholars than for his freedom. This account seems however mythical, cf. Sørensen 1994:457.
  72. Nagtsho Tshülthrim Gyalba (1011-? A.D.) was a translator who was sent to India to invite Atiśa to Tibet and later became a main disciple of the great Indian scholar.
  73. *Düntshig (bdun tshig)* are the rituals performed for seven times every seven days in order to pray for a good rebirth of the “principle of consciousness” of the deceased.
  74. Sangnag Sarma (*gSang sngags gsar ma*).
  75. See chapter III n. 36.
  76. Dromtönpa (1005-1064 A.D.) was the main disciple of Atiśa and founded the Radeng Monastery in 1056 A.D..
  77. Potoba Rinchen Sal (1031-1105 A.D.) was a famous scholar of the Kadampa tradition. He founded the Poto Monastery in Phenyül and developed to a great extent the Kadampa tradition.
  78. Chennagaba Tshülthrim Bar (1038-1103 A.D.) was a scholar of the Kadampa tradition and founded the monastery of Lo (to the east of Lhasa) in 1095 A.D..
  79. Phuchungba Shönnu Gyaltshen (1031-1106 A.D.) was a scholar of the Kadampa tradition.
  80. Rather than disappearing the Kadampa tradition constituted the basis on which at the beginning of the 15th century Tsongkhapa founded the Gelugpa tradition.

81. The two teaching traditions were focused respectively on philosophical studies basing upon the *sūtra* and on the study of the *tantra* with the relevant texts, rituals, practice of meditation etc.
82. The translator Ngog Legpe Sherab was a disciple of Atiśa. He founded the Sangphu Monastery in 1074 A.D. which later became a famous school for philosophical studies.
83. Ngog Loden Sherab (1059-1109 A.D.) was a great translator and one of the fathers of epistemological and philosophical studies in Tibet. He travelled to Kashmir, India and Nepal where he devoted himself to philosophical studies and then returned to Tibet and resided at Sangphu.
84. Muteg Kalden Sangpo seems to be Ngog Loden Sherab's teacher called Kalden Gyalpo (Bhavyarāja) who was a Kashmiri logician, cf. Jackson 1994:381-382, 391.
85. The teaching tradition concerning the works of Dharmakīrti on epistemology.
86. Chapa Chökyi Sengge was a famous Tibetan scholar particularly expert in *pramāṇa* and Madhyamaka who lived in the 12th century.
87. Tsangnagpa Tshülthrim Sengge and the other seven disciples of Chapa used to be called "the Eight Great Lions" (*seng chen brgyad*).
88. Bumthragsumpa was a great Indian scholar of the 11th century and a teacher of Ngog Loden Sherab. During his stay in Tibet he resided and taught at the Bodong E Monastery which therefore became an important centre for religious studies, cf. Introduction.
89. *Phyi rig pa gnas bzhi*, namely arts and crafts, medicine, grammar and logic, among the five major sciences, cf. chapter II n. 85.
90. *Chos grwa chen po*.
91. Khön Könchog Gyalpo (1034-1102 A.D.) was the founder of the Sakya Monastery and the relevant tradition.
92. Sakya Paṇḍita (1182-1251 A.D.) was a great scholar of Sakya particularly renowned for his masterpiece on epistemology called *Tshad ma rig gter*.
93. Sakya Paṇḍita in fact was invited by the Mongolian Prince Goden. Only his nephew Phagpa actually became the Imperial Preceptor of the Mongolian Emperor of China Khubilai.
94. This refers to the period of Sakya rule over Tibet which lasted from the middle of the 13th century until 1354 A.D..
95. Chomden Rigpe Raldri (?-1375 A.D.) was a great scholar of the Narthang Monastery particularly famous for his editing work on the Kanjur. The Old Tantra which had an uncertain origin and were dangerous if studied by non-qualified persons were not included in the Buddhist Canon. *rNying ma rgyud 'bum* is the name of the famous collection of *tantra* revealed and compiled by Tertön Ratna Lingpa (1403-1479 A.D.) which includes many of such *tantra*. *gSo rig rgyud bzhi* is the name of a fundamental work on Tibetan medicine which was not included in the Tenjur. It is traditionally considered to have been translated by Vairocana, then hidden and revealed as *terma*.
96. Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltsen (1312-1375 A.D.), cf. chapter I n.19.
97. Künkhyen Jonangpa alias Dolpo Sherab Gyaltsen (1292-1361 A.D.) was a great scholar of the Jonangpa tradition (which was declared heretical at the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama). He founded the great *stūpa* of Kumbum at Jonang.
98. Tsongkhapa Lobsang Dragpa (1357-1419 A.D.), the great founder of the Gelugpa tradition.
99. Sakya Künga Nyingpo (1092-1158 A.D.) was a great scholar and the second member

- of the Khön lineage who acted as abbot of Sakya.
100. Thegchen Chökyi Gyalpo (1349-1425 A.D.) belonged to the lineage of the religious lords of Sakya.
  101. Künga Sangpo (1382-1456 A.D.) was a scholar of the Sakya tradition. Ngor was a main monastery of the Sakya tradition. It was located to the west of Shigatse.
  102. See chapter III n. 97.
  103. Nyen Darma Drag was a translator living in the 11th-12th centuries.
  104. A meditation ritual on Tāra.
  105. Mudrā Chenpo was a Tibetan scholar of the 11th century. Apart from the fact that he founded the Bodong E Monastery in 1049 A.D. nothing precise is known about him.
  106. Pang Lotsāba, cf. Introduction.
  107. Namkha Dorje probably corresponds to the 9th early abbot of Shekar (cf. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 50).
  108. Namkha Könchog probably corresponds to the 11th early abbot of Shekar (cf. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 53).
  109. According to the *Shel dkar chos 'byung* the Ngari Chöde Monastery was founded by the nephew of Changchub Tsemo, Dragpa Gyaltshe in 1394 (cf. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 42). Also the *Gung thang gdung rabs* attributes the foundation of the above-mentioned monastery to Dragpa Gyaltshe even though with a slight difference of date (cf. *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga* p. 121).
  110. Changchub Tsemo gave some prophecies concerning the construction of the monastery of Shekar and blessed the relevant land (cf. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 41).
  111. Chennga Dragpa Changchub (ruling 1373-1381 A.D.) was a ruler of Phagmodrupa.
  112. Yoru (g.Yo ru) and Uru (dBu ru) were two of the subdivisions of the ancient Tibetan empire which included respectively the area of Yarlung and that of Lhasa, cf. also chapter II n. 14.
  113. See chapter III n. 100.
  114. Chumig is an area to the west of Shigatse.
  115. Drangmoche was a monastery near Bodong.
  116. Yag Mipham was a famous 15th century scholar of Sangphu. Later he resided in the Sakya Ganden Monastery. He was one of the antagonists of Chole Namgyal, cf. Introduction.
  117. Rongtön Shecha Künrig (1367-1449) was a famous scholar disciple of Yag Mipham. Like his teacher he was one of the antagonists of Bodong Chole Namgyal, cf. Introduction.
  118. Probably the Samtenling mentioned here is the meditation monastery situated on the holy mountain of Tsibri to the west of Shekar.
  119. Yigu, the birthplace of Chole Namgyal was located to the north of the holy mountain of Tsibri in Southern Latö. On all the details concerning Chole Namgyal, cf. the chapter on his biography.
  120. Dragpa Gyaltshe and Dragpa Jungne were respectively the fifth and the sixth ruler of Phagmodrupa. Their capital was located in Nedong.
  121. *Terab (gtad rabs)*.
  122. Probably this is the nephew of Chole Namgyal called Ngaggi Wangpo who acted as abbot of Bodong, Shekar, Langkhor after Chole Namgyal had resigned.
  123. That is to say the training in moral discipline, the training in concentration and training in wisdom.

124. She was a daughter of the king of Gungthang Thri Lhawang Gyaltsen (son of Thrigyal Sonam De) who was a great patron of Chole Namgyal. She initiated the famous lineage of female reincarnations who were the heads of the Samding Monastery in the area of Yamdrog, cf. Introduction.
125. Tsari is a famous holy mountain for pilgrimage located close to Dagpo in south-eastern Central Tibet, cf. Introduction.
126. Khachö Ne (*mkha' spyod gnas*).
127. According to the Kālacakra tradition the king of the Land of Śambhala was called Rigden Gyalbo.
128. Indrabhūti was the king of Uḍḍiyāna. A brief account on his sister is given in the Blue Annals in the narration concerning the predecessors of Phagmodrupa, cf. Roerich 1988:553.
129. Mandāravā is considered a consort and tantric partner of Padmasambhava as well as an incarnation of Vajravārāhī. She is also mentioned in the biography of Chole Namgyal (Biography of Bodong Chole Namgyal p. 268).
130. Phagmodrupa (1110-1170 A.D.) was the chief disciple of Dagpo Lhaje who founded the Phagmodrupa Kagyüpa tradition. His eight main disciples founded eight subsects of the Kagyüpa tradition. In historical sources there is mention of a *ḍakini*, incarnation of Vajravārāhī, who was prophesied as a suitable tantric partner for Phagmodrupa, (cf. 'Brug pa chos 'byung p. 406).
131. See chapter III n. 78.
132. Alias Phagmodruba, see chapter III n. 130.
133. Dagpo Lhaje (1079-1153 A.D.) who was a disciple of Milarepa founded his tradition in Dagpo. Because this tradition flourished extensively during his time, it is known as Dagpo Kagyüpa.
134. One of the monasteries which constituted important centres for philosophical studies before the foundation of the great Gelugpa monasteries.
135. This passage is somewhat unclear. One possible interpretation is that the author referred in an extremely synthetic way to former incarnations of this *siddha*. In this case this passage underlines the fact the two *siddha* were contemporaries already during their former lives.
136. Area in south-eastern Tibet in the vicinity of the Nyangchu River.
137. Loro is an area in southern Tibet to the east of Lhodrag, cf. Ferrari 1958:127.
138. Lhodrag is an area in southern Tibet close to the border with Bhutan.
139. Area between Ü and Tsang where the famous Lake Yamdrog is located.
140. *Ngari skor sum* is the traditional definition of Western Tibet indicating the "three circles of Ngari" ruled by descendants of the ancient Tibetan kings.
141. Tö-Hor indicates an area in western Tibet inhabited by some Mongolians.
142. A commentary to the *mKha' 'gro snying thig*, a text revealed by Longchen Rabjampa (1308-1363 A.D.).
143. The *shedra* (*bshad grwa*), 'teaching school', is the school for the training in the philosophical teachings whereas the *drubdra* (*sgrub grwa*), 'meditation school', is the school for the practice of meditation.
144. The rulers of Rinpong (in Tsang). During the 15th century they ruled over most of Tibet.
145. These are powerful local rulers, some of them acted as ministers of the Phagmodrupa government.

146. Char is an area to the south of Yarlung, cf. Ferrari 1958:127.
147. Samding is a monastery located in Yamdrog Taglung, close to Lake Yamdrog. This monastery considered as being initiated by Chökyi Drönme was the traditional residence of the reincarnation of Vajravarāhi, cf. Introduction.
148. The monastery of Yasang was founded in Yarlung at the beginning of the 13th century by Chökyi Mönlam. His teacher was Kalden Yeshe Sengge a disciple of Phagmodrupa and his tradition was known as the Yasang Kagyüpa.
149. The ruler of Phagmodrupa.
150. Yarlung Sheldrag is a monastery located in a holy place in Yarlung.
151. Karma Chödrag Gyatsho (1454-1506 A.D.) was the Seventh Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyüpa.
152. This may be the Riboche located in Northern Latö, but more probably this is the Kham Riboche located in Eastern Tibet.
153. This Taglung, also called “Northern Taglung”, is located to the north of Lhasa and was the main seat of the Taglung tradition.
154. See chapter II n. 102.
155. Commentary on the *Hevajra-tantra*.
156. Nyemo is an area to the west of Lhasa. Nyemo Chekar is the birthplace of Vairocana reported by the *Padma thang yig*, cf. Ferrari 1958:161. This ancient link to the great translator is still present in the local oral traditions and in the ritual life of the Nyemo Chekar Monastery. Some more details about the foundation of this monastery are given further on in this text, cf. also Introduction.
157. Nakartse was the main town in Yamdrog area where the local ruler used to reside.
158. Mön seems here to refer to the areas situated to the south of Central Tibet.
159. This seems to refer to a Mongolian lord who is reported as having sent an invitation to the ninth Karmapa in the second half of the 16th century, cf. Sperling 1992:745ff.
160. Yargyab Dzong is located in Lhokha.
161. *Guru, deva, ḍaḳiṇī*, the Three Roots in which to take refuge (particularly according to the Nyingmapa tradition). Together with the Three Jewels (Buddha, *dharma, sangha*) these are commonly mentioned in refuge taking formulas.
162. A disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal mentioned in the biography (all the disciples mentioned here are given in the biography pp. 260-266 of the Lhasa edition).
163. A disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal from Bodong Tagde.
164. See chapter II n. 135.
165. A disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal who acted as abbot of the Bodong E Monastery.
166. A disciple of Chole Namgyal from the Bodong E Monastery.
167. Changpa Sangye Sengge was a nephew of Chole Namgyal.
168. Alias Helambu, an area in northern Nepal where a number of holy places and hermitages are located.
169. The author might be referring to one of the frequent conflicts between Southern Latö and Northern Latö (cf. *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 52) but more likely he means the war between Gungthang and Rinpong which involved the area of Southern Latö in 1555 A.D. (cf. *Gung thang gdung rabs* in *Bod kyi lo rgyus deb ther khag lnga* p. 140).
170. Namkha Rinchen was the tenth early abbot of the Shekar Monastery. He is mentioned in the *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 53.
171. Lodrö Gyaltsen was the seventh abbot of the Shekar Monastery and one of the abbots of the Bodong E Monastery.

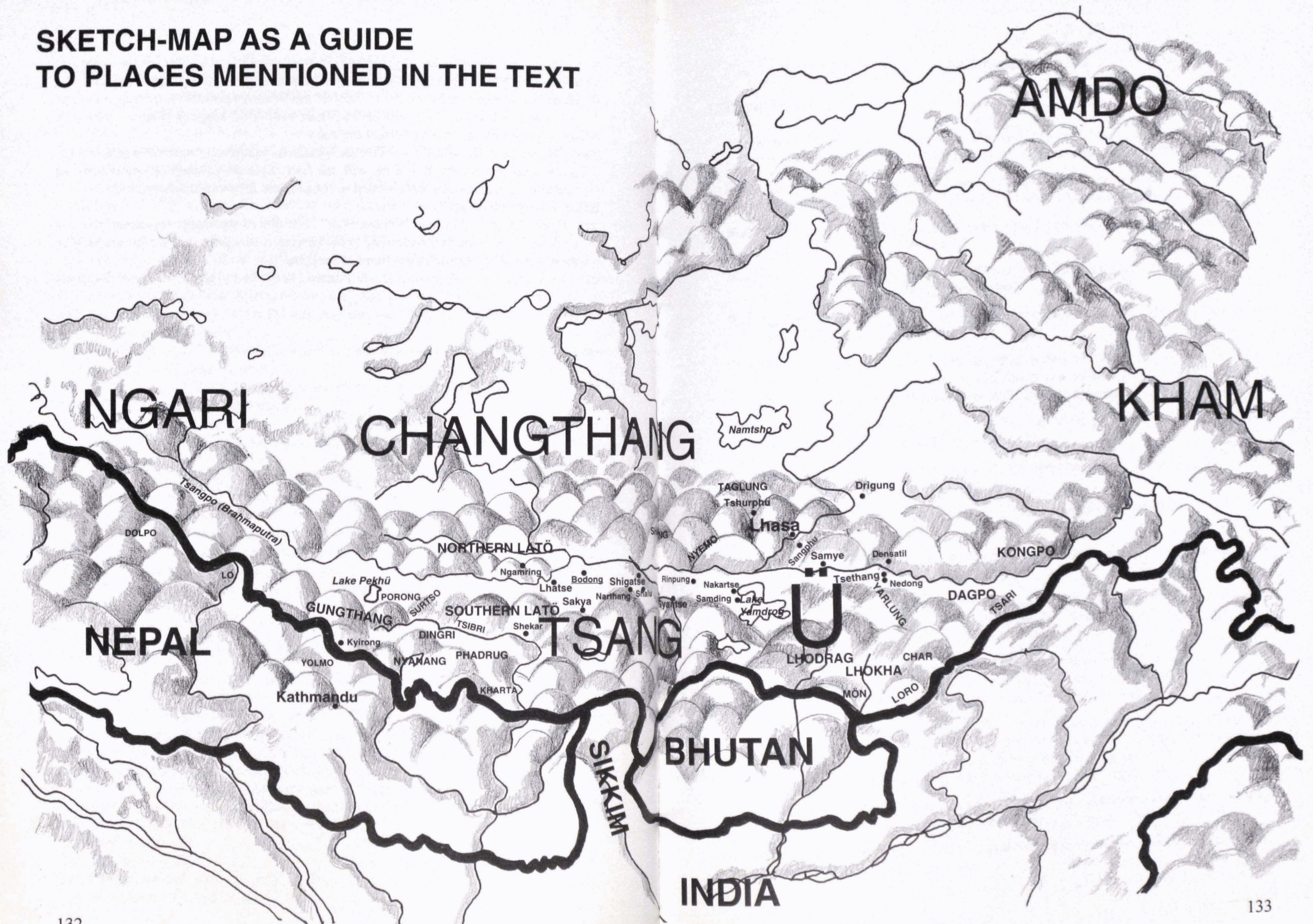


172. The foundation of this meditation monastery in Tsibri is given in the *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 48.
173. Gomo Chöding was a college of the Shekar Monastery mentioned in *Shel dkar chos 'byung* f. 52
174. See chapter II n. 132.
175. *sGrub mchod*.
176. See chapter III n. 156.
177. Yagde is an area between Shigatse and Lhasa, to the south of the Tsangpo river.
178. See chapter III n. 146.
179. See chapter III n. 137.
180. The abbot Jigme Dragpa (named thus with one of the names of his uncle) was a nephew and disciple of Chole Namgyal and is mentioned in his biography.
181. *Khyad par 'phags pa*.
182. *Zab gsal zung 'jug*.
183. On Shije (Zhi byed), cf. chapter II n. 78.
184. Lamdre (*lam 'bras*) is one of the main teachings of the Sakya tradition. Gayadhara is an Indian *paṇḍita* who came to Tibet and transmitted this tradition in the 11th century. See Roerich 1988:207.
185. Kagyüpa is a main tradition which was subdivided into Shangpa Kagyüpa and Dagpo Kagyüpa. From this latter stemmed further subsects which are mentioned in some detail further on in this text. The Shangpa Kagyüpa was founded by Khyungpo Naljor in the 11th-12th centuries in the Shang area.
186. Lama Shang alias Shang Tsöndrü Dragpa (1122-1193 A.D.), the founder of the Tshelpa Kagyüpa tradition. The main monastery of this tradition is located in Tshel close to Lhasa.
187. Chö (gCod) indicates the teaching tradition originating from Machig Labdrön, the famous female disciple of Phadampa Sangye.
188. Niguma, sister of Nārōpa, was a *yoginī* who was the main teacher and meditational deity of the master Khyungpo Naljor, the founder of the Shangpa Kagyüpa tradition.
189. Gampopa alias Dagpo Lhaje. The name Gampopa derives from the monastery founded by him in the Gampo area.
190. The first Karmapa Düsum Khyenba (1110-1193 A.D.) was one of the main disciples of Dagpo Lhaje. He was the founder of the Karma Kagyü tradition and established the Tshurphu Monastery, the main seat of his tradition, to the west of Lhasa.
191. Karma Pakśi (1204-1283) was the second Karmapa.
192. Area to the east of Kham. The ruler of this area in Tibetan used to be called Jangsa Dam Gyalpo.
193. Karma Rangchung Dorje (1284-1339 A.D.), the third Karmapa; Karma Rolpe Dorje (1340-1382 A.D.), the fourth Karmapa; Deshinshegpa (1384-1415 A.D.), the fifth Karmapa; Dorje Thongba Dönden (1416-1453 A.D.), the sixth Karmapa; Karma Chödrag Gyatsho (1454-1505 A.D.), the seventh Karmapa.
194. Mikyö Dorje (1507-1554 A.D.) and Wangchug Dorje (1556-1603 A.D.) were respectively the eighth and ninth Karmapa. On the various Karmapa cf. e.g. Karma Thinley 1980. The particular relation between Bodongpa and Karmapa in the 16th century is reflected in the paintings of Nyemo Chekar in which the Karmapa are depicted near the various Dorje Phamo, in the emphasis given in their description by the author of the *Bo dong chos 'byung* and by the fact that the eighth Karmapa refers

- significantly to Bodong Chole Namgyal in his doctrinal discussions.
195. Three disciples of Dagpo Lhaje, Khampa Useba (Karma Düsum Khyenba), Khampa Dorje Gyalpo (Phagmodrupa) and Khampa Salto Sharepa. Since they were from Kham (Eastern Tibet) they are known as the Three Khampa.
  196. Taglungpa (Thangpa Tashi Pal, 1143-1209 A.D.) was one of the eight main disciples of Phagmodrupa. He established the Taglung Kagyüpa tradition and founded the Taglung Monastery in 1180 A.D..
  197. Drigungpa (Kyopa Jigten Gönpö, 1143-1217 A.D.) was one of the eight main disciples of Phagmodrupa. He established the Drigung Kagyüpa tradition and founded the Drigungthel Monastery in 1179 A.D.
  198. Lingrepa (Pema Dorje alias Naphuba, 1128-1188 A.D.) was a disciple of Phagmodrupa and a great *siddha*. His main disciple Tsangpa Gyare founded a monastery in the Drug area (close to Lhasa).
  199. Parhuba was a disciple of Phagmodrupa, cf. also Roerich 1988:563.
  200. Tsangpa Gyare (1161-1211A.D.) who was the main disciple of Lingrepa founded the Drugpa Kagyüpa tradition.
  201. Götshangpa (1189-1258 A.D.) was the main disciple of Tsangpa Gyare and the founder of the Tö Drug tradition.
  202. Gyalba Lore (1187-1250 A.D.) was one of the main disciples of Tsangpa Gyare and the founder of the Me Drug tradition.
  203. See chapter III n. 197.
  204. In 1290 A.D. the Drigung Monastery was burnt down by Sakya Pönchen Anglen and the Mongolian army.
  205. Densathel was founded in the Phagmodru area in 1058 A.D. by Khampa Dorje Gyalpo who later was known as Phagmodrupa.
  206. Chennga Dragpa Jungne (1175-1255 A.D.) was a disciple of Kyopa Jigten Gönpö who founded the Drigung Kagyüpa tradition.
  207. Thripon Dorje Pel was an early ruler of the Phagmodru myriarchy in the 13th century.
  208. Phagpa Lodrö Gyaltsen (1235-1280 A.D.), nephew of Sakya Paṇḍita, was appointed imperial preceptor by the Yüan Emperor Khubilai and shaped to a great extent the Sakya rule over Tibet.
  209. The thirteen *thrikhor* (*khri skor*) were introduced into Tibet in the second half of the 13th century following the administrative organization of the Mongols which was based on military units. The number thirteen is consecrated in the tradition but the concrete lists of myriarchies vary according to the sources. On myriarchies and state organization cf. Petech 1990:50ff. In the *Bo dong chos 'byung* the following myriarchies are mentioned in an abridged form: in the upper areas Latö Lho, Latö Chang, Gungthang, Chumig, Shalu, Gur (Guge?); in the lower areas Yasang, Phagmodru, Taglung, Gyama, Drigung, Tshelpa; Yamdrog between Ü and Tsang.
  210. Lama Dampa Sonam Gyaltsen, who occupied the Sakya abbatial seat from 1343/44 until 1347, became a friend and preceptor of Phagmodrupa Changchub Gyaltsen. He played a significant role as mediator at the time of the demise of the Sakya political rule (cf. Petech 1990:100, 116-117; Sørensen 1994:31).
  211. *Zhal ngo*.
  212. See chapter II n. 2.
  213. See chapter III n. 186.
  214. See chapter III n. 83.

215. Thangtong Gyalpo was a great *siddha* who lived in the 15th century and was particularly famous for the construction of iron bridges on the Tsangpo and other big rivers. He is also considered the founder of the Tibetan opera. With the support of the rulers of Southern and Northern Latö together with of the kings of Gungthang he built the *stūpa* of Chung Riboche in Northern Latö.
216. Nyingmapa is the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism which is considered to refer mainly to the texts which arrived in Tibet with the Early Spread of Buddhism, some texts are said to have been hidden and revealed as *terma* in the following centuries.
217. See chapter III n. 55.
218. Jigme Dragpa, “Glorious Without Fear”, was one of the numerous names given to Bodong Chole Namgyal. According to his biography this name was attributed to him at the beginning of his teaching activity at Sangphu.
219. Reincarnation of Samding Dorje Phamo (1747/48-1774/75), cf. Tashi Tshering 1993:40.

SKETCH-MAP AS A GUIDE  
TO PLACES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT





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## Index

- abhidharma* S branch of Buddhist philosophy, part of *tripiṭaka*, q.v. 16, 18, 22, 23, 48, 49, 100, 101, 106, 107
- Abhidharmakośa* S (T *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod*) n. of text by Vasubandhu 47
- Abhidharmasamuccaya* S (T *Chos mngon pa kun las btus pa*) n. of text by Asaṅga 18, 47, 49, 51, 105
- ācārya* S (T *slob dpon*) 'teacher', 'master' 70, 71
- Agön (T A mgon) n. of a ruler of Lo (c. 15<sup>th</sup> c.) 77
- Ajātaśatru S (T Ma skyes dgra) n. of an Indian king (c. 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC) 101
- Amarakośa* S (T 'Chi med mdzod) n. of text on the science of synonyms 55
- Ame Pal Dzong (T A mes dpal rdzong) n. of a ruler of Lo (c. 15<sup>th</sup> c.) 81
- Amoghasiddhi Jigme (Könchog) Bang (T Amoghasiddhi 'Jigs med (dKon mchog) 'bangs n. of disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal, author of his detailed biography 'Feast of Miracles' (written in 1453) 13, 88
- Ānanda S n. of Buddha Śākyamuni's favorite disciple 101
- 'Ancient Tantra' (T *gSang sngag snying ma*) 103
- anuttarayoga-tantra* S 'Supreme Yoga Tantra' 52, 59, 72, 74
- arhat* S (T *gnas brtan*) lit. 'Worthy one', class of Buddhist saints, sixteen or eighteen in number 101; Arhats, Sixteen 109
- Āryadeva S (T 'Phags pa lha) n. of Indian scholar (c. 2<sup>nd</sup> c.) 101
- Aryans, land of 42, 102, 109
- Āryaśūra S (T 'Phags pa dpa' bo) n. of Indian scholar, author of *Jātakamālā*, q.v. 55
- Asaṅga S (T Thogs med) n. of Indian Buddhist teacher (c. 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> c.) 16, 17, 22, 57, 101
- Aśoka S n. of Indian king (3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC) 101
- Aṣṭāṅgahṛdayasamhitā* S (T *Yan lag brgyad*) n. of text on medical science 27, 55
- asura* S class of demons 82, 86
- Atiśa T (from S) (S Dipamkaraśrijñāna) n. of Indian teacher (982-1054) 51, 102, 103, 104, 105
- Avalokiteśvara S n. of tantric deity 41, 57, 58, 77, 102, 109 = Chenresi (T sPyan ras gzigs), q.v.
- bar dar* T 'Middle Spread' of Buddhism (in Tibet) 101
- bDen pa gnyis* (*bDen pa gnyis mam par 'byed pa'i Tshig le'ur byas pa*) T (S *Satyadvayavibhaṅgakārikā*) n. of text 51
- bDen gnyis rang 'grel* T n. of commentary on *bDen pa gnyis* 49
- Benares 15 = Vārāṇasī, q.v.
- Bha ra ta* T (S *Mahābhārata*) n. of Indian epic poem 55
- Bhadrakalpikasūtra* S (T *mDo bskal pa bzang po*) n. of text 99
- Bhavya S n. of Indian Buddhist teacher (c. 6<sup>th</sup> c.) 48, 77
- bhikṣuṇī* S (T *btsun ma, a ne*) Buddhist nun 110
- Bhikṣuṇī Lakṣmī* S 110 = Lakṣmīnkarā, q.v.
- Biography of Bodong Chole Namgyal (T see Introduction, n. 8), 'A Feast of Miracles' 13
- 'Blue Annals' (T *Deb ther sngon po*) Tibetan historical work (completed in 1478) by Gö Lotsāba (T 'Gos lo tsā

- ba gZhon nu dpal) (1392-1481) 18, 20, 21 Cf. Bibliography
- Bö (T Bod) 42 = Tibet, q.v.
- Bo dong chos 'byung* T (pr. Bodong Chöjung) 'Religious History of Bodong' by Chime Öser (compiled second half 16<sup>th</sup> c.) 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 99
- Bod = Tibet, q.v.
- Bodhgayā S n. of place of Buddha Śākyamuni's Enlightenment 42
- Bodhicaryāvātāra S* (T *sPyod 'jug*) 'Entering upon the Career toward Enlightenment', n. of text about the practice of the Bodhisattva by the Indian monk Śāntideva 49
- bodhisattva S* (T *byang chub sems dpa')* 'Enlightenment-Being' 30, 41, 55, 56, 73, 74, 80, 81, 101
- Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā S* (T *dPag bsam 'khri shing*) n. of text by Kṣemendra and Somendra 55
- Bodong (T Bo dong) n. of place 10, 17, cf. Map
- Bodong Chashong (T Bo dong bya bshongs, also sBo thong bya rgod bshongs) n. of temple 17
- Bodong Chole Namgyal (T Bo dong pañ chen Phyogs las mam rgyal) (1375/6-1451) n. of founder of the monastic order of the Bodongpa  
as author 72-74;  
*Biography* 12-15;  
biography as in *Bo dong chos 'byung* 108-111;  
birth 41-43;  
and Candrakīrti 30-31, 71;  
childhood 43-45;  
and Chökyi Drönme 33-34;  
cremation of 88;  
in debate 63-72;  
debate with Rongtön Shecha Künrig 69-72;  
debate with Yag Mipham 31-32, 63-67;  
disciples and successors 114-119;  
and *dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* 12-13, 72-74;  
entering into *dharmadhatu* 85-88;  
as a Master of Knowledge 53-56;  
as perfect monk 56-59;  
performer of rituals 81-85;  
practising the Six Perfections 79-80;  
predecessors 19-25;  
'presence' of 10-11;  
religious ordination 45-46;  
scholarly activities 25-27;  
structure of *Biography* 41;  
study of the *sūtra* 46-51;  
study of the *tantra* 52-53;  
as teacher 74-81;  
unconventional behaviour 27-28;  
and worldly concerns 59-63;
- Bodong E (T Bo dong E) n. of monastery 10, 15, 16, 17-19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 36, 41, 46, 47, 49, 51, 58, 59, 77, 83, 105, 108, 109
- Bodong Rinchen Tsemo (T Bo dong Rin chen rtse mo) n. of Tibetan teacher (13<sup>th</sup> c.) 18
- Bodongpa (T Bo dong pa) n. of monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17-19, 21
- Bodongpa, the Great 9, 19 = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.
- Bogong Menmogang (T Bo gong sman mo sgang) n. of monastery 111
- Bon T (pr. Pön) n. of a non-Buddhist Tibetan religious tradition 103
- Brahmā S (T Tshangs pa) n. of god 30, 46  
'*Brug pa chos 'byung* T (pr. Drukpa Chöjung) 'Religious History of the Drukpa' 21
- Budong Monastery 17, 18 = Bodong E Monastery, q.v.
- Buddha, Historical 16, 54, 74, 109 Cf. Śākyamuni

- Buddhapālita S n. of Indian Buddhist philosopher (c. 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> c.) 48
- Bumthragsumpa (T 'Bum phrag gsum pa) 17, 18, 22, 42, 51, 105, 107 = Sthirapāla, q.v.
- Butön Rinchendrub (T Bu ston Rin chen sgrub) n. of a Tibetan lama and historian (1290-1364) 15, 17, 23, 52, 73, 103, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109
- Byang chub sems dpa' rtag tu ngu rtogs brjod* T (pr. Changchub Sempe Tagtu Ngutogjö) n. of work in verse by Bodong Chole Namgyal 51, 91 (n. 59)
- bZhi brgya pa (dBu ma bzhi brgya pa)* T (S *Catuhśataka*) 'Four Hundred Verses', n. of text by Āryadeva 49
- Cakrasaṃvara S (T 'Khor lo bde mchog) n. of tantric deity 33, 77, 106
- Candragomin S n. of Indian grammarian (7<sup>th</sup> c.) 49
- Candrakīrti S (T Zla ba grags pa) n. of Indian philosopher (c. 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> c.) 19, 30, 31, 48, 71
- Candrapa* T (S *Candravyākaraṇasūtra*) n. of text on grammar by Candragomin 51, 53
- caryā-tantra* S (T *spyod rgyud*) 'Performance Tantra' 52, 72, 74, 81
- chabtor* (T *chab gtor*) type of ritual, 'water tormā', tormā for the water spirits 81
- chang* (T *chang*) Tibetan beer 56
- Chang Radeng (T Byang Rwa sgreng) n. of main monastery of the Kadampa 23
- Chang Taglung (T Byang sTag lung) n. of monastery 83
- Changchub Dröma (T Byang chub sgröl ma) n. of Bodong Chole Namgyal's mother 108
- Changchub Gyaltshe (T Byang chub rgyal mtshan) 108 = Phagmodrupa Changchub Gyaltshe, q.v.
- Changchub Tsemo (T Byang chub rtse mo) n. of translator, also considered second abbot of Shekar Monastery (1303-1380) 18, 23-24, 42, 51, 52, 72, 85, 88, 104/105, 108
- Changchubling (T Byang chub gling) n. of place 71
- Changpa Sangye Sengge (T Byang pa Sangs rgyas seng ge) n. of disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal 114, 115
- Chapa Chökyi Sengge (T Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge) n. of Tibetan scholar (1109-1169) 105
- Char Chöde (T Byar chos sde) n. of monastery 112
- Chennga Dragpa Changchub (T sPyan snga Grags pa byang chub) n. of a Phagmodrupa ruler (r. 1373-1381) 11, 108
- Chennga Tshülthrimbar (sPyan snga Tshul khriṃs 'bar) = Chenngaba Tshülthrim Bar, q.v.
- Chenngaba = Chenngaba Tshülthrim Bar, q.v.
- Chenngaba Tshülthrim Bar (T sPyan snga ba Tshul khriṃs 'bar) n. of a Kadampa scholar (1038-1103) 104, 111
- Chenresi (T sPyan ras gzigs) 11 = S Avalokiteśvara, q.v.
- Chime Öser (T 'Chi med 'od zer) n. of author/compiler of *Bo dong chos 'byung* 15, 34, 99, 114
- Chime Pelsang (T 'Chi med dpal bzang) 114, 115 = Chime Pelsangpo, q.v.
- Chime Pelsangpo (T 'Chi med dpal bzang po) n. of reincarnation of Palden Chime Druba 112, 113
- China 35, 108; Emperor of 22, 105
- Chö (T gCod, pr. Chö) Tibetan religious teaching and practice 118
- Chöding (T Chos sdings) 57, 60, 62, 77, 84, 85, 86 = Pema Chöding, q.v.

- Chödrön (T Chos sgron) 110 = Chökyi Drönme, q.v.
- Chödrön Wangmo 34 = Dorje Phamo, 7th, q.v.
- Chog (T Cog, Cog ro Klu'i rgyal mtshan) n. of Tibetan translator (9<sup>th</sup> c.) 103
- Chökhörling (T Chos 'khor gling) n. of monastery 109
- Chökyi Dorje (T Chos kyi rdo rje) n. of teacher of Bodong Chole Namgyal 46
- Chökyi Drönme (T Chos kyi sgron me) n. of princess of Gungthang and leading disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal considered to be the First Samding Dorje Phamo (S Vajravārahī) (15<sup>th</sup> c.) 13, 33, 34, 78, 110, 111
- Chökyi Rinchen (T Chos kyi Rin chen) 25 = Situ Chökyi Rinchen, q.v.
- Chole Namgyal = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.
- Chomden Rigpe Raldri (T bCom ldan rig pa'i ral gri) n. of Tibetan scholar (14<sup>th</sup> c.) 105
- Chöying Dechen Tshomo 35 = Dorje Phamo, 9th, q.v.
- Chöying Gyaltsen (T Chos dbyings rgyal mtshan) 'Banner of Victory of the Pure Sphere of Dharma' 42 = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.; n. of Bodong Chole Namgyal's father 108
- Chubori (T Chu bo ri) n. of place 17
- Chumig (T Chu mig) n. of area to the west of Shigatse 24, 108
- cintāmaṇi* S 'thought-gem', a fabulous gem supposed to yield its possessor all desires 102
- Cittamātra S (T Sems tsam pa) 'Mind Only', n. of philosophical school of Indian Buddhism 12, 16, 74
- councils, Buddhist 101
- Cultural Revolution 36, 37
- Dagchen Dragpa Lodrö (T bDag chen Grags pa blo gros) n. of abbot of Sakya Monastery (contemporary of Bodong Chole Namgyal) 78
- Dagpo Lhaje (T Dwags po lHa rje) n. of a disciple of Milarepa and founder of Dagpo Kagyüpa (1079-1153) 111
- ḍāka* S class of male deities 88
- ḍākinī* S (T *mkha'* 'gro / *mkha'* 'gro ma) class of female deities 52, 86, 88 Cf. following entries
- ḍākinī*, realm of the (T *mkha'* *spyod gnas*) 33, 110
- ḍākinī* Sönam Drenma (T *mkha'* 'gro bSod nams 'dren ma) 110
- ḍākinī* Sönam Paldren (T *mkha'* 'gro bSod nams dpal 'dren) 111
- Dalai Lama, First: T dGe 'dun grub (1391-1474) 26, 78
- Dalai Lama, 7th: T bsKal bzang rgya mtsho (1708-1757) 35
- Dalai Lama, 14th: Tenzin Gyatsho (T bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho), b. 1935, 29, 30
- Damchen Gyatsho (T Dam can rgya mtsho) n. of protective deity 57
- Dampa Sangye (T Dam pa sangs rgyas) 58 = Pha Dama Sangye, q.v.
- Damshö (T 'Dam shod) n. of place 33, 111
- Danaśīla S n. of Indian teacher and translator (9<sup>th</sup> c.) 103
- Daṇḍin S n. of Indian scholar 55
- dBu ma rgyan* T n. of text by Śāntarakṣita 49, 51
- dByangs can gyi mgul rgyan* T (pr. Yangcengyi Gülgyen) n. of text by Bodong Chole Namgyal 55
- Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* (pr. Debther Marpo Sarma), Tibetan historical work (written 1538) by bSod nams grags pa 13, cf. Bibliography.
- Deb ther sgnon po* (pr. Debther Ngönpo) 23 = 'Blue Annals', q.v.
- Debachen (T bDe ba chen) n. of monastery

- 50, 109
- Dechen Chökyi Drönme (T bDe chen chos kyi sgron me) 35 = Dorje Phamo, 12th, q.v.
- Deleg Tashi Gyaltsen Pelsangpo (T bDe legs bkra shis rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po) n. of Sakyapa lama 78
- Densathel (T gDan sa thil / the) n. of monastery 50
- dharmadhātu* S (T *chos dbyings*) 'Dharma-Sphere' 14, 41
- Dharmakīrti S (T Chos kyi grags pa) n. of Indian Buddhist teacher (c. 600–660) 46, 54, 67, 68, 101
- Dharmadza 110 = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.
- Dharmottara S (T Chos kyi mchog) n. of Indian Buddhist teacher (c. 750-810) 48
- Dignāga S (T Phyogs kyi glang po) n. of Indian Buddhist teacher (c. 480-540) 20, 48, 54, 101
- '*Dod pa 'jo ba* T (pr. Döpa Joba) n. of religious verses by Bodong Chole Namgyal 59
- Dodelha Gyalmo (T mDo sde lha rgyal mo) n. of wife of King Lhawang Gyaltsen, q.v. 111
- dogpa* (T *zlog pa*) type of ritual 53
- Do-Kham (T mDo Khams) n. of area in eastern Tibet 101, 112
- Dolpo (T Dol po) n. of place in the vicinity of Kyirong 9, 11, 81
- Dolpo Gyaltsen Dragpa (T Dol po rGyal mtshan grags pa) n. of disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal 114, 115
- Dolpo Lhakang (T Dol po lha khang) n. of temple 111
- Dorje Gyaltsen (T rDo rje rgyal mtshan) n. of translator, disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal 78
- dorje lopön* (T *rdo rje slob dpon*) 14 = *vajracārya*, q.v.
- Dorje Phamo (T rDo rje phag mo, S Vajravārāhi) n. of tantric goddess 33, 78, cf. Samding Dorje Phamo
- Dorje Phurba (T rDo rje phur pa, S Vajrakila) 52
- dPal de kho na nyid 'dus pa* T (pr. Pelde Khonanyi Düpa) 'Collected Suchness', n. of main work of Bodong Chole Namgyal 12, 16, 26, 34, 37, 73, 77, 83, 86, 107, 109, 112, 113, 114, 115, 117
- dPal yang dag par sbyor ba* T (pr. Pel Yangdagpar Chorba) n. of text on the correct practice of *yoga* 54
- Dragnag (T Brag nag) n. of monastery 45
- Dragpa Gyaltsen (T Grags pa rgyal mtshan) n. of Tibetan translator and teacher (1352-1405) 18, 24-25, 42, 43, 46, 48, 51, 52, 58, 73, 106, 108, 109
- Dragpa Lodrö (T Grags pa blo gros) n. of abbot of Sakya Monastery 76, 77 = Dagchen Dragpa Lodrö, q.v.
- Drangmoche 108 = Bodong Drangmoche, q.v.
- Drom 102, 104 = Dromtön Gyalbe Jungne, q.v.
- Dromtön Gyalbe Jungne (T 'Brom ston rGyal ba'i 'byung gnas) n. of bKa' gdams pa lama, disciple of Atiśa (1003-1063/64)
- Dromtönpa 111 = Dromtön Gyalbe Jungne, q.v.
- Drongpagyang (T Grom pa rgyang) n. of place 17
- Drönme Chödrön 88 = Chökyi Drönme, q.v.
- drubchö* (T *sgrub mchod*) type of ritual 116
- drugchuma* (T *drug chu ma*) type of ritual 83
- düntshig* (T *bdun tshig*) type of ritual 104
- 'Dzeng Dharmabodhi T n. of Tibetan *siddha* (11<sup>th</sup> c.) 20
- Dzongka Chöde (T rDzong dga' chos sde) n. of monastery 24, 62
- Dzungar Mongols 35

'Early Spread' of Buddhism 103= T *snga dar*, q.v.

Four Noble Truths (S *āryasatya*) 15, 100

Gampopa (T *sGam po pa*) = Dagpo Lhaje, q.v.

Gar (T *mGar [sTong btsan]*) n. of minister during the reign of Songtsen Gampo 102

Gendündrub (T *dGe 'dun grub*) 26, 78 = Dalai Lama, 1st, q.v.

Geleg Pel 68 = Khedrub Geleg Pelsang, q.v.

Geleg Pelsangpo (T *dGe legs dpal bzang po*) 26 = Pañchen Lama, 1st, q.v.

Gelugpa (T *dGe lugs pa*) n. of monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism 16, 18, 19

Geshe Mudrā Chenpo 17 = Mudrā Chenpo, q.v.

Gewa Rabsel (T *dGe ba rab gsal*) 17 = Gönpa Rabsel, q.v.

Gö Khugpa Lhetse (T 'Gos khug pa lhas btsas) n. of Tibetan scholar 20

Gongma Dragpa Gyaltsen (Gong ma Grags pa rgyal mtshan) n. of Phagmodrupa ruler 50, 62

Gönpa Rabsel (T *dGon pa rab gsal*) n. of monk (9<sup>th</sup> c.) 71, 104

*gönpo* (T *mgon po*) protective deity 87

Gopā S (T *Sa 'tsho ma*) n. of wife of Prince Siddhartha (later Buddha Śākyamuni) 100

Gr̥dhrakūṭa S (T *Bya rgod phung po*) 'Vulture Peak', n. of place of Buddha Śākyamuni's Second Sermon 100

*gSo rig rgyud bzhi* T (pr. Sorig Gyüshi) n. of work on Tibetan medicine 105

Guhyasamāja S (T *gSang 'dus*) n. of tantric deity 76, 77

*Guhyasamāja(-tantra)* S (T *gSang ba 'i 'dus pa*) 'Secret Union', n. of tantric

text 75, 106

Guṇaprabha S n. of Indian Buddhist scholar, disciple of Vasubandhu 101

Gungthang (T *Gung thang*) n. of area 23, 59; kings of 22, 24; princess of 32-34

Gungthang Monastery 51 = Dzongka Chöde

Gungthang Nepoche (T *Gung thang gNas po che*) n. of monastery 23

Guru Rinpoche (T *Gu ru Rin po che*) 'Precious Master' 9, 11 = Padma-sambhava, q.v.

*guru-yoga* S (T *bla ma 'i rnal 'byor*) 'Lama Yoga', type of meditational technique 87

Gyalmo Ri (T *rGyal mo ri*) n. of hill at Shekar 22 = Shekar Ri

Gyalse Thogme (T *rGyal sras Thogs med*) n. of Sakyapa lama (1295-1369) 41, 107, 108

Gyam (T *Gyam*) n. of place 21, 45; n. of monastery 24, 25, 59, 84

Gyantse (T *rGyal rtse*) n. of place 35, 84 Cf. Map

*gZugs kyi snye ma* T n. of Indian play 55

Hevajra S n. of tantric deity 25, 77, 113

*Hevajra-tantra* S n. of tantric text 106

Hīnayāna S 'Small Vehicle', 'Lesser Vehicle' 16, 64, 65

*ho thog thu (hu thug thu)* Mongolian equivalent for T 'phags pa, S *ārya*, title of high lamas 35

*homa* S fire-ritual 82

Hor 42 = Mongolia, q.v.

India 10, 26

Indra S (T *brGya sbyin*) n. of god 30, 46

Indrabodhi 33, 110, 111 = Indrabhūti S n. of a king of Uḍḍiyana

- Jambudvīpa S (T Dzam bu gling) n. of central continent according to Buddhist cosmology 42, 100, 103
- Jamyang (T 'Jam dbyangs) n. of lord of Northern Latö 26, 67
- Jamyang Dogyen (T 'Jam dbyangs mdo rgyan) n. of religious lord of Taglung 107
- Jātakamālā S (T sKyes pa'i rabs kyi rgyud) n. of Buddhist text containing stories of Buddha Śākyamuni's previous births 55
- Jetsun Chödrön (T rJe btsun Chos sgron) 111 = Chökyi Drönme, q.v.
- Jetsun Künga Sangmo (T rJe btsun Kun dga' bzang mo) n. of reincarnation of Jetsun Chödrön 111, 112
- Jetsun Nyendrag Sangmo 113 = Dorje Phamo, 3rd, q.v.
- Jetsun Urgyen Tsomo 113 = Dorje Phamo, 4th, q.v.
- Jigdrag Rinpoche (T 'Jigs grags Rin po che) 10, 11, 12 = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.
- Jigdrel Bodongpa (T 'Jigs bral Bo dong pa) 111 = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.
- Jigdrel Chole Namgyal (T 'Jigs bral Phyogs las rnam rgyal) = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.
- Jigme Dragpa (T 'Jigs med grags pa) 50 = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.
- Jigme Bang (T 'Jigs med 'bangs) 13, 88 = Amoghasiddhi Könchog Bang, q.v.
- Jinamitra S n. of Indian translator (9<sup>th</sup> c.) 103
- Jñānagarbha S n. of Indian Buddhist philosopher (c. 8<sup>th</sup> c.) 48, 71
- Jobo Atiśa = Atiśa, q.v.
- Jobo Śākya (T Jo bo Śākya) n. of statue of Buddha Śākyamuni in the Lhasa Jokhang temple 62
- Jonang (T Jo nang) n. of head monastery of Jonangpa, q.v. 17
- Jonangpa (T Jo nang pa) n. of monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism 18; Jonangpa, Omniscient 105, 106, 107 = Künkhyen Jonanpa [T Kun mkhyen Jo nang pa], alias Dolpo Sherab Gyaltshen, q.v.
- 'Jug pa T (T dBu ma la 'jug pa, S *Madhyamakāvātara*) n. of text by Candrakīrti 49
- Ka (= Kaba Paltseg) (T Ka ba dPal brtsegs) n. of Tibetan translator (9<sup>th</sup> c.) 103
- kabchuba* (T *bka' bcu pa*) n. of a master of the ten basic doctrinal subjects 51, 79, 115
- Kabchupa Dhamapel (T bKa' bcu pa Dha ma dpa) 111 = Palden Chime Druba, q.v.
- Kabchuba Namkha Pelsang (T bKa' bcu pa Nam kha' dpa) n. of disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal 114, 115
- kabshiba* (T *bka' bzhi pa*) n. of a master of four basic doctrinal subjects 51, 79
- Kadampa (T bKa' gdams pa) n. of monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism later absorbed in Gelugpa 104
- Kagyüpa (T bKa' 'brgyud pa) n. of monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism 33, 104
- Kailāsa S n. of holy mountain in West Tibet 42, 63 = T Gang Tise
- Kālacakra* (-tantra) S (T 'Dus kyi 'khor lo) n. of tantric text 106
- Kalāpa* S n. of text on grammar 22, 51, 53
- Kalidāsa S n. of Indian poet (c. 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> c.)
- kalyānamitra* S spiritual friend 14, 15 = *geshe* (T *dge bshes*), q.v.
- Kamalaśīla S n. of Indian Buddhist teacher (c. 740-797) 71, 101
- Kaṇiṣka S n. of Kuṣāṇa king (1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> c.) 101



- Kanjur (T *bka'* 'gyur) Tibetan canonical collection of Buddhist scriptures 26, 105
- Kapilavastu S n. of place of Buddha Śākyamuni's birth 100
- Karma Chödrag Gyatsho 112 = Karma pa, 7th, q.v.
- Karma Drongsar (T Karma Grong gsar), n. of place in Kongpo 34
- Karmapa (T Karma pa) n. of monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism, suborder of Kagyüpa 16, 18; head-lama of this suborder 15, 118
- Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka(-sūtra)* (T *sNying rje pad ma dkar po*) n. of text 99
- Kāvyaḍarśa S* (T *sNyan sngags me long*) n. of text by Daṇḍin 55
- Kesang Chogden Dechen Wangmo 35 = Dorje Phamo, 8th, q.v.
- Khachö Ne (T *mkha' spyod gnas*) = *ḍākinī*, realm of the, q.v.
- Khachö Pelmo 34 = Dorje Phamo, 5th, q.v.
- Kham (T Khams) n. of province (Eastern Tibet) 103, 104
- Khampa Dorje Gyalbo (T Khams pa rDo rje rgyal po) 111 = Phagmodrupa, q.v.
- Khampa Useba (T Khams pa dBus se pa) = Karma pa, 1st, q.v.
- khandro* (T *mkha' 'gro*) 114 = S *ḍākinī*, q.v.
- Khandro Niguma (T mKha' 'gro Ni gu ma) n. of tantric teacher, sister of Nāropa 52
- Khandro Yeshe Tshogyal (T mKha' 'gro Ye shes mtsho rgyal) 33
- Kharteng (T mKhar stengs) n. of monastery 78
- Khedrub Geleg Pelsang(po) (T mKhas grub dGe legs dpal bzang[po]) n. of Gelugpa lama (1385-1438) 34, 109, 114 = First Pañchen Lama, q.v.
- Khedrub Palden Sengge (T mKhas grub dPal ldan seng ge) n. of disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal 114, 115
- Khön (T 'Khon) n. of ancient family of Tibet associated closely with the Sakyapa 46, 78
- Khön Könchog Gyalpo (T 'Khon dKon mchog rgyal po) n. of Tibetan lama (1034-1102), founder of Sakya Monastery 105
- Khri Lhawang Gyaltshen 111 = Lhawang Gyaltshen, q.v.
- Khu = Khutön Tsöndrū Yungdrung (T Khu ston brtson 'grus g.yung drung) n. of disciple of Atiśa 102, 104
- Klu rab tu dga' ba* T n. of Indian play 55
- Könchog Gyaltshen (T dKon mchog rgyal mtshan) n. of secretary of Bodong Chole Namgyal 14, 81
- Kongjo (T Kong jo) n. of Chinese wife of King Songtsen Gampo, q.v. 102
- Kongpo (T Kong po) n. of area 34 Cf. Map
- kriyā-tantra S* (T *bya rgyud*) 'Action Tantra' 52, 72, 74
- Kṣemendra S n. of Indian polygraphist (11<sup>th</sup> c.) 55
- Künga Gyaltshen (T Kun dga' rgyal mtshan) n. of lord of Tshamda 83; disciple of Thegchen Rinpoche 106
- Künga Sangpo (T Kun dga' bzang po) n. of Sakyapa lama, founder of Ngor Monastery (1382-1456) 106
- Künrig (T Kun rig) n. of tantric deity, a form of Vairocana 78
- Kyee rDo rje'i mam bshad zab gsal gnas kyī lde mig* T n. of commentary on *Hevajra-tantra* by Chime Pelsangpo 113
- Kyirong (T sKyid grong) n. of place 9, 10, 11, 12, 58, 81, 82, 84 Cf. Map
- Kyirong Samtenling (T sKyid grong bSam gtan gling) n. of monastery 10
- Kyishö (T sKyid shod) n. of area in Ü 50
- Lagpa Gong (Lag pa gong) 42 = Śrī Lagpa Gong

- Lakṣmī S n. of sister of King Indrabodhi, q.v. 79, 111
- Lakṣmīnkarā S n. of sister of King Indrabodhi/Indrabhūti of Uḍḍiyāna 33, 110
- Lalitavistara (T *rGya cher rol pa*) n. of text relating Buddha Śākyamuni's life until First Sermon 99
- lam 'bras T 'Path and Fruit', type of tantric practice 20
- Lam rim chen mo (pr. Lamrim Chenmo) n. of treatise on non-tantric Buddhist teachings by Tsongkhapa, q.v. 26
- lama (T *bla ma*) lit. 'Higher One', master, religious teacher 114 = S *guru*
- Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltshen (T *Bla ma Dam pa bSod nams rgyal mtshan*) n. of Sakyapa lama (1312-1375) 18, 23, 52, 107, 108
- Lama Ma (T *Bla ma rMa*) n. of Tibetan lama (11<sup>th</sup> c.) 20
- Lama Phagpa 105 = Phagpa Lodrö Gyaltshen, q.v.
- Lama Samrin (T *Bla ma bSam rin*) n. of teacher of Bodong Chole Namgyal 51
- Lama Shithogpa (T *Bla ma bZhi thog pa*) n. of Tibetan lama (c. 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> c.) 22
- Lama Urgyenpa (T *Bla ma U rgyan pa*) n. of Tibetan lama (c. 13<sup>th</sup> c.) 21
- Lamdre 52 = T *lam 'bras*, q.v.
- lamtsho (T *bla mtsho*) soul-lake 13
- Langdarma (T *Glang dar ma*) n. of Tibetan king (9<sup>th</sup> c.) 16, 17, 101, 103, 104
- Langkhor (T *Glang 'khor*) n. of monastery 14, 52, 53, 58, 59, 77, 84, 88
- Langkhor Ngawang Gyaltshen (T *Glang 'khor Ngag dbang rgyal mtshan*) n. of nephew of Bodong Chole Namgyal 78
- 'Later Spread' of Buddhism 104 = T *phyi dar*, q.v.
- Latö Surtsho (T *La stod Zur tsho*) n. of place 24, 107
- Legdenje 71 = S *Bhavya*, q.v.
- Lha Lama (Yeshe Ö) (T *lha bla ma Yeshe 'od*) n. of monk-king of Purang-Guge (c. 959-1036) 102, 104
- Lhalu (T *lHa klu*) n. of Tibetan aristocratic family 35
- Lhalung Palgyi Dorje (T *lHa lung dPal gyi rdo rje*) n. of Tibetan *siddha* (9<sup>th</sup> c.) 104
- Lhasa (T *lHa sa*) 15, 23 Cf. Map .
- Lhathothori Nyenshel (T *lHa tho tho ri snyan shal*) n. of Tibetan king (c. 5<sup>th</sup> c.?) 101, 102
- Lhatsen Kyab (T *lHa btsan skyabs*) n. of ruler of Southern Latö (15<sup>th</sup> c.) 52, 63, 81, 84
- Lhatsün Changchub Ö (T *lha btsun Byang chub 'od*) n. of royal lama (11<sup>th</sup> c.) 104
- Lhawang Gyaltshen (T *lHa dbang rgyal mtshan*) n. of king of Gungthang 33
- Lhodrag (T *lHo brag*) n. of area 111 Cf. Map
- Li, Li yül (T *Li, Li yul*) 42 = Khotan
- Lo (T *Glo, Glo bo*) n. of area (present-day Mustang) 77, 78, 81, 86
- Lobsang Dragpa 106 = Tsongkhapa Lobsang Dragpa, q.v.
- Loden Sherab (T *Blo ldan shes rab*) 17, 50, 102, 105 = Ngog Loden Sherab, q.v.
- Lolo Chölung (T *Lo lo chos lung*) n. of monastery 78
- Loro (T *Lo ro*) n. of area 111
- lotsāba* T from S translator 22
- Lumbinī n. of place (near Kapilavastu), birth-place of Buddha Śākyamuni 100
- Lume (T *Klu mes*) n. of monk (c. 950-1025) 101, 104
- lung (T *rlung*) breath, vital energy, pneuma, wind 76, 82 = S *prāṇa*
- lutor (T *klu gtor*) type of ritual, *torma* for the *lu* (T *klu*), spirits of the underground 81

- Machig Labdrön (T Ma gcig Lab sgron) n. of Tibetan woman teacher (1055-1145) of Chö (T gCod) school, q.v. 33
- Machig Shama (T Ma gcig Zha ma) n. of Tibetan *yogini* (1062-1149) 20-21, 42
- Madhyamaka S (T dBu ma) 'Middle Way', n. of Buddhist philosophical school 16, 19, 47, 48, 75, 78, 101, 106, 115
- Mādhyamika S followers of Madhyamaka 12, 74
- Mādhyamika-Prāsaṅgika S (T Thal 'gyur ba) n. of Buddhist philosophical school, a subdivision of Mādhyamika 30, 48
- Mādhyamika-Svātantrika S (T Rang rgyud pa) n. of Buddhist philosophical school, a subdivision of Madhyamika 31, 48, 70, 106
- Mahākāśyapa S n. of one of Buddha Śākyamuni's disciples 19, 101
- Mahāmudrā S (T Phyag rgya chen mo, Phyag chen) n. of Buddhist meditational teaching 52, 78
- mahāsiddha* T great *siddha*, q.v. 27, 60, 78
- Mahāsiddha Chang Sung (T *mahāsiddha* Byang gzungs) n. of disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal 84
- Mahāyāna S (T Theg pa chen po, Theg chen) 'Great Vehicle' 16, 47, 57, 59, 65, 100, 111
- Mahāyānasūtralamkāra* S 'Adornment of Mahāyāna Sūtras', n. of text by Asaṅga, q.v. 49
- Maitreya S (T Byams pa) n. of future Buddha 76, 81, 101
- maṇḍal* T offering in the shape of a *maṇḍala* 28, 60
- maṇḍala* S (T *dkyil 'khor*) 'circle' as ritual space and arrangement of deities for meditational purposes 19, 25, 60, 70, 76, 82
- Mandāravā S n. of consort of Padmasambhava, q.v. 110, 111
- Mangkhar Nyugulung (T Mang mkhar smyu gu lung) n. of place 17
- Mangyul Kyirong (T Mang yul sKyid grong) 73, 81 = Kyirong, q.v.
- Mañjuśrī S (T 'Jam dpal dbyangs) n. of Buddhist deity 13, 47, 78, 81, 100, 103
- Maphamba (T Ma pham pa) 'Unconquerable', epithet of Maitreya, q.v. 74
- Marpa (T Mar pa [Chos kyi blo gros, Mar pa lotsāba]) n. of Tibetan lama (1012-1096), originator of Kagyüpa 102
- Megadhūta* S n. of Indian poem by Kālidāsa 55
- Mendong (T sMan gdong) n. of place 73
- Menkhab (T sMan khab) n. of locality to the north-east of Dingri 83
- Menkhampa Dragpa Sangpo (T dMan khams pa Grags pa bzang po) n. of disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal 114, 115
- 'Middle Spread' of Buddhism 103 = T *bar dar*, q.v.
- Milarepa (T Mi la ras pa) n. of Kagyüpa lama and poet (1040-1123) 9, 12, 102
- Mīmāṃsā S n. of ancient Indian philosophical school 54
- Miyoba (T Mi g.yo ba) n. of wrathful protecting deity 86
- mKhas pa 'i dga' ston* (pr. Khepe Gatön) 'Feast for the Learned Men', n. of Tibetan historical work (completed in 1565) by dPa' bo gTsong lag phreng ba 17
- Mongols 18
- mudrā* S (T *phyag rgya*) 'seal', ritual gesture 82; female partner in tantric ritual 78, 110
- Mudra Chenpo (T Mudra chen po) n. of Tibetan scholar (11<sup>th</sup> c.) founder of Bodong E monastery in 1049 17, 107
- Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (Fundamentals

- of the Middle Way) (T *dBu ma rtsa ba*) 'Basic Verses on the Middle Way', n. of philosophical work by Nāgārjuna (q.v.) on *Prajñāpāramitā* teachings 31, 48, 71
- mutegpa* (T *mu stegs pa*) designation of followers of non-Buddhist traditions 63, 65
- Nāgārjuna S (T Klu grub) n. of Indian Buddhist teacher (c. 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> c.) 16, 29, 30, 31, 48, 72, 101
- Nagtsho = Nagtsho Tshülthrim Gyalba (T Nag mtsho tshul khirms rgyal ba) n. of Tibetan translator and disciple of Atiśa (11th c.) 104
- Nairāñjanā S n. of river 100
- nairātmya* S selflessness of phenomena 64
- Nakartse (T sNa dkar rtse) n. of place 13, 88
- Namgyal Dragpa (T rNam rgyal grags pa) n. of ruler of Northern Latö during Bodong Chole Namgyal's time 55, 84
- Namgyal Dragpa Sangpo (T rNam rgyal grags pa bzang po) n. of ruler of Northern Latö 69, 78
- Namkha Gyaltshe (T Nam mkha' rgyal mtshan) n. of lord of Nakartse 33
- Namri Songtsen (T gNam ri srong btsan) n. of Tibetan king (d. 627) 102
- Namshö (T Nam shod, Nyam shod) n. of place 33
- namthar* (T *mam thar, mam par thar pa*) 'liberation', biography of holy persons, as a description of the process of liberation 14
- Nangkartse (T sNang dkar rtse, sNa dkar rtse) n. of ancient castle 35
- Naptra (T Nab khra) n. of monastery 10
- Nārōpa (T Na' ro pa) n. of Indian Buddhist teacher (10<sup>th</sup> c.) 102
- Narthang (T sNar thang) n. of monastery 23, 25, 78 Cf. Map
- Nedong (T sNe gdong) n. of place 62; palace 50, 109
- Nenying (T gNyas snying) n. of monastery 35
- Nepal 9, 10, 11, 15, 20, 22, 84
- Nepoche (T gNas po che) n. of monastery 22
- Ngagchang 101 = Padmasambhava, q.v.
- Ngaggi Wangpo (T Ngag gi dbang po) n. of nephew of Bodong Chole Namgyal 77
- ngagpa* (T *sngags pa*) lay tantric priest 104
- Ngamring (T Ngam ring) n. of place 26, 68, 69; n. of capital of Northern Latö 67 Cf. Map
- Ngamring Shalserma (T Ngam ring Zhal ser ma) n. of palace 68
- Ngari (T mNga' ris) n. of province in western Tibet 103, 111
- Ngari Chöde (T mNga' ris chos sde) 84, 108 = Dzongka Chöde, q.v.
- Ngari Gungthang (T mNga' ris gung thang) n. of area 75, 111
- Ngari Tö (T mNga' ris stod) West Tibet 104
- Ngawang Gyaltshe 14 = Langkhor Ngawang Gyaltshe, q.v.
- Ngawang Kalden Gyatsho (T Ngag dbang skal ldan rgya mtsho) n. of author of *Shel dkar chos 'byung*, q.v. 12
- Ngawang Kunga Sangmo 35 = Dorje Phamo, 10th, q.v.
- Ngog = Ngog Legpe Sherab (T rNgog Legs pa'i shes rab) n. of disciple of Atiśa 102, 104
- Ngog Loden Sherab (T rNgog Blo ldan shes rab) n. of Tibetan translator (1059-1109) 17, 50, 104
- Ngönga (T mNgon dga') n. of place 10, 76
- Ngönga Chöde (T mNgon dga') n. of monastery 14
- nirmāṇakāya* S (T *sprul pa'i sku*) 'Form-Body' 32, 65, 66
- nirvāṇa* S (T *myang 'das*) release from suffering 15, 19, 29, 74, 86, 100, 101, 110

- Norbu Sangpo (T Nor bu bzang po) n. of lord of Rinpong (d. 1466) 76, 84
- Northern Latö (T La stod byang) n. of *khri skor* (myriarchy) 17, 67, 71, cf. Map
- Nyanang (T gNya' nang) n. of place 84
- Nyangrong (T Nyang rong) n. of area 34
- Nyangtö (T Nyang stod) n. of area 54, 76, 85
- Nyathri Tsenpo (T gNya' khri btsan po) n. of mythical Tibetan king 102
- Nyemo (T sNye mo) n. of area 35; lords of 36
- Nyemo Chekhar (T sNye mo bye mkhar) n. of monastery 37
- Nyemo Chöde (T sNye mo chos sde) n. of monastery 36
- Nyen Darma Drag (T gNyan Dar ma grags) n. of Tibetan translator (11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> c.) 107
- Nyendrag Sangmo 34, 115 = Dorje Phamo, 3rd, q.v.
- Nyingmapa (T rNying ma pa) n. of monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism 35
- Öjangdo = (T 'Od ljang rdo, also 'U zhang rdo) n. of temple near Lhasa 101, 103
- Padmasambhava S n. of Indian sage-magician (c. 8<sup>th</sup> c.) 33, 63, 79, 103, 110 = Guru Rinpoche
- pagtshe* (T *dpag tshad*) ancient Indian unit of linear measure 42
- Palden Bodong E Monastery 107 = Bodong E Monastery, q.v.
- Palden Chime Druba (T dPal ldan 'Chi med grub pa) n. of successor of Bodong Chole Namgyal 110, 111, 112
- Palden Lama Sönam Gyaltshen (= Lama Dampa Sönam Gyaltshen, q.v.) 105
- Palden Yeshe 35 = Pañchen Lama, 6th, q.v.
- Pañcakrama* S n. of text by Nāgārjuna
- Pañchen Bumthragsumpa = Sthirapāla, q.v.
- Pañchen Lama, 1st: T mKhas grub dge legs dpal bzang (1385-1438) 34
- Pañchen Lama, 6th: T Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes (1738-1780) 35
- paṇḍita* T (from S) scholar 28, 42, 44, 49, 64, 73, 101, 107
- Pang Lodrö Tenba 107 = Pang Lotsāba, q.v.
- Pang Lotsāba (T dPang lo tsā ba, dPang ston blo gros brtan pa) n. of Tibetan lama and translator (1276-1342) 18, 19, 21-23, 24, 26, 41, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 72, 78, 82, 105, 108
- pāramitā* S 'perfection', the six (sometimes ten) virtues or 'perfections' of the *bodhisattva* path 79-80
- pawo* (T *dpa' bo*) 'heroes', a class of deities 41, 59, 85
- Pekhö(tsho) (T dPal khud mtsho, also Pad khud mtsho) n. of lake 13, 19, 86, cf. Map
- Pelkhor Dechen (T dPal 'khor bde chen) n. of monastery 76
- Pelthang (T dPal thang) n. of area 59
- Pema Chöding (T Pad ma Chos sdings) n. of monastery 14, 36
- Pemo Chöding (T dPal mo chos sdings) 13, 109, 110, 113, 115 = Pema Chöding
- Perfections 30 = *pāramitā*, q.v.
- Pha Dampa Sangye (T Pha dam pa sangs rgyas) n. of Indian teacher (d. c. 1117), founder of Shije (T Zhi byed) and Chö (T gCod) schools 10, 20, 52, 53
- Phadrug (T Pha drug) n. of place 20
- Phagmodrupa (T Phag mo gru pa) n. of ruling dynasty of Tibet (14-16<sup>th</sup> c.); n. of suborder of Kagyüpa
- Phagmodrupa (T Phag mo gru pa) n. of founder of suborder bearing his name (1110-1170) 20, 33, 110
- Phagmodrupa Changchub Gyaltshen (T Phag mo gru pa Byang chub rgyal

- mtshan) n. of first Phagmodrupa ruler (1302-1373) 18, 25
- Phagpa = Phagpa Lodrö Gyaltsen, q.v.
- Phagpa Lodrö Gyaltsen (T 'Phags pa Blo gros rgyal mtshan) n. of Sakyapa lama (1235-1280)
- Phagpa Rinpoche = Phagpa Lodrö Gyaltsen, q.v.
- Phagpawati (T Phags pa wa ti) n. of statue of Avalokiteśvara in a temple at Kyirong 58
- phartsheba* (T *phar tshad pa*) n. of a master of *Prajñāpāramitā* and *pramāṇa* 31
- Phenyül (T 'Phan yul) n. of valley north of Lhasa 51
- Phuchungba (= Phuchungba Shönnu Gyaltsen, T Phu chung ba gZhon nu rgyal mtshan) n. of Kadampa scholar (1031-1106) 104
- Phuntsholing (T Phun tshogs gling) n. of place 17
- Phure (T Phu re) n. of monastery 59
- phyi dar* T 'Later Spread' of Buddhism (in Tibet) 102
- Phyogs las rnam rgyal gsung 'bum* (pr. Chole Namgyal Sungbum) 'Collected Works of Chole Namgyal'
- Porong (T sPo rong) n. of area 9, 10, 16, 19 Cf. Map
- Porong Pema/o Chöding 14, 16, 19 = Pema Chöding, q.v.
- Potoba = Potoba Rinchen Sal (T Po to pa Rin chen gsal) n. of Kadampa lama (d. 1105) 104
- Potopa Chole Namgyal 35 = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.
- Prajñāpāramitā* S (T *Pha rol tu phyin pa*) 'Perfection of Wisdom', a class of Buddhist philosophical scriptures concerned with the doctrine of the 'Void' (S *śūnya*) 18, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 64, 72, 100, 104, 105, 106
- pramāṇa* S (T *tshad ma*) logic 22, 23, 41, 46, 48, 49, 68, 71, 105, 108
- Pramāṇasamuccaya* S (T *Tshad ma kun las btus pa*) n. of text by Dignāga 54
- Pramāṇavārttika* S (T *Tshad ma rnam 'grel*) n. of text by Dharmakīrti 46, 49, 51, 65, 105
- Pramāṇaviniścaya* S (T *Tshad ma mam nges*) n. of text by Dharmakīrti 105
- Prāsaṅgika S n. of Buddhist philosophical school, a subdivision of Mādhyamika 31 = Mādhyamika-Prāsaṅgika, q.v.
- pratityasamutpāda* S (T *rten 'brel*) law of moral causation 15
- pratyekabuddha* S (T *rang sangs rgyas*) 'Lone Buddha'; being who attains to Enlightenment by his own efforts but does not reveal it 55, 64, 65, 100, 101
- rabchung* (T *rab 'byung, rab tu 'byung ba*) ordination as a monk 56
- rabjampa* (T *rab byams pa*) title of high geshe (T *dge bshes*) 115
- Rājagṛha S place of First Council of Buddhism 100
- Ralpachen (T Ral pa can) n. of Tibetan king (r. 815-841?) 101, 103
- Ramoche (T Ra mo che) n. of ancient temple in Lhasa 101
- Rang 'grel* T n. of autocommentary to *Rig gter*, q.v.
- Rangma (T Rang ma) n. of place 9
- Rangma Lama (T Rang ma bla ma) n. of lama 9
- Rangmaphu (T Rang ma phu) n. of place 11
- Rasa Thrulnang (Tsuglagkhang) (T Ra sa 'Phrul snang gtsug lag khang) old name of Lhasa Jokhang 101
- Red Guards 9
- Rendaba Shonnu Lodrö (T Red mda' ba gZhon nu blo gros) n. of Sakyapa scholar (1349-1412) 25, 51, 58, 59, 106

- Ribo Ganden(pa) (T Ri bo dga' ldan [pa]) 106, 111= Gelugpa, q.v.
- Rig gter* T n. of text on *pramāṇa* by Sakya Paṇḍita 49, 50, 67, 71 = *Tshad ma rig gter*
- Rigsum Gönpö (T *rigs gsum mgon po*) 3 protector *bodhisattva* (Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, Avalokiteśvara) of Tibet 101
- Rinchen Sangpo (T Rin chen bzang po) n. of Tibetan translator (958-1055) 102, 104
- rindzin* (T *rig 'dzin*, S *vidyādhara*) possessor of knowledge 58
- ringtsel* (T *ring srel*) particles said to be found in the burnt ashes of certain holy lamas 88
- Rinpung (T Rin spungs) capital of the Rinpungpa until 1435 18, 84, cf. Map
- Rinpungpa (T Rin spungs pa) n. of Tibetan ruling dynasty (15<sup>th</sup> c.) 34
- rNying ma rgyud 'bum* (pr. Nyingma Gyübum) 'Collected Tantras of the Old School', n. of a Nyingmapa Tantra collection 105
- Rol snyed ma'i zlos gar* T (pr. Rölnyeme Dögar) n. of text by Bodong Chole Namgyal 55
- Rong 108 = Rongtön Shecha Künrig, q.v.
- Rongtön, Rongtön Shecha Künrig (T Rong ston Shes bya kun rig) n. of disciple of Yag Mipham (1367-1449) 31, 69, 70, 106
- rTsa shes* T (T *dBu ma rtsa ba shes rab*, S *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*) n. of text by Nāgārjuna 49
- Rulag (T Ru lag) 'Supplementary Horn', one of the four great administrative units of the Tibetan kingdom 42
- Ṣaḍāṅgayoga* S (T sByor la yan la drug) Six Yoga of the *Kālacakra-tantra* 52
- sādhana* S (T *sgrub thabs*) tantric ritual for evocation of deity 20
- Sakya (T Sa skya) n. of place in southwestern Tibet (cf. Map) 17, 22, 74; n. of head monastery of Sakyapa 23, 46, 74
- Śākya, king of the 99; lineage 100
- Sakya Drangmoche (T Sa skya brang [/rang] mo che) n. of monastery 24
- Sakya Kūnga Nyingpo (T Sa skya Kun dga' sNying po) n. of Sakyapa lama (1092-1158) 106
- Sakya Paṇḍita (T Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan) n. of Sakyapa lama (1182-1251) 67, 83, 105
- Śākyamuni S 'Sage of the Śākyas', n. of the historical Buddha (c. 460-380 BC) 15, 19, 47, 51
- Śākyanāga S n. of Indian Buddhist teacher 48
- Sakyapa (T Sa skya pa) n. of monastic order of Tibetan Buddhism 18, 25, 52, 76, 77, 102, 104, 106
- Śākyaprabha S n. of Indian Buddhist teacher 101
- samadhi* S (T *ting nge 'dzin*) mental concentration 44, 45, 52, 76
- Samantabhadra S (T Kun tu bzang po) n. of tantric deity 102
- samaya* S (T *dam tshig*) solemn vow, bond; also used as *mantra* 57
- Śambhala S n. of legendary realm 110
- sambhogakāya* S (T *slong spyod rdzogs pa'i sku*) 'Enjoyment-Body' 31, 32, 65, 66
- Samding (T bSam sdings) monastery 13, 14, 34, 35, 36; abbesses 13
- Samding Dorje Phamo (T bSam sdings rDo rje phag mo) line of female reincarnations of Dorje Phamo (S Vajravārāhi) at Samding Monastery initiated by Chöky Drönme, q.v. 13, 14, 21, 32-37, 110-114
- Sāṃkhya S n. of ancient Indian philosophical school 54
- sampannakrama* S (T *rdzogs rim*) 'Process of Perfection' 28, 76, 82

- samsāra* S (T 'khor ba) round of phenomenal existences 8, 15, 30, 31, 32, 44, 62, 65, 66, 75
- Samtenling (T bSam gtan gling) n. of monastery 45, 49
- Samye (T bSam yas) n. of first Tibetan Buddhist monastery (founded 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 8<sup>th</sup> c.) 23, 35, 101, 103, cf. Map
- Sanggye Gyaltsen (Buddha's Banner of Victory) (T Sangs rgyal rgyal mtshan) 46 = Bodong Chole Namgyal, q.v.
- Sangphu, Sang phu Neuthog (T gSang phu Ne'u thog) n. of monastery 18, 23, 50, 104, 105, 109
- Śāntarakṣita S (T Shi ba 'tsho) n. of Indian Buddhist teacher (c. 725-784) 71, 101, 103
- Śāntideva S n. of Indian monk (c. 7th c.), author of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 53
- Sarasvatī (Yangchenma, T dByangs can ma) n. of goddess 13, 33, 47, 54, 72, 109
- Sārnāth S n. of place (near Vārāṇasī) of Buddha Śākyamuni's First Sermon 15
- Sautrāntika S n. of Buddhist philosophical school 12, 74
- see (T gzi) n. of precious stone 56
- Segshing (T Sreg shing) n. of monastery 63
- Sekharchung (T Se mkhar chung) n. of monastery 52
- sGrol ma yid kyi lcag kyu T meditation ritual on Tārā 107
- Shabme (T Shab smad) n. of area 76
- Shalu (T Zha lu) n. of place, cf. Map
- Shama (T Zha ma) n. of clan 19, 42
- Shama Sengge Gyaltsen (T Zha ma Seng ge rgyal mtshan) n. of Tibetan translator (11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> c.), brother of Machig Shama 20, 42
- shang (T zhang) maternal uncle 17
- Shang = Shang Yeshede (T Zhang Ye shes sde) n. of Tibetan translator (9<sup>th</sup> c.) 103
- Shang (T Shangs) n. of area 63, 76, cf. Map
- Shang Lhabsang Lupel (T Zhang lHa bsang klu dpal) n. of minister during ancient Tibetan kingdom (c. 9<sup>th</sup> c.) 17
- Shang Tashitse (T Shangs bKra shis rtse) n. of place 35
- Shangpa Kagyü (T Shangs pa bka' brgyud) n. of order of monastic Buddhism, subdivision of Kagyüpa 52
- shedra (T bshad grwa) teaching college (in monastery) 49
- Shekar (T Shel dkar) n. of place, monastery 14, 24, 25, 31, 34, 46, 49, 51, 56, 59, 62, 64, 81, 84, 85, 86, 108, 109
- Shel dkar chos 'byung T (pr. Shekar Chöjung) 'Religious History of Shekar' written in 1732 by Ngawang Kalden Gyatsho 12, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24
- Shelchag (T Shel lcags) n. of river 43
- shibdag (T gzhi bdag) local deity 81
- Shigatse (T gZhis ka rtse) n. of place 17, cf. Map
- Shije (T Zhi byed) doctrine, n. of Tibetan Buddhist school 52
- Shiwatsho (T Shi ba 'tsho) 71 = Śāntarakṣita, q.v.
- Shongtön Dorje Gyaltsen (T Shong ston rDo rje rgyal mtshan) n. of Tibetan translator (13<sup>th</sup> c.) 12, 11, 72, 73, 109
- siddha S (T grub thob) tantric adept 20, 28, 102, 104
- Sinmo Nyen (T Srin mo gnyen) n. of place 34, 111
- Situ Chökyi Rinchen (T Si tu Chos kyi rin chen) n. of lord of Southern Latö (d. 1402) 24, 46, 51
- Situ Rabten (T Si tu Rab brtan) n. of lord of Gyantse (15<sup>th</sup> c.) 76, 84
- snga dar T = 'Early Spread' of Buddhism (in Tibet) q.v.
- sNgags rim chen mo (pr. Ngagrim Chenmo) n. of treatise on tantric Buddhist teachings by Tsongkhapa 26
- Sobashi, Sobo Soshi (T So ba bzhi, So bo



- so bzhi) n. of place in Kham 34
- Sönam Drenma 33 = *ḍākinī* Sönam Drenma, q.v.
- Sönam Paldren 33 = *ḍākinī* Sönam Paldren, q.v.
- Sönam Sangpo (T bSod nams bzang po) n. of translator, disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal 78
- Songtsen Gampo (T Srong btsan sgam po) n. of Tibetan king (d. 649/50) 20, 35, 101, 102
- Southern Latö (T La stod lho) n. of *khri skor* (myriarchy) 17, 84 Cf. Map
- srang* (T *srang*) Tibetan currency unit 22, 104
- śrāvaka* S (T *nyan thos*) 'hearers', early disciples of Buddha Śākyamuni 55, 64, 65, 100, 101
- Śrī Lagpa Gong (T Śrī Lag pa gong) 108
- Śrī ri (T Śrī ri) n. of mountain 62
- sTag mo lus sbyin rtogs brjod* T n. of work in verse by Bodong Chole Namgyal 51, 91 (n. 59)
- Sthirapāla S (T brTan skyong) n. of Indian scholar (11th c.) 17 = Bumthragsumpa
- stūpa* S (T *mchod rten*) 'cenotaph', originally representing the funeral mounds containing Buddha Śākyamuni's relics, later symbol of Buddhahood 77, 86, 102
- Śuddhodana S n. of Buddha Śākymuni's father 99
- Sulphu (T Zul phu) n. of monastery 111
- sungjug* (T *zung 'jug*) 29
- Surtsho (T Zur tsho) n. of area 10, 21, 23, 43, 45 Cf. Map = Latö Surtsho, q.v.
- śūnyatā* S (T *stong pa nyid*) 'Voidness' 48
- sūtra* S (T *mdo*) a class of scripture 16, 19, 41, 53, 69, 72, 73, 80, 101, 104, 107, 108; teachings of the 12, 14, 19, 26, 33, 53, 58, 73, 77, 78, 79, 105
- Śvetaketu S (T Tog dkar) n. of Buddha Śākyamuni in Tuṣita Heaven before his last incarnation 100
- Switzerland 10
- Tagdeba Sengge Gyaltshen (T sTag sde ba Seng ge rgyal mtshan) n. of Tibetan teacher (1212-1294) 42
- Taglung (T sTag lung) n. of main monastery of Taglung Kagyüpa 23, 50, 51
- Taglung Ngawang Dragpa (T sTag lung Ngag dbang grags pa) n. of disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal (1427-?) 76, 85, 112
- Taglung Önsim (T sTag lung dBon gzim) n. of place 34
- Taglung Rinpoche (T sTag lung Rin po che) = Taglung Ngawang Dragpa, q.v.
- Taglung Thangpa (T sTag lung Thang pa) 13, 51, 57, 82, 84 = Taglung Ngawang Dragpa, (in this text)
- Tagnag (T Brag nag) n. of place in Surtsho 63
- Takartaso (T Brag dkar rta so) n. of place 10
- Taktra (T sTag brag) n. of regent of Tibet (1941-1950) 36
- tantra* S (T *rgyud*) a class of scripture 19, 41, 52, 53, 58, 59, 69, 72, 76, 77, 80, 104, 107, 108, 109; teachings of the 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 26, 33, 53, 57, 58, 73, 77, 78, 79, 106
- Tārā (T sGrol ma) n. of tantric deity 20, 81
- Tashi Ömbar (T bKra shis 'od 'bar) n. of protective deity 22, 36, 37
- Tashipeltseg (T bKra shis dpal brtsegs) n. of abbot of Taglung 51
- Tasitu Changchub Gyaltshen = Phagmodrupa Changchub Gyaltshen, q.v.
- tathāgata* S (T *de bzhin gshegs pa*) 'Thus-Gone' 19, 72 = Buddha
- Tenjur (T *bstan 'gyur*) Tibetan canonical collection of Indian Buddhist treatises and commentarial works 26, 105

- Tenma (bsTan ma, brTan ma) n. of (12) protective goddesses 63
- Tenzin Gyatso 29, 30 = Dalai Lama, 14th, q.v.
- tertönpa* (T *gter ston pa*)
- Thandrug (T Khra 'brug) n. of temple 50
- thangka* (T *thang ka*) Buddhist scroll-painting 77, 88
- Thangpoche (T Thang po che) n. of monastery 101
- Thangtong Gyalpo (T Thang stong rgyal po) n. of Tibetan *siddha* (1385-1464) 33, 34
- Thegchen Chöje 108 = Thegchen Rinpoche
- Thegchen Rinpoche (= Thegchen Chökyi Gyalpo, T Thegs chen Chos skyid rgyal po) n. of Sakyapa lama (1349-1425) 106
- Thogme 41 = Gyalse Thogme, q.v.
- Tholing (mTho gling / lding) n. of place in West Tibet; Golden Temple (T gSer khang) 102
- Thönmi Sambhoṭa (T Thon mi Sam bho ṭa) n. of minister of King Songtsen Gampo 35, 102
- Thri Ralpachen = Ralpachen, q.v.
- Thride Songsten (T Khri lde srong btsan) n. of Tibetan king (r. 800?-8115) 17
- Thrigyal Sönam De (T Khri rgyal bSod nams lde) n. of king of Ngari (1371-1404) 51
- Thrisong Detsen (T Khri srong lde btsan) n. of Tibetan king (742-797) 101, 103
- Thritsün (T Khri btsun) n. of wife of Kings Songtsen Gampo 102
- Thugjepel (T Thugs rje dpal) n. of translator, disciple of Bodong Chole Namgyal 78
- Tinley Tshomo 34 = Samding Dorje Phamo, 6th
- Tö-Hor (T sTod-Hor) n. of area in western Tibet 111
- torma* (T *gtor ma*) ritual dough figure 25, 82, 83
- tripiṭaka* S 'Three Baskets', collection of the holy scriptures of Buddhism (divided into 3 parts: *abhidharma*, *sūtra*, *vinaya*) 16, 59, 104, 105, 108
- Tshad ma rig gter* T (pr. Tshema Rigter) n. of text on *pramāṇa* by Sakya Paṇḍita 51
- Tsagong (T Tsa gong) n. of place in Kongpo 111
- Tsagong Palky Nesar (T Tsa gong dpal kyi gnas gsar) n. of monastery 34
- tsampa* (T *rtsam pa*) roasted barley flower 9, 58
- Tsang (T gTsang) n. of province 23, 42, 77, 84 Cf. Map; ruler of 34
- Tsangnagpa = Tsangnagpa Tshülthrim Sengge (T gTsang nag pa Tshul khriims seng ge) n. of disciple of Chapa Chökyi Sengge 105
- Tsangrong (T gTsang rong) n. of place 76 = Rinpung
- Tsari (T Tsa ri) n. of place 33, 110
- Tsechen (T rTse chen) n. of place 54, 84; lord of 54
- Tselpa Kagyüpa (T Tshal pa bKa' brgyud pa) subdivision of Kagyüpa 118
- Tsepong (T Tse spong) n. of clan 17
- Tsethang (T rTsed thang) n. of monastery 49, 50, 109
- tshewang* (T *tshe dbang*) life-empowerment 81
- Tsibri (T rTsib ri) 12 = Śrī ri, q.v.
- Tshogs gsum gsal ba* T n. of grammatical treatise on Tibetan orthography 23
- Tsomo Kesang Chogden (T mTsho mo skal bzang mchog ldan) n. of reincarnation of Samding Dorje Phamo (1747/8-1774/5) 15
- Tsongkhapa (Lobsang Dragpa) (T Tsong kha pa Blo bzang grags pa) n. of Tibetan scholar and founder of

- Gelugpa school (1357-1419) 26, 34  
Tucci, Giuseppe n. of Italian tibetologist (1894-1984) 35  
Tuṣita S (T dGa' ldan) n. of heaven or paradise 23, 100  
Twelve Tenma = Tenma, q.v.
- Ü (T dBus) n. of province in central Tibet 23, 42, 48, 49, 77, 84, 85, 86  
Umbu Lhakhar 101 = Yumbu Lhagang, q.v.  
Upāli S n. of disciple of Buddha Śākyamuni 101  
Urgyen Tshomo 15, 34 = Samding Dorje Phamo, 4th  
Uru (T dBu ru) n. of subdivision of ancient Tibetan kingdom 108  
*utpattikrama* S (LT b/skyed rim) 'Process of Generation' 28, 76, 80  
Ü-Tsang (T dBus gTsang) n. of main Tibetan provinces 101, 103  
*Uttaratantra* S n. of text 49
- Vaibhāṣika n. of Buddhist philosophical school 12, 74  
Vairocana S (T rNam par snang mdzad) n. of a Buddha 44; n. of translator (8<sup>th</sup> c.) 19  
Vaiśālī S n. of town in ancient India 100  
Vaiśeṣika S n. of ancient Indian philosophical tradition 54  
Vaiśravaṇa S n. of god 59  
Vajrabhairava S (T rDo rje 'jigs byed) n. of tantric deity 77, 78, 86, 112  
*vajrācārya* S (T rdo rje slob dpon) tantric master 14  
Vajradhara S (rDo rje 'chang) n. of tantric deity 72, 81  
Vajrapāṇi S (T Phyag na rdo rje) n. of *bodhisattva* 54, 81, 101, 103, 104  
Vajrasattva S (T rDo rje sems dpa') n. of tantric deity 59, 109
- Vajravārahī S (T rDo rje phag mo) n. of Buddhist goddess 33, 78, 110 = Dorje Phamo, q.v.  
Vajrayāna S 'Diamond Path', generic term for tantric Buddhism 52, 56, 57, 73  
Vajrayoginī S n. of Buddhist goddess 73, 109  
Vārāṇasī S (Benares) 100  
Vasubhandu S n. of Indian philosopher (c. 400-480) 16, 49, 101  
*Veda* collection of ancient Indian ritual texts 43, 54  
Vimalamitra S n. of Indian master (c. 8<sup>th</sup> c.) 103  
*vinaya* S (T 'dul ba) rules of monastic discipline 16, 17, 18, 27, 49, 56, 101, 106, 107  
*Vinayamūlasūtra* S (T 'Dul ba mdo rtsa) n. of text by Guṇaprabha 49  
Virūpa S n. of *mahāsiddha* (c. 9<sup>th</sup> c.) 72
- Wangchug Dorje 15 = Karmapa, 9<sup>th</sup>, q.v.
- Yag (T g.Yag) 32, 108 = Yagthrug Sangyepel, q.v.  
Yag(de) Mipham 64, 65, 66, 67, 109 = Yagthrug Sangyepel, q.v.  
Yagthrug Sangyepel (T g.Yag phrug Sangs rgyas dpal) n. of Tibetan scholar, contemporary of Bodong Chole Namgyal 31, 50, 106  
Yamdrog (T Yar 'brog) n. of area 13, 14, 34, 85, 86, 88, 111; n. of lake 13, 14; lord(s) of 34, 83  
Yamdrog Taglung (T Yar 'brog sTag lung) n. of place 85  
*Yan lag brgyad* T (pr. Yenlag Gye) 27 = *Saṣṭāṅgahṛdayasāṃhitā*, q.v.  
Yarlung (T Yar lung) n. of area 50  
Yasang (T g.Ya' bzang) n. of monastery 34, 112  
Yatshe (T Ya tshe) n. of area (in the

north-west of present-day Nepal) 22  
Yeshe Nyingpo 71 = Jñānagarbha, q.v.  
Yeshe Ö = Lha Lama Yeshe Ö (T lha bla  
ma Ye shes 'od), q.v.  
*yidam* (T *yi dam*) tutelary deity 72, 114  
Yigu (T dByi gu) n. of place 12, 42, 108  
Yo Gechung (g.Yo dge 'byung) n. of  
monk (9<sup>th</sup> c.) 17, 104  
*yoga* S (T *mal 'byor*) meditation 29, 51, 106  
Yogācāra S 'Practice of Yoga', n. of  
Buddhist philosophical school  
*yoga-tantra* S (T *mal 'byor rgyud*) 'Yoga  
Tantra' 52, 72, 74, 82  
*yogin* S (T rnal 'byor ba) performer of  
*yoga* 20, 28, 309, 42  
*yoginī* S class of female tantric deities 41,  
43, 59, 78, 85

Yoru (T g.Yo ru) n. of subdivision of  
ancient Tibetan kingdom 108  
*yuganaddha* S (T *zung 'jug*) 29  
Yumbu Lhagang (T Yum bu bla sgang)  
n. of ancient palace in Yarlung valley  
101, 102  
Yumtsho Chugmo (T g.Yu mtsho phyug  
mo) 88 = Lake Yamdrog, q.v.  
Yungdrung Sangye Kyi (T Yung drung  
Sang rgyas skyid) 43, 108 = Bodong  
Chole Namgyal, q.v.

*Zab gsal mkha' 'gro snying thig* T (pr.  
Sabsel Khandro Nyingthig) n. of text  
by Palden Chime Druba 112

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