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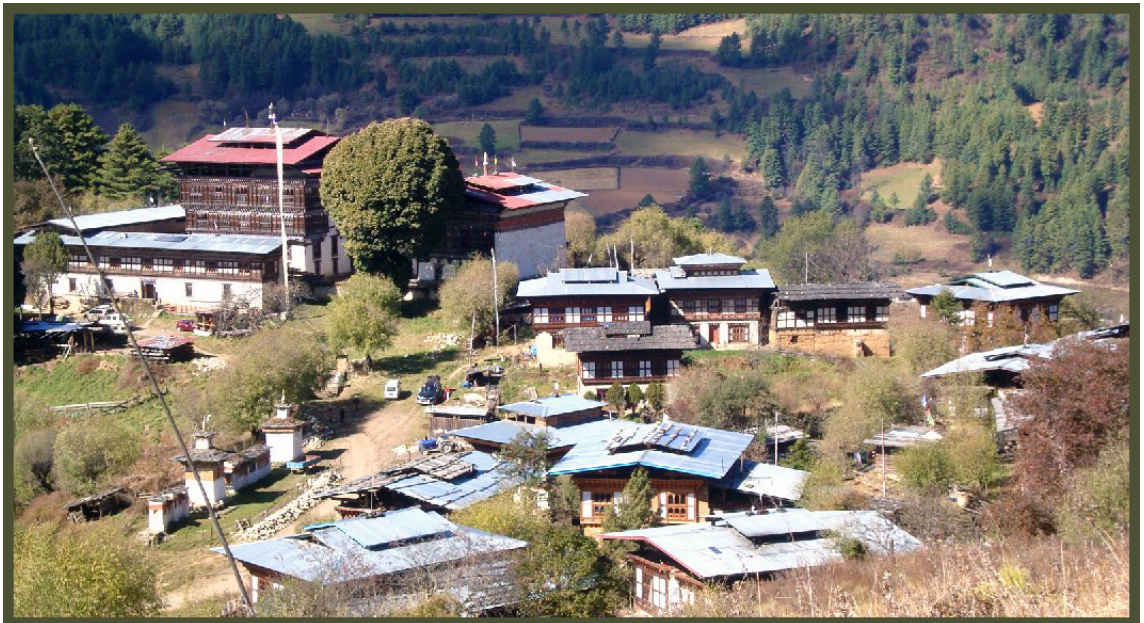
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OGYEN CHOLING IN BHUTAN: AN INTERPRETATION OF THE TEMPLE AND ITS ART

Volume One



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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2019

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Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to my family, my sister and my mother for the moral support they provided me. Overall, I could not have sustained the stress and efforts of such an endeavor without the unfailing support of my husband, Paul Spencer Sochaczewski. This journey would not have happened without him.

Abstract

This thesis contains a detailed interpretation of the significance and the importance of the religious site at Ogyen Choling (o rgyan chos gling) - which was the seat, in central Bhutan, of the treasure revealer (gter ston) of the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405). It is perched on a hill in the Himalaya at a height of three thousand meters above sea level.

In the fourteenth century, in the Tang (stang) valley of Bumthang, the Tibetan philosopher Longchen Rabjam (klong chen ra byams: 1308-1364) had already established a meditation site on a hill there and gave it its name Ogyen Choling. Later on, Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405) settled at that location where his descendants are still living. The religious noble family (chos rje) of Ogyen Choling who also count in their lineage the Bhutanese treasure revealer Pema Lingpa (pad ma gling pa: 1450-1521) became politically influential in the 1850s when the head of the family was the Trongsar *pönlop*, the de facto governor of Bhutan.

The buildings on the estate were rebuilt after the Assam earthquake which struck this Himalayan region in 1897 and the temple (gtsug lag khang) was reconstructed and consecrated in 1902. The estate is very much inscribed into the sacred landscape of the Tang valley and is built in the traditional Bhutanese style of architecture while showing motifs signaling the historical link of Bhutan with the ancient Empire of Tibet. The temple iconography features, in large part, the tantric master Padmasambhava and the Nyingma treasure (gter ma) tradition. It also highlights the transmission and legitimation of this tradition and the teaching lineage of Dorje Lingpa.

Additionally, through the representation of the Deities of Long Life (tshe lha) and the goddess Tārā (sgrol ma), attention is brought to the worldly concerns of the women of the family in charge of the present and future life of their household.

The crowning of Bhutan's first king, in 1907, transformed the country's political environment, and the societal changes brought about by the agrarian reforms of

the third king in the 1950s put an end to the old order. The noble families *chöje* were constrained into a different way of life. Under the new circumstances the *chöje* in Ogyen Choling succeeded in reinventing their lifestyle and preserving their heritage, eager to transmit its tradition to the generations to come.

This thesis is the result of extensive research carried out in respect of the temple and its two shrines inside: the Jowo Lhakhang and the Drölma Lhakhang, on the estate. The research also takes into account the context, geographical, social and historical, within which the sacred operates in the present day as well as how it operated in the past.

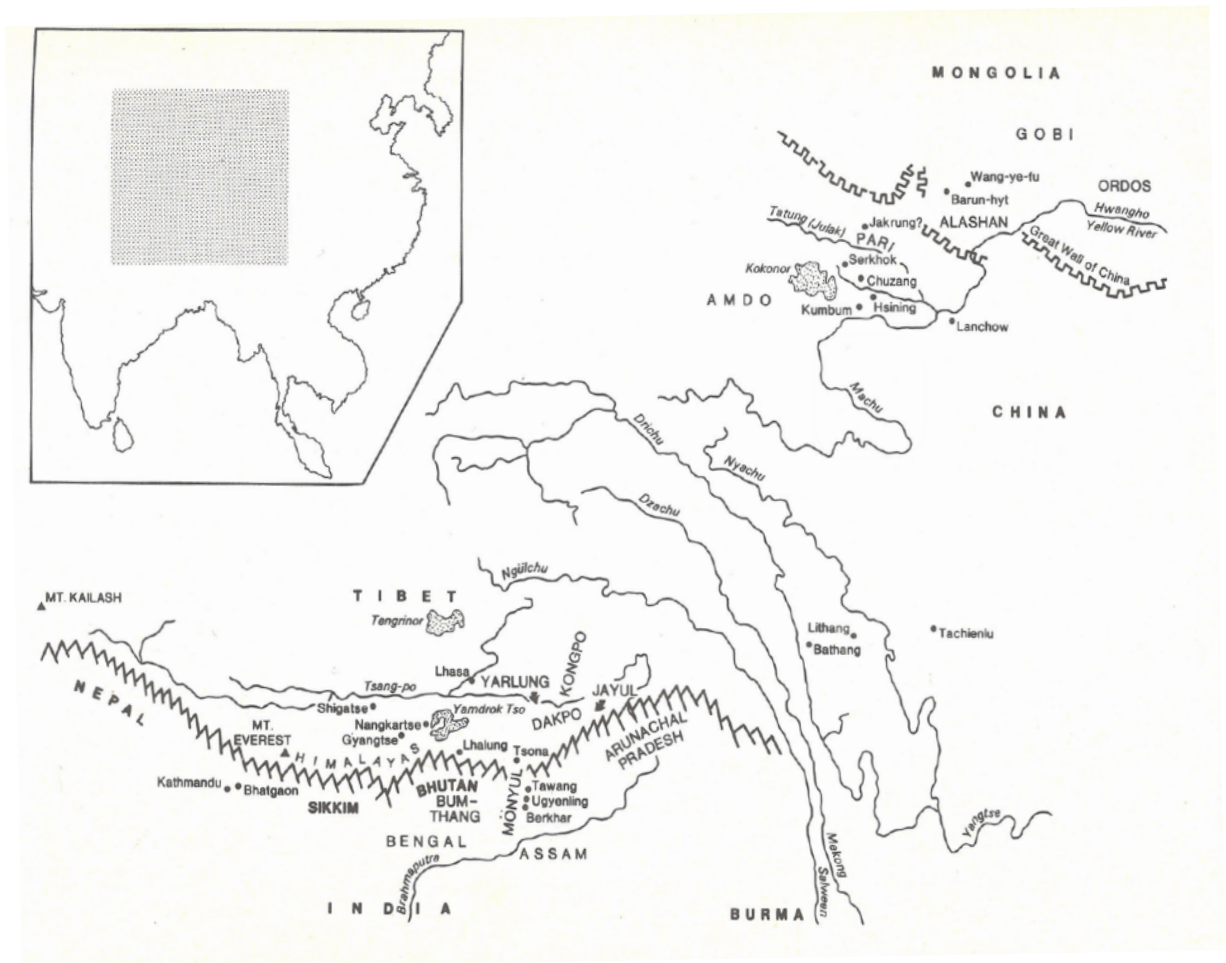
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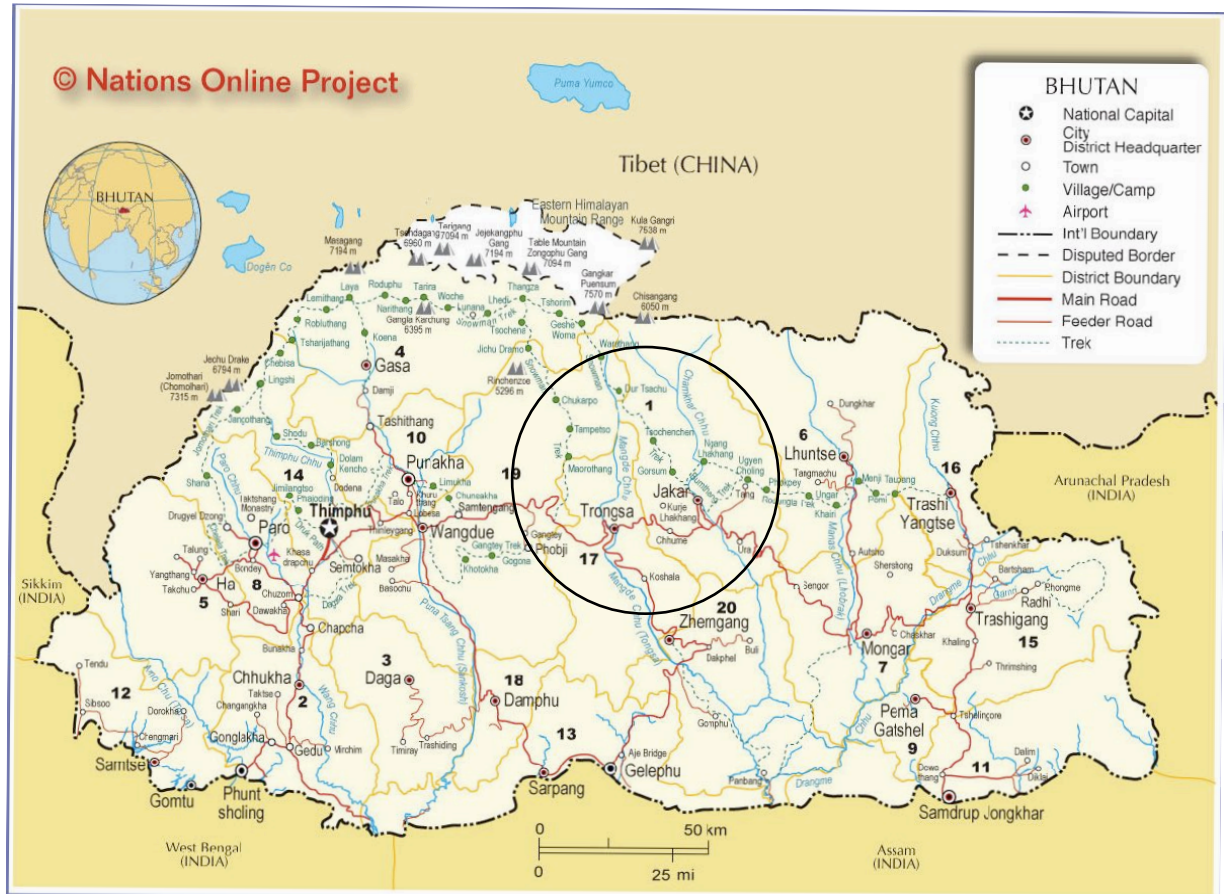
1 - Maps

1.1 Bhutan and the Himalayan Region¹



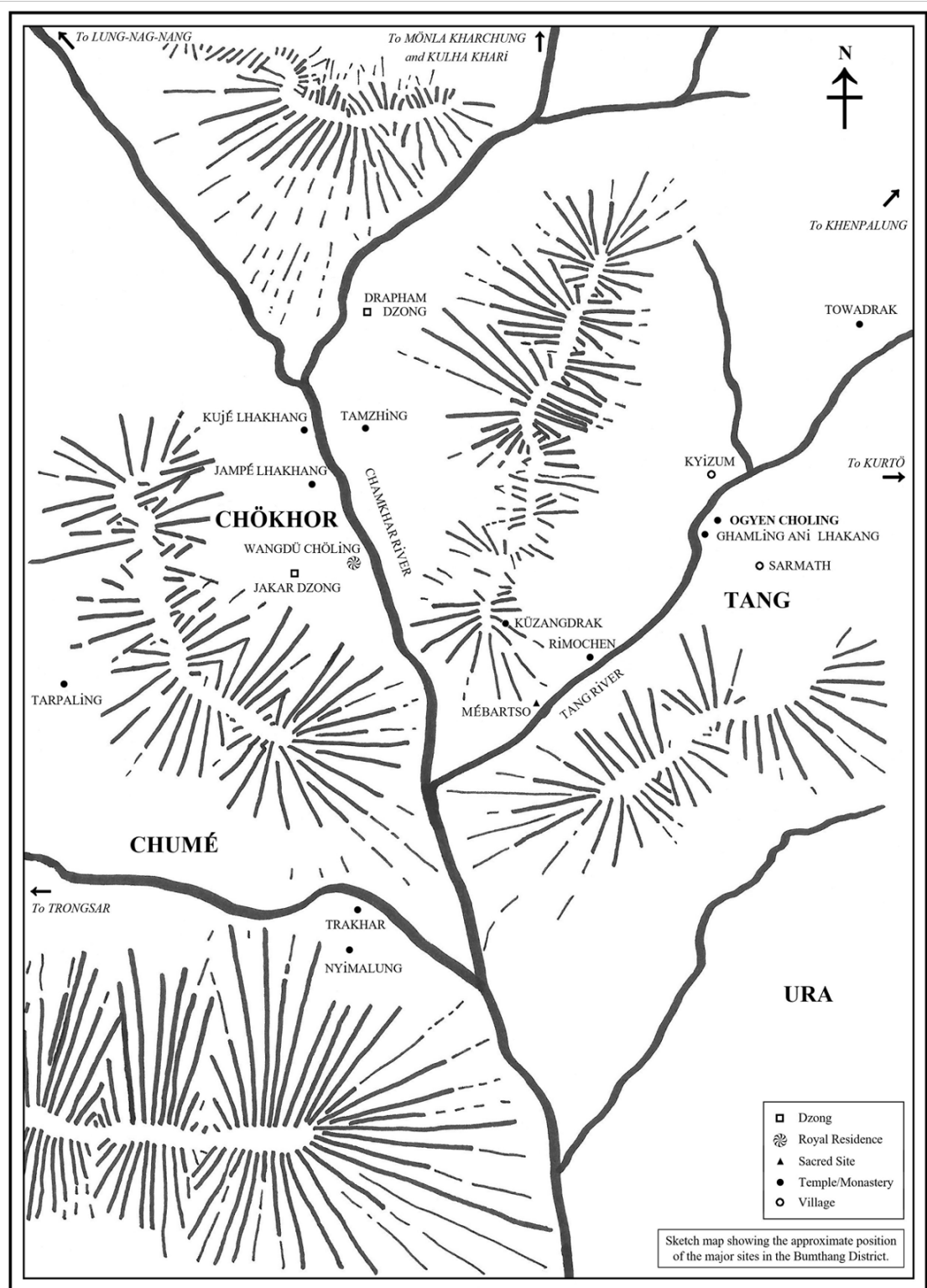
¹ Aris 1989: p. XIII.

1.2 Bhutan and Ogyen Choling²



² Map from Nations Online Project accessed from www.nationsonlineproject.org in June 2018.

1.3 Bumthang³



³ Map of Bumthang showing the four valleys of Chökor, Chumey Tang and Ura. (design Alex Vucic based on Michael Aris' map, Aris 1979: p.4)

2 - Introduction

In 2010, when trekking in Bhutan, I visited the estate of Ogyen Choling (o rgyan chos gling). Entering the temple, I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the paintings on the walls, by the abundance of deities depicted as well as the ferocious look of some of them. My overwhelming feeling was compounded by my quasi-total ignorance of the scenes depicted. I was amazed and curious and the idea, that one day I would study the meaning of these magnificent paintings, started to rise. One thing led to another and after several years of learning and hard work, and with the authorization of its owners, I engaged in the research of the temple of Ogyen Choling.

I immediately perceived the importance of Ogyen Choling for multiple reasons. The beauty and the authenticity of the place, its religious importance as the seat of the treasure revealer (gter ston) Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405), and the power of the paintings would be sufficient enough to deserve research. It was also easy to notice that such an unspoiled estate is by itself an important piece of the history of Bhutan. It deserved to be documented, studied and understood in the hope that Bhutanese scholars would further investigate it to ensure its preservation for the future.

The temple of Ogyen Choling, as we see it now, was consecrated in 1902 and the paintings have not been restored or retouched since. This is a precious quality for the researcher who can appreciate and analyze a style, the colors, the nuances and brush strokes of the artists. In Bhutan, the paintings in temples are often restored or painted over, thus erasing the authentic testimony of a style, a regional pattern, or a rare depiction.

2.1 Historical and Political Background

Located in the central region of Bumthang, the estate is perched on a hill at an altitude of three thousand meters in the Tang (stang) valley. The north of Bumthang has its border with the southern region of Lhodrak (lho brag) in Tibet.

Until the 1950s, the high mountain passes saw the frequent circulation of people and trade exchanges between the two regions.

The story of Ogyen Choling started in the fourteenth century when the religious philosopher Longchen Rabjam (klong chen rab 'byams: 1308-1363) fled Tibet after a long conflict with Tai Situ Jangchup Gyeltsen⁴ (ta'i si tu byang chub rgyal mtshan: 1302-1364). He travelled to the south and resided for an estimated ten years in Monyul, as Bhutan was called at the time. He established eight meditation and teaching sites (dgon pa), among them Ogyen Choling in the central region of Bumthang.⁵

One century after Longchenpa, the Tibetan *tertön* Dorje Lingpa, following a vision he had in a dream, traveled to Paro (spa gro) and arrived in Bumthang in 1374.⁶ He settled in Ogyen Choling in western Bhutan where his descendants, the Ogyen Choling *chöje*, are still living. Subsequently, in the nineteenth century the alliance with the *chöje* from Tamzhing brought the Bhutanese *tertön* Pema Lingpa (pad ma gling pa: 1450-1521) into the family lineage. A village was built next to the estate and bears the same name, reflecting the feudal organization of the society.

The nineteenth century marked a period of increased political power for the family when the heir Tshokye Dorji (mtsho skye rdo rje) became the Trongsar *pönlop* (dpon slob) governing the major part of Bhutan. His grandson, Ugyen Dorji (o rgyan rdo rje), became the head of the dynasty towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁷ After the Assam earthquake of 1897 he undertook the reconstruction of the temple, which was consecrated in 1902. It was certainly a major religious event in the country. A crowd of nobles and prominent lamas attended the consecration ceremony. Among them, we know from oral recounts, was the treasure revealer Zilnon Namkhai Dorji (gter ston zil gnon nam mkha'i

⁴ Aris 1979: p. 155. Shakapa T.W.D. pp. 24-32 for details on the life of Tai Situ Changchub Gyeltsen.

⁵ Aris 1979: p. 155 and note 19 p. 315.

⁶ Karmay 2005: pp. 122-124.

⁷ See also the recent genealogy of the family at the end of the Introduction.

rdo rje: 1868 - unknown) who became one of the teachers of Dudjom Rinpoche.⁸ The presence of the renowned master at the ceremony reveals the continuing connection of the estate and its family to eminent treasure revealers of the Nyingma tradition.

Towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, Bhutan was plagued by internal turmoil. Skirmishes with the British started to erupt at the border with the Assam region of India, at the time called Cooch Bihar.⁹ The British, who had installed trading posts in India in the 1600s, were progressively and successfully expanding their control and commercial influence over the sub-continent and the Himalaya. Their ultimate goal was to open a commercial route from Bengal to Lhasa through Bhutan to sell their local products, mainly textiles, to Tibet, which was seen as a profitable market.¹⁰ In the commercially strategic borderland of Bengal and Assam, eighteen passes, or *duars* were under Bhutanese control. After strife and a diplomatic breakdown between the Bhutanese Jigme Namgyal, a powerful man in the country, and the British, the Duars War erupted, leading to the treaty of Sinchula in 1865 by which the Bhutanese lost one fifth of their territory.¹¹ It was during this war that the *chöje* Tshokye Dorji of Ogyen Choling lost his son Tsondrue Gyaltsen (brtson 'grus rgyal mtshan).

From these years of conflicts and devastation the brilliant politician Jigme Namgyel (jigs med rnam rgyal: 1825–1881), who had a complicated but important relationship with Ogyen Choling, would rise to power and become *desi*,

⁸ Choden, Roder 2012: p. 60. In 1904, Zilnon Namkhai discovered the Chime Saktik (chi med srog thig) "The Practice of the Immortal Life Essence" in a cave in Bhutan. http://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Zilnön_Namkhé_/dorjé&oldid=76471, [accessed on 12 March 2018]. This terma (gter ma) associated with the Vajrakīlaya practice became the property of Dudjom Rinpoche who lists Zilnon Namkhai Dorji among the great revealers of the Nyingmapa and qualifies him as 'my own supreme guide', Dudjom Rinpoche p. 919. Following the tradition of alliance among the nobility and the clergy, Ugyen Wangdi towards the end of the 1960s married Chimme Wangmo, the daughter of Dudjom Rinpoche, Choden, Roder: 2012: p. 22.

⁹ Phuntsho pp. 394, 395.

¹⁰ Collister pp. 7, 13.

¹¹ Phuntsho p. 458, and for details about the events leading to the treaty and the rise of Jigme Namgyal, see Phuntsho pp. 441-468.

the secular ruler, in 1870.¹² His son Ugyen Wangchuck (o rgyan dbang phyug: 1862-1926), who put an end to the internal strife, was elected King of Bhutan and crowned in 1907. He was the first of the current royal line.¹³

Until the 1950s the social structure of Bhutan was based on a feudal system¹⁴ which was gradually abolished by the third King of Bhutan between 1950 and 1960. With the abolition of privileges and the redistribution of lands it was a difficult period for the Bhutanese nobility who were obliged to adapt to the new social order. For the *chöje* of Ogyen Choling this transition, coupled with the untimely death of the heir, was time of struggle. The present generation, driven by the inspiration and determination of Kunzang Choden, salvaged the estate and its traditions. After the decision was made to open the estate to the public, the *utsé* (dbus rtse)¹⁵ that was the former dwelling of the ancestors was converted into a museum, and the outbuildings were developed into a guest house that received its first visitors in 2001.

2.2 *The Literature and the Research*

Among the major temples across the Himalaya few have been the subject of comprehensive studies: the Jokhang (jo khang) in Lhasa, construction initiated during the fifth century, Tabo (ta po) in the Spiti Valley in Himachal Pradesh, founded in the tenth century and renovated at the beginning of the eleventh century, Alchi (a lci) in Ladakh, twelfth to thirteenth century, and Gyantse (gryal rtse), the Kumbum (sku 'bum) in central Tibet fifteenth century.¹⁶ Considering their geographical and temporal remoteness, elaborating comparison with Ogyen Choling would be a complex exercise without being necessarily relevant.

¹² The Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal: 1594-1651) who unified the country between 1620 and 1650 had established a theocracy with two heads of government, a Khenpo for the religious and a Desi for the secular affairs.

¹³ Pommaret 2005: p. 52.

¹⁴ See Phuntsho pp. 543, 544 for a summary of this complex social structure.

¹⁵ I have used the Tibetan and Himalayan Library (THL) Tibetan Phonetics Converter unless local usage prevails. In this case, though the THL recommends *wütsé*, I use *utsé* that is widely used locally.

¹⁶ For more information on these temples see: on the Jokhang, Dorje 2010, Tabo Klimburg-Salter, Luczanits, Alchi Luczanits 2004, Gyantse Ricca, Lo Bue 1993.

Studies of Bhutanese temples are scarce, the temple of Tamzhing (gtam zhing) in Bumthang being the most studied, by Yoshiro Imaeda and Françoise Pommaret in 1987, and by Michael Aris in 1988. Ariana Maki took the temple iconography as the subject of her PhD which was completed in 2012 and titled *The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study* (her work remains unpublished). The mandalas of the monastery of Gangtey (sgang steng) located in the Black Mountains were the subjects of Eden Samdup's PhD, accessible online.¹⁷ The monastery of Tango and parts of its iconography are the subject of John Ardussi's article *Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1696) Artist Ruler of the 17th-century Bhutan*.¹⁸

Concerning Ogyen Choling, the book published in 2012 *Ogyen Choling a Manor in Central Bhutan*, deals with the history of the estate and the family, religious events, memories of its past life, gives information on the museum and its beginnings, and provides a rapid overview of the temple. The book was written and edited by Kunzang Choden, her daughter Drolma Roder and Kunzang's brother Ugyen Rinzin; it also includes an article by Françoise Pommaret on the history of the estate. The second part of the book is a study of the buildings and the technical aspects of their architecture by Pierre Pichard who is an architect and a member of the Ecole Française-d'Extrême Orient. This comprehensive book provided me with an invaluable basis for my research and gave me insights into the estate.

More material on the history and ethnology of Bhutan is available and I consulted the abundant and rich literature on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism and art history. I relied on Santem Karmay for information on Dorje Lingpa, his life and his activities in Bhutan.¹⁹ The articles and books by Françoise Pommaret guided my research while my ongoing referents for the history of Bhutan were Michael Aris

¹⁷ Eden Samdup (2007) *Semiotic Universe of the Buddhist Mandala with Special Reference to Gangtey Goenpa in Bhutan*, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
<https://search.proquest.com/pqdtthss/index?accountid=16710>, [accessed on 1-11-2015].

¹⁸ Ardussi pp. 88-99.

¹⁹ Karmay 2000: *Dorje Lingpa and His Rediscovery of the 'Gold Needle'*.

and Karma Phuntsho. However, my primary source of information has been the temple and my main task during my October-November 2016 fieldwork was to gather photographic documentation - taking pictures of the mural paintings, the sculptures exhibited in the temple, and the collection of thangkas. My preliminary work was to compile an inventory of all this material to appraise the iconographic and religious content of the monument.²⁰

The thesis encompasses two volumes. Volume one (vol. 1) comprises eight chapters, of which three chapters are organized into eight sections dedicated to the temple structure, the iconography and the main themes displayed throughout the monument. The second volume, Volume two (vol. 2), is the Appendix containing the inventory that records the mural paintings, sculptures and thangkas, as well as the hat of Dorje Lingpa.

The temple is primarily a private religious monument that serves the family and the villagers. I study the temple itself and its iconography in chapters 3 and 4, while chapter 5 is dedicated to discussions on themes predominant in the temple's shrines. Starting with section 3.1, I examine the structure of the monument as well as the style of the buildings on the estate to search for a possible architectural continuity with buildings of this type constructed previously in the region. I also analyze the motifs of the external decoration of the temple facade to determine connections with the Tibetan tradition.

In section 3.2, I continue with the examination of the structure of the temple focusing on the internal organization of the space in the two shrines. I look at the murals in the entrance hall and in the upper landing, linking the motifs to regional examples. In particular I consider the rare painting of the kingdom of Śambhala with a comparable depiction of the Kingdom represented in the Trongsa Dzong.

I analyze and interpret the iconography and the functions of the shrines in sections 4.1 and 4.2. With its iconography predominantly displaying

²⁰ All research data is gathered in the Appendix, volume 2 of this thesis.

Padmasambhava, and refined in its decorative details, the upper floor shrine — the Jowo Lhakhang — is suited for public celebrations, and major rituals. The Drölma Lhakhang on the ground floor addresses the worldly and soteriological concerns of the family and villagers as a large number of the murals are dedicated to the Deities of Long Life.

In sections 5.1 to 5.4, I initiate a discussion on specific themes which in my view are pertinent to the temple and to Ogyen Choling, as well as being engaging, and appealing to, my interests.

When I was researching the architecture of the building and the iconography of the shrines, my analysis of the Drölma Lhakhang and examination of the depiction of the donor Ugyen Dorji, represented with his ancestor Dorje Lingpa, prompted the importance of the notion of ‘gift of life’. This led to my reflection, in section 5.1, on the role of the women at Ogyen Choling and their possible involvement in the iconography of the Drölma Lhakhang.

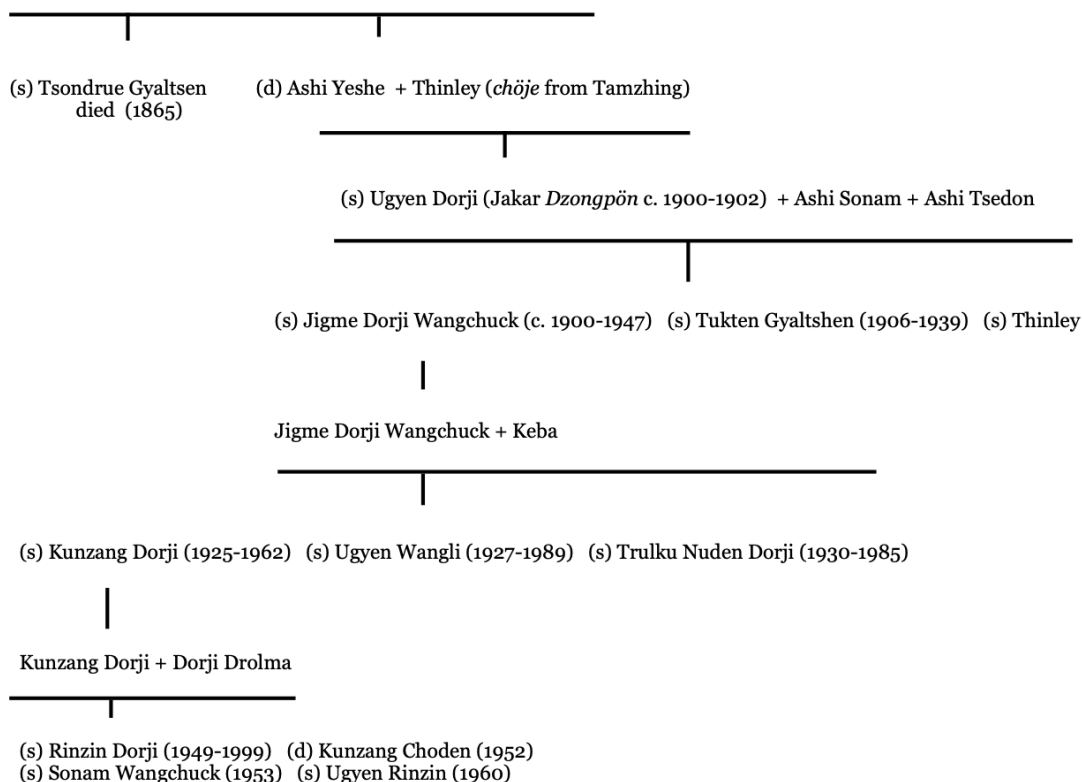
In the Jowo Lhakhang, the omnipresence of Padmasambhava deserves a discussion that focuses on the lineage of Dorje Lingpa, on treasure revealers and consequently on their treasures (*gter ma*). In concealing treasures, to be discovered when the world is ready to receive them, Padmasambhava is the symbolic father of the Treasure Revealers (*gter ston*). In this section 5.2 I analyze the ways artists represent them as the embodiment of Padmasambhava.

For the Tibetans, the second Buddha after Śākyamuni is Padmasambhava. In section 5.3, I review the strength of his presence in the Jowo Lhakhang, his impact for the worshippers and his emblematic role during the Kangso ritual, (*bskang gso*) functioning both on the worldly and soteriological levels.

The last section 5.4 is dedicated to the sacred landscape, a territory stretching from the temple and its close surrounding environment to the entire confines of the Tang valley, (see map Fig. 1.3). I examine the nexus between Ogyen Choling and its geographical and historical environment and explore the place and functions of the local protectors.

RECENT GENEALOGY OF THE *CHÖJE* OF OGYEN CHOLING

Tshokye Dorji (Trongsa *Pönlop* c. 1849-1853) + Aum Drolma



Notes on the Recent Genealogy of the *Chöje* of Ogyen Choling

The filiation of the *chöje* from Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405) is traced through the oral tradition of his incarnation Chogden Gonpo (mchog ldan mgon po: 1497-1531) who lived in Ogyen Choling probably sometime during the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Also, it is possible that the son of Dorje Lingpa, Choying Gyamtsho from Chukhyer (chu 'khyer) in Lhodrak (lho drak), Tibet, and his descendants had settled at Ogyen Choling.²¹

²¹ Choden, Roder pp. 15-18. For the list of the subsequent generations living in Ogyen Choling, see the compilation by Trülku Nuden Dorji p. 20. For Chogden Gonpo as the incarnation of Dorje Lingpa see Aris 1989: p. 92.

Before becoming the Trongsar *pönlop* (krong gsar dpon slob), Tshokye Dorji (mtsho skyes rdo rje) was the chief of protocol for the previous *pönlop* for several years.²²

Tsondrue Gyaltzen (brtson 'grus rgyal mtshan) was the Jakar *dzongpön* (bya dkar rdzong dpon) and then promoted to Jakar *pönlop* in 1858 before his death in 1865 during the Duars War.²³

The son of Ugyen Dorji (o rgyan rdo rje), Tukten Gyaltshen (thub bstan rgyal mtshan) was recognized as the ninth reincarnation of the heart-son (thugs sras) of Pema Lingpa (pad ma gling pa).²⁴

Trülku Nuden Dorji (sprul sku nu ldan rdo rje) studied at the monastery of Mindröling (min sgrol gling) in Tibet and later became the abbot of Nyimalung (nyi ma lung) monastery in the Chumey (chu mad) valley in Bumthang.

Dorji Drolma was the niece of the two queens of the second King of Bhutan.²⁵

Kunzang Choden and her husband Walter Roder, as well as Ugyen Rinzin and his wife Kesang Wangmo, live at Ogyen Choling.

²² Phuntsho p. 431.

²³ Phuntsho p. 427, 516.

²⁴ Pommaret 2009: p. 54.

²⁵ Pommaret 2009: p. 54.

3 - The Temple

3.1 The Structure



1. The temple of Ogyen Choling, the view of the south facade. The entrance to the temple is on the left. The right door opens onto a large prayer wheel, with a storage room in the back. (IMG 9605)

At first glance, the temple built on the Ogyen Choling (o rgyan chos gling) estate looks more like a noble family dwelling than a religious monument. It is constructed respecting the tradition of Bhutanese architecture and buildings while some of its features connect it to the old Tibetan temples. In *Real Space* David Summers writes: “Although they are universal, real spatial conditions

never exist in themselves, and are always culturally shaped.”²⁶ In this first section I give an overview of the architecture of the building and the decoration of its facades that identify its origins as deeply rooted within the traditional cultural environment (Fig. 1). I will then review its internal structure and evaluate how the space unfolds inside the building.²⁷

The Temple (gtsug lag khang) Background and Surroundings

The temple, as we see it now, was built during a period of approximately five years between 1897, the date of the Assam earthquake which severely damaged it, and 1902, the date of its consecration. We do not know the appearance of the monument before its destruction, which may have been partial or complete. Ugyen Dorji (o rgyan rdo rje), the heir of the religious noble family at that time, immediately undertook the reconstruction of the estate after the disaster. It is safe to assume that he would have attempted to replicate the original as much as possible; certainly the ‘new’ temple occupies the same ground as its predecessor. Considering the volatility of the political situation, compounded by the disastrous consequences of the earthquake, it was important, in my view, to assert the legitimacy of the family’s power.

The present architectural features of the temple and the buildings on the property are well documented in the 2012 publication.²⁸ However, in spite of the fact that there is no trace of the initial construction, the estate is often referred to as a fortress *dzong*. At its inception, sometime in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, Ogyen Choling would have resembled a fortress inhabited by the lord of the valley and his household. The Drapham Dzong, now in ruins, located on a hill in the valley along the Chamkhar river²⁹ in central Bumthang, is an example of such a fortress. Within the framework of the Bhutan-Swiss Archaeological Project 2008

²⁶ Summers p. 53.

²⁷ In the Choden, Roder 2012 publication: *Ogyen Choling: A Manor in Central Bhutan*, pp. 92 to 155, Pierre Pichard has thoroughly documented the architecture of the buildings on the estate and the techniques employed in their construction giving a significant amount of detail on the measurements and the material used.

²⁸ Choden, Roder 2012, *Ogyen Choling: A Manor in Central Bhutan*.

²⁹ See Map of Bumthang 1.3.

to 2010, a team of archaeologists excavated and investigated the site and the remains of the construction. The project report describes a fortress built in two phases during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, pillaged and destroyed by fire during an act of war, at a date which could not be precisely determined.³⁰



2. The flight of stairs and the bench of the *utsé* in the Drapham Dzong. (Photo from the Bhutan-Swiss Archaeological Report, p. 135)

3. The stairs and the bench at the entrance of the *utsé* in Ogyen Choling. (IMG 2919)

The destruction of the *dzong* left few buildings standing but the entrance to the *utsé* with a flight of stairs (Fig. 2) shares similarities with the entrance to the *utsé* at Ogyen Choling (Fig. 3). The stone construction and the wide stairs with the lateral benches along the building wall are reminiscent of the entryway to the *utsé* at Ogyen Choling which also has a stone bench on both sides. The Drapham Dzong archaeological report informs that the *utsé* was probably a fortress, and at the same time residential, as well as a building where religious ceremonies could have taken place, the outside bench having been fitted with prayer wheels.³¹ It could also have been used more practically by the porters delivering their heavy loads, as we see in the Himalaya, in Nepal for example. We could envision the architecture of Ogyen Choling as a continuation of the way *dzong* were built at the time of the Drapham Dzong, and a link back to the sixteenth or seventeenth century.

³⁰ Meyer, Fischer, Britschgi 2007: pp. 243-244.

³¹ Meyer, Fischer, Britschgi 2007: p. 244.



4. The Wangdu Choling Palace facade during restoration in 2016.

5. One of the Wangdu Choling Palace courtyards fitted with new pillars.

At a later date, in the mid 1850s, the power and wealth of the family was at its apogee, the grandfather of Ugyen Dorji, Tshokye Dorji (mtsho skyes rdo rje) was the governor of Trongsar (krong gsar dpon slop). This was a favorable period for Tshokye Dorji who would have transformed his austere fortress into an elegant family mansion, eventually taking inspiration from the Wangdu Choling (dbang 'dus chos gling) Palace which was being built in the Chökhör (chos khor) valley in 1858 (Figs. 4, 5). It is likely that after the earthquake, his grandson would have rebuilt the estate in a similar fashion to what we see today.³²

The Ogyen Choling temple is built on two levels, receiving the daylight from the large bay windows *rabsel* (rab sal) facing south. It differs from the sixteenth-century Tamzhing (gtam zhing) monastery in the Chökhör valley of Bumthang which was built with an internal courtyard and a skylight - as was the case generally in the ancient Tibetan temples.³³

During several weeks of fieldwork in the autumn of 2016, on my daily morning walks crossing through the estate to the temple, I would see the sun rising above the eastern slopes of Mount Kyanyai. The first rays of sun were touching the gold roof ornament *sertog* (gser tog) at the top of the central tower *utsé* (dbus rtse). They were slowly reaching the temple victory banner (rgyal mtshan) on the roof

³² Pommaret 2012: p. 39 and 2015: p. 397.

³³ Imaeda, Pommaret p. 21.

and the top of the windows of the *gönkhang* (mgon khang), the shrine in the temple dedicated to the local protectors.³⁴ The sun would then illuminate the east facade of the temple while the village would still be shadowed in the morning blue light of mist and wood smoke. The sun would then reach the courtyard, brightening up the south facade of the monument and the entrance to the shrines. The main facade is said to face south, however, in reality it is angled towards the west, giving a southwest orientation to the temple complex.



6. Houses in the village of Ogyen Choling opposite the estate.

The estate is perched on a mountain escarpment overlooking the Tang (stang) valley, and extends over its entire surface, the temple being built within this natural perimeter and on its higher point.

From the entrance of the estate, the access to the temple is through a gradual progression across the flagstone yard leading to the front of the *utsé*. Then through several steps to reach the elevated level of the sanctuary.

The stone wall enclosing the estate is slightly above an average person's height. While it would not give protection from a military invasion, it is high enough to prevent onlookers or large animals leaping over it, disturbing the privacy and sanctity of the site. The wall also protects against the wind from the valley.

³⁴ Being a restricted shrine accessible only by the men of the family and from the village, the *gönkhang* is not part of my research.

The temple is positioned on the furthest north side of the terrain, its rear facing the mountains and the northern end of the valley. On the west side of the courtyard stands the dance house (*cham khang*) which was not destroyed by the 1897 earthquake.³⁵ Next to it, two *chorten* (*mchod rten*) were erected commemorating the lives of ancestors.³⁶ On the eastern side, attached to the enclosure wall, a large *lu* shrine (*klu khang*) is in shade under a canopy of wisterias and is flanked by the fumigation burner (*bstang thab*). On the same side, a small house has recently been added to burn the increasing amount of oil donated for the butter-lamps (*dkar me*) by pilgrims and villagers.

The *utsé*, the main building that was the former dwelling of the family, is located on the southern side of the courtyard. It dominates the temple by nearly five meters even though the temple is built on the highest elevation on the estate. The hierarchic norm would prescribe that the religious power should be above the temporal one. However, since the top floor of the *utsé* hosts the family's private shrine,³⁷ the hierarchy is respected. This positioning and the proximity of the building also indicates a close relationship between the spiritual and secular power and their mutual protection. The *utsé* is prominently visible from the valley and from the village, reflecting the feudal structure of the society, which lasted until the 1950s, and the dominance of the religious noble family (*chos rje*) over the land and the valley.

The temple looks like a rather straightforward and compact structure measuring 17.6 meters long, 11.68 meters wide and 10.48 meters high. In the extreme weather of the Himalaya, where the sun provides light and warmth, the southern exposure of the facades is dictated by the climate and is the generally preferred orientation for religious buildings and farmhouses. In Bhutan a view towards the valley is also favored, as in the case of the temple, while the *utsé* faces east and towards the village. With its slightly skewed direction towards the west the temple captures the afternoon sunlight shedding a warm glow onto the shrine

³⁵ Choden, Roder p. 56. For lack of documentation it would be difficult to know when the dance house was built.

³⁶ One *chorten* commemorates the life of Ashi Drölma the wife of Tshokye Dorji and the other the parents of the present generation of heirs, in the *Ogyen Choling Annual Report* 2014 p. 4, and Choden, Roder p. 71 respectively.

³⁷ I visited this shrine dedicated to Amitāyus (*tshe dpag med*) during my fieldwork in 2016.

and the sculptures inside. The orientation brightens the spacious courtyard, which is a gathering space for ceremonies and community events, a function traditionally assigned to temple yards.³⁸

The layout of the traditional Bhutanese farmhouse (Fig. 6) serves as the basis for the construction of dwellings in Bhutan. From this basic structure of stone, pressed earth and wood, the size, the number of storeys, and the wealth of the decorative elements on the facades determine the function, use of the building and the rank of its residents. In these instances, the temple adheres to this tradition.³⁹



7. Facade decoration with *kīrtimukha* and garlands of jewels.

8. Trefoil arch windows, on this picture they are closed with the inside shutters.

9. Temple entrance.

³⁸ The courtyard serves a variety of purposes. When in fieldwork in 2016, the Queen Mother, Ashi Tsering Pem Wangchuck visited Ogyen Choling on 5th November. She was welcomed and received the homage from the villagers in the courtyard. On less auspicious days, village children play volleyball in the courtyard which is the only flat surface available.

³⁹ Dujardin 2003: p. 21, Pichard p. 97.

Ogyen Choling does not host a monastic congregation, therefore no accommodation for the monks is built in the courtyard or in its vicinity. The privately owned estate has been the residence of the family since the fifteenth century and the temple serves their ritual needs as well as those of the inhabitants living in the village outside the property.⁴⁰

The Front Facade

The temple's front facade displays a symmetrical layout with carved wood windows fashioned and adorned in the traditional Bhutanese carpentry style (Fig. 1). They are decorated with painted garlands of flowers and jewels under the roof, on the facade and along the vertical and horizontal elements of the wood frames. On the frames, the top corners of the building, images of *kīrtimukha* and dragons ensure protection from evil spirits. The thematic cohesion of the ornamentation, connected from the top to the bottom with friezes and motifs, gives a homogeneous outlook to the ensemble (Figs. 7, 8, 9).

On the temple's ground floor, the large bay window is flanked by identical doors and a semi-circular flight of stone steps. On the left side, the steps lead to the temple entrance hall (*sgo khang*) and on the right side to a large prayer wheel (*ma ni chos 'khor*) and a storage room at the back of the building. The lintels above these two doors are made of five protruding blocks of wood, each inscribed with yellow *lantsa* characters. In the recess between the wood blocks snow lions are depicted standing on their rear legs with their two front legs stretched above their heads (Fig. 10). They look as if they are supporting the building. They display the same posture as *yakṣas*, which extend their arms upwards holding a heavy load.

⁴⁰ The head lama from the Nyingma monastery of Towadrak (*mtho ba drak*) in the Tang valley is called for the celebration of important rituals.



10. Snow lion as a *yakṣa* in the recess of the lintel of the entrance door of the temple.
(IMG 3042)

In this image, the Himalayan snow lion borrows the posture from the Indian *yakṣa*, creating an iconographical link between the two regions. Sculptures representing *yakṣas* are also seen in Lhasa in the Jokhang temple (jo khang), carved at the base of the pillars of the Jowo Lhakhang (jo bo lha khang), one of its inner shrines.⁴¹ In the Jokhang, on pillar brackets of doorway lintels, *yakṣa* figures are carved and painted in a similar fashion with extended arms supporting the beam. In Lhasa, the representations of these ancient protectors link the sacred temple (gtsug lag khang) to the Indian religious past.



11. On the road leading to the estate, a *chorten* stands on the left side. Further up, the *utsé* is seen in the middle of the picture. The temple is on the right with the *kémar* visible on the north wall.

⁴¹ Alexander pp. 223, 224.

On the temple at Ogyen Choling, the image of the *yakṣa* has been reformatted using the ubiquitous mythic snow lion as an indication of the affiliation to the Jokhang while interpreting the figure within the local context. Just as it was important for the builders of the Jokhang to show the connection with India, it was important for the *chöje* of Ogyen Choling to show their temple's association to the illustrious past of the ancient Tibetan Empire.

The lateral ornamentation of the doors features jewels and lotus flowers and an intricate frieze of carvings of recessed small-sized cubic wood blocks or *chötsek* (chos brtseg), 'the stacking of religious law', painted predominantly in a distinctive red color.⁴² In between the *chötsek* and jewel decoration, a vertical and horizontal row of round silver moonlike dots brightens the framing composition. It attracts the light and directs the gaze of the visitors towards the cartouche written with *lantsa* letters placed in the middle of the door lintel. Outside the door frame, a checkered patterned decoration is painted directly onto the whitewashed stone facade. Above the doors, the bolsters under the main cornice supporting the bay windows exhibit a group of flaming jewels flanked by two dragons or sea monsters.

The bay windows *rabsel* (rab gsal), within projecting timber frame panels, are built on the three facades: south, east and west. The frame panels of the *rabsel* were traditionally made of wattle and daub (clay on bamboo mesh) but in Ogyen Choling wood planks have been used for the temple.⁴³ The south facade displays two identical sets of trefoil arch windows, carved from blue pine wood (Fig. 8). Above them lotus flowers are depicted on the arches and the jewels on the lotuses are displayed vertically on the mullions.

Although fading, on the eastern facade facing the village and Mount Kyanyai, the flowers and patterned decoration can be seen. It seems that they were not given a retouch of paint as often as on the main facade. The symmetry and elegance of

⁴² As seen on the door of the Norbulinka summer palace, Larsen p. 58.

⁴³ The *chamkhang* which supposedly survived the earthquake is built with that technique suggesting that the buildings on the estate were also built using this same type of material. Choden, Roder p. 126.

this facade is enhanced by the arrangement of the windows covering the surface. There are a total of thirty-six small trefoil windows, organized in three sets of twelve, on three vertical and four horizontal rows. The windows are left open for the air to circulate and are inset with bamboo netting to prevent birds from flying in.

The north facade is plain and whitewashed with a dark red or brown *kémar* (ske dmar) painted at its top. On all religious edifices in Bhutan, a relatively broad band, called *kémar* locally, is painted at the top of the external walls as their identification marker. The *kémar* is the Bhutanese adaptation of the *benma*⁴⁴ frieze of the Tibetan temples and religious buildings.⁴⁵ The *kémar* is barely visible under the wood carvings close to the roof on the east and west walls but is in clear view across the length of the north side wall (Fig. 11). Contrary to the Tibetan *benma* which consists of an assemblage of thin wood branches, generally juniper (spa ma), which can also be used within the structure of the building, the Bhutanese *kémar* is a coat of dark red-brown paint on the surface of the wall. Metal disks representing the stars, affixed onto the *kémar* are often seen in Bhutan; these are absent in Ogyen Choling. Completing the external arrangement of the monument, awnings and a row of niches accommodating prayer bells skirt the building, and carved slates line the rear side of these niches.

The Building

The north wall of the temple as well as its base is made of stone masonry while a timber structure was used for its upper part. Bhutan's forests' abundant supply of timber makes wood a material of choice for construction for most of the buildings. The conception and design of this type of edifice required (and it is still the case nowadays) the agency of a patron, a lama, a master carpenter, and daily manual labor to construct the monument. The master carpenter, who traditionally belongs to a family of craftsmen, receives the knowledge passed down through generations. The measurements are normally calibrated using the body of the carpenter as a standard, and these become the criteria for the layout

⁴⁴ The Tibetan spelling for *benma* is unclear. In their publication, Larsen and Sinding-Larsen do not mention it, p. 49, while Alexander refers to such a frieze as *penbey* (span bad), p. 320.

⁴⁵ See Larsen and Sinding-Larsen for details on the *benma* frieze, p. 49.

and the dimensions of the temple as no written plan is usually drawn up. Therefore there are very few or no paper traces of the building outline.⁴⁶ All the pieces of the temple are carved and fitted at the carpenter's workshop then assembled on the prepared ground. On the foundation of rammed earth and stones, the temple is built up piece by piece and the wooden structure set up without nails to allow it to be dismantled and assembled again when repairs are needed. This type of construction is labor intensive and requires many people. In addition to the expertise of the craftsmen, villagers and daily laborers would have been employed on the building site. Women as well, and sometimes children, would have joined in to carry the smaller and lighter pieces of wood. The collective effort of the laborers from the villages would give the community a sense of ownership of the building.⁴⁷ While the craftsmen would receive wages for their work, the laborers would be rewarded with meals.⁴⁸ On the dedication plate in the temple,⁴⁹ the quantity of food distributed is indicated. Among grains, cattle, fat, oil and chilli, forty loads of butter and more than fourteen thousand *dre* of buckwheat were consumed. This amounted to approximately a ton of butter and twenty tons of buckwheat; a significant volume to feed the workforce though it would be difficult to evaluate the number of laborers based only on these figures.⁵⁰

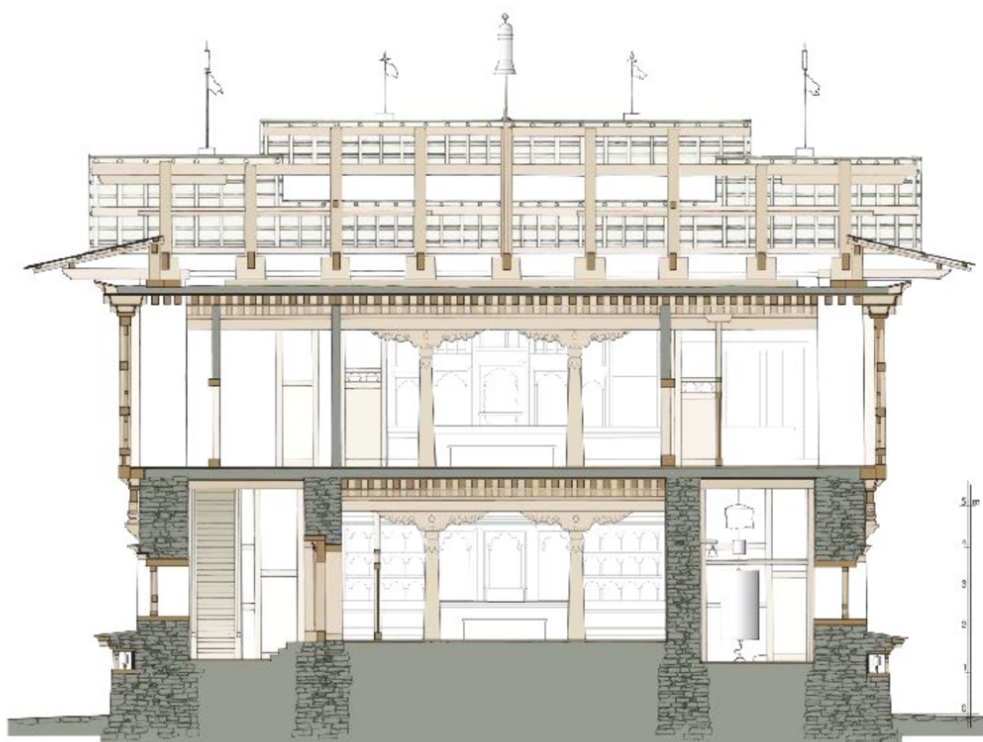
⁴⁶ Yangki p. 116.

⁴⁷ Dujardin 2013: pp. 167-169.

⁴⁸ Phuntsho pp. 545, 546. The taxation on households was mainly composed of in-kind and labor. Free labor generated by this tax was used to build infrastructure, *dzong* and temples.

⁴⁹ For a translation of the dedication plate, see Choden, Roder p. 62.

⁵⁰ The measurement unit of 1 *dre* for 1.45 kg. of buckwheat, and 30 kg per load of butter. Choden 2008: p. 63.



12. Longitudinal south section of the Temple. (Design P. Pichard)

The temple is covered by a wide encompassing gabled roof resting on beams and traditionally built in two tiers (Fig. 12). The first tier acts as a wide shield, the second is narrower and stands in the middle of the surface of the roof where the victory banner (*rgyal mtshan*) is erected. The combination of the raised roof and the double tier provides efficient ventilation and protection against the heavy monsoon rains and winter snowstorms. In the farmhouses this combination also provides a storage area for hay, chili and dry crops. Fir shingles (1.5 meters long and 15 to 20 centimeters wide) were used to cover the roof of the temple and other buildings; the shingles were placed directly on the battens and maintained by horizontal strips of wood and by stones to keep them from slipping down the roof. This method is still used on the village houses. The shingles are light and provide the ideal insulation from heat and cold but they require a great deal of maintenance. They have a limited lifespan of ten years and need to be turned over after five years to expose their other side to the seasonal elements before being replaced. Frequent winter storms and strong winds often blow away part of the shingle roofing resulting in recurrent repairs. In 1998, the roofs of both the temple and the *utsé* were replaced by metallic corrugated sheet covers providing good protection at a lesser cost though probably less aesthetically and insulation

friendly.⁵¹ On the estate, shingles are still seen on the dance house *chamkhang* (cham khang) sheltered between the *utsé* and the temple, and less exposed to extreme weather. With its shingle roof and daub walls, the dance house is an example of how the buildings were constructed and how they looked before the earthquake, as it is said to have survived the event.

The eminent Tibetan Nyingma philosopher Longchenpa (klong chen rab 'byams: 1308-1363) in his 1355 poem *The Flower Garden: A Profile of Bumthang the Celestial Hidden Land* marveled at the 'semi-raised' roof of the 'castles and houses' which reminded him of heavenly palaces.⁵² The vision of these roofs and pinnacles evokes the images of the deities in their paradise. From material conserved on the estate, we know that divination, rituals and geomancy would be used in the construction of edifices in an effort to live in harmony and peace with the spirits and local protectors.⁵³ Ugyen Dorji is said to have been well versed in the science of astrology. To hinder the ominous influences of the Wengmed Phunsum, three peaks situated at the north end of the valley, stones from that mountain were used in the foundations of the estate buildings. It is not exactly clear why these peaks cast a negative spell. One explanation is that by their shape they recall three sisters who stole their lama's pet dog and then disappeared.⁵⁴

Geomancy connects the history of Bhutan to the Emperor of Tibet Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po: c. 605-650). The Emperor is believed to have built the Kyichu (skyid chu) Lhakhang in Paro and the Jampa (byams pa) Lakhang in Bumthang (bum thang) in the seventh century to counteract the evil spirits at the southern borders of his empire and to politically mark the confines of his territory.⁵⁵ In his 1979 groundbreaking publication *Bhutan: the early history of a Himalayan Kingdom*, the scholar Michael Aris wrote this story as a myth while acknowledging the fact that these two temples and probably others date from this period. Later, in *History of Bhutan* (2013) Karma Phuntsho suggests that

⁵¹ Pichard p. 150.

⁵² Phuntsho pp. 30, 203, 204. Penjore p. 62 Longchenpa arrived in Bhutan probably in 1350 and returned to Tibet in 1360. He established eight meditation and teaching sites in Bhutan; Ogyen Choling is one of the three Longchenpa established in Bumthang, Aris 1979: p. 154 n. 19 p. 315.

⁵³ See chapter 3 section 3.4.

⁵⁴ See Choden, Roder pp. 57, and 58 for the full story of the three sisters.

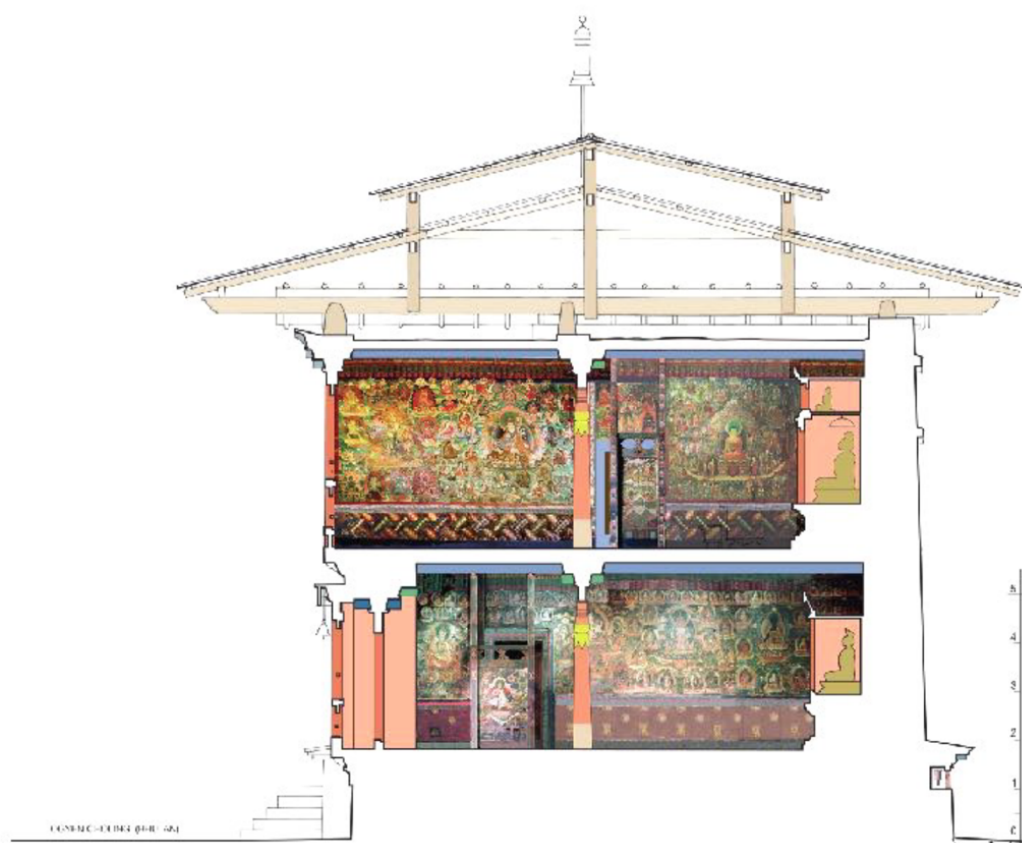
⁵⁵ Aris 1979: pp. 3, 33 and Aris 1994: p. 16.

through oral story tradition these two temples were originally built during the time of Songtsen Gampo.⁵⁶ The monuments were subsequently expanded and renovated. The links with the Emperor of Tibet are deeply rooted with pride and faith in the cultural fabric of Bhutan. The same attitude would have animated the original builders of Ogyen Choling and their descendants.

Interior Structure

The temple is built like a large box with two storeys of similar proportions and dimensions (Fig. 13). After ascending the five high steps from the courtyard, the threshold leads into the entrance hall (sgo khang). Along the west side wall of the building, the entrance opens on to a long, rather narrow and dimly lit room producing a stark contrast to the outside daylight. A small room at its rear is used by the caretaker of the temple (dkon gnyer) as a workshop where he stores his tools. The two windows of the hall do not provide much light as they are set in the recesses of the thick wall, one being ensconced in the back under the stairway which leads to the upper floor. The steep and sturdy wooden stairs are fashioned like a barn ladder and are the first thing one sees when entering the temple. They are an invitation to climb up to the upper shrine, the Jowo Lhakhang (jo bo lha khang), the main shrine of the monument. The door to the ground floor shrine, the Drölma Lhakhang (sgrol ma lha khang), to the right in the entrance is covered by a heavy felt curtain protecting against the cold and the dust. The worshippers generally rush up the ladder to the upstairs landing where they take a deep breath to pause and to look around. On the landing the space has a different feeling. Compared to the entrance hall, the room is spacious, air and light flood in from the window overlooking towards the northern part of the Tang valley, with the monastery of Towadrak (mtho ba drag), the mountain range and the three inauspicious peaks dominating the landscape.

⁵⁶ Phuntsho p. 84: 'Though the question of whether the two temples were built during the time of Songtsen Gampo as tradition claims remains to be conclusively resolved, there is no disagreement among scholars as to the origins of the Jampa Lhakhang and Kyerchu Lhakhang in the period of Early Diffusion.'



13. Cross section of the temple. (Design P. Pichard)

The paintings on the walls of the landing are stained by the soot of resin torches. Before electricity reached Ogyen Choling in 2008, these torches were the only means of providing light in the late hours of the evening or early morning.⁵⁷ They were held by family members and servants who would accompany their masters to their daily rituals, as well as attendants for visitors and eminent guests. The attendants would usher the guests across the threshold into the entrance of the shrine at the appropriate moment and wait for them on the landing during ceremonies. The entrance doors to both the upstairs and downstairs shrines are built with wooden panels, known locally as *gochor*, at a ninety-degree angle to hide the shrine from the sight of a newcomer and avoid direct entry into the

⁵⁷ The telephone reached Ogyen Choling in 2006, electricity in 2008, cell phones in 2010 and the new pedestrian bridge over the Tang river was built in 2011. Choden, Roder p. 93. An unpaved road links the village to the valley. Cell phone coverage is operational as well as internet access on the estate.

room.⁵⁸ It has however a carved porthole allowing a peek inside, so the attendants would know when their masters required their presence at their side or when a ritual would be nearing its end. Explanations I obtained locally about this device can be summarized in three words: discretion, confidentiality, and etiquette. The comings and goings of visitors waiting to be introduced and the servants scurrying to look after their masters would distract the people praying. It would also prevent overhearing of private and potentially sensitive conversations. Moreover, Bhutanese etiquette dictates that it is not proper to face a hierarchical superior directly when entering a room. I noticed the same type of structure for the doors of the private rooms when visiting the palace of Wangdu Choling (dbang 'dus chos gling), in the Chökhör (chos 'khor) valley, the main valley of Bumthang.⁵⁹ The palace, currently under a program of renovation and conservation was, according to the local tradition, built in 1858 by Jigme Namgyel ('jigs med rnam rgyal) the father of the future first king of Bhutan Ugyen Wangchuck (o rgyan dbang phyug).⁶⁰

The landing of the upper floor is situated in the northwest corner of the building, where one door opens to the Jowo Lhakhang and another to the Vajrasattva (rdo rje sems dpa') Lhakhang. This Vajrasattva shrine was formerly a room used to prepare the dough offerings (gtor ma) before rituals. It was converted into a shrine in 1966 in memory of the parents of the actual heirs of the family.⁶¹

The Jowo Lhakhang is a two-pillared room, both pillars standing precisely above the two pillars of the ground floor shrine. Official and important ceremonies were and still are performed in the Jowo Lhakhang, for instance the Kangso (bskang gso), during three days in autumn. The celebration of the New Year, Losar (lo gsar) which used to be grandiose in the Jowo Lhakhang has been scaled down and now takes place in the Drölma Lhakhang (sgrol ma lha khang) with a reduced number of participants.

⁵⁸ Communication with Kunzang Choden dated 25 July 2018. *Gochor* is the Bhutanese name of this type of door element.

⁵⁹ Bumthang region is made of four valleys: Chökhör (chos 'khor), Ura (u ra), Chumey (chu mad) and Tang (stang).

⁶⁰ Pommaret 2015: p. 397.

⁶¹ The Vajrasattva Lhakhang has a recent iconography (1966), it is not part of my research.

On the north side, the wide stone wall of the temple extends up to the roof and onto the side corners of the building giving a sturdy bracketed frame to the structure. The windows opening on the south in the Jowo Lhakhang bring significant brightness into the upper floor. The situation in the Drölma Lhakhang on the ground floor is different as the room is enclosed within a thick stone structure bracketing to the south. The windows are set in the recess of the *rabsel*, and the wood shutters are built inside. This arrangement restricts the penetration of light and gives the room a dim atmosphere in contrast with the upper floor. In both shrines, the altar has been placed against the north wall.

The structure of the temple and its space is a subtle combination of tradition and innovation. The rectangular floor layout, and the use of wood and stone for example, relate to traditional religious building; while the absence of a skylight, the temple entrance door being located on the side rather than in the middle of the facade as well as the semi-circular stone steps to climb up to the temple would qualify as innovation.⁶² The nineteenth century in Bhutan saw the development of a new trend in architectural design for the construction of buildings for noble households. In Bhutan, while using the traditional material and construction methods, the long established *dzong* built as a stronghold was evolving towards a more gentle type of construction more suitable for family life.⁶³

To build their temple, the patrons of Ogyen Choling adhered to the local contemporary design, adopting the carved external wooden structures and the painted decorations on the main facades. At the same time, the display of motifs recalling the Jokhang signals the link to Lhasa and evokes the old Tibetan Empire, affirming a connection to its prestigious heritage, in accordance with the proudly inherited historical Bhutanese past.

⁶² Pichard pp. 116 and 120 for a layout of the temple ground floor.

⁶³ Choden, Roder 2012: pp. 18, 39.

3.2 *The Spatial Organization of the Temple*

In this section I look at the internal structure of the temple, focusing on how the layout reveals the character of the monument, and how Ugyen Dorji conceived his temple to serve his family and the community. I also explore the iconography of the liminal spaces, the entrance hall on the ground floor, the landing upstairs and the temple furniture.

The Entrance Hall (sgo khang)

After climbing the steps from the courtyard, the door of the temple creaks loudly when I open it as if to announce an imminent presence in the sanctuary. Walking bare foot on the wood floor feels cool and soft where it has been polished by the passage of worshippers and visitors. After the blue sky and the sunlight outdoors, the semi-darkness of the hall is a sharp contrast. Due to the height of the walls and the narrow space, an odd feeling arises after crossing the expanse of the courtyard. A faint scent of incense, dust and butter-lamps wafts through the air of the room. The timid light from the window is barely enough for the eyes to grasp the surroundings. The front half of the room is occupied by the wooden stairs leading straight up to the Jowo Lhakhang (jo bo lha khang) while on the right the door opens to the Drölma Lhakhang (sgrol ma lha khang), the shrine dedicated to Tārā.

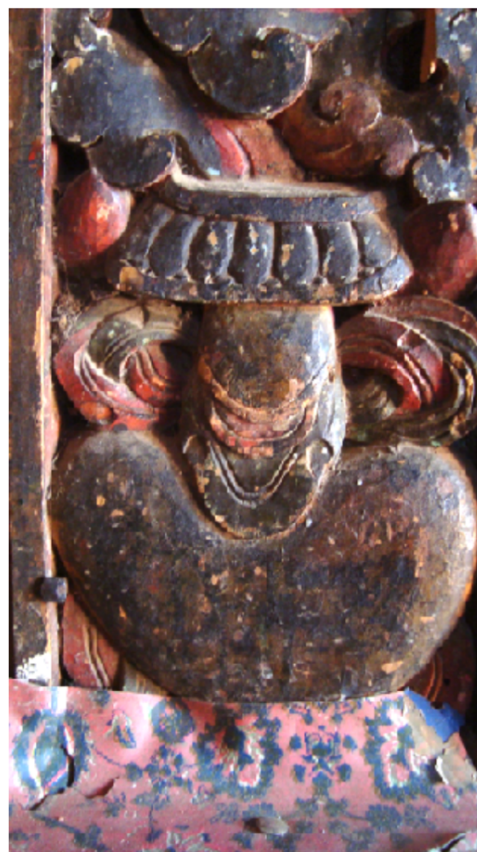
Behind the stairs on the left, a second window is partly obscured by a stack of bamboo poles. Next to it, the door to the workshop of the temple caretaker is decorated with a horned animal skull, probably a yak, with a moon and a sun between his horns, that no one can miss when entering the premises. The skull of this powerful animal was hung there by the previous *könyer*, perhaps as an attempt to protect the door to his workroom. A storage room is located on the opposite side of the building where ancient artefacts are kept, well preserved in the cool and dry space. In front of the storage room the large prayer wheel (ma ni chos 'khor) chimes rhythmically during the day, spun by the village elders who thereby accumulate merits while gossiping with their friends.

The confined feeling of the entrance room is accentuated by the large size of the the depiction of the Four Great Kings (rgyal po chen po bzhi) guardians of the

cardinal directions which occupies the entire surface of the 3.50 meters high wall overlooking the visitors.⁶⁴ Because there is no space to step back to have an overview, one can only see them fully while climbing the stairs. They are reminiscent of the large sized images of the Great Kings seen in the entrance of the Nyingma (rnying ma) Gangteng (sgang steng) monastery in the valley of Popjikha (phob sbyis kha) in the Black Mountains of Bhutan.⁶⁵ The staircase obliquely intersects the opposite wall on which recent paintings in vivid colors illustrating the parable of the Four Friends and the symbols of Long Life (tshe ring drug skor) contrast with the subtle tones, finesse and detailed depiction of the Guardian Kings.



14. Drölma Lhakhang entrance door. (DSC 2077)



15. Detail at the bottom on both sides of the door frame. (DSC 0938)

⁶⁴ See also Appendix chapter 1 section 1.

⁶⁵ When I visited the Gangteng monastery in November 2016 the portico was under renovation and the Four Great Kings still partly visible. The Black Mountains is the mountain range between the western and eastern parts of Bhutan.

The floor of the hall is set lower than the floor of the Drölma Lhakhang, elevating the shrine by fifty centimeters above the profane space of the entrance.⁶⁶ It is necessary to climb up three semi-circular stone steps to reach its threshold. The door to the shrine is painted in two tones of red and embellished with two repoussé copper bands affixed horizontally (Fig. 14). A rope is hanging in place of the doorknob and bolt that have disappeared. When considering the design and the craftsmanship of the repoussé copper bands, that are similar to the ones seen on the door of the upper floor shrine door, we can propose that they were made by the same workshop.

The wooden frame of the door to the Drölma Lhakhang is intricately carved with symbols representing the auspicious gifts between two friezes of a geometric design. At the bottom, on both sides of the door, the motifs, within clouds, are placed over a round-shouldered vase as symbols of fertility and wealth (Fig. 15). This vessel resembles a plain earthenware vase, rather than a sacred water vase or *bumpa*, generally made of silver or copper, and suggests its apotropaic purpose. This frame shows distinctive motifs and workmanship that are seen among the temple woodwork, on the altars in the shrine in particular. The local story tells that this frame belonged to the previous monument, and after surviving the earthquake it was placed on the new door.

Another tier of decoration which surrounds the frame of the door is similar to the external temple door with a structure of *chötsek* (chos brtseg) and lotus petals. The lintel is made of a horizontal alignment of wood blocks carved with *lantsa* characters (Fig. 16). In between, lotus flowers and jewels are depicted, and the same motifs can be seen carved on a wooden frieze above and across, completing the decoration of the door.

These auspicious characters: HŪṂ ĀḤ OM TRAM HRĪ, from left to right (Fig. 16), express the mantra of the five Buddhas, they are also referred to as the seed letters of the Buddhas that they represent. A sixth syllable HĀ, at the extreme right is an additional auspicious invocation. When configured within a mandala

⁶⁶ Pichard p. 121.

at the cardinal directions, the five Buddhas are generally displayed as follows: Vairocana (rnam par snang mdzad) in the center, Akṣobhya (mi bskyod pa) in the east, Ratnasambhava (rin chen 'byung ldan) in the south, Amitābha ('od dpag med) in the west, Amogasiddhi (don yod grup) in the north. Above the door, the syllables of the five Buddhas are represented according to the cardinal directions but in a linear sequence. It should therefore read - still from left to right): HŪṂ (Akṣobhya east), TRAM (Ratnasambhava south), OM (Vairocana center), ĀḤ (Amogasiddhi north) and HRĪ (Amitābha west). Instead, it reads HŪṂ, ĀḤ, OM, TRAM, HRĪ. An inversion took place between Amogasiddhi ĀḤ and Ratnasambhava TRAM.⁶⁷ The inversion of the wood blocks, Amogasiddhi in place of Ratnasambhava could have happened after the earthquake when the wood blocks were put back at the top of the door during the reconstruction of the temple.



16. Wood blocks engraved with *lantsa* letters. Padmasambhava is flanked by Dukkar and Vajrapāṇi above the entrance door of the Drölma Lhakhang. (IMG 2079)

⁶⁷ My best thanks go to Christian Luczanits for the information to decipher the *lantsa* syllables and the meaning of their representation from: <http://inkessential.blogspot.com/2009/07/five-wisdom-buddhas.html> accessed on 20 May 2019.

The *lantsa* formula syllables represent the Five Buddhas and their Families, Akṣobhya is head of the Vajra Family, Ratnasambhava of the Jewel Family, Vairocana of the Buddha Family, Amogasiddhi of the Action family, Amitābha of the Lotus Family, and are invoked to dispel the five poisons of hate, greed, ignorance, envy and desire respectively. At the top, below the ceiling and the valance, Padmasambhava is seen in the centre flanked by the goddess Sitātapatrā (gdugs dkar) holding her white umbrella and a wrathful Vajrapāṇi (phyag na rdo rje) (Fig. 16). The goddess Dukkar is particularly venerated in Bhutan for her protective qualities against illnesses.⁶⁸ Crossing the threshold into the shrine, the worshippers and visitors receive the protection and the blessings of the Five Buddhas and of Padmasambhava together with the protectors by his side.



17. The Great King Guardian of the east, Dhṛtarāṣṭra. (IMG 0922)

⁶⁸ According to information gathered locally, the goddess has a shrine next to the hospital of Jakar (bya dkar) in the Chökhör valley.

In the entrance hall (sgo khang), the triad formed with Padmasambhava connects with the Four Great Kings (rgyal chen bzhi) Guardians of the Cardinal Directions - subsequently the Four Great Kings - depicted on each side: Dhṛtarāṣṭra (yul 'khor bsrung) King of the east is on the right side of the door (Fig. 17), Virūḍhaka ('phags skye bo) King of the south on the other side, followed by Virūpākṣa (spyan mi bzang) King of the west, and Vaiśravaṇa (rnam thos sras) King of the north.⁶⁹ A painted valance topped by a ribbon runs along the wall as well as lotus flowers between the ceiling beams.

The only way to reach the upper floor and to access the Jowo Lhakhang is by climbing the steep wooden staircase, a prominent feature in the entrance hall. After years of usage the steps have become smooth and slippery, making the climb treacherous for visitors in their socks.⁷⁰ The dexterity of the locals climbing up and down the stairs reveals years of practice as they scramble down on their heels striking the steps with speed and noise.



18. Two protectors in the entrance portico at Tamzhing. (IMG 9476, 9477)

⁶⁹ Lamotte pp. 551, 685, Willson and Brauen ill. 411-414 text p. 375.

⁷⁰ Repairs were made in 2015, after a visiting high ranking government official lost his balance on the slippery wooden steps and fell.

The long entrance hall on the west, the large prayer wheel (ma ni chos 'khor) and the storage room on the east, belong to the liminal spaces at the edge of the temple. These areas, where the profane and the sacred come together without clear and well-defined demarcation, are therefore vulnerable.⁷¹ Traditionally, in Tibetan temples, protective deities are represented in the liminal space of the *gokhang* that gives access to the assembly hall ('du khang) and inner shrines. This is the case at Tabo in the Spiti valley in Himachal Pradesh.⁷² In the Jokhang, in Lhasa, large sculptures of the Four Great Kings stand by the entrance of the Central Inner Sanctum.⁷³ In the nearby Chökhör (chos khor) valley of Bumthang, the Four Great Kings in the Tamzhing (gtam zhing) monastery are represented on the walls of the portico of the entrance courtyard together with the local protectors (Fig. 18). In Ogyen Choling, it would be reasonable to think that local protectors were once represented in the entrance hall but are now concealed under the repainted segment of the wall.

The Upper Floor Landing

When climbing to the upper floor, one is accompanied on the right side by the Four Great Kings represented larger than life and seen in full view as reaching the top of the stairs. Details of the quality of the painting are also striking when seen at a close distance. At the top of the stairs the gaze is immediately attracted by the spectacular depiction of the kingdom of Śambhala (bde 'byung) (Fig. 19) which covers the surface of the north wall. The Tibetan tradition locates this mystical Kingdom '...hidden behind snow peaks somewhere north of Tibet.'⁷⁴ The story goes that the Dharma Kings of Śambhala were entrusted with the Kālacakra tantra by the Buddha Śākyamuni. It also says that the last king of Śambhala, Raudracakrin, seen with his army at the bottom of the painting, would at the end of time save the world from the 'barbarian' enemies of Buddhism and restore the law of the Dharma. The King is easily identifiable leading his battalions while

⁷¹ Leach p. 35.

⁷² Klimburg-Salter pp. 77, 78.

⁷³ Alexandre p. 71.

⁷⁴ Bernbaum 1980: p. 4, and for more on the kingdom of Śambhala see Bernbaum 1985.

riding on his white horse. He wears a helmet embellished with a flaming jewel and pierces an enemy with a lance. The battle is a tangle of bodies and gushing blood. The soldiers of Raudracakrin, unmistakable with their helmets topped by red tassels, walk out of the Śambhala on the left side of the panel. The ‘barbarians’ are on the right side with elephant-shaped helmets.⁷⁵ However, swords, bows and arrows and even rifles will not be enough to defeat the last Dharma King vanquishing his enemy. In the scene at the extreme right of the panel a flying cannonball surprises the lord of the ‘barbarians’ in his pavilion while he waits for his meal that is being prepared by cooks who are busy slaughtering an animal and stirring steaming cauldrons.

This representation of the kingdom of Śambhala in the temple of Ogyen Choling is one of the few in Bhutan. In the Popjikha (phob sbyis kha) valley, in the Black Mountains, on the way to Bumthang from Thimphu, the kingdom of Śambhala was represented next to the Four Great Kings at the entrance of the monastery of Gangteng (sgang steng).⁷⁶ Another depiction is seen in the Trongsar *dzong* (krong gsar rdzong) (Fig. 20) by the side of the main entrance to one of the temples.⁷⁷ The repetition of this theme at the entrance of religious buildings emphasizes its protective function. This configuration is relevant in Ogyen Choling and one could speculate whether the Śambhala had been meant to be downstairs in the entrance hall close to the Four Great Kings but for lack of space was located upstairs. Or whether it was conceived to be upstairs, as we see it today, with the intent, as at Gangteng, to consider the depiction of the Śambhala and the depiction of the Four Great Kings as an ensemble. Both themes are linked since the ground floor and the landing on the upper floor are physically connected by the staircase. Therefore, the intertextuality prevailing between the two rooms, indicates that the protective group made of the kingdom of Śambhala and the

⁷⁵ Appendix chapter 3 section 3.1 n. 10.

⁷⁶ A picture of the kingdom of Śambhala in the entrance hall of the monastery of Gangteng was published in 2006 in the Architectural Heritage Journal 1, pp. 36, 37. Unfortunately this representation has disappeared under a brown coat of paint.

⁷⁷ In the Trongsar *dzong* the representation of the kingdom of Śambhala is located on the right side of the door of the temple on the first-floor gallery overlooking the main internal courtyard. A representation of Lhasa is depicted on the left side of the door. There is another representation of the kingdom of Śambhala in Paro.

Great Kings works on both levels, at the entrance of the temple and the entrance of the upper shrine, the Jowo Lhakhang.



19. The Kingdom of Śambhala at Ogyen Choling, on the left. (IMG 0721)

20. The Kingdom of Śambhala in the Trongsar *dzong*, on the right. (IMG 2702)

When recalling that Tshokye Dorji (*mtsho skyes rdo rje*) held the position of Trongsar *pönlop* (*krong gsar dpon slop*) during several years in the 1850s, we would expect that he had most surely seen the Śambhala and valued its protective function. He would then have commissioned his artist to replicate it in his own temple which would have been constructed before 1897. With this hypothesis, the north wall must have survived the earthquake, corroborating the oral narrative that Ugyen Rinzin gave me during my fieldwork in 2016.⁷⁸

The protective purpose of the Śambhala also extended into it being a device to ward off enemies and to serve as a political statement. The nineteenth century in Bhutan and in the Himalayan region was a period of violence and political turmoil. Internally, feuds and rivalry between local lords were weakening the central power and externally, the situation was alarming. Foreigners were menacing the western and northern borders to the point that the survival of the country was in jeopardy. With regard to these political events, Tshokye Dorji

⁷⁸ More time would be necessary to determine the extent of the stylistic similarities between the kingdom of Śambhala and the Four Great Kings panels and to assess if they were part of the iconography of the previous temple and survived the earthquake.

would have spared no effort to protect his land from the invaders. With the representation of the kingdom of Śambhala on the north wall of his temple he would have invoked the protection of the Dharma Kings against the enemies. The use of the Śambhala as a defensive wall is proposed by Erberto Lo Bue in his analysis of the Śambhala displayed on the north shrine of the Lukhang (klu khang) in Lhasa to repel the eventual invasion of Tibet by the Nepalese Ghorka kings.⁷⁹

Next to the Śambhala, a mural painting exhibits the allegory of longevity with an old bearded man sitting by a tree with the symbols of long life. Next to it a door leads to the Jowo Lhakhang (jo bo lha khang). Above that door, the treasure revealer, builder, adept and philosopher Tangtong Gyalpo (thang stong rgyal po: 1361/1365-1480/1486)⁸⁰ is represented as the protector on the entrance to the shrine. Tangtong Gyalpo is said to have lived for more than one hundred years; he is depicted holding his iconic iron chain and a longevity vase. He is flanked by two protectors engulfed in flames. He is a well-known figure in Bhutan where he built monuments and eight iron bridges. In particular, in Paro (spa gro) he built the Dungle Lhakhang (zum brtseg lha khang). The temple has the shape of a *chorten* (mchod rten) meant to subdue a nefarious spirit active in the region.⁸¹ There is another image of this great adept in the Jowo Lhakhang, a small bronze sculpture placed in a niche at the top of the pillar facing the windows. It is believed locally that Tangtong Gyalpo also protects against fire hazards.⁸²

The temple dedication panel (dkar chag) is displayed on the landing. It is at the end of the south wall, next to an unidentified monk meditating in a cave, followed by a victory banner and an image illustrating the fable of the Four Friends against a green and luxuriant backdrop of trees and fruits. The temple dedication text is written on a panel which is noticeably a later addition because the surface is free of the stain seen on the other paintings. The text, skillfully and elegantly calligraphed, gives a list of the expenses involved in the construction of the monument. It also justifies these significant amounts spent in terms of gaining

⁷⁹ Lo Bue 2010: p. 371.

⁸⁰ Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC) ID P2778.

⁸¹ Phuntsho pp. 177, 180.

⁸² Information received during my 2016 fieldwork.

merits towards an auspicious perpetuation of the lineage, merits for the family, for all sentient beings and for the diffusion of the Nyingma faith.⁸³

According to the family, the dedication text was written during the time of Ugyen Dorji on a paper scroll which was rolled and deposited in the *gönkhang* (mgon khang) - where it is still kept. The space on the wall where it was supposed to have been written had been left vacant until the 1960s during the time of Trülku Nuden Dorji (sprul sku nus ldan rdo rje: 1930-1985), the uncle of the family and former Chief Abbot of the Nyimalung (nyi ma lung) monastery in the Chumey (chu mad) valley. The Lama Pema Tsewang (pad ma tshe dbang: 1926-2009), also known as Lama Pemala, who after his retirement as the Director of the National Library was appointed Chief Abbot of Nyimalung,⁸⁴ duly corrected the spelling of the text and the grammatical imperfections as an act of merit and a gift to the temple. He calligraphed it on a cotton cloth which was subsequently applied to the wall. Later, the text was translated by Damchoe Lhuendup and published in 2012 in *Ogyen Choling: A manor in Central Bhutan*.⁸⁵

On the south wall, a door leads to a small vestibule, and an enfilade of doors opens onto the shrine dedicated to Vajrasattva (rdo rje sems dpa') while another door on the right leads to the stairs going to the roof. This room was converted into a shrine in 1966 by Trülku Nuden Dorji in memory of his brother and sister-in-law, the parents of the actual family, who died prematurely. Before its conversion the room was used for the preparation of offerings *torma* (gter ma) for rituals and is still in use for that purpose before the Kangso ritual that takes place on the estate and temple every year.⁸⁶

The landing receives the daylight from a trefoil arched window on the west, overlooking the mountains towards the end of the Tang valley. Its inside frame decoration bears the silver dots attracting the light and a row of *chötsek* also seen around the doors and windows of the monument. A recent depiction of auspicious gift symbols and large jeweled lotus flowers in a *bumpa* is shown on the adjacent

⁸³ Choden, Roder 2012: p. 62 for the translation of the dedication plate.

⁸⁴ For details on the life of Lama Pema Tsewang see BDRC P7800 and the BDRC External Hyper link: Treasury of Lives Biography of Lama Pema Tsewang.

⁸⁵ Information given by Kunzang Choden during my 2018 fieldwork.

⁸⁶ The study of this shrine is not included in the present paper.

wall. A clock hanging on the wall eerily chimes the hours in the silence of the shrines, acting as a secular reminder of the mundane preoccupations of life.

The Shrines

Both shrines, the Drölma Lhakhang (sgrol ma lha khang) (Fig. 21) on the ground floor and the Jowo Lhakhang (jo bo lha khang) (Fig. 22) on the upper floor have the same measurements and both have two central pillars, though the general feelings they project are very different.

The Drölma Lhakhang appears cold, dark and silent. The light supplied by the electric installation and the windows ensconced in the bays hardly brightens up the room. The first impression is one of confusion, of blurred images, as it takes a few minutes to adjust and appraise the surroundings. On the upper floor, in the Jowo Lhakhang, the more intense daylight coming through the windows on the facade gives clarity to the interior setting.



21. Layout of the Drölma Lhakhang, on the left. The arrow indicates the *gochor*.
(Design P. Pichard, the arrow is added by the author)

22. Layout of the Jowo Lhakhang on the right. The arrow indicates the *gochor*.
(Design P. Pichard, the arrow is added by the author)

Though similar in their dimensions, the layout of the shrines shows the difference in architectural structure between the two. The foundation of the external stone wall which girdles the ground floor is wide, to firmly anchor the monument in a

region prone to earthquake. The dividing walls between the shrine and the liminal area are relatively wide. The bracketing of the walls on the south east and south west corners increases the solidity of the building though diminishes the surface available for the windows. This sturdy and efficient architectural structure reduces the supply of light and the warmth brought by the sun into the lower floor, consequently the Drölma Lhakhang, on the lower floor, is dim and cold. The bracketing of the external wall upstairs is minimal, on the northeast and west corners, and the plain stone structure features only on the north wall. The dividing internal walls are thin and the windows extend on the three facades that are made of wood (Figs. 21, 22).

Traditionally, the source of light in Tibetan temples comes from a skylight on the roof of the internal courtyard. Within the architectural configuration of the temple (gtsug lag khang), the natural light in the shrines comes from the south facade windows and not vertically from the roof. The light reaches the sculptures set along the north wall facing the windows and touches the mural paintings laterally. In a traditional environment, the sculptures are lit by the butter-lamps offered by the devotees and placed in front of the images, and rarely receive direct daylight. They are kept in the semi-darkness which softens their contours leaving their drapery and jewels shimmering. In Ogyen Choling, the light is direct and horizontal, its strength depending on the weather and the season. The cardinal south-west orientation of the temple allows the shrines to receive the sunlight from morning till late afternoon, with of course less access to light on the lower floor; while the elevated position and the thin wood layout of the upper floor accentuates the retention of light.⁸⁷ In autumn, the low sun of the late afternoon brushes the gold of sculptures beyond the altar in a splendid radiance.

A door on the east wall of this shrine leads to the *gönkhang* that houses the local protective deities. The *gönkhang* occupies the entire surface of the oblong space along the eastern side of the temple. It is restricted to the presence of the men of the family and those from the village.

⁸⁷ Particularly when the weather is dry and sunny.

The Gochor, the Pillars the Color Palette and Decoration Scheme

At the entrance doors of both shrines, visitors go through a passageway made of wooden panels built to block direct entrance to the room (Figs. 21, 22). The wooden structure, the *gochor* meets the requirement of the Bhutanese tradition for discretion and etiquette. One is not supposed to directly enter a room in a religious setting or noble dwelling. The *gochor* also prevents the cold air and dust from running into the room. These types of wood screens are also built into the doors to family rooms in the *utsé* (dbus rtse) and in the Wangdu Choling Palace in Chökhör. In the Jowo Lhakhang, the *gochor* is oriented south towards the lama chair and the windows and in the Drölma Lhakhang it is oriented north towards the altar. However, when entering the shrines, either upstairs or downstairs, one is compelled to bypass the pillar standing in the way. The protocol dictated that the head carpenter should insert the *gochor* into the architecture of the building. He placed them in the best possible way accommodating them within the limited space available. The resulting success of this arrangement is seen by the painted motifs on these wood panels which are fully integrated within the predominant visual program of the shrines. Offering Goddesses are depicted on the *gochor* of the Jowo Lhakhang, celebrating the glory of Śākyamuni and Padmasambhava in the shrine and symbols of longevity are depicted on the *gochor* of the Drölma Lhakhang as part of the painted mural of long life (Fig. 23).



23. Drölma Lhakhang carved wood shutter. (IMG 1005)

Other woodwork of interest is the set of shutters on the inside bay windows in the ground floor shrine which are carved with victory banners and lotuses (Fig. 23). Upstairs, flower motifs on the wooden shutters are depicted without great details on a plain yellow background.

Also, in both shrines the pillars are painted a bright vermillion and decorated with chains of golden vajras and jewels on the four sides of their length. They direct the visitors' attention towards their top with ornaments of garlands and lotuses on their bolsters. The capitals are carved and shaped in the traditional cloud fashion and intricately embellished with golden dragons slithering among foliage and flowers (Fig. 24). Niches are carved in the capitals to host small bronze figures.

On the walls downstairs, the surfaces below the paintings are decorated with Chinese longevity symbols traced in gold on a dark brown coat of paint. While upstairs a grid of square designs are organized in diagonal patterns and create a movement emphasized by blocks of color. The beams of the ceilings in both shrines are painted blue and the space between them red. In the Drölma Lhakhang this combination of shades seems to absorb the light, reinforcing the subdued feeling of the space.

The refined details and care in the decoration of this temple is remarkable. In addition to the attention paid to the pillars, (Fig. 24) the wall bases, the carved shutters and the ceilings, the doors and the mural paintings are bordered by a frieze. In the shrine upstairs, the frieze shows delicately depicted dragons playing hide and seek in the midst of clouds and rocks (Fig. 25). They recall the dragons in aquatic elements and riding waves on the 'door' of some of the thangkas from the temple collection.⁸⁸ The frieze is inserted between two borders of geometric endless knot motifs, with stylized variations of the Chinese *shou* symbols of longevity⁸⁹ painted in gold. These decorative elements run all around the room as the rich green pleated curtain motif of the valance, adorned with *kīrtimurkha* figures holding garlands of jewels. In addition to satisfying the will of wanting the

⁸⁸ Appendix chap. 6, thangkas 15 to 24 for example.

⁸⁹ Beer p. 358, plates 159 and 160.

best for the deities, the dazzling details of the decoration were also meant to impress the guests and regional *chöje* when invited to celebrations. The apotropaic function of these decorative elements at the edge of the paintings is not to be overlooked. They serve as a boundary between the sacred surface of the painting and its base down to the floor. The *kīrtimukha* on the valances at the top of the wall function in the same register as a demarcation between the sacred and the ceiling below the roof and the infinite.



24. Jowo Lhakhang pillar bolster. (IMG 2994)



25. Jowo Lhakhang frieze around the door and the mural painting.

The details in the Drölma Lhakhang are more restrained but still remain elegant. A blue and red border, matching the ceiling shades, surrounds the mural paintings and the door is hidden by the *gochor*. The wooden frame of the *gochor* shows a vertical row of golden vajra and a blossoming lotus drawn on its horizontal beam. The discreet decoration in that shrine is suited to a space dedicated to the more private concerns of daily life. Though not as refined as in the Jowo Lhakhang, the sacred space of the painting is clearly defined by the simple frieze.

The Inner Sanctum and the Altars

The sanctum on both floors is located along the north wall, the altar being placed in front of the display cases where the large sculptures are exhibited. There is no ante chamber to approach the sanctum as is generally the case in Bhutanese temples.⁹⁰ The above or adjacent shelving hosts a collection of smaller sculptures, and the one hundred and eight volumes of the Kagyur (bka' gyur) of the Narthang (snar thang) edition ⁹¹ in the Jowo Lhakhang. In this instance, the display cases are protected by glass panels that were allegedly brought from Tibet, probably in the very late nineteenth or early twentieth century.⁹² The space between the cases and the altar is narrow, though allowing the passage of the temple caretaker *könyer* to dust the sculptures or the worshippers to deposit a bank note or a flower as an offering to a deity. Behind the altar and barely visible, the bottom of the display cases, as a pedestal for the sculptures or the sacred books, are decorated with cartouches depicting auspicious animals: a horse, a snow lion and, in the middle, a probable *yakṣa* figure.



26. Drölma Lhakhang silk banners and a niche in the pillar with a sculpture of a Green Tārā. (DSC 0814)

⁹⁰ Immaeda, Pommaret 1987: layout of Tamzhing temple pp. 21, 27.

⁹¹ Karmay 2004: p. 351.

⁹² According to the family narrative the glass panels were bought in Tibet and transported by yaks over the mountain passes.

The altars are made of wood and set out in layers above and below the main and central massive body. The libation flask, the seven offering water bowls, and the flower vases are aligned on the main altar. On top of the altar, a table of smaller dimensions is placed bearing a row of *torma* (gtor ma), a divination mirror and a variety of offerings brought by devotees and pilgrims such as biscuits, drinks and money. A bench the length of the altars is placed in front, covered with a brocade and carrying an incense burner. Since the temple is a living place of worship, the number of objects on the altars varies, and items are removed and replaced according to the celebrations performed. The front and side facades of the altars are richly carved and colored with motifs illustrating the eight auspicious substances, the auspicious gifts and the precious ornaments of the ‘universal ruler’, the *cakravartin*. Framing the altar in both shrines, a pair of large elephant tusks stands on the floor, as a final addition to the list of the precious ornaments.⁹³

Above the altars, a canopy of Chinese brocade is suspended and long silk pendants hang from the ceiling (Fig. 26). These ‘victory banners’ are made of colorful drapery and large bands of silk.

The Peculiar Placement or Displacement of the Display Cases



27. Corniche on the west wall in the Drölma Lhakhang. (IMG 1494)



28. Corniche on the east wall in the Drölma Lhakhang. (IMG 1067)

⁹³ See next section 4.1 The Jowo Lhakhang (jo bo lha khang) for a full discussion on the altars and their iconography.

In each shrine, a set of wooden display cases accommodates the large and small sculptures of the temple collection.⁹⁴ They are built against the north wall. Some observations can be made.

One concerns the embellishment motifs on the frames and on the top cornice of the shelving. These recall those of the facade of the temple showing *kīrtimukha* and jewel garlands, as well as the motifs of the temple entrance door with silver painted dots and *chötsek*. These similarities and the coherence of the decoration can be attributed to the workshop of one master carpenter and his craftsmen commissioned to build the entire structure. This would also support the proposition that the frame of the entrance door to the Drölma Lhakhang and the carving on the altars, showing a different set of craftsmanship, ornaments, and style, would be part of the previous monument that survived the earthquake. It is also noticeable that the frame of the entrance door to the Drölma Lhakhang and the altars display both the auspicious gifts and symbols.

Another observation would be about the wall painting adjacent to the shelves in the Drölma Lhakhang. In the northwest and northeast corners, the shelves encroach on the surface of the murals (Figs. 27, 28). On the east wall they hide part of the figure depicted on the top row of the *mahāsiddhas* seen on the panel. On the west wall one of the Buddhas of Confession is partially covered. There is also on both sides a gaping space between the top of the cornice and the ceiling beam. In the Jowo Lhakhang the same phenomena occur. I observed that the painting on the west wall is partially concealed by the shelving along its vertical north side, and there is a gap at the top between the cornice and the ceiling beam. The cloth on which the mural is painted shows folds as if pushed from the side. On the opposite wall the same can be observed where the painted cloth shows folds and cracks.

Linked to the previous observations, when looking behind the shelving, perched on a ladder, a gap of about fifty centimeters between the shelves and the external wall is visible. Since the shelving was fitted after the painted cloth was glued on

⁹⁴ See section 5.1 and 5.2 in the Appendix for details of the temple sculptures.

the walls, this phenomenon would be explained by the recurrence of minor and medium seismic activities strong enough to exert a pressure on the shelves that progressively move and obscure part of the depictions while at the same time inducing the cracks and folds to the cloth.⁹⁵ This also explains the gap between the shelves and the exterior wall.

A Family Temple

Recalling the remarks made in the previous section regarding the architectural outlook of the estate buildings that notably depart from the severity and unadorned building of a *dzong*, the temple integrates many nineteenth-century innovative features. Inside, the structure of the space and the elegant details of its decoration illustrate the care taken by Ugyen Dorji in the planning of his family temple. The harmony and integration of the motifs in the decoration and the carvings point in the direction of a coordinated effort and a well thought out layout which prevailed in the construction of this sacred structure. Rightly so. Ugyen Dorji had organized the internal space of the temple into two shrines, each with open access to their Inner Sanctum and a *gochor* for discretion. Given the private usage of the structure, no assembly hall was needed to serve a monastic congregation and its daily needs for community prayer, teachings or extended rituals.

Within the similarity in space and color scheme in the two shrines, the subtle details and the variations in their embellishment point to their functions. The more subdued quality of the Drölma Lhakhang would accredit the familial character of this shrine, giving to the Jowo Lhakhang its ceremonial and official role in a more flamboyant decor.

During a conversation, Kunzang Choden indicated that the function of the Jowo Lhakhang upstairs was to carry out merit making ceremonies of a soteriological nature, while the Drölma Lhakhang was the shrine for rituals for protection and remedies for illnesses, answering the family's immediate concerns. It would be wrong though to clearly identify the Jowo Lhakhang as a soteriological place and

⁹⁵ A seismic activity occurred during my fieldwork in 2016 with no damage but strong enough to rattle windows and furniture. Walter Roder confirmed my hypothesis in his mail dated 2 June 2019.

the Drölma Lhakhang as a pragmatic one as in rituals the two elements intermesh constantly with each other.

To take an example, a ritual of several days' duration and of a public nature, like the Kangso, is performed in the Jowo Lhakhang while more secular and family rituals like cleansing ceremonies *tsangma* (gtsang ma) for family members are held in the Drölma Lhakhang. The ritual for Losar (lo gsar), the New Year celebration, which was celebrated in full splendor and with numerous guests up to 1959, is nowadays in its streamlined format performed in the Drölma Lhakhang.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Choden 2007: p.29. See also chapter 5 section 5.4.

4 - The Shrines

4.1 *The Jowo Lhakhang (jo bo lha khang)*

When visiting the temple in 2016, the Queen Mother Ashi Tsering Pem Wangchuck climbed immediately up to the Jowo Lhakhang. Afterwards, she descended to the ground floor to visit the Drölma Lhakhang. At Ogyen Choling, the Jowo Lhakhang is the main shrine; the sanctuary where the noble family (chos rje) performs its major rituals. It is the shrine where dignitaries are invited to attend ceremonies and where Ugyen Dorji probably celebrated the consecration of the family temple in 1902. Ugyen Dorji spared no effort and care in the decoration and detailing of the ornamentation of his temple, particularly in the Jowo Lhakhang.

After exploring the architectural and spatial environment of the temple, in sections 4.1 and 4.2, I describe and analyze the iconographic program of the shrines where motifs and themes sometime intermesh or are recurrent. Therefore, to avoid repetition when similar objects are concerned, I analyze them only once, generally in this section dedicated to the Jowo Lhakhang.



29. The Sanctum in the Jowo Lhakhang, Śākyamuni is flanked by Padmasambhava, and Sönam Gyeltsen on his right, Dorje Lingpa and Choden Gönpö on his left. (IMG 0869)

The Buddha Śākyamuni and the Treasure Revealers (tertön) in the Sanctum

Entering the Jowo Lhakhang on the upper floor, one is welcomed by the gleaming sight of the sculptures. They are exhibited in intricately carved cases on the north side of the shrine (Fig. 29). The central image of the Jowo Śākyamuni, (jo bo skya thub pa) framed by *nāgas* and foliage in a golden mandorla, is resplendent and attracts the attention.

On his right side, Padmasambhava (gu ru rin po che), the mythical tantric master, is represented raising his hand and, at the Buddha's left side, Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405) holds his iconic attributes, a *ḍamaru* and a bell. Dorje Lingpa's immediate lineage is also represented by his father Sönam Gyeltsen (bsod nams rgyal mtshan), seen at the right side of Padmasambhava. On the left side of Dorje Lingpa, his second incarnation Choden Gönpö (mcho ldan mgon po) is displayed.⁹⁷ The statue of the Jowo Śākyamuni displays an ornate crown and long ear pendants, his body covered by a silk mantel. The family history relates that this sculpture was cast using the same measurements to reproduce the image of the twelve-year-old Jowo Śākyamuni located in the Jokhang (jo khang) in Lhasa.⁹⁸

According to an ancient tradition, the creation of the Jowo as a statue of the twelve-year-old Śākyamuni started with the idea to represent the three bodies of the Buddha, the *dharmakāya*, *saṃbogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya*.⁹⁹ The making of these images took place in India when a gifted artist crafted the sculpture of Jowo Śākyamuni as his *nirmāṇakāya*. After this event the legend of this statue continued as it was offered to the Emperor of China by the King of India. It then arrived in Tibet with the Chinese Princess Wengcheng the bride-to-be of the Emperor Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po: c. 605-650). The story also

⁹⁷ Choden, Roder p.63.

⁹⁸ Information gathered during my fieldwork in 2016. Though there is no evidence about the identical measurements between the two sculptures, this oral story is important and reinforces the link with the ancient empire of Tibet and this sacred image in the temple.

⁹⁹ *Dharmakāya* (chos sku) the Truth Body of the Buddha, *saṃbogakāya* (long spyod rdzogs pa'i sku) his complete Enjoyment Body and *nirmāṇakāya* (sprul pa'i sku) his Emanation Body.

states that a unique gaze at the Jowo is enough to be freed from the ‘Three Poisons of greed, hatred and ignorance’ which represent a major obstacle towards a rewarding afterlife.¹⁰⁰ For the Tibetans, the image of the Jowo in the Jokhang is a national protector. It is also a strong symbol of the assimilation of Buddhism during the period of the Tibetan Empire.¹⁰¹

The sculptures of the Jowo are also found in numerous temples throughout Bhutan. In particular a well-known statue of the Jowo Śākyamuni can be seen in the Kyichu Lhakhang (skyid chu lha khang) in the Paro (spa gro) valley. That temple’s construction is traditionally credited to the Emperor Songtsen Gampo though material evidence is too lacking to allow confirmation of the Emperor as the builder. According to Karma Phuntsho, the temple dates most certainly from the fifteenth century.¹⁰² Though the dating of the sculpture is uncertain, Michael Aris, who visited the country in the early 1970s, noticed a difference in the style of this sculpture from the seventeenth-century sculptures of the Jowo, noting that it showed a more ornate style. Aris reached the conclusion that the Jowo in the Kyichu Lhakhang was made before the seventeenth century.¹⁰³ The Jowo Śākyamuni in Ogyen Choling (o rgyan chos ling) as well as the other large sculptures of the Inner Sanctum, were commissioned in the mid-nineteenth century by Tshokye Dorji (mtsho skyes rdo rje), the grandfather of Ugyen Dorji (o rgyan rdo rje).

On both sides of the central display, bookshelves, protected by glass doors, contain the one hundred and eight volumes of the Kagyur (bka' gyur). Above, a series of shelves host a collection of sculptures. The Kagyur used to be read once a year in the shrine. But the practice died out until December 2012 when, after a forty-year hiatus, sixty-four nuns from the Pema Choling Nunnery, located at the beginning of the Tang (stang) valley, read the Kagyur throughout four days and nights. However, it has become increasingly difficult to find practitioners available for the reading, therefore the sacred text is today only read

¹⁰⁰ Bsod-nams-rgyal-mtshan, S. B. D., Choedak Yuthok, L., & Taylor, M. pp. 38-45, 286.

¹⁰¹ Warner p. 2.

¹⁰² Phuntsho pp. 30, 204.

¹⁰³ Aris 1979: pp. 3-5.

occasionally.¹⁰⁴ In 2016, it took several months for an elderly villager to read the Kagyur and gain merits in doing so.

The collection of sculptures belonging to the temple is displayed in both shrines, the Jowo Lhakhang and the Drölma Lhakhang, in glass cases above or adjacent to the large sculptures in the sanctum. Here in the Jowo Lhakhang, the collection includes pieces commissioned by family ancestors and others offered by worshippers or members of the Royal Family.¹⁰⁵ Among them we find the series of eight bronze and silver *stūpa* (mchod rten), each commemorating one of the Eight Events of the life of the Buddha. This series is said to have been acquired by Ugyen Dorji. The eight manifestations of Padmasambhava and treasure revealers are seen with images of Longchenpa (klong chen pa: 1308-1364), Jikmé Lingpa (‘jigs med gling pa: 1729-1798), Pema Lingpa (pad ma gling pa: 1450-1521) and Dorje Lingpa. Most of the sculptures are related to the themes displayed on the mural paintings of the Jowo Lhakhang where Śākyamuni and Padmasambhava are predominant. However, among them, some are connected to the themes exhibited in the Drölma Lhakhang - as is the case with the statue of Dorje Pagmo (rdo rje phag mo) which mirrors the representation of this *dākinī* in the sanctum of the Drölma Lhakhang or the Kadampa *stūpa* linked to Atiśā, also depicted in that same shrine. This image of Dorje Pagmo could have served as the model for the larger representation of the *dākinī* in the ground floor shrine. I will come back to this image in the next section.

On the right side of the top shelf, a large and heavy statue of Mahāsahasra-pramardanī, (stong chen rab ‘joms ma) one of the five Pañcarakṣā (bsrung ba lga) is displayed. She is a formidable protectress against demons.¹⁰⁶

During my field visit in 2016 the decision was taken by the family to clean the glass-cased shelves in both shrines. It was necessary to clear up the dust which had accumulated since the last serious cleaning in 1998. And it was also the best way to give me access to the sculptures, not only to observe and identify them but

¹⁰⁴ Ogyen Choling Annual Update 2012 Trust Fund Report, available on www.oling.bt.

¹⁰⁵ A painted clay sculpture of the lama Changchub Tsöndrū (Byang chub brtson-gus) was offered by the Royal Grand Mother Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck.

¹⁰⁶ de Malmann pp. 289-291. For a complete list and descriptions of the sculptures in the Jowo Lhakhang, see Appendix chapter 5 section 5.2.

to photograph, measure and document them to establish a comprehensive inventory ¹⁰⁷ of all the items belonging to the collection. Such an inventory did not exist at that point. After removing the carved wood frames and the glass panels the cases were thoroughly scrubbed. The dust was brushed off the sculptures and small repairs were carried out by the *könyer*. The carpenter fitted the back of the shelving with wooden planks to protect against rodents. All the items were put back in their case, in the same positions behind the now spotless glass panels. All of us involved in that task, the family, the *könyer*, the cleaning team, the carpenters, and myself, quickly realized that the removal of the glass changed the dynamic of the shrine. The glass that gathers dust quickly does not act as a filter any longer. This clarity provided a closer and immediate proximity to the deities. It was noticeable as well that the sunlight, poor or bright, would be captured by the smallest touch of gold on the sculptures which in turn would increase the brightness of the shrines. The skillful orientation of the temple and the sanctum facing south reveal the intention of Ugyen Dorji to light up the sculptures, thereby enhancing the presence of the deities and the *tertöns* in the shrines. Based on these observations, after removing the large glass panels, it was decided not to place them back, in order to give worshippers and viewers an unencumbered sight of the images. For security reasons, the glass panels of the small sculptures display cases were maintained.

The Altars

The altars occupy an identical position in both shrines. They are located in front of the display of the Sanctum along the north wall. Because they are similar in their construction, though at variance in their iconography, I examine both of them in this section.

The altars stand midway between the two lateral walls of the shrine. They are made of three levels where liturgical objects are placed, together with offerings witnessing the passage of devotees and pilgrims. During the elaborate Kangso (bskang so) ritual, additional layers of planks and benches are added that are loaded with *torma* (gtor ma) and an array of offerings.

¹⁰⁷ The inventory is in the Appendix, vol. 2 of the thesis.



30. Jowo Lhakhang: altar front facade. (IMG 3169)

31. Jowo Lhakhang: altar west facing side. (IMG 3173)

32. Jowo Lhakhang: altar east facing side. (IMG 3189)

In their arrangement, the main altars (Figs. 30, 33) are wide, heavy and large. Made of intricately carved blue pine, and painted on their front and side facades, they show at the edge the colorful *chötsek* which are often noticed within the decoration elements of the monument. In the middle of their top surface stands an offering table, of the type depicted in front of lamas or deities on thangkas or mural paintings. This item is decorated in the same fashion as the front. This close stylistic relationship indicates that these two

pieces of furniture were made at the same time, by the same workshop of artists. Examination of the motifs on the frame of the Drölma Lhakhang on the ground floor door suggests that its decoration is stylistically very close to the decoration of the altar. This would indicate that the altars survived the earthquake and belong to the previous temple. It endorses the oral tradition which tells that '[miraculously] while the building crumbled and fell, the altar and all the statues in the temple stood intact...' ¹⁰⁸

Once the bench that hides a large part of the front of the altar is removed, a magnificent display of elegant motifs and intricate friezes is revealed. In both shrines, the Jowo Lhakhang and the Drölma Lhakhang, the altars are similar in their construction and share the decoration theme that mainly evokes the Universal King, the *cakravartin*, his auspicious possessions and gifts, with a nod towards Padmasambhava and treasure revealers. Therefore I analyze them together.

The carved motifs are organized in three registers. In the Jowo Lhakhang, the upper register of the altar displays auspicious gifts within cartouches, including conch, an endless knot, separated by ornate cabochons with a central colored half sphere, and golden stylized foliage. The mid register shows at its center the palace of the Copper Mountain Paradise (*zangs mdog dpal ri*) of Padmasambhava with several *gings* dancing at the top of the roof and water at the bottom. This centerpiece, above a wide *kīrtimukha*, is flanked by dancing goddesses of the senses and treasure revealers attended by a *ḍākinī*. On each side of the panel a soldier brandishes a flaming sword. These Precious Generals of the *cakravartin* are next to elephants and horses carrying flaming jewels. The sides of the altar, not easily seen in the dim corners of the temple, depict auspicious substances and gifts of vermilion powder and *durva* grass, conch and mirror. All the scenes are displayed within a backdrop of green mountains in a blue sky. The wide bottom register shows a succession of *kīrtimukha*, auspicious animals and *yakṣa* (Figs. 30, 31, 32).

In the Drölma Lhakhang the middle register focuses on the *cakravartin* with his Precious Queen and Precious General and the Precious Possession with the

¹⁰⁸ Choden, Roder p. 56.

Paradise Palace at the center. The top and bottom registers show the gifts in cartouches as well as auspicious animals and *kīrtimukha* respectively. A difference is noticeable in the representation of the mountains in the backdrop which are covered with snow and enveloped in clouds. The side facades display the Eight Auspicious Substances (Figs. 33, 34, 35). The thematic decoration unfolds uninterrupted on the three facades from the beginning of the left to the end of the right side.¹⁰⁹



33. Drölma Lhakhang: altar front facade. (IMG 3271)

34. Drölma Lhakhang: altar west facing side. (IMG 3283)

35. Drölma Lhakhang: altar east facing side. (IMG 3287)

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed description of the decoration of the altar see the Appendix chapter 2 section 2.9 and chapter 4 section 4.6.

Kunzang Choden and Ugyen Rinzin explained that the carvings on the altars illustrate the *Offering the Mandala of the Universe* prayer that is part of a worshipper's daily devotion and recited at Ogyen Choling. In the prayer, the elements carved on the altars are offered to the deities.¹¹⁰

In addition I would add that in this agrarian society, subsistence, prosperity and stability were dependent on the weather for good harvests and pasture to feed the herds. Showing these offerings in two decisive seasons would also underline the request to the deities to ensure the best possible conditions for the growth of food. Therefore, the altar in the Drölma Lhakhang shows winter snow, clouds and rain for the necessary water to germinate the seeds and in the Jowo Lhakhang the altar shows the blazing sun in a summer landscape to ensure bountiful crops.

An Image 'Auspicious to See'

When facing the altar in the Jowo Lhakhang, the left side mural painting displays the Buddha Śākyamuni touching the earth (Fig. 36).¹¹¹ On this large and complex panel, the Buddha takes up the central position surrounded by bodhisattvas (byang chub sems dpa'), disciples, arhats (gnas brten) and Indian masters. The three Deities of Long Life: Amitāyus (tshe dpag med), White Tārā (sgrol dkar) and Uṣṇīṣavijayā (gtsug tor rnam rgyal sgrol ma), as well as Prajñāpāramitā (yum chen mo) are seen at the top, and the Four Great Kings at the bottom of the painting.

The body of Śākyamuni is the color of gold represented in an intricate mandorla facing east and touching the earth at the moment of his enlightenment. He holds a bowl, his throne is embellished with two snow lions, and a gold lotus flower shaped like a *viśvavajra* is displayed on the red cloth in front of his throne. His two faithful disciples Śāriputra (sa ri'i bu) and Maudgalyāyana (mo'u 'gal gyi bu) stand at his lower sides. This scene is supported by a wide blossoming lotus

¹¹⁰ See the prayer of the *Offering the Mandala of the Universe* at the end of this section. The prayer is attributed to Chögyel Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen ('phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan: 1235-1280), Lotsawa House: www.lotsawahouse.org and for details on Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen, see BDRC P1048.

¹¹¹ See also Appendix chapter 4 section 4.1.

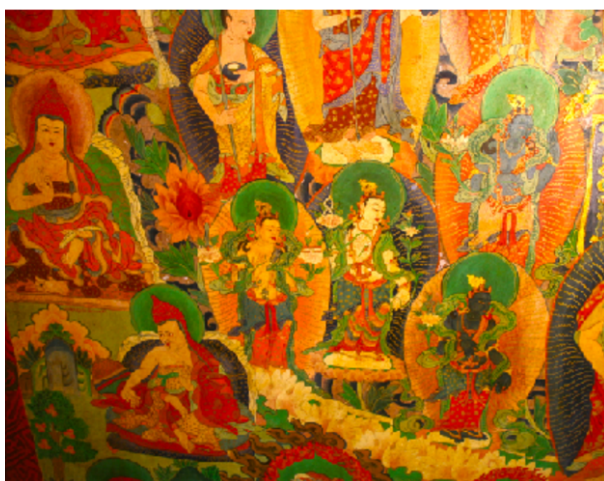
growing from a pond as a mark of the purity of the Buddha and his supranatural power. The lotus gradually morphs into a garland of flowers and foliage to encompass the Eight Great Disciples and the Eight Bodhisattvas of the Bhadrakalpa positioned on each side of the central Śākyamuni.



36. An Image 'Auspicious to See', the Buddha Śākyamuni with bodhisattvas, disciples, arhats and Indian masters. (IMG 0862)

At the bottom, two white *nāgas* hold the stem of the lotus looking up at the Buddha. The pond is inhabited by auspicious fishes, frolicking birds, floating jewels, and auspicious gifts. The position and attitude of the two *nāgas* match the description of the *nāgarājas* Nanda and Upananda from the great lake

Anavatapta given by Lalou in the *Etoffes Peintes in the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*.¹¹² On the shore, two hills delimit the perimeter of the lake, and the base of the panel shows vessels filled with auspicious offerings. On the opposite side, at the top of the mural and above the central image, a monumental parasol between the sun and the moon connects Śākyamuni to the infinity of the cosmos. The painted clouds around the parasol go beyond the panel and vanish under the valance close to the ceiling. Amitāyus is displayed on both sides at the top. On the left he stands beside Prajñāpāramitā, the Perfection of Wisdom (ses rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa) and on the right he sits in meditation with the White Tārā (sgrol dkar) and Uṣṇīṣavijayā (gtsug tor rnam rgyal sgrol ma).



37. Bodhisattvas on the right side of Śākyamuni. (IMG 0537)



38. Bodhisattvas on the left side of Śākyamuni. (IMG 0582)

The image of Śākyamuni and its composition with his two faithful disciples, surrounded by the sixteen elders or arhats, plus Hwa śaṇ and Dharmatrāta, and the four Great Kings is a theme often represented in murals and thangkas.¹¹³

The presence of the Indian Masters in the median register could be understood as being part of the legitimization of the texts and transmission of the dharma which is largely the theme of the mural. It is unusual to see in the close proximity

¹¹² Lalou p. 31, and planche I.

¹¹³ Bhutanese examples from Bartholomew and Johnston cat. 16 p.181, a set of eleven thangkas cat.17 pp. 183-187, cat.18 p. 189.

of the Buddha, and within an enclosure, his disciples together with the bodhisattvas. They all stand on lotuses, which are more visible under the figures on the front row. They all have a green halo and all look towards the Buddha. The bodhisattvas are curiously positioned below the disciples, while hierarchically they would be expected to be above them. However, we find this configuration in the *Rite du Pata Supérieur*, in the *Etoffes Peintes in the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, where the bodhisattvas are placed on both sides of Śākyamuni, each standing on a lotus. In that iconography they form a group of sixteen, eight on each side.

On the shrine's mural each of the bodhisattvas has a body of distinctive color and is richly dressed (Figs. 37, 38). They belong to the group of the Eight Close Sons (ne ba'i sras brgyad) from *sādhana*s transmitted by the teacher Śākyarakṣita in the second half of the thirteen century and later by Tāranātha. The group making the *Eight Close Sons* is composed of the five bodhisattvas: Maitreya (byams pa), Samantabhadra (kun tu bzan po), Khagarbha (nam mkha'i snin po), Kṣitigarbha (sa'i snin po), Nīvaraṇaviṣkambhin (sgrib pa rnam sel), with the addition of the three belonging to the group of the *riksum gönpo*, or *The Lords of the Three Families Among the Eight Close Sons* (ne sras brgyad kyi nan tshan rigs gsum mgon po): Mañjuśrī ('jam dpal), Ārya-avalokita ('phags pa spyān ras gzigs) and Vajrapāṇī (phyag na rdo rje).¹¹⁴

Since there is no inscription on that part of the painting, I could identify six of the eight bodhisattvas depicted. On the right side of Śākyamuni, (Fig. 37) Vajrapāṇi stands in the front holding a vajra, Mañjuśrī is shown with a book and a sword, and Ārya-avalokita is shown with lotuses on his side. A fourth bodhisattva, with a blue body, is in the back holding a vajra. On the left side (Fig. 38) Maitreya in the front holds a large lotus flower, Samantabhadra holds a jewel on a lotus, and Khagarbha is depicted with a lotus topped with a sword. A fourth bodhisattva, with a white body holding a book on a wide lotus, stands in the back. Two bodhisattvas, one on each side of Śākyamuni, are not clearly identified — one with a white body holding a book on a wide lotus and one with a blue body holding a vajra. These two figures might represent Nīvaraṇaviṣkambhin and Kṣitigarbha.

¹¹⁴ Willson, Brauen illustration 247-251 text pp. 306-307, and ill. 272-274 text p. 315.

Above the Eight Close Sons, the Ten Great Disciples are positioned in two groups of four on both sides of Śākyamuni. Each of them holds a monk's staff *kakkhara* in one hand and a bowl in the other, but their gestures, body colors, and robes are different. The historian Buton (bu ston) writes in his *History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*, translated by Obermiller, that after the Buddha's demise and after the monument containing his relics was erected, the main disciples of Śākyamuni engaged to spread the Buddhist doctrine. During the first period, or Rehearsal, the ten disciples are named along the narrative: Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, Mahā-Kāśyapa, Pūrṇa, Ānanda, Aniruddha, Upāli, Bhadradatta, Çānavāsika, Rāhulabhadra.¹¹⁵

In the *Etoffes Peintes (pata) dans le Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, the Great Disciples are placed above the bodhisattvas. The text translated by Lalou advises: '...qu'on peigne huit Mahāśrāvaka; ils ne sont pas placés plus bas que la tête des Bodhisattva.'¹¹⁶ This indication is reflected in the painting in which the eight disciples are placed around Śākyamuni and above the bodhisattvas.

In the shrine's mural, Śākyamuni at the moment of enlightenment is represented inside a mandorla which is supported by *yakṣas* on snow lions and embellished with flowers and an intricate arrangement of foliage. Above that mandorla and right over the head of the Buddha, the supreme achievement is witnessed by the Buddhas of the Three Times, former, present and future, respectively Dīpaṅkara (mar me dzad), Śākyamuni and Maitreya (byams pa). They sit on lotuses forming an elevated crown on the extended wings of a flying *garuḍa* holding snakes in its beak. The *garuḍa* is represented as a symbol of the conqueror of all the poisons, victorious over the lower realms.

Over and outside the large lotus and the garden encompassing the Buddha, the remaining surface of the panel is composed in a hierarchy in three tiers. On this part of the painting all figures bear an inscription which facilitates their identification.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Obermiller pp. 73, 77, 84-86, 100.

¹¹⁶ Lalou p. 35.

¹¹⁷ With the exception of two Indian Masters at the bottom of the painting.

Sixteen arhats are represented above Eight Indian Masters positioned along the sides of the painting. The arhats are depicted within their familiar living environment of green hills, forests and rivers and with their assistants seen next to them attending to their daily occupations. They look towards the central Śākyamuni, with the exception of Vajrīputra, who looks straight at the viewer. A small naked dwarf is standing next to him wearing a garment made of green leaves and bringing him a bottle. The arhats are said to have remained in the world after the Buddha's passing to *parinirvāna* to propagate and protect the teachings of the dharma.¹¹⁸

At the bottom of the painting Hwa śaṇ and Dharmatrāta, who are the attendants of the arhats¹¹⁹, flanked by two Great Kings on each side complete the picture. The Four Great Kings were converted by the Buddha and assigned the role of protectors of the Dharma at the four cardinal directions: Dhṛtarāṣṭra (yul 'khor bsung) in the east, Virūḍhaka ('phags skyes bo) in the south, Virūpakṣa (spyang bzang) in the west and Vaiśravaṇa (rnam thos sras) in the north. In *The Sūtra of Golden Light*, (Skr. *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra*) also *Sūtra of the Sacred Golden Light*, (gser 'od dam pa), the Four Great Kings kneel down and pledge allegiance to the Buddha.¹²⁰

The Eight Indian Masters were teachers, philosophers and writers during a long period between the first century BCE to the seventh century AD and are referred to as the *Six Ornaments* and *Two Superiors*. The *Six Ornaments* look frontally or towards the Buddha and are inscribed as: Vasubandhu, Dharmakīrti, Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Ārya and Dignāga. The *Two Superiors*, who were the agents of major changes in the monastic orders do not have an inscription. These two masters are depicted on both sides of the panel at the base of the large lotus encircling the Buddha. They are debating, each with one arm raised and their gaze is projected

¹¹⁸ According to the inscriptions the arhats are: Rāhula, Bakula, Aṅgaja, Ajita, Abhedha, Pindola Bharadvāja, Cūdapanthaka, Vanāvasin, Kalika, Kanaka [bharadvāja], Gopaka, Nāgasena, panthaka, Kanakavatsa, Vajrīputra, Bhodra, Hwa śaṇ and Dharmatrāta.

¹¹⁹ Himalaya Art Resource: HAR 395 and 348 respectively.

¹²⁰ Lamotte pp. 551, 685.

outside the panel. In all likelihood, in the absence of inscription, they would be Guṇaprabha and Śākyaprabha.¹²¹

The depiction of the enlightenment of the Buddha Śākyamuni on this panel embraces numerous iconological themes and evokes the victory of the teachings of the Dharma which endure beyond the vanishing of the Buddha after his worldly life. The arhats, who are the Buddha's enlightened followers, ensure the propagation of his discourse; the Great Indian Masters studied, commented and taught the Buddhist doctrine and the Great Kings had to protect it. The whole scene is unfolding under the gaze of the deities assembled in the upper part.

Beside these iconological considerations, the specificity of this painting lies in its composite assemblage of elements. The central figure of Śākyamuni touching the earth in the enclosure of the wide blossoming lotus held by the *nāgarājās* is a citation from the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*. The Buddha surrounded by the Sixteen Arhats and the Four Great Kings with Hwa śaṇ and Dharmatrāta at the bottom is borrowed from a composition often seen represented in Tibetan iconography.¹²² This painting presents a conflation of motifs into an image for the benefit of the viewers. Ugyen Dorji and the artists he commissioned made this image to obtain merits not only for themselves but also for everybody looking at the powerful image. At the end of the chapters dedicated to the rite of the three *paṭas*, superior, middle and small in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* the text narrates that the making of these *paṭas* brings magnificent results. The image, 'Auspicious to See' brings benefits by looking at it because it eliminates past and present bad deeds. In a juxtaposition of salvation concerns and worldly considerations, it also cures illnesses, ensures women can obtain sons, and promises success will come. Furthermore, it brings the promise of a rewarding rebirth 'Si (seulement) on désire voir ce *paṭa* resplendissant, une naissance avantageuse, rapide et heureuse est obtenue.'¹²³

¹²¹ Rhie and Thurman p. 146.

¹²² See note 91.

¹²³ Lalou p. 46. This quote is from the *Rite du Paṭa Moyen*. Similar formulation is found in the *Rite du Paṭa Supérieur*: '...en un instant, rien que par la vue du *paṭa*, ils sont délivrés de tous leurs péchés', p. 41 and in the *Rite du Petit Paṭa*: 'Oui, rien que par la vue du *paṭa*, on est délivré en un instant', p. 48.

The idea of death and afterlife is very much present on the opposite wall which depicts the visions during the forty-nine day journey after death and before rebirth in one of the realms of the afterworld.

The Bardo Tödröl and the Dzokchen (rdzogs chen) Lineage



39. The Bardo Tödröl, the peaceful side is seen on the left and the wrathful side on the right. (IMG 0858)

The east wall of the shrine displays on its main part the illustration of the Bardo Tödröl (Fig. 39), *The Great Liberation Through Hearing in the Bardo* (*bar do thos grol*). This soteriological text was composed as a treasure (*gter ma*) by Padmasambhava and revealed by Karma Lingpa (*kar ma gling pa*: 1326-1386). It was designed to assist the deceased during the transitory period between death and rebirth, to escape the *samsaric* cycle to the state of *nirvāṇa*, or a rebirth into one of the six realms of the afterlife. According to the text as it is read now and depicted in the shrine, the Bardo is composed on the left of a peaceful domain with a wrathful domain on the right. The peaceful domain shows the assemblies of the five Buddhas organized around the primordial Samantabhadra (*kun tu*

bzan po) while the wrathful one represents these same Buddhas in their *heruka* manifestations, totalling one hundred deities. For the followers of the Nyingma (rnying ma) tradition, the liberation from the cycle of life is attained when the consciousness of the deceased has recognized the inner radiance of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri.¹²⁴ It is out of compassion for human beings that Padmasambhava developed the *Self-Liberating Wisdom of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*, and *The Great Liberation Upon Hearing in the Bardo*, and concealed the texts for future revelations and the benefit of generations to come.¹²⁵

The number of figures on the shrine's panel, their depiction and their names translated from the inscriptions conform to the translation of the text of the Bardo in Coleman and Dorje. However a minor departure from the text appears when analyzing the wrathful side. Two goddesses with a *garuḍa* (khyung) head are depicted, while the text from Coleman and Dorje indicates instead one goddess with the head of a bear and one with the head of a scorpion.¹²⁶

10 8 6 4 2 1 3 5 7 9 11



40. The *dzokchen* lineage depicted at the top of the Bardo.

At the top of the Bardo panel, a gallery of deities and lamas runs across both sides of the peaceful and the wrathful intermediate state. Eleven figures seen in (Fig. 40) and representing the lineage of the *dzokchen* tradition are represented. This lineage reads from the center to the sides.

¹²⁴ Dudjom Rinpoche p. 19 and Coleman, Dorje p. 234.

¹²⁵ Cuevas p. 84.

¹²⁶ For a detailed description of these figures see the Appendix chapter 4 section 4.5.

The lineage:

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Samantabhadra | |
| 2. Vajarasattva | 3. Garab Dorje |
| 4. Śri Simha | 5. Padmasambhava |
| 6. Yéshé Tsogyel | 7. Vairocana |
| 8. Dorje Lingpa | 9. Pema Lingpa |
| 10. Longchenpa | 11. Jikmé Lingpa |

The lineage can be examined in three groups involved in the transmission:

1. the wisdom-mind transmission of the victorious buddhas (rgyal ba'i dgongs brgyud) showing Samantabhadra (kun tu bzan po) and Vajrasattva (rdo rje sems pa),
2. the symbolic transmission of the awareness-holders (rig 'dzin brda'i brgyud) showing Garab Dorje (dga 'rab rdo rje), Śri Simha, Padmasambhava, and Yéshé Tsogyel (ye shes mtsho rgyal),
3. the authentic oral transmission of human beings (gang zag snyan khung du brgyud pa) who are the translators, philosophers and treasure revealers: Vairocana, Longchenpa (klong chen rab 'byams), Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa), Pema Lingpa and Jikmé Lingpa ('jigs med ling pa).¹²⁷ A bright sun is seen between Vairocana and Pema Lingpa. One might have expected the artist to include a moon in his composition placed between Yéshé Tsogyel and Dorje Lingpa.

The presence of Vajrasattva and Garab Dorje on each side of Samantabhadra points to the lineage of the *dzokchen* or Great Perfection defined as the Atiyoga of the Nyingma tradition. It was revealed by Garab Dorje through the guidance of

¹²⁷ The figures are identified from their inscription and my classification in three groups refers to Cuevas p. 83. Jikmé Lingpa (1729-1798) rediscovered the *Lönchen Nyintik*, a cycle of teachings, established by Longchenpa and that contributed in the eighteenth century to a renewal of interest in the *dzokchen* tradition.

Vajrasattva. The authenticity of the foundation texts of the *dzokchen* is provided by the transmission from Garab Dorje through Śri Siṃha, the Indian scholar who wrote and translated the text from the Sanskrit with the translator Vairocana.¹²⁸

Padmasambhava is said to have met Śri Siṃha at the Sosaling Sosadvīpa charnel ground, where he gave him the essential teachings of the *dzokchen* doctrine.¹²⁹ It was further translated and transmitted by the famous philosophers and treasure revealers of the *dzokchen* associated with Ogyen Choling: the Tibetans Longchenpa and Dorje Lingpa and the Bhutanese Pema Lingpa.

After passing through the Bardo, the journey continues for the deceased who would rejoice if rewarded with an auspicious rebirth in the realm of Padmasambhava in his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise.



41. Padmasambhava in his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise. (IMG 0855)

¹²⁸ For the role of Vairocana and Dorje Lingpa see Karmay 1988: pp. 17-31 and 30-36.

¹²⁹ Cuevas pp. 59, 84.

Padmasambhava in his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise (zangs mdog dpal ri)

Moving along the wall, the depiction of the Copper Colored Mountain Paradise of Padmasambhava is depicted next to the Bardo (Fig. 41). The fringes of the Paradise mural start above the door of the *gönkhang* (mgon khang) and terminate at the extreme south of the wall, close to the windows of the shrine.

A magnificent Padmasambhava ¹³⁰ surrounded by his eight manifestations sits enthroned at the centre of the painting, shimmering in layers of brocades, radiating serenity and benevolence, his two consorts at his side, Yéshé Tsogyel (ye shes mtsho rgyal) and Mandāravā (man da ra va).¹³¹ According to his life story told by Yéshé Tsogyel, he retired to this southwest mountain island where he lives teaching the dharma to the ogres *rākṣasa*, preventing them from invading the world.¹³²

In this depiction of the Paradise the dominant color palette is green and blue. This is a departure from the traditionally represented Paradise with its use of orange as the color of the copper. Otherwise the painting reflects the text of the *Prayer in Seven Chapters* (le'u bdun ma) ¹³³. The mountain island on which the Paradise is located extends from the realm of the ogres, demons and *nāgas*, up to the domain of the *ḍākinīs* and celestials close to the moon and the sun. On the slope of the mountain, siddhas are depicted meditating in caves above turbulent water crowded with *lu* (klu) and water monsters. On boats and ladders, newcomers climb the cliff to heaven. The fragrant gardens, planted with fruit-bearing trees surround the palace up to the dome-shaped sky where the *gings* and celestials

¹³⁰ I come back to Padmasambhava the mythical tantric master in sections 5.2 and 5.3.

¹³¹ The eight manifestations displayed as follows: on his right side, Tshokye Dorje (mtsho skyes rdo rje), Nyima Ozer (nyi ma od zer), Padma Gyalpo (pdma rgyal po), Sengye Dragog (senge sgra sgrogs) on his left side: Loden Chogsey (blo ldan mchog sred), Padmasambhava (pdma sem bha), Sakya Senge (sha khya senge), Dorje Drolö (rdo rje gro lo). For a detailed description of the figures see the Appendix chapter 4 section 4.4.

¹³² Tsogyel pp. 201, 208. For more information on the possible location of the Copper Colored Mountain, see Bogin 2014.

¹³³ *The Prayer in Seven Chapters* is a *terma* (gter ma) revealed by the fourteenth-century *tertön* Trülku Zangpo Drakpa (sprul sku bzang po graps pa: 1303, 1315 or 1326?, date of death unknown). Jay Valentine, "Zangpo Drakpa," *Treasury of Lives*, accessed 22-05-17) <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Zangpo-Drakpa/9572>. See also section 5.3 for the depiction of the Copper Colored Mountain Paradise and *The Prayer in Seven Chapters*.

dance and play instruments between rainbow and clouds. The Buddha Amitābha sits on the top portico of the palace while the group of bodhisattvas - Protectors of the Three Families (rigs sum mgon po) composed of Avalokiteśvara (sryan ras gzigs), Mañjuśrī ('jam dpal) and Vajrapāṇī (phyag na rdo rde) are seen in the gallery underneath.

At the top of the left boundary of the Copper Colored Mountain Paradise, Amitābha ('od dpag med) is represented in a palatial mansion with an inscription: (bde ba can gyi zhing khams) the blissful realm of Dewachen or Sukhāvātī, while a collection of vignettes depicting episodes narrated in the *Prayer in Seven Chapters* (le'u bdun ma) fills a significant surface around the Paradise itself. The series of vignettes faithfully show Padmasambhava as a guide in this world of suffering, rescuing groups of travelers or individuals thrown into confusion and despair facing illnesses, poverty and hunger, and pilgrims lost in a snowstorm and at the mercy of evil spirits.¹³⁴



42. Padmasambhava as the Medicine Buddha, on the left. (Detail from Fig. 41)



43. Padmasambhava as the deity of wealth, on the right. (Detail from Fig. 41)

¹³⁴ *The Prayer in Seven Chapters* p. 7. www.lotsawahouse.org [accessed 23-05-2017]

To the right side of the main central image of the Paradise, Padmasambhava is depicted as the Medicine Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru (sangs rgyas sman bla) surrounded by the seven *tathāgatas*¹³⁵ (Fig. 42) and as the deity of wealth (Fig. 43). As the Medicine Buddha Padmasambhava invests himself with the healing powers of the Buddha, thereby allowing his devotees to call on him and his retinue to alleviate the pain of illnesses.¹³⁶ Depicted as the deity of wealth, he is sitting on a lotus throne holding a victory banner in his right hand and a mongoose producing jewels (gter gyi ne'u le) under his left arm. Underneath the lotus, the jewels fall and reach a group of soldiers riding horses amid clouds, each of them holding a mongoose and a sword or a jewel. In that scene Padmasambhava is pictured as Vaiśravaṇa with his retinue composed of “the eight masters of the horses” (rta bdag brgyad). They are said to stand in the eight cardinal directions.¹³⁷ The combination of these two images, close to each other on the panel, addresses the worshipper's aspiration for a healthy, long and prosperous life allowing enough time to accumulate merits through rituals and offerings for a rewarding rebirth.

On the painting's higher register, and seen in a vignette close to the top of the Paradise, Padmasambhava is standing on a cloud under a parasol performing the *tarjanī* gesture against fear and evil spirits. He is surrounded by attendants and travels to the world, faithful to his promise to be visible to all of us ‘...on the tenth day of the waxing moon...’.

¹³⁵ The *tathāgatas* are, Śākyaketu (shak ya ke tu) touching the earth, Sunāmaparikīrtanaśrī (mtshan legs yongs bsgrags dpal) granting protection, Aśkottoma (mya ngan med mchog) holding his hands in meditation, Ranacandrāja (rin chen zla ba) performing the gesture of giving, Suvarṇabhadravimalaprabhāsa (gser bzang dri med snang) teaching the doctrine, Dharmakīrtisāgaraghoṣa (chos bsgrags rgya mtsho'i dbyangs) teaching the dharma and Abhijñānārāja (mngon mkhyen rgyal po) in the gesture of generosity. Dorje 2014: p. 136.

¹³⁶ Padmasambhava as the Buddha of Medicine is invoked in *The Prayer in Seven Chapters* p. 9 and as the deity of wealth p. 10.

¹³⁷ Nebesky-Wojkowitz p. 69 : East: Jambhala: yellow, holds a jewel, South: Gang ba bzang po: yellow holds a vessel filled with gems, West Nor bu bzang po: white holds a jewel, North: Kubera: black, brandishes a sword, Southeast: Yang dag shes: yellow wields a sword, Southwest: 'Brog gnas: black, holds a red lance made of gems, Northwest: lnga rten: Yellow-white, lifts a palace, Northeast: Dzam po 'khyil pa: white, wields a sword in his right hand and a shield in his left.

The full display of the Copper Colored Mountain Paradise with the pictorial representation of the *Prayers in Seven Chapters* gives a message to the worshippers. It is a message from Padmasambhava about the accessibility of his Paradise where he welcomes the devotees and also about his presence on earth for those who would call to him. In the *Prayer in Seven Chapters* he demonstrates that with commiseration he can be reached and alleviate distress and suffering. More importantly, the Copper Mountain Paradise displays an immediate vision of the three *kāya* of Buddhahood.¹³⁸ The worshipper would meditate before the large image of Padmasambhava the awakened Guru who, on the second story of the palace, transforms himself into Avalokiteśvara and guides the meditator to share the joy of the *sambhogakāya* up to the achievement of perfection, when Padmasambhava in his *dharmakāya* form is the Buddha Amitābha at the highest stage of the Paradise.¹³⁹

On the opposite wall, Padmasambhava is depicted twice on a wide panel. He is shown as the wrathful Dorje Drakpo (rdo rje drag po), and as the manifestation of the brilliant guru of knowledge (rig ‘dus gu ru snang srid zil non).

Padmasambhava as Dorje Drakpo (rdo rje drag po) and with his Teachers and Disciples



44. Padmasambhava as Dorje Drakpo and surrounded by teachers and disciples.
(IMG 0847)

¹³⁸ Bogin 2019: p. 129.

¹³⁹ Essen, Thingo p. 125.

The west wall painting is made up of two parts, the left side, when looking at the painting, is occupied by Dorje Drakpo with his Consort and his assembly, the right side by Padmasambhava surrounded by his teachers and disciples (Fig. 44). I first examine the left side and continue, in a second paragraph, with the right side of the painting.¹⁴⁰

Padmasambhava as Dorje Drakpo (rdo rje drag po)

As one of the twelve manifestations of Padmasambhava, Dorje Drakpo is shown with his assembly of four protectors and four dancing *ḍākinīs*. This central deity has no inscription but is identified by his wrathful appearance and by the scorpion next to the *phurba* (phur pa) he holds in his left hand. His right hand brandishes a golden vajra. In the painting, the *phurba* seems to kill demons by hurling projectiles in a swirl of blood and smoke while Dorje Drakpo and his consort trample on human couples. On the opposite side, a siddha sits on an animal skin in a charnel ground with a *stūpa* shown behind him. He holds a *ḍamaru* and plays a bone flute in front of a dead tree that has an owl perched on top of it. A snake, a bird and a wolf devour a corpse that hangs in that same tree. In the epic biography *The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava*, a scene takes place where Padmasambhava as a yogi was practising in the Rugged Grove in Uḍḍiyāna. He then received the teachings of several *ḍākinī* who named him Dorje Drakpotsel (rdo rje drag po rtsal). He had previously killed demons and *rākṣasa* and subdued the people of the district. After further colorful adventures along his journey, he is ordained as Śākya Senggé by the master Prabhahasti who gives him the teachings of the Vajrakīlaya.¹⁴¹ A depiction of a blue Heruka Vajrakīlaya, identified by a caption, stands in embrace with his consort at the top right of the central figure of Dorje Drakpo.

¹⁴⁰ For a detailed description of the figures see Appendix chapter 4 section 4.3.

¹⁴¹ Tsogyal pp. 40, 43.



45. The Queen of Great Bliss on the mural. (detail from Fig. 44)



46. The Queen of Great Bliss on the thangka. (IMG 2135)

Above the Heruka Vajrakīlaya, a red *ḍākinī* stands with her left leg bent. She wears a crown and a long garland of flowers holding a *ḍamaru* and a curved blade in her right hand. She is identified by a caption on her pedestal as the *Ḍākinī* Queen of Great Bliss (mkha' 'gro bde chen rgyal) (Fig. 45). The same *ḍākinī* is depicted on a small thangka hanging in the shrine on a ceiling beam adjacent to this mural (Fig. 46). From the long inscription¹⁴² on the thangka we learn that the scene refers to the *Lönchen Nyingtik* (klon chen snying thig) revealed by Jikmé Lingpa, that the *ḍākinī* is Yéshé Tsogyel (ye shes mtsho rgyal) and the siddha sitting above and connected to her is Pema Tötrengetsel (pad ma thod phreng tsal), a form of Padmasambhava.¹⁴³ The representation of these figures echoes the *dzokchen* lineage seen above the Bardo Tödröl and emphasizes the role of the *ḍākinī* Yéshé Tsogyel in her transmission of the mind treasure (dgongs gter), the *Lönchen Nyingtik*, to Jikmé Lingpa.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² See Appendix chapter 6 Thangka 30 for the translation of the inscription.

¹⁴³ Padmasambhava was given the name of Pema Tötrengetsel after surviving the fire ordeal by the people of Zahor, Tsogyal pp. 48, 278 and n. 14 p. 217.

¹⁴⁴ Gyatso p. 167.

The four protectors positioned at the corners of this panel are iconographically identical bearing the same posture and gesture. Their body colors differ and, respectively, are yellow, red, blue, and brown; they also are carrying different implements. From that group, only the red figure has an inscription; it reads 'Homage to the Glorious Indestructible Heruka'. Reading that inscription, I would deduce that the qualification as *'heruka'* would also apply to the other figures. Following the same pattern, four *ḍākinī*, at the bottom and on the side of the panel show similar postures and gestures, each holding a different attribute and of different body color: yellow, red, white and green. These other figures do not bear any inscription.

At the top of the panel, the Buddha Amitāyus is shown sitting in a rainbow medallion. It is supported by Garuḍa with wings wide open, extending his arms and holding a long serpent in his beak. Vertically located above Dorje Drakpo, the bird king soars down between Vajrajālaya and The Queen of Great Bliss. Metaphorically, Garuḍa spreads his wings and flies to conquer the *nāgas*. He is also victorious against the five poisons of anger, pride, attachment, envy and ignorance.

Locally, this figure of Dorje Drakpo was not clearly identified and it was thought that it was a deity coming from the monastery of Mindröling (*smin grol gling*) and that the uncle of the present family, Trülku Nuden Dorji (*sprul sku nus ldan rdo rje*: 1930-1985), meditated every morning in front of it. Nuden Dorji was a student at Mindröling until 1959.¹⁴⁵ The representation of Dorje Drakpo was made well before the time when Nuden Dorji meditated in the shrine and there is no evidence, to my knowledge, that this particular deity was favored at Mindröling. However being a Nyingma practitioner Trülku Nuden might have chosen Dorje Drakpo as his *yidam*. The connection with Mindröling, much talked about locally, could possibly be related to Terdak Lingpa (*gter bdag gling pa*: 1646-1714), depicted on the panel above the entrance door, who founded the Mindröling monastery.

¹⁴⁵ He then became the Abbot of the monastery of Nyimalung, in the Chumey valley until his death in 1985.

Padmasambhava with his Teachers and Disciples

The violent phase of Padmasambhava as Dorje Drakpo (rdo rje gra sgros) occurred during the early period of his life when he was a young prince. It was also at that time that he received his education to become a powerful and enlightened teacher. Initially, he met and received empowerment from groups of *ḍākinī* and then travelled to India where he was taught by great teachers. He subsequently met Śrī Siṃha who bestowed on him the doctrine of the Great Perfection (rdzogs chen).¹⁴⁶ These teachers are depicted among the figures surrounding Padmasambhava who is represented at the center. This side of the painting is wider than the wrathful side's representation of Dorje Drakpo, the two themes being visually separated by the vertical alignment of protectors and *ḍākinī* (Fig. 44).

Enthroned and surrounded by rows of sages, Padmasambhava, who here is inscribed as the Brilliant Guru of Knowledge (rig 'dus gu ru snang srid zil non), is celebrated for his endless awareness, vast knowledge, and for the transmission of his teachings. On one side, as Dorje Drakpo, he crushes ignorance and on the other side he is shown as the magnificent teacher.

Above Padmasambhava, Samantabhadra (kun to bzang po) is seen amid clouds and mountains with Garab Dorje depicted below (Fig. 47). Garab Dorje, who revealed the text of the *dzokchen*, which he possibly taught to Padmasambhava, is identified by an inscription. The lineage vertically depicted projects a clear image of the transmission of knowledge and the link between Samantabhadra the primordial Buddha, Garab Dorje the Indian sage and Padmasambhava.

¹⁴⁶ Tsogyal pp. 41-45, note 13 p.215. His great teachers were: Prabhahasti, Manjushrimitra, Humkara, Vishuddha, Nāgārjuna, Buddhaguhya, Mahavajra, Dana Sanskrita, Rombuguhya, Devachandra, Shantigarbha.



47. The transmission lineage showing Samantabhadra and Garab Dorje above Padmasambhava. (detail from Fig. 44). (IMG 0459)

The twenty-five disciples of Padmasambhava are depicted performing their deeds. For example Nanam Yéshé flies among snowy peaks, Sangye Yéshé emerges from a cave with a flaming *phurba*, and Palgyi Dorje passes his arms and legs through a rock. Close to the right side of Padmasambhava, Palgyi Sangye is subduing a demon and a *lu* (klu). The Emperor of Tibet Trisong Détsen and Yéshé Tsogyel are also seen. The eight Indian teachers, who are the knowledge holders, *vidyadhara*, are represented close to Padmasambhava at the cardinal and median points. They are dressed like great adepts with light flowing clothes and meditation bands. They all bear an inscription - Naganasamkri, Prabhahasti, Hūmkāra, Śantigarbha, Rambuguhya-Devachandra, Mānjushrimitra, Nāgārjuna, and Vilamitra.

This extended mural might have been conceived as a diptych, the astral allegory of the sun and the moon reflecting the passage of time. The sun is depicted high in the sky above Dorje Drakpo while the moon shines above Padmasambhava the Enlightened Guru. From left to right, the direction of this panel works chronologically from Dorje Drakpo, when he was a young prince, to the later stages of his life when he became the Precious Guru following an arduous education. This panel echoes, on the adjacent wall, the panel emphasizing the long-lasting power of the dharma represented by Śākyamuni surrounded by bodhisattvas, disciples, arhats and philosophers. Padmasambhava, the second

Buddha, is seen as an enlightened being, possessing the authentic knowledge of supreme awareness transmitted from the Indian *vidyadhara*. It also highlights the power of his teachings, as well as their transmission and the perpetuation of the Buddhist creed.

The Triad of Treasure Revealers

The depiction of three treasure revealers *tertön* (gter ton) above the entrance door acts as a link between the Padmasambhava panel and the auspicious depiction of the Buddha Śākyamuni. Above the lintel, a gallery shows three Nyingma Treasure Revealers identified by inscriptions. In the center is Terdak Lingpa (gter bdag gling pa: 1646-1714) the founder in 1676 of the monastery of Mindröling (smin grol gling) flanked on his right by Drime Lingpa (dri med gling pa: 1700-1775/6) and on his left by Ratna Lingpa (ratna gling pa: 1403-1478). Underneath three wealth deities are depicted - Vasudhārā (nor rgyun ma) surrounded by two forms of Jambhala (dzam bha la), one yellow and one black.

In Central Tibet, the establishment of the monastery of Mindröling by Terdak Lingpa and his brother Lochen Dharmaśri (lo chen dharma shri: 1654-1717) had a decisive impact on the teaching and propagation of the Nyingma canon. Based on thorough historical research into the history of the tradition of the Nyingma School, Terdak Lingpa and Lochen Dharmaśri unified the Nyingmapa teachings corpus. They also created elaborate and grandiose rituals while gathering the most eminent Nyingma masters of the time. These complex and codified rituals, including dances, served as the structure for the renewal of the school's development and expansion. These ceremonies became institutionalized and over time were replicated in other Nyingma monasteries. They continued after the death of the brothers and the violent events of 1717 which saw the looting and destruction of monasteries in central Tibet. In the words of Dalton, 'The efforts of these two brothers changed the face of the Nyingma School forever.'¹⁴⁷

The most prominent among these three Treasure Revealers is certainly Terdak Lingpa. Drime Lingpa was one of his students and appears to be also one of the

¹⁴⁷ Dalton pp. 98-113.

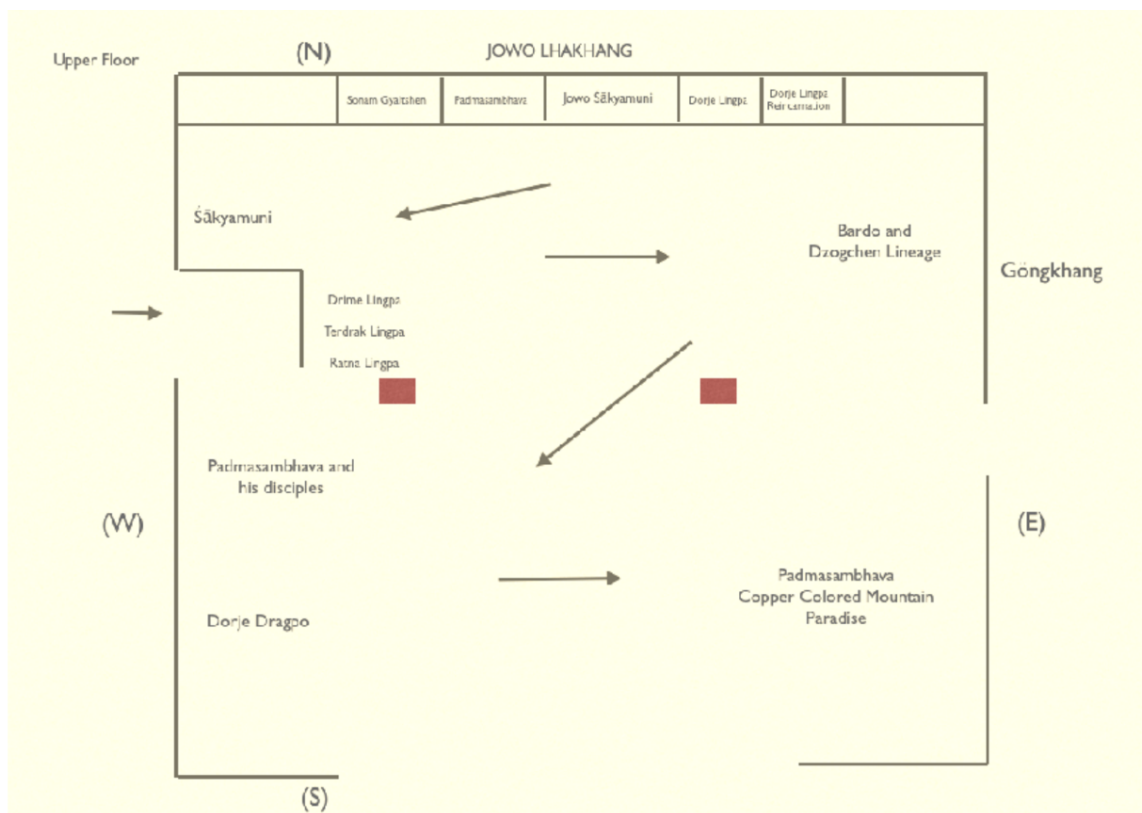
teachers of Jikmé Lingpa.¹⁴⁸ Ratna Lingpa discovered numerous treasure texts and compiled the Collected Tantras of the Nyingma tradition, a collection which received additional texts by Jikmé Lingpa.¹⁴⁹ The representation of these Masters does not seem to be directly linked to the iconographic theme of the Jowo Lhakhang which is dedicated to Śākyamuni and to Padmasambhava. The fact that Trülku Nuden Dorji (1930-1985) was a student at Mindröling denotes the attachment or connection of the family to this monastery and to the value of its teaching. I examine the representation of the Treasure Revealers in more detail in section 5.2.

Through the overarching presence of Padmasambhava, one of the themes displayed on the walls of the Jowo Lhakhang is the importance of the transmission of teaching, its legitimation through the Indian teachers, and the promise of salvation. In the sanctum, the statue of Jowo Śākyamuni positioned in the middle, hierarchically at the head of a lineage composed on one side by Padmasambhava who is at the inception of the treasure (gter ma) practice and by Dorje Lingpa, and his own lineage. This display also expresses clearly the legitimation of Dorje Lingpa and his tradition.

On the walls of the shrine, treasure texts are the theme of the paintings displayed around the Image 'Auspicious to See'. This image which depicts the Buddha Śākyamuni with groups of teachers and transmitters functions also as the rightful and uninterrupted transmission from India and the Buddha through Padmasambhava.

¹⁴⁸ Gyatso p. 289 n.24.

¹⁴⁹ Dudjom Rinpoche p. 795, Gyatso p. 141, p. 298 n.13.



48. Layout of the Jowo Lhakhang and a possible way of circulation for the worshipper.

For the worshipper, there is no prescribed route, but multiple ways to circulate in the shrine. Each devotee would have a preference to approach and pray before one or the other deity and the routine might change according to different needs at different times. One way, among several, to worship in the Jowo Lhakhang would be to start from the entrance and face the guiding light of the Jowo Buddha in the sanctum (Fig. 48). The worshipper would then turn towards the depiction of the enlightenment of the Buddha Śākyamuni, which also celebrates the power of the dharma, and to gaze at the Image ‘Auspicious to See’ in search of a meritorious rebirth. The worshipper would then approach the journey after death in the Bardo, and further on meditate on the vision of an after-life hopefully spent in the Copper Colored Mountain Paradise. The worshipper would thus be placed between two spectacular images of Padmasambhava, to the back the formidable teacher and to the front the Guru guiding his meditation towards enlightenment (Figs. 44, 41).

Offering the Mandala of the Universe¹⁵⁰

Om Vajra Bhumi Ah Hum
 Here is the mighty and powerful golden base.
 Om Vajra Rekhe Ah Hum
 Here is the diamond-hard fence.
 The outer ring is encircled with this iron fence,
 In the centre stands Mount Meru, the king of All Mountains,
 In the East is the continent Purva-vide
 In the South Jambudvipa,
 In the West Aparaganiya,
 In the North is the continent Uttarakuru
 Around the East, the sub-continent Deha and Videha,
 Around the South, Camara and Aparaganiya, Around the West, Saha and
 Uttara-mantrina, Around the North, the sub-continent Kurava and Kaurava.
 In the East is the Treasure Mountain,
 In the South, the Wish-granting Tree,
 In the West, the Wish-granting Cow,
 In the North is the Unploughed Harvest.
 Here is the Precious Wheel,
 Here is the Precious jewel,
 Here is the Precious Queen,
 Here is the Precious Minister,

Here is the Precious Elephant,
 Here is the Precious and Best of Horses.
 Here is the Precious General,
 Here is the Great Treasure Vase,
 Here is the Goddess of Beauty,
 Here is the Goddess of Garlands,
 Here is the Goddess of Song,
 Here is the Goddess of Dance,
 Here is the Goddess of Flowers,
 Here is the Goddess of Incense,
 Here is the Goddess of Light,
 Here is the Goddess of Perfume,
 Here is the Sun,
 Here is the Moon,
 Here is the Umbrella of all that is Precious,
 Here the Banner of Victory in all the Directions,
 In the Centre are all the possessions precious to gods and men
 This magnificent collection lacking in nothing,

¹⁵⁰ I copied this prayer from Kunzang Choden's *Daily Recitations* book that she lent me when I was in Ogyen Choling in December 2018.

The Prayer is from the Sixth revised edition 1993 Reprint 1998 *Daily Recitations* Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, and printed at Indraprasha Press (CBT), 4 Bahadurshah Zafar Marg, New Delhi - 110002, Director Gyatso Tsering, pp. 30, 31. See also footnote 106, and lotsawa.org for another version of this prayer.

I offer to you, my kind and holy root Guru
 Together with you venerable lineage Gurus,
 And to you, Lama Je Tsong-kha-pa,
 To you O Buddha and to you Vajradhara.
 Together with the entire assembly of gods.

4.2 The Drölma Lhakhang (sgrol ma lha khang)

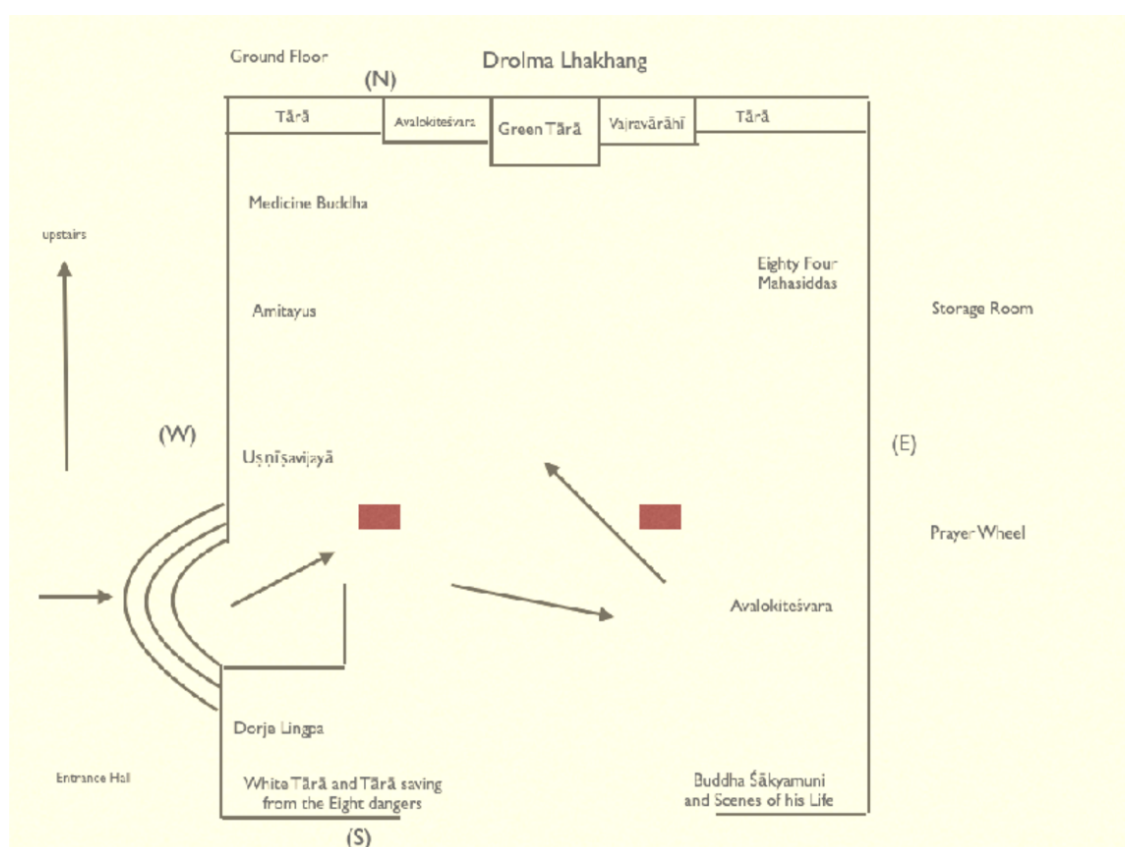
Entering the Drölma Lhakhang one accesses the silent and muted atmosphere of the ground floor shrine. The eyes need to adjust to the sober blue and green color palette of the murals and the dim light.



49. The Sanctum in the Drölma Lhakhang. The Green Tārā in the center is flanked by Avalokiteśvara on her right and Vajravārāhi on her left. (IMG 1353)

After the Jowo Lhakhang, which has a more public and official function, the rituals of propitiation pertaining to the worldly concerns of daily life are performed in the Drölma Lhakhang, named after the goddess Tārā (sgrol ma).

Together with the goddess who is well represented, a large part of the iconography is centred on the Deities of Long Life (tshe lha), whose images occupy the surface of the west and southwest corner walls. The shrine also hosts panels of a different nature representing: the Buddha Śākyamuni, the eighty-four Mahāsiddhas (grub chen), and Avalokiteśvara (sphyan ras gzigs) (see Fig. 50 for the layout of the murals). In this section, I choose to begin the examination of the shrine with the three paintings located on the south-east and south-west corner walls and end with the predominant theme of longevity, a theme which underscores most of the remaining sections of the thesis.



50. The lay out of the Drölma Lhakhang, the deities of long life, including Dorje Lingpa, are located on the west and south west corner walls.

The Buddha Śākyamuni and Scenes of His Life

Several formats would apply to describe and interpret the iconography of this shrine as the paintings exhibit diverse themes that are not necessarily related. The theme of the shrine is largely dedicated to the aspiration for a long life in

order to prepare for an auspicious afterlife. Two paintings are not directly connected to the theme: the Buddha Śākyamuni and scenes of his life and the Eighty-Four Mahāsiddhas. I choose to begin my analysis with these two paintings and to start hierarchically with the image of Śākyamuni.



51. The Buddha Śākyamuni surrounded by scenes of his life. (IMG 0928)

Located on the south corner next to the window, the image of Śākyamuni is discrete though powerful and engaging. At the center of the painting, the Buddha radiates from the soft glow of the gold of his wide halo (Fig. 51). He is depicted at the moment of his enlightenment, sitting in meditation, touching the earth with his right hand *bhūmiparśamudrā*. He wears a monk's robe made of red and gold woven textile with a patch pattern embellished with stylized lotus flowers and holds a bowl topped by a red fruit in a cluster of leaves. A layer of lotus petals finely highlighted with a golden edge enhances his throne cushion, which appears to be set on a lotus flower. The elevated throne is adorned with two snow lions and a large dharma wheel on a red banner. The ensemble seems to hover above and within the surrounding vignettes illustrating the main deeds of his life. These colorful crowded scenes are depicted on the remaining surface on the panel around the central image.

The composition of the painting displays the chronicle of the twelve acts of the Buddha written by Butön (bu ston: 1290-1364) in the *Lalitavistarasūtra* and the *Vinayaśūdraka*, translated by Eugene Obermiller.¹⁵¹

The illustration of the narrative starts at the top of the panel when Śākyamuni in the Tuṣita heaven bestows his crown to Maitreya (byams pa). It continues with the white elephant gliding in a cloud towards the bottom left of the panel where we see the birth of the Buddha from Queen Maya in the Lumbini garden. The story continues, gradually winding upwards towards his awakening and until his demise in Kuśanagara and his passing away into *parinirvāṇa*. The deeds of his life are vividly depicted, from his childhood, as a young prince, his discovery of the sufferings of mankind and his Great Departure. It is followed by several episodes leading to his fights with Marā to arrive at the site of the supreme event of his enlightenment. After his preaching of the dharma to an attentive group of listeners we can see his grieving disciples when he passes away.

The sense of direction given to the story by the artist suggests a cycle. From the top of the painting we see the descent from heaven to earth and the birth at the bottom left. Then, the eventful and strenuous path progresses upwards to culminate with the enlightenment and finally, after death, reach the departure point, the heaven, at the top of the painting. This circular itinerary mirrors the premise that human is basically suffering after birth until the final demise and rebirth. However, the Buddha Śākyamuni, being the life model leading to enlightenment, gives the sentient beings the choice to follow the path of the dharma to escape the return to the cycle of life. When taking into account this interpretation, this painting would therefore link to the overarching theme of the shrine which is the desire for a long life in the pursuit of a meritorious quest to escape the irremediable *saṃsāra*.

¹⁵¹ Obermiller: pp. 7-64 see also Luczanits 1999: 30-39, and the Appendix chapter 2 section 2.6 for the description of the scenes on the panel.

The Eighty-Four Mahāsiddhas (grub thob brgyad bcu tsa bzi)



52. The Eighty-Four *Mahāsiddhas*. (IMG 1065)

The Great Adepts (grub chen) (Fig. 52) found their own method to reach enlightenment, most of the time through original means and unconventional ways of living. They were well learned scholars practising self-discipline and often rigorous asceticism while often performing extravagant actions.

On the east wall, the Eighty-Four *Mahāsiddhas*,¹⁵² the outstanding tantric masters from India, are represented in a lush scenery of trees, cascades and mountains. I have identified them based on the inscription attached to their depiction, unless unreadable or imprecise, and on their iconic attitude that is generally linked to the task they perform. Among the most familiar, Saraha the ‘arrow maker’ holds an arrow, the green Lūipa is known for eating the entrails of fishes, Virūpa stopped the sun in order to drink more alcohol, and Tantipa who wove continuously. For the lesser known among this large group, the identification was more complex.¹⁵³

¹⁵² About the *mahāsiddhas*, Linrothe 2006 and Dowman 1985 were my guides.

¹⁵³ See also Appendix chapter 2 section 2.8 for the identification of the figures on the painting.

Saraha is the main figure on that panel and occupies its central position, his size is significantly larger than the size of the other siddhas. He wears a tiger skin and a meditation band and sits holding a long golden arrow with both hands, with his *ḍākinī* consort at his side.¹⁵⁴ In his immediate surroundings we see, among others, Nāgārjuna, Indrabhūti, Tilopa, and below, Drukpa Kunley (brug pa kun legs: 1455-1529), referred to as the 'Divine Madman', with his dog lying close to him.¹⁵⁵

At the bottom of the painting, a group composed of eminent figures is depicted, namely the Zhabdrung Nagwang Namgyal (zhabs drung ngag dbang nam rgyal: 1594-1651), next to him Marpa (mar pa chos kyi blo mo: 1012?-1097) and Milarepa (mi la ras pa: 1040-1123). The respect of the hierarchy and usages would dictate the representation of the Zhabdrung at the top or central position on paintings, either a mural or a portable thangka. The situation on this panel would be a departure from the tradition. Nonetheless, this configuration calls to mind the representation of the Kagyü (bka' brgud) lineage observed on an eighteenth-century thangka belonging to the Seula Gönpa in Punakha.¹⁵⁶ On that thangka, the Zhabdrung, Marpa, and Milarepa are depicted below the *mahāsiddhas*, and Saraha is placed at the top of the Kagyü lineage. This placement emphasizes the legitimacy of the religious teaching transmission through the Indian masters to the unifier of Bhutan. The depiction at the bottom of the painting of the deities associated with root-tantra, Hevajra, Kālacakra, Guhyasamāja, Cakrasaṃvara and Vajrabhairava-Yamāntaka,¹⁵⁷ clearly indicates the transmission path of texts. Being the meditational deities of the *mahāsiddhas*, they are the transmitters of tantra to the *mahāsiddhas* and afterwards to the Tibetan lamas receiving the teachings from the Great adepts. In this case, and also represented on that

¹⁵⁴ In the context of the dominant image of Saraha, it is interesting to note that a manuscript on a commentary of the Doha treasure of Saraha is kept in the Ogyen Choling library. do ha skor gsum gyi TI ka 'bring po karma 'phrin las pa; do ha skor gsum gyi Ti ka 'bring po/; W10426, pp. 1-158. druk sherig press, thimphu. 1984. reproduced from rare manuscripts preserved at o rgyan chos gling in Bumthang, Bhutan. dbu med. a commentary on the do ha mdzod of saraha (from <https://www.tbrc.org> [accessed on 24 -07-17]).

¹⁵⁵ See Dowman 2000 on Drukpa Kunley.

¹⁵⁶ Bartholomew, Johnston, cat. 73 pp. 309-311 and David Jackson pp. 82-87.

¹⁵⁷ Dowman 1985: p. 8.

painting, are Marpa and his student Milarepa,¹⁵⁸ who are at the inception of the transmission teaching lineage of the Kagyüpa.

Traditionally, the religious affiliation of the family in Ogyen Choling is Nyingma, in a region where historically this School of Buddhism has been strong. The representation of the Kagyü lineage would be seen as a political message or a manner of paying respect to the Zhabdrung. It could also simply reflect the reality of Bhutan where the two Schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Nyingma and Kagyü, live and are practiced side by side.

Avalokiteśvara, Atīśa and Gelongma Palmo

The depiction of the *mahāsiddhas* seems to merge with the edge of the next painting as there is no obvious delimitation between it and the representation of the resplendent Avalokiteśvara (spyen ras gzigs).

The representation of the bodhisattva possesses such a power of attraction that one feels compelled to step towards the wall for closer observation. Located near the windows, the gold highlights of the painting shine, revealing the wealth in the ornamentation, in his jewelry, and in the attributes he holds in his eight hands. Tall and magnificent, splendidly dressed with colorful scarves and a long richly embellished lower garment, the image occupies part of the east wall (Fig. 53). The artist has delicately drawn and applied the paint on each of his ‘one thousand’ arms and hands which show a finely delineated eye to symbolize his encompassing compassion.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Dowman 1985: p. 27.

¹⁵⁹ Recalling the tradition prevailing to this form of Avalokiteśvara who is propitiated during fasting rituals, Roger Jackson tells that the bodhisattva was frustrated by the immense task he faced to save all beings and felt that his body and his head were splitting apart. Amitābha rescued him giving him a thousand arms and eleven heads. Amitābha took place at the top of the eleven heads. Jackson R., 1997: p. 272.



53. Avalokiteśvara and some of his manifestations. Atiśa and Gelongma Palmo are seen at the top of the panel. (IMG 1023)

As the central figure on the painting, Avalokiteśvara stands on a lotus pedestal in his Eleven-Faced Avalokita in the tradition of the nun Lakṣmi (spyān ras gzigs bcu gcig zal dpal mo lungs).¹⁶⁰ We can see the nun Lakṣmi at the top of the painting identified with an inscription bearing her Tibetan name Gelongma Palmo (dge slong ma dpal mo). She is represented sitting on the right side of the eleventh head of the bodhisattva holding a mendicant staff *khakkhara* and with a bowl on her lap. The eleventh head shows the head of the Buddha Amitābha ('od dpag med), and on its left side the religious master Atiśa (Dīpaṃkara śrī jñāna: 982-1054) is depicted sitting and performing the *dharmacakramudrā* with a gold Kadampa stūpa next to him.

Within an idealized landscape of green hills and snowy peaks and cascades, Avalokiteśvara is surrounded by some of his forms, while flaming jewels and auspicious gifts rest at his feet. Among the forms displayed is Siṃhanāda (seng

¹⁶⁰ Willson and Brauen p. 64 and 264 illustration 104.

ge sgra), seen sitting on a snow lion, holding a trident with a snake and a sword on a blossoming lotus.¹⁶¹ Hari Hari Hari is represented at the bottom left of the painting with the bodhisattva squatting on Viṣṇu (khyab 'jug), who morphs here into Rāhula (za du kyab jug), the protector of the Nyingma treasure tradition, with a raven on his head.¹⁶² Rahula is then on top of Garuḍa who in turn is astride a snow lion.¹⁶³

The display combining Avalokiteśvara, Atiśa and Gelongma Palmo becomes clearer after examination of the biography of the latter figures. A passage in the publication on Atiśa, written by James Apple, reveals that a vision of Avalokiteśvara while meditating on love and compassion was pivotal in his decision to travel to Tibet. The Bodhisattva told him that Tārā was there already and that he was needed, declaring: 'Since many beings are there for you to train, go North!' It also turned out that Atiśa, still hesitant, met a woman, an emanation of Tārā, who encouraged him to travel.¹⁶⁴ Shortly after the death of the *mahāsiddha* Nāropa in 1040, he finally decided to leave India and departed on his long trip, and after two years on the road, in 1042 he reached his destination. He remained in Tibet, where he died in 1054.¹⁶⁵ Atiśa wrote several texts in praise of the goddess and contributed significantly to the diffusion of Tārā in Tibet.¹⁶⁶ He is among the scholars at the origin of the lineage of the diffusion of the Tārā tantra in the eleventh century.¹⁶⁷

The spiritual association between the Atiśa, the Bodhisattva and the goddess would partly explain the presence of Atiśa on this painting, while the link with Gelongma Palmo seemed slightly more tenuous. However, the *Blue Annals* mentions the connection of Gelongma Palmo with Avalokiteśvara, here mentioned as Ārya Avalokiteśvara. The text reads: '...The degree of propitiating Ārya Avalokiteśvara by performing the rite of fasting was preached by the nun Lakṣmī (Palmo) personally blessed by Ārya Avalokiteśvara. She taught it to the

¹⁶¹ Willson and Brauen p. 74 illustration 131.

¹⁶² See HAR 77124 and 851.

¹⁶³ For details about all the figures see the Appendix chapter 2 section 2.7.

¹⁶⁴ Apple pp. 20, 22, 29, 70-71, 74.

¹⁶⁵ Apple pp. 29, 30, 36, 74.

¹⁶⁶ Apple chapter 13 pp. 233-244.

¹⁶⁷ Arènes pp. 264, 262.

paṇḍita Yeshe bzang po (Jñānabhadra), blessed by her...'. Gelongma Palmo is also quoted in the *Blue Annals* for having received from the Bodhisattva the lineage of the *dmār khrid* (detailed exposition) of the Cycle of the Great Merciful, and transmitting it on to Śrībhadra (dpal gyi bzang po), who gave it to Atiśa.¹⁶⁸

Narratives of the life of Gelongma Palmo are widespread. Also referred to as Lakṣmī, she is portrayed as a Kashmiri Princess who defied her family's wishes and became a nun. Afflicted with leprosy she rigorously meditated, fasted and prayed to Avalokiteśvara to alleviate her pain. Subsequently she was cured from her ailment and died as an enlightened being. The story of her life has been circulating orally through storytellers and women *maṇipas* throughout the Himalaya. Though details differ according to the locations where the story is told, the core of the narrative remains similar. It tells about the severe hardship she endured, her healing and salvation due to her resilience and long fasting coupled with her faith and her worship of the Bodhisattva.¹⁶⁹ She is said to have particularly propitiated the form of Avalokiteśvara with eleven heads and one-thousand arms and to have initiated a well-known fasting ritual (*smyung gnas*).

The iconographic form of Avalokiteśvara, with a wrathful tenth head, is not the decisive factor for its systematic attribution to the *nyungné* of Gelongma Palmo. To ascertain the link of this form to the fasting ritual, the context should be established, either with a depiction of Gelongma Palmo or with a specific indication or inscription, from the donor or by the artist, mentioning the link. An example can be seen in the Kyichu Lhakhang (*skyid chu*) in the Paro valley where sculptures in this form of Avalokiteśvara, are referred to as being in the 'tradition of [the nun] Lakṣmī'.¹⁷⁰ Such a sculpture is part of the group of the large statues in the sanctum (Fig. 56). In that case, no specific reference to the fasting is explicitly made, though the close proximity of the nun links it to her practice.

¹⁶⁸ Roerich *The Blue Annals* page n. 1036 and page n. 1073, 1044. The *Blue Annals* is referred to by Vargas-O'Brian pp. 162-163.

¹⁶⁹ Schaeffer pp. 62-65, 217. It is in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century that Jodan Sonam Zangpo (jo gdan bsod nams bzang po: 1341-1433) gathered pieces related to the nun's life and put together a hagiography known as the *Life of Gelongma Palmo*. For texts relating the story of Gelongma Palmo see Vargas-O'Brian pp. 158, 159 and n.6.

¹⁷⁰ Sangay, Supawan, Wangchuck, Wangdi, p. 54, p. 150 n.73, and Bartolomew, Johnston p. 203.

On the fasting itself, Roger Jackson, in his essay *A Fasting Ritual*, gives the translation of the text of the ritual written by Tuken Chökyi Nyima (thu'u bkwan chos kyi nyi ma: 1737-1802) at the end of the eighteenth century. This text expounds the liturgy to be followed during the three days of the purification rite the goal of which is essentially of a soteriological nature. With a succession of prayers, recitation of mantras, visualization, gestures, prostrations, and with the repetition of these acts over the days, the worshippers' karmas are gradually cleansed, aided in that task by their abstinence from food. They pray with the belief of getting closer to Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of immense compassion watching over them to spare them the rebirth in an unworthy realm. A section of the ritual includes the invocation to the Thirty-Five Buddhas of Confession during which the devotees recite the general confession for all sins committed.

In the context of the Drölma Lhakhang dedicated to worldly concerns this large painting is a reminder that the family at Ogyen Choling regularly performed the fasting ritual and still engaged in a *nyungné* every year on the first month of the Buddhist calendar.¹⁷¹ My identification of the forms surrounding Avalokiteśvara is initial and not conclusive.

The Images in the Sanctum

In addition to the image of Avalokiteśvara Eleven-Faced Avalokita in the Tradition of the Nun Lakṣmi, the Sanctum hosts in its center a large sculpture of the Green Tārā (sgrol ljang) with a golden halo carved with an abundance of scrolling foliage. On her left side stands the *ḍākinī* (mkha' 'gro ma) Vajravārāhī (rdo rje phag mo) with a small White Tārā (sgrol dkar) at her feet, a sculpture that seems to have been added at a later stage (Fig. 54).

¹⁷¹ Conversation with Ugyen Rinzin during fieldwork in 2016.



54. The large statues in the Sanctum, Green Tārā in the center flanked on her right by the Eleven-faced Avalokita in the Tradition of the Nun Lakṣmī and by Vajravārāhī on her left.

Several oral stories, well-known in the family, are attached to the representations of the two goddesses, the Green Tārā and Vajravārāhī. They both involve the mother of Ugyen Dorji, Ashi Yeshe (a lce ye shes) who as a young woman was praised for her great beauty. When her father Tshokye Dorji commissioned a sculpture of a Green Tārā for his temple, he would have asked the artist for an image resembling his daughter. Decades later, according to the local narrative, the sculpture of the *ḍākinī* had been commissioned by her son Ugyen Dorji, after the death of his mother. The sculpture of Vajravārāhī had been cast using Ashi Yeshe's silver jewellery. Another narrative tells that it was Ashi Yeshe, as an adult, who decided to have her portrait made into a sculpture of a Green Tārā. Because she was never satisfied with the sculpture, she had it made several times. When talking about the sculpture of Vajravārāhī an alternative story came to light telling that Ugyen Dorji had it cast from his own silver weapons to commemorate his mother after her death.

Ḍākinī are often the vehicles of transmission of treasures *terma* (gtser ma) to treasure revealers. The *ḍākinī* Vajravārāhī, who is the expression of enlightenment achieved through tantric practices, is also the consort of Cakrasaṃvara ('khor lo sdom pa) as together in embrace they subjugated the

Indian deities to prepare the mountainous lands for Buddhism.¹⁷² The couple functions also within mandalas and as the meditation deity, *yidam* for adepts in search of the supreme awareness through rituals contained in the cycles of the *Anuttarayogatantra*.¹⁷³



55. Vajravārāhī in the Drölma Lhakhang. (IMG 1363)



56. Vajravārāhī in the Jowo Lhakhang. (IMG 9623)

In the shrine, the iconography of the representation of Vajravārāhī with four arms (Fig. 55) is problematic. In general, Vajravārāhī has a red body and two arms. In this case, the sculpture in the sanctum is made of silver and copper, and has a golden face, therefore the color of her body cannot be defined. She also has a

¹⁷² Huber 1999: p. 41.

¹⁷³ Snellgrove 1957: p. 210 writes that Vajravārāhī is the only female deity to have a reincarnation lineage among women in Tibet. This lineage was initiated in the fifteenth century by Chokyi Dronma a princess of the kingdom of Mangyul-Gungthang and perpetuated through the Samding monastery situated by the Yandrok Lake. This tradition has been documented and narrated by Hildegard Diemberger in her 2007 book *When a Woman Becomes a Religious Dynasty: The Samding Dorje Pagmo of Tibet*.

semi-wrathful smile, two small fangs clearly visible, as well as a pointed tongue. The usual head of a boar is on the top of her head hidden behind her crown. With her central hands she holds a chopper and a skull full of blood close to her chest, and with the two other hands a trident and a *khaṭvāṅga*. She does not hold a vajra but we cannot exclude that this attribute was lost and replaced. The position of her legs is barely visible under the brocade covering her body. However, through a gap of her dress she is seen stepping on a human body with her left foot. Consequently, her right leg is raised and bent at the knee according to her most current trampling or dancing position. Another sculpture of Vajravārāhī (Fig. 56) is located on the top shelf in the Jowo Lhakhang.¹⁷⁴ Of a smaller size, that clay sculpture is entirely of a golden color, also has four arms and the head of a boar is clearly visible on the side of her head behind the crown. In this representation, in the same way she holds a chopper in her hand, a skull bowl close to her chest and brandishes a *khaṭvāṅga* with her right hand. The sword in her left hand seems to have been added recently. I suggested in the previous section 4.1, that this sculpture would have been, possibly, the iconographic model for the larger one. (Fig. 55).

These two images of Vajravārāhī, one in each shrine, are similar and present a seemingly rare iconography. A Vajravārāhī with four arms and a human face, identified by Malmann, is red, from the *Sādhnamālā (SM) 224* and given the name of Sarvāthasadhana-Varāhī. In this configuration the attributes do not correspond to the sculptures in the shrines because with her two right hands she holds a vajra and a vajra goad and on the left a skull with a rope while performing the *tarjanī* gesture.¹⁷⁵ The Vajravārāhī described and illustrated by Lokesh Chandra is the same Artha-sādhana Vārāhī from *SM 224* but with the face of a sow. In Willson and Brauen, Vajravārāhī with four arms also has the face of a sow.¹⁷⁶

A Vajravārāhī resembling the image in the shrine can be seen on a thangka belonging to the temple collection (Figs. 57, 58). She has a white body, the boar head is at the top of her head in the same fashion as the red Vajravārāhī on the

¹⁷⁴ Appendix chapter 5 section 5.2 nb. 36.

¹⁷⁵ Malmann p. 427 nb.7.

¹⁷⁶ Chandra vol. 14 p. 4200 nb. 20, Willson and Brauen ill. 80 p. 56 text p. 259.

right side of the Buddha Vajradhara. With her four arms she holds a trident on the right side and a *khatvāṅga* on the left side, the two central hands hold a skull bowl and a chopper by her chest. She is depicted dancing on the right side of the central figure. Within the collection of thirty-six thangkas, this representation of the Buddha Vajradhara with his consort was, according to the family, commissioned before the time of Tshokye Dorji; therefore it is among the most ancient.¹⁷⁷ Together with the statue of Vajravārāhī (Fig. 56) this figure (Fig. 58), could also have been a model for Ugyen Dorji.



57. Thangka 1, the Buddha Vajradhara from the collection of Ogyen Choling. (IM1637)

58. White Vajravārāhī depicted in the center at the bottom of thangka 1. (Detail from Fig. 57)

The Goddess Tārā

The goddess Tārā (sgrol ma) is present in the shrine in multiple forms. The imposing image of the green Tārā (sgrol ljang) in the sanctum and the collection

¹⁷⁷ Details in the Appendix chapter 6 thangka 1.

of smaller sculptures by the sanctum give their name to the shrine and reinforce the identity of the place. The sanctum is flanked by three rows of shelving filling up the vertical and the space on the sides. The exhibit shows a series of clay sculptures, the main group belonging to the twenty-one manifestations of the goddess Tārā (sgrol ma nyer gcig). With the exception of the sculpture of the twenty-first representing the Tārā Kadiravani, that is slightly taller and of a visibly different fashion from the others, they all have the same size, the same color palette and are cast similarly and probably issued from the same workshop of artists. I have based their identification from the inscription carved in the clay at the back of each of them, guided by the texts in Willson and Brauen of the tradition of Sūryagupta.¹⁷⁸ This impressive and complete set of sculptures had been commissioned by Ugyen Dorji, according to information gathered locally.

The goddess Tārā is associated to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and her origin has its roots in Indian and Tibetan traditions.¹⁷⁹ One of the popular stories explaining her birth is told by the scholar Pierre Arènes who thoroughly researched and documented the subject. It happened that the bodhisattva was lamenting that in spite of his efforts the number of beings in the *saṃsāra* did not decrease. He started to cry and from his tears falling on the ground grew an *utpala* from which the goddess Tārā emerged.¹⁸⁰ Rapidly she said: 'Je vais sans délai entreprendre de libérer les êtres du *saṃsāra* aussi, je t'en prie ne pleure pas 'and immediately began with her rescue mission.¹⁸¹ The compassionate nature of the goddess and her eagerness to act with great speed to deliver the beings from the cycles of life are expressed in her words.

¹⁷⁸ Willson and Brauen pp. 317-319, illustrations 276-299. See also description and inscriptions in the Appendix chapter 5 section 5.1.

¹⁷⁹ Arènes p. 145.

¹⁸⁰ Arènes p. 148, from the commentary of Gendün Druppa (dge 'dun grub pa: 1391-1475), of the first strophe of the *Éloge en Vingt et un Hommages à Tārā*, (sgrol ma la phyag 'tshal nyi shu rtsa gcig gis bstod pa).

¹⁸¹ Arènes p. 148. Also, in one of the Tibetan sources she is born from a beam of light coming from the left eye of Amitābha p. 155, source from the Mani Kabum (ma ni bka' 'bum) of Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po: 569-649?/605) discovered by Nyima Ozer (nyi ma 'od zer: 1124/1136-1192/1204) and the siddha Ngödrup (dngos grub: eleventh or twelfth century).

The Deities of Long Life (tshe lha)

Long life is significant as its iconography takes up half the surface on the walls of the room and it also encapsulates the theme of the Drölma Lhakhang. Being born in a human body is a precious gift for a devotee who would aspire to have time enough on earth to accumulate merits for a rewarding rebirth.¹⁸² The Deities of Long-Life - White Tārā, the Buddha Amitāyus and Uṣṇīṣavijayā - are exhibited on the west wall and on the south corner of the shrine. Among them we also see Dorje Lingpa, the Medicine Buddha, and the Buddhas of Confession.

The White Tārā (sgrol dkar) and the Savior from the Eight Dangers (‘jigs pa brgyad las skyob pa’i sgrol ma)

The longevity panel begins on the relatively narrow wall on the south corner with a representation of the White Tārā (Fig. 59), one of the forms of the goddess.

The White Tārā Cintācakra, elegantly dressed in rich garments and ornaments, occupies a large part of the center of the panel. She holds a blossoming blue *utpala* with her left hand and performs the gesture of giving with the right one. Above her, the Buddha Amitābha is represented within clouds and the Buddha Akṣobhya is seen sitting on her lower right side. On the very top register of this panel, a row of Buddhas of Confession ensures the link between the several paintings of the same theme. The association of the goddess to her power of extending life appears in a series of texts written by the famous *paṇḍita* Vāgīśvarakīrti, subsequently translated and transmitted by Atiśa. In this cycle, generally known as *Cheating Death*, the goddess as the White Tārā became definitely linked to that function.¹⁸³

Around the central White Tārā, eight smaller figures of Green Tārā (Fig. 59) as the ultimate saviour rescuing from the dangers of dangerous encounters, are depicted. These Eight Dangers, represented by small images next to the depiction of the goddess are: angry elephant, snake, lion, fire, water, thieves, demons or prison. It conforms to the list generally known from the *Ārya-Tārā*

¹⁸² Beyer pp. 363-366.

¹⁸³ Beyer pp. 13, 363-364.

aṣṭaghoratāraṇī-sūtra ('phags ma sgrol ma 'jigs pa brgyad las skyob pa'i mdo)¹⁸⁴ that includes epidemics in place of prison. Suggesting a later addition to the list, Tucci extended the number of perils from the *sūtra* to sixteen, based on popular stories gathered by Tāranātha. These, according to Pierre Arènes, were not added but a variant of the existing perils. For example, the danger of tempest belongs to the same category as the danger of water.¹⁸⁵ On the painting, the dangers represented conform to the usual known list but with minor exceptions. For example, Tucci mentions epidemics and not prison conforming to the *sūtra*.



59. White Tārā surrounded by Tārā Saviour of the Eight Dangers. (IMG 1347)

Writing about the same theme depicted in the Alchi Sumtsek (gsum brtsegs), Eva Allinger quotes the text by Sarvajnamitra and refers to ‘robbers and thieves’ but does not mention the demons.¹⁸⁶ The reality of some of these dangers were

¹⁸⁴ Arènes pp. 35-36, and n. 57 where Arènes explains that the *Sūtra* is considered a *tantra*.

¹⁸⁵ Arènes p. 36. and n. 60 indicating that Tucci does not mention Tāranātha’s text though it could be *sgrol ma’i rgyud kyi byung khungs gsal ba’i byed pa’i lo rgyus gser hreng ba* (1604), the other title of the *sgrol ma rnam thar*, in *Five Works of Tāranātha*.

¹⁸⁶ Allinger pp. 42, 44.

pertinent in the rural and feudal world of the nineteenth century in Bumthang, though the likelihood of an encounter with an elephant or a lion in the forests around Ogyen Choling was certainly non-existent.

However, the soteriological facets of these physical and real dangers reveal the pertinence of the insidious and internal poisons inherent to humans and endangering a happy rebirth. Heather Karmay has drawn the list of the equivalent iniquity to each of the dangers, the lion is pride (*nga rgyal*), the elephant ignorance (*gti mug*), fire anger (*zhe sdang*), snake jealousy (*phrag dog*), robbers wrong views (*lta ba ngan pa*), prison greed (*ser sna*), water desire (*kham s gum gyi 'dod chags*), and the demons doubt (*the tshoms*).¹⁸⁷ This list of physical and spiritual dangers confers on Tārā the possibilities of twofold actions. She can immediately save a devotee facing a dire situation and she can also prevent a worshipper from the blindness of ignorance.

An unusual scene is depicted on this panel. A small vignette, on the lower left side of the goddess, shows the mythical Abominable Snowman, 'yeti' or *migoi* (*mi rgod*) as it is called locally (Fig. 60).¹⁸⁸ The male has gently passed his arm around the shoulders of its female and both are sitting at the entrance of a cave. Stories circulate in the Himalaya about the *migoi* and they appear to be very much part of the life of yak herders and firewood gatherers in the Tang valley.¹⁸⁹ During conversations on the subject no agreement could be reached on whether they are dangerous or not, though most participants to the discussions have agreed that an encounter with one of them would not be auspicious. The *migoi* is rarely, if ever, seen but often felt as an invisible presence in the forest or when traveling on an isolated mountain slope. The reason for the depiction of this couple is difficult to assess. The *migoi* considered as a threat can be assimilated to the Eight Dangers. However, the image of this peaceful pair depicted next to couples of

¹⁸⁷ Karmay H. p. 104.

¹⁸⁸ In Ogyen Choling, the villagers identify the *migoi* as *chu gred* associating the yeti with water and streams, information given by Kunzang Choden during my field visit in 2018. The Himalayan 'yeti' has been the central character of numerous stories, scientific research, movies and cartoons. To my knowledge, the most recent scientific article is by Edward and Barnett published in 2015, and Taylor's book published in 2017.

¹⁸⁹ Choden 1997: pp. 19-21.

grazing deers is harmless enough for them to be considered as sentient beings and as such worthy of Tārā's immense compassion.



60. The *migo* couple depicted on the left lower side of the White Tārā. (Detail from Fig. 59) (IMG 1318)

On the right side of the central White Tārā, the Buddha Akṣobhya (mi bskyob pa) is shown touching the earth with his right hand and holding an upright gold vajra set on the palm of his resting left hand: this is the unique representation of the Buddha Akṣobhya in the temple. Next to him rises a rock formation in the shape of a vajra. As the head of the Vajra Family, Akṣobhya is the strong, imperturbable and calm Buddha who dispels anger, one of the poisons which taints the karma. He is a formidable protector attested to by his multiple images displayed on the wall of the Sumtsek in Alchi in Ladakh.¹⁹⁰ Without forgetting that in his Abhirati Paradise (mngon par dga' ba) he welcomes men and also women. In this context they are called 'feminine jewels', are free from their unfortunate inherent traits and he promises them an afterlife without pain or suffering. Protection and salvation are the main functions of the Buddha Akṣobhya and of the goddess Tārā.

¹⁹⁰ Goepper 1999: p. 28, Goepper has counted 1063 images of Akṣobhya on the eastern walls of the Sumtsek in Alchi.

Their emphasis would be the rationale behind the seemingly unexpected presence of Akṣobhya on the painting.

On that painting, the artist and his patron Ugyen Dorji have represented the goddess in her most popular forms, the white and the green. The White Tārā, together with Amitābha and Uṣṇīṣavijayā would then complete the trinity of Long Life and, with the addition of the Green Savior, amplify and reinforce the theme and the soteriological powers of Tārā.

Another popular way to pray to Tārā is through the recitation of the prayer to the Twenty-One Tārā. The translation of *l'Éloges en Vingt et un Hommages*, the text from the first Dalai Lama (dge 'dun grub pa dpal bzan po: 1391-1475) reveals the poetic expression of these texts.¹⁹¹ They are a glorification of the multiple qualities of the goddess, her origin, her body and her activities which are propitiated through these homages. The benefits brought by the regular practice of this prayer are numerous and can operate in the present life by preventing a premature death as well as warding off demons and illnesses and also avoiding an unfortunate rebirth.¹⁹²

The Depiction of Dorje Lingpa within the Deities of Long Life

Represented between the White Tārā on his right side and the Deities of Long Life on his left side, Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405) the Treasure Revealer, (Fig. 61) seen among them is assimilated to longevity. The image of the treasure revealer is located between the two goddesses, White Tārā and Uṣṇīṣavijayā. If the entrance door of the shrine physically separates them, he is linked to the goddesses by the alignment of the Buddhas of Confession traversing the entire composition from south to north.

¹⁹¹ Arènes p. 205, note 208 indicates: 'Cf. *dge' dun grub pa sgrol ma phyag 'chal ñer géig gi ṭikka [sic] rin po che'i phren ba*, in *The Collected Works (gsun 'bum) of the First Dalai Lama*, *dge 'dun grub pa*. Vol. 6 (CHA) pp. 59-73.'

¹⁹² Arènes p. 208.



61. Depiction of *tertön* Dorje Lingpa in the Drölma Lhakhang. (detail from Fig. 87)

The representation of the Treasure Revealer (*gter ston*) would suggest a portrait, though it is certainly nothing of the sort. The man had long passed away when the painting was made and the reality of his traits on the depiction would have been impossible to confirm. The artist would have depicted the *tertön*, who is the embodiment of Padmasambhava, with the idealized features of an eminent figure.¹⁹³ Dorje Lingpa is also depicted several times on the estate, and easily recognizable. With his *padma* hat (*pad zhwa*), *ḍamaru* and bell, we can see him on the wall of the private family shrine in the upper floor of the *utsé* (*dbus rtse*), on a *thangka* belonging to the temple collection, as a sculpted image in the Jowo Lhakhang, within the *dzokchen* lineage and here on the west wall of the Drölma Lhakhang.¹⁹⁴

In the recess between the *gochor* and the wall, Ugyen Dorji had enshrined Dorje Lingpa, his fifteenth-century ancestor and did not spare the gold which glows in

¹⁹³ I come back on that question in section 5.2.

¹⁹⁴ The temple collection includes a set of five *thangkas* dedicated to Dorje Lingpa. According to the oral tradition the set was commissioned by Ugyen Dorji's grandfather Tshokye Dorje.

the daylight diffused by the windows. Dorje Lingpa is magnificent on a throne sitting well above a crowd of worshippers. The painting is organized in registers in which he occupies the wider part at the center between deities above him, the realm of the humans below, and the protectors and the head of village at the bottom. At the top we see the Buddhas of Confession. Like a ribbon, this row of thirty-five Buddhas associate Dorje Lingpa with the three Deities of Long Life (tshe lha rnam gsum): the White Tārā, Uṣṇīṣavijayā and Amitāyus with the addition of the Medicine Buddha. Below the Buddhas, amid snow mountain peaks, the Protectors of the Three Families (rigs gsum mgon po) are represented composed of Avalokiteśvara (spyan ras gzigs) flanked by Mañjuśrī ('jam dpal) and Vajrapāṇi (phyag na rdo rje). Dorje Lingpa is sitting behind an ornate table loaded with ritual artefacts and groups of worshippers bringing him gifts. Being a tantric master he can be seen here performing a ritual in the presence of family members. Ugyen Dorji is sitting nearby on his right side, his wives and other ladies of the household handing white long ceremonial scarves *khatak* (kha btags). On the lower register, the white goddess Tseringma, leads another group of long life. She rides on a snow lion, wears flowing dresses and a crown of flowers and is surrounded by her four sisters (tshe ring mched lnga). Long life is associated with prosperity, and two mongooses and a jewel are placed below the sororal group. On the right side, the protector Penden Lhamo Düsölma (dpal ldan lha mo dud gsol ma), who is gnawing at a corpse, is cantering on her mule. Three men are seen at the extreme left corner of this painting. The two with red scarves *kabné* across their torsos could possibly be heads of the village, or the three of them family retainers.

The figure of Dorje Lingpa is set high on the wall and it is necessary to raise your head to see him or to step back to take in the 'portrait' in its entirety. His gaze reaches above his audience and a distance has thus been created between the viewer and the image. Ugyen Dorji has placed that painting in the shrine devoted to family celebrations. In that respect, Dorje Lingpa, who epitomizes the long living tradition of treasure revealers and also the inception of the family ancestry, represents in this context a symbol of perpetuity. The display could also be seen as the everlasting power bestowed on the family through their prestigious and religious filiation through the treasure revealer. On the more public side, it would be the affirmation of prestige and wealth of a noble man who wanted to establish

that in spite of the earthquake's devastation the family is still robust and resilient. The reconstruction of the temple and its rich decoration was an act of religious faith and an act of confidence in the future. And the social confirmation that the family remains strong and proud.

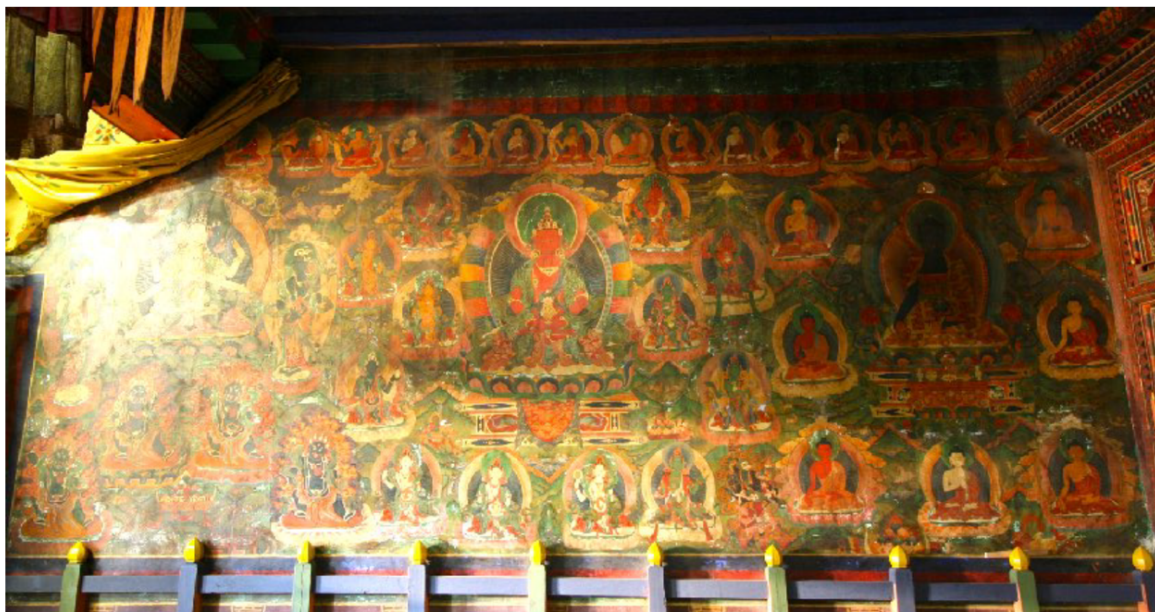
The composition of the painting reflects the societal order and its relation with the spiritual world. The buddhas and the deities are positioned on the highest register, the religious enlightened *tertön* sits below, the nobleman *chöje* (chos rje) underneath and the villagers at the bottom. At this time of feudality - the painting was made around 1902 - the villagers worked for the *chöje* who in return was responsible for their welfare.¹⁹⁵ It was also within the prerogative of the noble family to organize ceremonies and rituals to propitiate the deities to ensure that their ongoing benevolence would bring good health and abundance to the community. Therefore, and as illustrated on the painting, the *chöje* Ugyen Dorji is seen as the agent of prosperity interceding with the deities through his ancestor Dorje Lingpa.

The Buddha Amitāyus, the Medicine Buddha, the Goddess Uṣṇīṣavijayā

In the Jowo Lhakhang, we have seen the Three Deities of Long Life: the Buddha Amitāyus (tshe dpag med), the White Tārā (sgrol dkar) and Uṣṇīṣavijayā (gtsug tor rnam rgyal ma) depicted at the top of the Image 'Auspicious to See' above the Buddha Śākyamuni. In his Drölma Lhakhang on the ground floor, Ugyen Dorji had asked his artist to attach the Medicine Buddha (sangs rgyas sman bla) to the group, adding a tangible dimension to the power of the deities (Fig. 62).

Within the familial concept of this shrine, good health as an underlying condition for a long existence would be one of the primary concerns of the household. The Medicine Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru (sangs rgyas sman bla), depicted at the extreme right of the wall, is represented with a blue body of lapis lazuli as he is commonly referenced by or the beryl stone as informed by Gyurme Dorje. The Buddha holds a myrobalan flower in his right hand, has a seed, probably of myrobalan, and two

¹⁹⁵ The feudal system was abolished in 1958 by the Third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck ('jigs med rdo rje dbang phyug: 1929-1972) Phuntsho p. 568 and pp. 543-545 for a detailed explanation of the social structure before the reform.



62. The Mural of Long life with the Buddha Amitāyus in the center flanked by the Goddess Uṣṇīṣavijayā on the right and the Medicine Buddha on the left. (IMG 1390)

flower buds on the bowl he holds with his left hand resting on his lap.¹⁹⁶ The panel is rather simple in its composition, with the Buddha surrounded by his assembly of seven *tathāgatas*. The iconography of the *tathāgatas* on the panel supports their identification when compared to the description in the text of the *Permission Ritual* attributed to Śāntarakṣita (725-783) and reproduced by Gyurme Dorje in his 2014 article *The Buddhas of Medicine*.¹⁹⁷ These Buddhas grant protection and are propitiated for their remedial power against a wide scope of ailments ranging from physical and mental illnesses and diseases to the pain of childbirth, as well as hunger and thirst. As much as they relieve pain and would successfully cure life threatening conditions, the Medicine Buddha and his entourage are also efficacious against the three poisons (dug sum), desire, anger

¹⁹⁶ Dorje p. 129 and p. 284 n. 2. According to Dorje, *vaiḍūrya* should be identified as beryl rather than the traditional lapis-lazuli.

¹⁹⁷ Dorje p. 135, and p. 285 n.38-40. The text of Śāntarakṣita's permission ritual is from *The Rite of Reciting the Incantation of the Particularly Extensive Former Aspirations of the Seven Sugatas, Compiled from the Sūtra*, and can be found in the *Extended Transmitted Teachings of the Nyingma School* from Katok. For the names and full description of these *tathāgatas* see the Appendix chapter 2 section 2.1 nb. 2-2.8.

and ignorance, giving relevance to the facets of this deity acting in respect of this life and the after life.¹⁹⁸

The desire to be in good health, for as long as possible, is a legitimate aspiration. It also gives sufficient time to clean the bad deeds, past and present, by engaging in purification through confession and fasting. The regular practice of a devotee would include confession as a means to clear the stains and remove the sins. In the prayer to the Thirty-Five Buddhas of Confession in the *Vinayaviniścaya Upāliparipṛcchā*, and in the ritual of confession quoted by Skorupski, each of the Buddhas is described in evocative lines.¹⁹⁹ The thirty-five Buddhas are depicted in the shrine, among them Śākyamuni positioned in the center of their alignment, the seventeen others on each of his sides. Above the door of the shrine, the depiction of the Buddhas is arranged on two registers, the top one with Śākyamuni, and the lower one with the Buddha Vajrasattva (*rdo rje sems dpa'*) who is also propitiated for the removal of sins and the purification of obscurations. The ritual of confession opens with an homage to Śākyamuni and finishes with a strong commitment by all the devotees towards repentance and determination to improve their behaviour: 'I confess and reveal all my sins, and I promise not to commit them again.'²⁰⁰ The tradition recalls that the prayers to the Buddhas of Confession were recited on the first month of the Buddhist calendar by the family in Ogyen Choling, possibly in conjunction with fasting.

At the center, the Buddha Amitāyus is represented within a red and green halo and a wide mandorla. He wears an array of ornate and colorful scarves, intricate jewelry, and a crown topped with a flaming jewel. He holds the vase of long life and sits on a wide lotus placed on a pedestal embellished with peacocks and a red banner showing a mythical winged horse flying over mountains and clouds within

¹⁹⁸ The Atiśa's ritual, presented by Willson and Brauen, ill. 40-48 pp. 44-46, text p. 249 has an assembly of seven members, the six *tathagatas* and the central Medicine Guru. The additional two bodhisattvas Candrarocana and Sūryarocana are also mentioned. Raoul Birnbaum in his 1979 book on the subject quoted the draft translation worked by Alex Wayman called *Bhaishajya-guru, the Seven Brothers*, listing, as per the title, the 'Seven Brothers' assembly which includes the central guru. Birnbaum pp. 93 and 110 n.33.

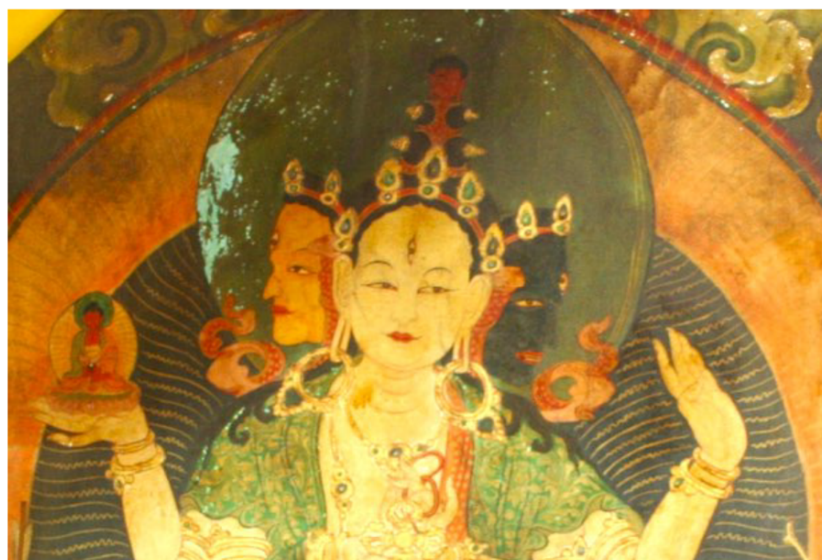
For details on the identification of this group, see Appendix chapter 2 section 2.1 nb. 2 to 2.8.

¹⁹⁹ Skorupski pp. 59-64, and description and names of each of the Buddhas in the Appendix chapter 2 sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5.

²⁰⁰ Skorupski p. 58.

Chinese longevity symbols. Next to the elevated pedestal, vessels of auspicious gifts are poised and held by a celestial in a pastoral landscape where animals graze peacefully. Amitāyus is surrounded by a large assembly comprising four gatekeepers holding weapons at the outposts and eight offering goddesses.

A couple of local protectors on horseback is represented at the bottom, on the demarcation point between the Buddha Amitāyus and the Medicine Buddha. These two fearsome riders have white lion heads, one has a green and the other a red body, and they ride a black and a pink horse respectively striding along within billowing flames and smoke. According to the description given by Nebesky-Wojkowitz, they are the green Dügön Sengdong (bdud mgon seng gdong) and the red Dūmo Sengdongma (bdud mo seng gdong ma).²⁰¹



63. The Goddess Uṣṇīṣavijayā. (Detail from Fig. 62)

At the extreme left of the panel, the goddess Uṣṇīṣavijayā, the ‘victorious Uṣṇīṣa’ is a warrior with three heads and eight hands. With her central hands she holds a *viśvavajra* and a noose close to her heart. On her right side she holds a small image of the Buddha Amitābha (‘od dpag med) on a lotus, an arrow, and she

¹⁶⁷ Nebesky-Wojkowitz p. 65. For details, see also the Appendix chapter 2 section 2.1 nb. 1-11 and 14.

performs the gesture of giving. On the left side she holds a flask of nectar topped by a jewel, a bow and performs the gesture of reassurance. This image of the goddess shows an unusual feature as the small red head of the Buddha Amitābha is seen at the top of her elaborate hairstyle (Fig. 63). Uṣṇīṣavijayā is the personification of a *dhāraṇī* which, when recited, alleviates the karmic obstructions which precipitate the devotees into a dreadful afterlife. She is depicted flanked by Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇī. Above her from high in the clouds two celestials pour nectar on her heads out of a libation vase topped by a peacock feather. Four protectors posted in the four directions complete her assembly. At the east, Acala (mi yo ba) with a flaming sword, at the south, Ṭakkirāja ('dod pa'i rgyal po) with a trident, at the west, Nīladaṇḍa (dbyug sngon can) with a club, and at the north, Mahābala (stobs po che) brandishes a sickle.²⁰²

To complete and close the section of long life, salvation and eternity in the shrine, a painting on the wood panel of the *gochor* of the door (Fig. 64) underlines and links the ensemble. By filling the gap of the door it visually unifies the theme making the east wall of long life one of long unbroken unity. The depiction of the 'Six Symbols of Long Life' (tshe ring drug skor) on the *gochor* of the entrance door is integrated within the iconography. The symbols of Chinese origin are an illustration of the theme displayed on the wall. On the painting, the depiction of the old man, presumably Shou-lao, has been adapted to the indigenous customs of wearing a Tibetan monk's robe and a large white scarf. With his hair pulled up in a chignon and holding a book he looks like an ascetic and philosopher. A small figure of the Buddha Amitābha emanates from a curling rainbow-colored ribbon which reaches the clouds in a sky with the moon and the sun, while a mythical bird soars downwards. The old man is sitting on an elaborate armchair, a *dākinī* presents him with a flask of immortal nectar, the scene is peaceful and serene. The symbols are depicted around the old man: the tree and the fruits, the deers, the cranes, the rocks and water. A cartouche, partly blocked by the protective barrier, is inscribed with a poem on longevity. Golden vajras as additional signs

²⁰² Mallmann pp. 389, 390, Willson and Brauen, p. 174 illustrations 425g, 425f, 425e, 425d and text p. 383, Chandra 1999: pp. 3751-52 and 3755. The representation is also similar to the representation of the goddess on the thangka from The Metropolitan Museum of Art reproduced in the catalogue of the exhibition, *Sacred Visions: Early paintings from Central Tibet* Kossak, S., Singer, J. C., Bruce-Gardner, R., cat. 6 pp. 64, 66.

of indestructibility frame the scene on the wooden pillars of the *gochor*.²⁰³ When looking at this part of the panel from the ground floor up to the ceiling, it is apparent that the rainbow encircling Amitābha spirals upwards to connect with the Buddha Vajrasattva (rdo rje sems dpa') depicted above the entrance door with the Buddhas of Confession, thereby confirming the association of this allegory with the general depictions.²⁰⁴



64. The symbols of long life depicted on the *gochor*. (IMG 1555)

The preservation of human life is a major preoccupation of devotees in the Tibetan tradition. In an often harsh climate and harsh living conditions, numerous tangible and intangible dangers - illnesses and evil spirits - loom for all sentient beings be they human or animal. Through its iconography with a predominance of the three deities dedicated to long and healthy life, the theme of the shrine dedicated to the goddess Tārā addresses the household values for the benefit of the family on the estate and the villagers.

²⁰³ Beer pp. 95-96.

²⁰⁴ See also Appendix chapter 2 section 2.3.

I also examine this theme in the next section, through the role of the women in Ogyen Choling and their possible influence on the iconography of the Drölma Lhakhang.

5 - The Main Themes

In this chapter, the following sections are dedicated to three themes that, in my view, are significant and deserve to be discussed as part of the study of the temple. I examine the possible role of the women on the iconography of the Drölma Lhakhang. I then explore the way the artist represents the Treasure Revealers as the embodiment of Padmasambhava continuing with how Padmasambhava's overarching images in the Jowo Lhakhang function during the annual Kangso ritual. The subject of sacred landscape concludes the chapter that also evokes the local protectors and their significance in the daily life of the people of Ogyen Choling.

5.1 The Agency of Women in Ogyen Choling

Women give life and nurture this precious gift. The Deities of Long Life (tshe lha) in the Drölma Lhakhang (sgrol ma lha khang) are particularly propitiated for their power in warding off all dangers to cut life short. In this section I examine the role of women and their possible influence on the iconography of the Drölma Lhakhang.

A Ritual in the Drölma Lhakhang

On a clear, cold evening in November 2016, it was already getting dark and a cool wind was announcing the approach of winter. I walked through the temple courtyard, left my shoes at the entrance where sandals and flip flops were lined up by the door. I had been invited to a family ritual in the Drölma Lhakhang. Before stepping over the threshold to the entrance of the shrine I glimpsed the figure of Padmasambhava auspiciously depicted above the door, and symbolically blessing the worshippers passing underneath.

Since my arrival at Ogyen Choling, I had felt each time I entered the Drölma Lhakhang dedicated to the goddess Tārā (sgrol ma), that a close relationship links the goddess to the women who have lived on the estate. This undercurrent pervading the Drölma Lhakhang was reinforced by the ceremony which was soon

to take place for the daughter of the twentieth generation of the descendants of Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405). She was expecting a baby, the first of the next generation and a cleansing ceremony, locally called *tsangma* (gtsang ma), had been organized in the temple's ground floor shrine.²⁰⁵

The preparations for the ceremony were going on. Cushions and blankets were placed on the floor along the walls. Family members and villagers were gathering and chatting together in the room when the lama came in, accompanied by his attendants. The future parents sat behind a low table at the side of the lama who took his seat under a silk canopy hanging from the ceiling. His vajra and bell were displayed in front of him together with a vessel full of rice. Young children were running about, excited by the coming event. The lama had come from the monastery of Towadrak (mtho ba brag), at the end of the Tang valley, to lead the Kangso (bskang gso) ritual that would last three days, and it was particularly auspicious to take this opportunity to welcome the unborn baby. The master of the ceremony received the white scarves *khatak* (kha btags) offered by the guests. They were rapidly piling up in front of the young couple who also received gifts and envelopes safely placed in a wooden box. Tea was served to the assembly out of a large pot and saffron rice ('bras sril) distributed. *Arak* (a rag) was flowing into the small cups held by the guests, and the level of conversation gradually increased. It was cold in the shrine and food, alcohol and the presence of friends were welcome.

Looking around the Drölma Lhakhang, I noticed the goddess Tārā represented in her numerous forms: twenty-one in the display cases, the White Tārā, Tārā the Savior from the Eight Dangers, a Green Tārā in the Sanctum together with the *ḍākinī* Dorje Pagmo (rdo rje phag mo). This accumulation of female forms of deities was intriguing compared to their absence upstairs in the Jowo Lhakhang. Padmasambhava, profusely represented upstairs, was unseen on these walls. I could also admire, here in the Drölma Lhakhang, the magnificent depiction of Dorje Lingpa, the local presence of Padmasambhava. In the Jowo Lhakhang, the

²⁰⁵ In this context, the *tsangma* also gives the opportunity to officialize the union and to introduce the couple to the community.

image of the *tertön* is positioned in the direct line of transmission after Padmasambhava; in the Drölma Lhakhang he is his incarnation.

The wives of Ugyen Dorji were also depicted on the same panel as Dorje Lingpa, standing beside their husband, confident, and active, handsome in their elegant dress. Questions started to gather in my mind about the women, their presence, their role and whether they would have possibly influenced the iconography of the shrine. To start my investigation I reviewed the different elements which characterized the life and the responsibilities of the women at Ogyen Choling to gather evidence for their motivations to influence the design of the shrine and their reasons to participate in the composition of its iconography.

To understand the importance of the women of Ogyen Choling, I looked into the story of their daily lives, their tasks and duties, and relied on my interpretation of the shrine's murals to better understand their religious aspirations.

Academic studies on Bhutanese women are a recent occurrence, and the history of the Kingdom has been written by male historians narrating the history of men. In most cases, the female agency is left in the shadows and confined to women's propensity to perform within their stereotypical activities as daughters, brides, mothers, or nuns.²⁰⁶ This ignores the fact that women were often industrious, strong, communicative and integrated in their social environment. Miranda Shaw, in *Passionate Enlightenment*, writes that '...one of my operative principles is to view women as active shapers of history and interpreters of their own experience rather than as passive objects or victims of history.'²⁰⁷ Therefore, through examples taken from the stories of their life, I was able to bring together elements which would inform my comprehension of the agency of women belonging to the social strata of the women in Ogyen Choling and their possible influence on the iconography of the family temple.

The Women around Dzongpön Ugyen Dorji

From where I was seated in the shrine, I could see the image of Dorje Lingpa represented on the west wall, partially hidden by a protective curtain. He gazed

²⁰⁶ Brooten p. 66.

²⁰⁷ Shaw p. 12.

over his progeny, the gold and the red of his garment glowing in the soft light. In that painting the family of *dzongpön* (rdzong pon) Ugyen Dorji, the temple donor, is represented below Dorje Lingpa (Fig. 65). Ugyen Dorji is shown seated next to a group of four women standing and handing out white scarves to an officiant during a ritual which could be commemorating the festivities of the consecration of the reconstructed temple in 1902.



65. *Dzongpön* Ugyen Dorji with his wives Ashi Sonam, Ashi Tsedon and family members. (Detail from Fig. 87)

The four women wear the same distinctive Bhutanese hairstyle and seem to be dressed similarly in their *kira* (dkyis ras) fastened with a large 'holding needle' ('thin khab') (Fig. 65). On close observation, differences appear. Two women stand in front of the group, each wearing a long red scarf - the *rachu* (rags chung) - typical of the noble women of that time.²⁰⁸ The taller lady, who is passing the

²⁰⁸ Myers pp. 103, 220, 222.

white scarf, wears a Tibetan-style striped apron on top of her green robe, while necklaces of gold and coral beads embellish the layers of her silk shirt and jacket. Her dress fastener is made of gold while the other women wear the same ornament made of silver. She visibly occupies a higher position compared to the other women of the group. This leads me to believe that she could be Ashi Sonam (a lce bsod nams), the first wife of Ugyen Dorji. By deduction, the smaller woman holding a horn could be his second wife, Ashi Tsedon (a lce tshe ldan), on whom Ugyen Dorji's hopes for a healthy offspring rested. Ashi Tsedon looks at her husband who looks at her in return. In doing so, he acknowledges her publicly. As usual during such important events, she would be the one to serve alcohol from the finely gilded horn she is holding. Like the first wife, she wears a *rachu*, the ceremonial scarf, wrapped around her shoulders and ending with long fringes falling near the feet.²⁰⁹

The two other women in the background look upwards towards the ancestor Dorje Lingpa and they seem to ensure that proper procedure is observed during the ceremony. One of the two, with both her hands resting on her legs, seems ready to perform a prostration. The women are likely to be family members, sisters or aunts, or very close servants. The group members are close to each other suggesting the intimacy of a family scene. Ugyen Dorji, the heir of the lineage sits nearby, serene and strong, supervising the proceedings.

Ugyen Dorji's marriage to Ashi Sonam did not bring children; he then married her younger sister Ashi Tsedon.²¹⁰ The young women came from a noble family with links to the prestigious Treasure Revealer Ratna Lingpa (rat na gling pa: 1403-1478) in their lineage. They were from Chusa in Lhuentse (lhun rtse), a district east of the Tang Valley, on an important trade route north to Tibet and to the eastern part of Bhutan and on to India.²¹¹

In addition to a perfect lineage and education, young brides were expected to provide their new household with healthy children, preferably boys. Ugyen Dorji's second marriage was successful as three sons were born from his union with Ashi Tsedon. Their second son was recognized as the ninth reincarnation of

²⁰⁹ Myers pp. 103, 219, 221. The *rachu* is nowadays narrower and shorter.

²¹⁰ Choden, Roder p. 21.

²¹¹ Pommaret 2009: pp. 54, 60.

the son of Pema Lingpa (padma gling pa), the Bhutanese Treasure Revealer, a situation in conformity with these kind of noble families with the reincarnation of an eminent master in each generation among their male descendants.²¹²

The sororal polygynous marriage of Ugyen Dorji was current practice within the *chöje* (chos rje) families of Bumthang, protecting the power and prestige received from their religious ancestors as well as keeping their properties, estates and lands within control of a nuclear family.²¹³

The Donor Ugyen Dorji, his Family and his Social-Environment

Ugyen Dorji, Jakar *dzöngpong* (bya dkar rdzon dpon) was faced with the task of rebuilding the estate after the 1897 earthquake. He was the seventeenth descendant of two Treasure Revealers: Dorje Lingpa on his mother's side and Pema Lingpa on his father's side. We see him seated on a pile of cushions, (Fig. 65) wearing several layers of garments, and wrapped in a large brown-colored mantel embellished with stylized Chinese long-life characters. Depicted with his ancestor Dorje Lingpa, he is portrayed carrying himself with the calm, caring demeanor of a noble gentleman from an eminent and powerful family. He has joined his hands in prayer and observes the scene unfolding (Fig. 65). There is no sign of his political authority, public role and responsibility as *dzongpön*, governor of the Bumthang district in his attitude and no indication revealing his religious aspirations. We cannot ascertain whether he was a tantric practitioner, however his religious education was certainly excellent as was expected of men of his rank.

The larger-than-life dimensions of the image of Dorje Lingpa, and the diminutive size of Ugyen Dorji and the four women follows the pattern of the representation of donors seen on Tibetan *thangkas* or murals. What is less usual is the standing and proud pose of the women and their size when compared with the man of the

²¹² Followed by Trülku Nuden Dorji (sprul sku nu ldan rdo rje :1930-1985) incarnate master of the nineteenth generation.

²¹³ A recent example of sororal polygyny is the marriage in 1979 (the public ceremony was held in 1988) of the fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck to four sisters: Ashi Dorji Wangmo, Ashi Tshering Pem, Ashi Sangay Choden and Ashi Tshering Yangdon. Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck: 2006 pp. 57, 58, illustration p. 117.

family. Ugyen Dorji was a gentleman of his time and social-environment and a good example of Pierre Bourdieu's definition of 'habitus'. Ugyen Dorji was inherently used to navigate and to adhere to the inherited non-spoken rules of the *chöje*, contracting the best possible marriage with daughters from a suitable family with the intention of safeguarding his inherited prestige and patrimony.²¹⁴ On this image he shows his subdued and at the same time solid presence as a support to the women rather than as an overpowering patriarch. He enables them, by giving them space, for they are not austere or very formal and seem free to move.

The wealth of the family is communicated by the piles of silk rolls and woven textiles topped by bags of coins, by the silver vessel of fruit, the Chinese porcelain cup and the gold gilded betel box arranged on the presentation table in front of Ugyen Dorji. Little is known about the family's fortune before the mid-nineteenth century when the power and wealth of the family certainly expanded. At that time, Ugyen Dorji's grandfather, Tshokye Dorji, was the chamberlain of the Trongsar *pönlop* (trong gsar dpon slob) before becoming the Trongsar *pönlop* himself in 1845 and holding that position until he retired to his estate in Ogyen Choling in 1853. Tshokye Dorji and his wife Aum Drölma had a son Tsöndrö Gyaltsen (brtson 'grus rgyal mtshan) and a daughter Ashi Yeshe (Al ce ye shes). Tsöndrö Gyaltsen, who was then the Jakar *pönlop*, disappeared in 1865 during a particularly violent episode of the Duars War.²¹⁵ The survival of the lineage and the honor of the family became the duty of his sister Ashi Yeshe.

Ashi Yeshe, the Mother of Ugyen Dorji, her Presence in the Shrine

Another mark of the importance of the women in the family and the women's presence in the ground floor Drölma Lhakhang can be found by studying the large statue of the Green Tārā (Fig. 66). It is said that the model for Tārā's face was none other than Ashi Yeshe, Tshokye Dorji's daughter. Tshokye Dorji commissioned the prominent sculpture, which is seen in the Sanctum of the Drölma Lhakhang. The Green Tārā is the original form of the goddess according

²¹⁴ Bourdieu: 1990 pp. 283-284.

²¹⁵ Phuntsho p. 468.

to Pierre Arènes, and qualified as being ‘éclatante de jeunesse’ and a ‘vierge divine’.²¹⁶ As a symbol of youth, beauty and innocence this is particularly fitting when it comes to celebrating a young lady. It is a mark of great esteem from a father to his daughter to have her represented by a goddess for whom devotion is endless.



66. The Green Tārā in the sanctum. Her face was supposedly modeled after Ashi Yeshe's.

67. Dorje Pagmo in the Sanctum, said to be made out of Ashi Yeshe's silver jewelry.

Later, Ashi Yeshe was highly regarded by her family, and to a large extent, was active in shaping her own destiny. She resisted a suitor who was not to her liking by exiling herself in the east. And by marrying Trinlé ('phrin las), the *chöje* from Tamzhing, after the disappearance of her only brother and heir of the family, she rescued the lineage. She would have considered it her responsibility to take a husband with impeccable ancestry even though she might have had other plans for her life. Ashi Yeshe's aunt was a nun, and records show that she herself had

²¹⁶ Going back to the narrative of the origin of Tārā by Tāranātha, P. Arènes p. 122 n.27 and 123. She is also named Varada, 'celle au don' (SM 91) and Ārya 'la noble' (SM 98) according to the description given by M.T. de Mallmann p. 369 1a.

received a strong religious education. She might have considered a religious life had her brother not disappeared.²¹⁷

It is probably necessary to recall that in the religious noble families of Bumthang, the matrilineal inheritance, current in some regions of the country where the women inherit the land, does not apply.²¹⁸ Among the *chöje*, the tradition of transmission of the lineage and, consequently, property is effected ‘through the bone’ (*rus*) which means through a male descendant.²¹⁹ Therefore, after the loss of the only male descendant of Tshokye Dorji, Trinlé came as a *makpa* (*mag pa*) in the family. At the same time he brought the lineage of the treasure revealer Pema Lingpa (*padma gling pa*: 1450-1521) his ancestor.²²⁰

Ashi Yeshe was certainly well learned and versed in religious subjects and probably received her education from the resident lama who would have been part of the household and resided on the estate, as was the custom among the *chöje* families. Though we do not know the name of the resident lama, the Tibetan lama Jangchub Tsönggrü (*byang chub brtson grus*: 1817-1856) is reported to have visited Ogyen Choling several times. It is during his tenure as Trongsar *pönlop* that Tshokye Dorji met the lama and invited him to his family estate.²²¹ Later, Jangchub Tsönggrü became the chaplain of the then Trongsar *pönlop*, Jigme Namgyal (*‘Jigs med rnam rgyal*: 1825-1881). The lama remains famous in Bhutan for fashioning a hat, topped by a raven head, that Jigme Namgyal would wear as a magic protection during battles against his enemies. Subsequently, this type of hat became the ‘Raven Crown’ (*bya rog gdong can*), the emblem of the Kings of Bhutan.²²²

²¹⁷ In particular she received the Cakrasaṃvara tantra initiation, see further in this text.

²¹⁸ For an indepth analysis of this practice see 2004 Pain and Deki *The Matrilineal Inheritance of Land in Bhutan*. In her 2015 article *Men have Titles, Women have Property, A Note on the History of Wangdu Choling, Bumthang, Bhutan*, Françoise Pommaret refers to Wangdu Choling in a specific historical context.

²¹⁹ Choden, Roder: 2012 p. 20 and Stein p. 107 on the female ‘flesh’ *sha*, as opposed to *rus*, ‘bone’.

²²⁰ Pommaret: 2009: p. 53.

²²¹ Pommaret: 2004: pp. 82-84

²²² Aris 1994: p. 56, Pommaret: 2004 p. 73.

Under the title *The Fascinating Life of Lama Changchub Tsönggrü (1817-1856) According to his Biography*,²²³ Françoise Pommaret translated the main events of the lama's life from his biography, *rdo rje 'dzin pa chen po 'phrin las mkha' khyab mchog gi rdo rje am byang chub brtson 'grus kyi rtogs pa brjod pa ngo mtshar nor bu'i snying po*²²⁴, written by Kunga Pelzangpo Shenpen Rolpe Dorje (kun dga' dpal bzang po gzhan phan rol ba'i rdo rje)²²⁵, one of his religious disciples. Through that text, and his active life, we learn that Jangchub Tsönggrü, when at Ogyen Choling '...gave the Demchog initiation to several members of the household. Ashi Yeshe also received the initiation...'. It was also during that visit that the lama tamed a *lu* (klu) and a *gyalpo* (rgyal po), two evil spirits tormenting her. By 'Demchog' I understand that she received the initiation to the *déchok* (bde mchog), the tantra of Cakrasaṃvara ('khor lo bde mchog). The fact that she received initiation to a highest class of tantra reveals her high degree of religious literacy and accomplishment. Also, her name being recorded by the disciple of Jangchub Tsönggrü, who wrote his biography, is a sign of her memorable personality.²²⁶

In the Drölma Lhakhang, Ashi Yeshe is represented twice. She is seen as Tārā, as a young person through the dedication of her father, and she is also seen as the *ḍākinī* Vajravārāhī Dorje Pagmo (rdo rje phag mo) (Figs. 66, 67). According to the local narrative, after her death, her son Ugyen Dorji gathered together her silver jewellery and had it cast into a sculpture of the *ḍākinī*. Dorje Pagmo has two main roles. She is the consort of Cakrasaṃvara at the centre of his mandala and, as is the case in the shrine, she is the *ḍākinī* who is the quintessence of Wisdom. As a tantric deity, she is towering above all beings. Naked, she dances and flies in the rarefied realm of the enlightened 'sky-goers' (mkha' 'gro ma). In the temple image, her grim smile shows the fangs of a semi-wrathful face, exposing a shift in iconography between the gentle and regal representation of

²²³ Pommaret 2004: pp. 73-89.

²²⁴ *rdo rje 'dzin pa chen po 'phrin las mkha' khyab mchog gi rdo rje am byang chub brtson 'grus kyi rtogs pa brjod pa ngo mtshar nor bu'i snying po*, dated 1859, Trongsar dzong woodblocks, vol. ka, 172 folios in Byang chub bka' 'bum, Thimphu; National Library.

²²⁵ No date is available for Kunga Pelzangpo Shenpen Rolpe Dorje.

²²⁶ Pommaret: 2004 pp. 82, 88, the biography was completed during the Year of the Sheep in 1859.

Tārā who gives and saves and the tantric *ḍākinī* on whom the practitioner would meditate, sparing no effort to reach absolute freedom.

As regards the size and the silver work involved, the mandorla is a spectacular piece of craftsmanship and Ugyen Dorji would have invested a considerable amount of the family fortune in commissioning this posthumous sculpture (Fig. 67). This donation accrues into an accumulation of merit for his mother, his family and for himself, in addition to creating a memorial. With its placement by the altar, the sculpture is the beneficiary of continuous propitiation: the ever-burning butter-lamps, the constant swirls of incense, the sound of prayers and rituals, the incantations of lamas, the devotions of worshippers and gifts from pilgrims and family members.

Pieces of jewellery worked into the sculpture were used by Ashi Yeshe. We can estimate that most of the items were necklaces, bracelets, headpieces, 'holding needles' ('thin khab) and brooches. They would have been gifts from her parents, her husband, and also perhaps from other members of the family. They were objects she certainly valued. These precious jewels, of a personal and intimate nature, touched her body; her neck, fingers, ears, chest, and they became relics 'deposited' in the sculpture, as a reliquary, located in the sacred space of the Sanctum in the Drölma Lhakhang. The Sanctum is the symbolic site where the Buddha resides in the shrine. The sculpture therefore could be considered a *depositio ad sanctos*, a placement, close to the god, which is believed to grant freedom from the *saṃsāra* after death and rebirth in heaven.²²⁷

The sculptures of the feminine and compassionate figure of Tārā and the semi-wrathful *ḍākinī* stand side by side behind the altar in the Sanctum of the shrine. We may never know the specific reasons which led to the choice of these images with their abundant symbolism to perpetuate the memory of Ashi Yeshe. We could suggest that Ugyen Dorji's decision to commemorate the memory of his mother through the representation of Dorje Pagmo would arise from the devotion of his mother to Cakrasaṃvara - she received the initiation of the Cakrasaṃvara tantra - and because Dorje Pagmo is the symbolic consort of Cakrasaṃvara. Also, the oral story recalls that Dorje Pagmo was the meditational deity *yidam* of Ugyen

²²⁷ Schopen 1997: p. 135.

Dorji.²²⁸ By meditating on this deity and by visualizing her regularly, eventually daily, Ugyen Dorji was calling upon and amplifying the presence of the *ḍākinī* in the shrine.

An historical event took place around mid-1858 which involved Ashi Yeshe's father Tshokye Dorji and Jigme Namgyel ('jigs med rnam rgyal: 1825–1881) who was the Trongsar *pönlop* at that time. During a conflict between the two men, Jigme Namgyel decided to set siege to Ogyen Choling. According to the Bhutanese scholar Karma Phuntsho, among the reasons triggering the assault would have been Ashi Yeshe's refusal to consider him as a suitor. Jigme Namgyel was a young and ambitious politician rising to power and opposition from a woman was certainly not something he would have expected.²²⁹

The siege of the estate lasted for several days and ended through the clever intervention of another woman from the family, a nun, the aunt of Ashi Yeshe, when she hurled a stone at the assailants. The stone had the shape of a pig face and fell at the feet of Jigme Namgyel. It was seen as a bad omen and the order was given to put an end to the siege.²³⁰ The wit and the strength of this nun freed Ogyen Choling, which had been cut off from any communications. Even access to water had been restricted, the story stating that only the water necessary for the temple offerings every morning was authorized to pass through the blockade.²³¹ As is the case for most of the women, we know little about this nun, the sister of Tshokye Dorji. Though we do not remember her name, the story is still told today of the nun who became a family hero.²³²

²²⁸ Conversation with Ugyen Rinzin during fieldwork in October 2016.

²²⁹ Phuntsho p. 438.

²³⁰ Phuntsho p. 439.

²³¹ The estate is built on a rock hill, and the water had to be fetched from a fountain outside the protection walls.

²³² The name of this nun seems to have disappeared from the memory of the family and villagers. However, the cave where she meditated, not far from Ogyen Choling, is still seen today.

Gelongma Palmo (dge slong ma dpal mo) and the Fasting (smyung gnas) Ritual

In a much earlier era, another nun became a hero. Numerous texts from the fifteenth century relate the life of Gelongma Palmo, represented in the shrine above Avalokiteśvara (Fig. 68). She is revered, particularly by women in Bhutan, and is said to have meditated in the monastery of Towadrak (mtho ba brag) in the north of the Tang valley.²³³



68. Gelongma Palmo holding a *khakkhara* and a bowl depicted above Avalokiteśvara. (Detail of Fig. 53)

The narrative of her life story tells us of a Kashmiri princess who fled a marriage and a family life to dedicate herself to religion. While a nun she contracted leprosy, bringing on herself a miserable time of rejection and suffering until she was thrown out of the monastery where she was living. Physically impaired, she wandered in the wild, meditating in caves and worshipping Avalokiteśvara. She received from the Bodhisattva a fasting ritual that she practiced with dedication and was cured from the terrible disease, subsequently gaining her way to enlightenment. For Gelongma Palmo, her affliction and intense suffering were the consequences of her present and past karmic obscurations. Her fasting aimed

²³³ Choden 1997: p. 254 and 262 n. 2 and Thinley p. 260.

at the purification of her body and at the cleansing of wrongdoings. The fasting ritual she initiated is still popular in the Himalaya and is mostly practiced by women, as Yvette Vargas-O'Brian observed during her fieldwork in Nepal and Tibet. Not only do the number of women outnumber the number of men practising the ritual but it is commonly called a 'woman's practice'.²³⁴ The rationale of this imbalance came to light with the realization that women grow up within an environment where the Buddhist doctrine highlights their inborn flaws. Examples abound of texts describing how women are inherently impure, irremediably stained and beyond redemption. 'A woman should look upon her body as full of faults.... This body is a vessel of impurity, full of stinking filth. It is a rotten pit...' according to the Mahāyāna Strīvartasūtra.²³⁵ In the fourth century, the Indian philosopher Asaṅga wrote in his *Bodhisattvabhūmi* that: 'All women are by nature full of defilement and of weak intelligence.'²³⁶

By taking the decision to fast, women gained control of their bodies in an attempt to overcome their inherent filth which is the ingrained societal belief of their own tainted nature. The self-denial of food would relieve their bodies from pollution and would also cleanse their *karma* through the acquisition of merits. The last verse of the prayer of the Gelongma Palmo fasting ritual, translated by Roger Jackson, is an appeal to a rewarding afterlife out of the *saṃsāra*: 'May he [Avalokiteśvara] quickly save us from the worldly ocean agitated by waves of suffering, And place us in the bliss of a liberated state.'²³⁷

The *nyungné* (smyung gngas) ritual, which implies fasting and also observing silence, was conducted at Ogyen Choling where the women practised the ritual on the first month of the Buddhist calendar. They were perhaps joined by the men of the family and the whole household. During the first month of every year, the ritual is also followed by devotees across three days at the monastery of Towadrak up in the Tang valley.²³⁸

²³⁴ Vargas-O'Brian p. 159 n.7.

²³⁵ Quoted by Havnevik 1989: p. 27.

²³⁶ Asaṅga quoted by Willis 1985: p. 69.

²³⁷ Jackson 1997: p. 292.

²³⁸ Oral communication with Ugyen Rinzin and Kunzang Choden during fieldwork in 2016 and 2018.

The Role of Women and Their Agency

Fasting and food, prosperity and the care for life are intimately connected to women. Hereunder, I explore how these relationships function at Ogyen Choling.

In most societies, women are in control of food; and food preparation is seen as a woman's prerogative.²³⁹ Bhutan is no exception. If a woman does not cook herself she supervises the kitchen, gives advice on what and how meals are put together, at what time, for whom and with what types of ingredients. She controls the quantities, supply, quality, process and delivery. The reverse effect of this situation, poor administration, preparation and storage, could lead to chaos and disgruntled, hungry family members. In places like Ogyen Choling, where all produce was grown on site, bad planning and failure to create reserves could create shortages of food. The lady of the house had, and still has, the responsibility of providing regular and substantial meals for her household, a responsibility which necessitates a *savoir faire* acquired through the years by practising and observing her mother and grandmother, who pass on their role and knowledge to the younger females. The management of food, from its production to the dinner table, required skillful coordination.

In the mountainous environment of the Tang valley, the growing of produce is a difficult endeavor due to the altitude, the weather and the paucity of arable land. As was the case with most of the gentry, the family of Ogyen Choling had a second estate, located in Lhuentse in the east at the lower altitude of 1,500 meters which made it possible to cultivate rice and fruit in a sub-tropical climate.²⁴⁰

For the landed noble family in this self-reliant agrarian economy, the most valued commodities were grain, butter, salt and meat. These goods were stockpiled for consumption, and as assets they amounted to a demonstration of prosperity and wealth. A quantity of them were also put aside for trade and barter.²⁴¹ The wide circulation of money as a means of payment only started gradually in the 1950s

²³⁹ Bynum pp. 191-192.

²⁴⁰ Every year in November, after having propitiated the local deities during the Kangso ritual, the household, together with the villagers, and the herds, would embark on a three-day journey walking over the high pass of Rodong La at 4,019 meters to reach the verdant valley in Lhuentse, Choden, Roder pp. 50-51.

²⁴¹ Choden 2008: p. 61.

during the reign of the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (jigs med rdo rje dbang phyug: 1929-1972).²⁴² Therefore, at the beginning of the twentieth century, trade and barter were still used to exchange commodities and to procure goods which could not be grown or manufactured on site.²⁴³ The storage, utilization and control of the resources were the responsibility of the wife of the *chöje*, the lady of the house who was the diligent and competent guardian of the family wealth.

In her book *Chilli and Cheese: Food and Society in Bhutan*, Kunzang Choden gives an account of the relationship between these food items and their omnipresence in social and religious events and in business transactions prior to the agrarian reform. From her childhood memories, when she observed and followed her mother, Kunzang vividly recounts life on the estate, the tasks of the women and the servants attending to their daily domestic chores and the preparation for the celebrations and rituals punctuating the year at Ogyen Choling.

Through her narrative we learn how her mother measured the grain and flour for daily meals while meticulously keeping account of the quantity of grain for seed, trade, gifts or loan.²⁴⁴ In time of emergency and between two harvests, the surplus of grain would be loaned to farmers in difficulty. The land produced a variety of cereals: buckwheat, barley and wheat grown in the Tang valley and red and white rice on the Lhuentse estate. After the harvest they would be stored in the ground and on the first floor of the *utsé* (dbus rtse) in large containers each of which could contain an average of three to five tons of grains.²⁴⁵ Part of the rice was traded with Tibet in exchange for salt, a necessary nutriment used by the household and the villagers. It was essential to bring back a sufficient quantity of salt required for a year since the snow obstructing the passes in the winter prevented winter trade expeditions.

A part of the grain was also kept for the distillation and production of *arak* and *chang*. It was the task of the lady of the house to provide an ongoing supply of

²⁴² The first bank, the Bank of Bhutan (BOB), opened in 1969 and began issuing bank notes for the national currency, the ngultrum.

²⁴³ Rhodes: p.80, coins were in circulation for external trade and were used as gifts from the sixteenth century.

²⁴⁴ Choden 2008: p. 63, in 1950 between 30 to 45 persons were fed daily on the estate.

²⁴⁵ Choden 2008: pp. 65, 66.

these drinks of the highest quality. Her ability to make the best beverage was highly praised and it was her duty to train her daughters and to hand on her expertise to the next generation. The reputation of the house was partly determined by her ability to make the beverage as it was served at social occasions, receptions of important visitors, on the day of the celebration of Losar (lo gsar), for the Tsechu (tshes bcu) and during the Kangso (bskang gso). In *Ogyen Choling* the making of alcohol was traditionally entrusted to a woman trained and supervised by the lady of the house.²⁴⁶

Another valuable product was the butter made from the herds of yaks and cows grazing on the non-arable lands. The butter was churned by the women in the kitchen for immediate consumption or produced by the herders in the fields. It was then wrapped in rhododendron leaves and brought to the estate to be piled high in the butter room.²⁴⁷ Besides its use for cooking or being mixed with tea, and for the butter-lamps, butter is an essential component when kneaded with flour, for the production of the offerings (gtor ma) arranged on the altars during the rituals. Large quantities of butter are required as approximately one hundred kilograms of butter and two hundred kilograms of flour are necessary to make the *torma* for the three days of the Kangso.²⁴⁸ Though most traditional meals are composed of rice, cottage cheese and vegetables, meat - usually from pigs - was appreciated mostly in the time of festivals and was served to visitors. The meat was dried and kept in the ventilated top floor under the roof of the *utsé*. During the Kangso, meat is displayed on the altar as an indispensable offering to the wrathful deities.

Cooking for the three days of the Kangso ritual was an achievement for the lady of the house who had, and who still has, to supervise the cooking done in two kitchens to produce the quantities required to feed family, guests, the head lama and his attendants as well as the villagers.²⁴⁹ She had to plan and ensure that the

²⁴⁶ Choden 2008: pp. 105, 106, during the Tsechu (tshes bcu) 250 people were invited for the meal and served *chang*. Pommaret 2007: p.138, due to socio-economic reasons, in the 1970s, the Tsechu was merged into the Kangso.

²⁴⁷ Choden 2008: p. 182.

²⁴⁸ Choden 2008: p. 42.

²⁴⁹ Coordinating and providing the food for the guests during the Kangso is still the responsibility of the lady of the house.

recipes were executed to the taste of her guests following precise quantities of ingredients and that the special diet of monks and nuns was observed. For the celebration of Losar marking the beginning of the year, rituals were also performed and the logistics and preparations for this day involved the distribution of gifts and several meals served to an array of guests.²⁵⁰ On this occasion it was the custom to give each villager a set of new clothes. All throughout the year the women of the family and the weavers would have worked to ensure that the garments would be ready for this day.²⁵¹

A good part of the success of the rituals, which were performed to please and conciliate the deities in return for their benevolence and protection, was the responsibility of the women, particularly the wife of the *chöje*. In the midst of the excitement of the preparations and the anticipation preceding the events her attention to detail was critical, for the precise observation of the ritual protocol was essential to ensure its success.

Considering all these observations, the result would have been that women were faced with considerable responsibilities. The weight of their duties was compounded by the frequent absence of the men travelling for trade or to their *dzong* to deal with the administration of their region. Most of the time staying on the estate, women were often alone in taking decisions, and in figuring out the best solutions to solve issues which could arise at any time. In moments of uncertainty and gravity they would have recourse to divine support, a deity to whom they could confide and pray for the wellbeing of their household and the safety of their men on the roads. Within this context, the appeal of Tārā would be undeniable, a goddess who comforts and helps. The goddess, with her qualities of compassion and perceived accessibility would listen to them and ease their distress.

Women and the Religious Domain

In addition to being the managers of the household's daily life necessities, they were also active in managing the religious activities of the family. They would be

²⁵⁰ On that day, an archery competition was also organized and an ongoing supply of *chang* and food was brought to the contestants. Choden 2008: p. 22.

²⁵¹ Choden 2008: p. 17.

in contact with the lamas visiting the estate and have frequent communications with lamas and the religious hierarchy of the monastic communities established in the nearby valleys, sometimes at the highest level.

The women did not have the possibility of joining a monastery for schooling, as this was the reserve of boys. Young girls were educated at home and learned how to run and provide for a large household. They would also receive a religious education from the family lama and by attending and taking part in the frequent rituals. Growing up they would soon be involved in the organization of large ceremonies. It would also happen that their agency in that domain could influence the course of historical events beyond the strict religious matters.

I refer to a few examples to show the relationship and the activities of women in the religious sphere. Among them, I relate the case of Rinchen Pelmo (rin chen dpal mo), the wife of the *chöje* of Tamzhing (gtam zhing), who became the first Royal Grand Mother, though the title was not used at the time. From the biography of the lama Jangchub Tsöndrö (byang chub brtson grus) we know that Richen Pelmo invited the lama who was returning from his pilgrimage to Tsari. At that time she was residing at the monastery of Lhalung (lha lung) in Lhodrak (lho brag) which is the seat of the Pema Lingpa (padma gling pa) tradition in Tibet. Richen Pelmo was the mother of a young son who was the speech reincarnation of Pema Lingpa the Eighth Peling Sungrul (pad gling gsung sprul) and she also had a daughter Pema Chöki (pema chos skyid).²⁵²

Jigme Namgyal ('jigs med rnam rgyal), then a promising young man, was a senior courtier for the Trongsar *pönlop* (krong gsar dpon slob) who at that time, in 1845, was Tshokye Dorji, the *chöje* of Ogyen Choling.²⁵³ While trading in Tibet Jigme Namgyal had met Pema Chöki a few years earlier and was soon rising to the position of Trongsar *pönlop* that he took in 1853.²⁵⁴ In the meantime, lama Jangchub Tsöndrö had become his lama to whom he confided his hesitations

²⁵² Pommaret 2004: p. 80, Rinchen Pelmo was the mother of the Pema Lingpa's speech incarnation, the Eighth Peling Sungrul (pad gling gsung sprul) Rinpoche Kunzang Tenpe Nyima (rin po che kun bzang bstan pa'i nyi ma: 1843-1891).

Imaeda and Pommaret 1987: p. 19, Lhalung is located a few days walk from the Tamzhing monastery, which is in the Chökor valley of Bumthang.

²⁵³ Phuntsho p. 431.

²⁵⁴ Phuntsho p. 431, he met Pema Chöki '...sometime around 1847...'.

before making a decision to become a monk. The lama, who was not in favor of celibacy, encouraged Jigme Namgyal to take a wife envisioning that a union with Pema Chöki would be auspicious. Pema would bring her prestigious lineage as a direct descendant of Pema Lingpa and comfortable means from her wealthy family. This did not escape the attention of the lama as resources would prove of great use for building the political career of Jigme Namgyal.²⁵⁵ The marriage was celebrated around 1853 and Pema Chöki gave birth to the first King of Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck in 1862 (o rgyan dbang phyug: 1862-1926).²⁵⁶ Thus Rinchen Pelmo became the first royal grandmother, elevating her family to become the origin of the Bhutanese royal dynasty.

The precise narratives of these encounters are not recorded, but it is however highly possible that Rinchen Pemo talked to the lama about her daughter while visiting Lhalung. This conversation would have helped in the development of the following events as it gave signals to Janchub Tsöndrü to encourage Jigme Namgyal to marry Pema, a young and most eligible young woman (see note 223).

Women were also donors, in accordance with their wealth and status. This is a long tradition in the Tibetan world. History narratives recount that the future Queens of the Emperor of Tibet Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po: 617-649/50), the princess Wenchen, and the possibly legendary princess Bhṛkuṭī,²⁵⁷ brought images with them to Lhasa. From Nepal, Bhṛkuṭīdevī would have arrived with several statues of Jowo Akṣobhyavajra (jo bo mi bskyod rdo rje), Maitreya (byams pa) and Tārā (sgrol ma) while from China, Wencheng came with a golden statue of Jowo Śākyamuni for which it is said that they built the Ramoche (ra mo che) and the Jokhang (jo khang) temples.²⁵⁸ In the Sumtsek (gsum brtsegs) in Alchi, women from the nobility are represented offering strings of pearls to Tārā and bringing gifts to the temple.²⁵⁹

To quote an example closer to Ogyen Choling, in the sixteenth century in the eastern region of Bhutan, the great granddaughter of Pema Lingpa, the nun Ani

²⁵⁵ Phuntsho p. 436.

²⁵⁶ Phuntsho pp. 436, 479, Ugyen Wangchuck was the second son of the couple.

²⁵⁷ Uebach p. 32 and note 4, Dorje p. 8.

²⁵⁸ Dorje p. 7-8 and Stoddard 2010: p. 160-166 for a discussion about the foundation texts on the building of these temples during the early history of the Tibetan empire.

²⁵⁹ Goepper 1996: pp. 79, 85 and 136, 143.

Chöten Zangmo (a ni mchod rten bzang mo: (b. circa 1535) founded a monastery in Dramétsé (dgra med rtse). A community of monks is still living at the monastery where the *Dance of the Drummers of Dramétsé*, composed by the brother of the nun who saw the drummers in a dream, is performed every year.²⁶⁰



69. A Kagyur (bka' gyur) cover made in the *kushü* style of weaving, in the Jowo Lhakhang.

More recently in 1968, the Queen Mother Her Majesty Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck built a temple in Paro close to the Kyichu Lhakhang where the royal family gathers every year to pray for the country and for the King.²⁶¹

Though we do not know whether the female entourage of Ugyen Dorji donated to their temple in Ogyen Choling, his grandmother, the wife of Tshokye Dorji, Aum Dolma and her weavers gave their time and offered their talent to weave the intricate patterned fabric of the covers for the one hundred and eight volumes of the Kagyur (bka' gyur) kept in the Jowo Lhakhang (Fig. 69). They were made

²⁶⁰ Pommaret 1990: pp. 107, 232-233 and Pommaret 2009: p. 53.

²⁶¹ Wangchuk p. 119.

around the 1850s using the *kushü* (skud shud) weaving technique of silk patterns on cotton which comes from Kurtö in the eastern district of Lhuentse.²⁶² We also have a record of Aum Drölma, who gave jewels and silver to the lama Janchug Tsöndrü, who then blessed her.²⁶³ The mother of Tshokye Dorji is said to have donated a victory banner (rgyal mtshan) to the Trongsar *dzong* requesting the deities for one of her sons to become the Trongsar *pönlop*.²⁶⁴ Women of the family, probably the grandmothers of the current generation, stitched the brocade surrounding the thangkas of the temple collection. The mantels on each of the sculptures of the *Twenty-One Manifestations* of Tārā were created and sewn by Kunzang Choden who also regularly makes offerings of pieces of jewelry to some of the images in the temple.

Through donations, women would gain blessings and merits and with their religious education they were firmly engaged in the religious domain through their interaction with prominent lamas. When they were wives of religious dignitaries, their status placed them close to the political life in a theocratically governed society. From this position they could facilitate family and political alliances and also could jeopardize or damage a reputation, implying that their agency behind the scenes of the public arena could be significant.

The political history of Bhutan is largely androcentric and the notable exception of a young woman with a 'boy's name' Tshokye Dorji (1680-1698) is worth mentioning. At the age of fifteen she was officially designated as the successor to her 'grandfather' the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal: 1594-1651).²⁶⁵ The succession of the Zhabdrung had been a long and complex process. In reality, Tshokye Dorji was not the granddaughter of the

²⁶² Personal communication with Kunzang Choden, April 2018. Pommaret 2009: p. 54, Aum Dolma came from Trashigyang (kra shis gyang) in the far east of Bhutan and she probably brought her weavers to Ogyen Choling when she came as the bride of Tshokye Dorji. It was the custom for noble women to keep their weavers who would accompany them to their new dwelling after their wedding. The ancestors of the royal family moved with their weavers when they relocated from the Kurtö region to Bumthang, Myers pp. 176-179.

²⁶³ Pommaret 2004: p. 82.

²⁶⁴ Information received from Kunzang Choden during fieldwork in 2018.

²⁶⁵ Imaeda 2013: pp. 34-37, the difficulties surrounding the succession of the Zhabdrung has been thoroughly researched by Yoshiro Imaeda for his 1987 PhD thesis. It is the subject of his book *The Successors of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel Hereditary Heirs and Reincarnations* published in 2013.

Zhabdrung but the daughter of the Desi Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1696). The Desi was a nephew of the Zhabdrung, as such the heir to the lineage of Gya (rgya), and designated by him as his successor on the throne of the Drukpa. The unique son of the Zhabdrung, Jampel Dorje (1631-1675) who was suffering from an unknown disability had been recognized as unfit to succeed his father.²⁶⁶

Following revenge, machinations, and a coup orchestrated by the Punakha *dzongpön* Gendun Choepel in 1694, Tenzin Rabgye, deeply affected by the killing of his trusted chamberlain during the turmoil, left his office and retired to Tango monastery. Gendun Choepel then placed the young woman Tshokye Dorji on the throne. He argued that her authority was legitimate as the last heir of the lineage of the Gya, and he promoted himself as her regent. The power was in the hands of Gendun Choepel while Tshokye Dorji the ‘fake man, puppet head of state’ occupied the post of Desi until her untimely death in 1697 at the age of nineteen from small pox that she contracted during the epidemic in 1695-1696.²⁶⁷ During her short reign she nominated the fourth Je Khenpo (rje mkhan po) Damchö Pekar (1639-1707). Gendun Choepel’s rule was not without critics though he remained the Desi until 1701 when he was killed at Punakha during an uprising against him.²⁶⁸

The turn of events which put Tshokye Dorji at the head of the Drukpa theocracy, even for a few years, is extraordinary and happened through the destiny of her birth. Her agency and power were probably unassuming and limited during her short time in the political arena which was very much the realm of the men surrounding her. Should she have been granted the possibility of a proper education to supplement her natural authority from birth, she might have played a more fulfilling role than being the puppet of the strongman. The levers of power were held by men educated in monastic institutions controlled by men. From an early age boys would learn the scriptures but would also acquire competencies in literacy and numbers that they could put into practice in the public domain. They

²⁶⁶ Imaeda 2013: p. 19.

²⁶⁷ Phuntsho p. 294.

²⁶⁸ Imaeda 2013: pp. 37-38, 41.

would also be in contact with potential benefactors and grow within the political nexus of the theocracy.²⁶⁹

These examples show that women are in the background of political life and are very rarely brought out of the anonymity of their domestic realm. Though distant from public affairs their influence can be significant. Similarly, at Ogyen Choling it is probably right to assume that the decisions implying the external world and the political sphere were taken by the men, father, grandfather, brothers and husband. Women usually were involved in decisions closer to home and within the enclosure of the estate.

The temple was very much part of their life and their frequent, possibly daily, worshipping. In particular, the Drölma Lhakhang and the dominant presence of the Deities of Long Life, the Medicine Buddha and Tārā reflect their religious preoccupations mostly addressing the concerns and the preservation of human life. Tārā with her qualities of compassion and perceived accessibility would listen to the women, the goddess being an inspiration for a gender born with a stained karma. The dim light and the blue tone of the color palette in the Drölma Lhakhang induce a feeling of calm and profound tranquility propitious for the intimacy of individual prayers, fasting rituals, silence and private family celebrations.

This is a departure from the flamboyant iconography of Śākyamuni and Padmasambhava which prevails upstairs in the Jowo Lhakhang where formal and public ceremonies are performed. In the Jowo Lhakhang, the female presence is limited, reduced to a few numbers of female deities, consorts and *yoginī* on the murals and among the sculptures standing in the display cases. There is no representation of Padmasambhava in the Drölma Lhakhang or in the ground floor beside his representation on the lintel above the entrance door of the shrine. On this depiction, he is dressed as a *paṇḍita* as a reminder of his vast knowledge

²⁶⁹ Pain, Pema p. 432, in their 2004 article *The Matrilineal Inheritance of Land in Bhutan*, consider that this situation continues, giving men the mobility to move into the government institutions. In the 1960s onward this situation led to the low number of women in Bhutan participating within public life at the national level.

and omnipresence. He is also a protector and a link between the shrines located on each floor.



70. White Tārā in the Drölma Lhakhang. (IMG 9850)

With these considerations in mind it would be appropriate to see in the iconography of the Drölma Lhakhang the participation of the women in its elaboration and their influence in the choice of the themes displayed. Entrusted with their essential task of safeguarding, nurturing and perpetuating the prosperity of the *chöje* of Ogyen Choling, in this life and beyond, they would have requested Ugyen Dorji to create within the family temple a shrine for Tārā, a goddess to their image, reflecting their aspirations, in whom they could confide, propitiate and whom they trust to bring them support. They would also have asked to be protected by the essential Buddha of good health, one committed to find a cure for ailments threatening to curtail the lives under their care. Adding the help of Amitāyus and White Tārā (Fig. 70) they would have, on the wall of their shrine gathered in front of them, all the possible insurance against adversity.

I was in the Drölma Lhakhang, the *tsangma* was over, the lama was in conversation with a group of villagers, and the children were asleep carried in the arms of their fathers. It was time for everyone to leave with the blessing of the deities in the shrine and the protection of Padmasambhava above the door. In a

fleeting moment I could conjure up the image of the women of the past. Aum Drölma, Ashi Yeshe, Ashi Sonam and Ashi Tsedon, at the end of the day on a winter evening under the moonlight and the stars, wrapped in their woollen double *kira* and bundling up their long flannel scarves against the wind and the cold, walking past the Lukhang in the courtyard and rushing up to the shrine to confide their pains and hopes to Tārā, at the same time to thank and propitiate the goddess for the spiritual comfort she had brought to them and to their families.

5.2 *Padmasambhava, Dorje Lingpa and the Treasure Revealers*

Myths abound surrounding the tantric master Padmasambhava, who is credited with bringing Buddhism to Tibet during the eighth century.²⁷⁰ He is certainly the prominent figure of the Nyingmapa (rnying ma pa). Allegedly, he has concealed numerous ‘spiritual treasures’ (gter ma) that are to be discovered over the centuries by treasure revealers (gter ston) who are ‘thought to be the embodiment of, or regents acting on behalf of, Padmasambhava’.²⁷¹

A large number of treasure revealers are featured in the temple of Ogyen Choling (o rgyan chos gling). Among the seven *tertöns* in the temple we find Tangtong Gyelpo (thang stong rgyal po: 1361?-1485) Jikmé Lingpa (‘jigs med gling pa: 1729-1798) and a group of five *lingpas* (gling pa)²⁷², namely Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje glingpa: 1346-1405), Pema Lingpa (padma gling pa: (1450-1521), Terdak Lingpa (gter bdag gling pa: 1646-1714), Drime Lingpa (dri med gling pa: 1700-1775/6) and Ratna Lingpa (rat na gling pa: 1403-1478).

In this section I explore the representations of the five *lingpas* and analyse how the artists have created a distinctive image defining their identity (Figs. 84 to 88). I also assess the particular representation of Dorje Lingpa in the ground floor

²⁷⁰ See 2019 Doney’s article *Padmasambhava in the Conjured Past*.

²⁷¹ Kapstein p. 164.

²⁷² See Gyatso 1998: p. 281 n. 1, she explains that the denomination ‘lingpa’ taken by several treasure revealers could be the abbreviation for ‘Orgyan Kandro Lingpa, that is, one who is of, or has been to, Oḍḍiyānā, Country of the Ḍākīnīs.’

shrine, the Drölma Lhakhang, and the significance of his personification for his descendants at Ogyen Choling.

I start my investigation with the images of Padmasambhava exhibited in the Jowo Lhakhang on two large panels. On the west wall he is surrounded by his teachers and disciples inscribed as the Brilliant Guru of Knowledge (rig ‘dus gu ru snang srid zil non) and on the east wall he is among his eight main manifestations in his Copper Colored Mountain (zangs mdog dpal ri) Paradise (Figs. 71, 72). By observing and analyzing these images I review the elements that became the markers and the tangible symbols of the quintessence of Padmasambhava and consider what the artist has retained from them to fashion the treasure revealers in his image.

Padmasambhava a Composite Image: Prince, Siddha and Himalayan Shaman

Padmasambhava is very popular in Bhutan where he is fondly called Guru Rinpoché, the Precious Guru. His image is seen on the walls of temples, on thangkas and also depicted, large and prominent, painted on boulders along the roads. The narrative of his life abounds with legends and extraordinary deeds. He is said to have arrived in Bhutan, at the time called the region of the Mon, Monyul²⁷³, in the eighth century after his visit to Tibet upon the invitation of the Emperor Trisong Détsen (khri strong lde btsan: 742-797). At that time, Trisong Détsen was building a monastery in Samyé (bsam yas) and called for the Guru to clear the ground from the evil spirits which during the night were tearing down the construction that was erected during the day.²⁷⁴ Armed with his supranatural powers, Padmasambhava, the Indian tantric master, pacified the spirits and Samyé could be successfully built. Before leaving the kingdom of Tibet, and while in Monyul, Padmasambhava is said to have hidden *termas* to be discovered at the right time by spiritually accomplished religious masters throughout the centuries. The *terma* can be texts, objects, statues or mind revelations (dgongs gter)²⁷⁵

²⁷³ According to Phuntsho p. 2, this term is accepted by Bhutanese historians though the definition of ‘Mon’ remains unclear.

²⁷⁴ Kapstein pp. 155, 157. Tsogyal p. 58.

²⁷⁵ Gyatso p. 147.

which are interpreted by the *tertön* for the education of the devotees and followers of the dharma.

When looking at Padmasambhava with his Teachers and Disciples and in his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise (Figs. 71, 72) the artists give him an attitude and a posture which convey an immediate impression of strength and authority. At the same time he also seems to fully occupy the space. This impression is rendered by his wide shoulders, the volume of his dress and his gaze over the viewers. The size of his body is several times larger than the surrounding figures, giving him an aura of omnipotence. The iconography of his depiction exhibits composite features. The detailing of some of the elements of his garment and attributes: his lotus hat (*pad zhwa*), robes, overcoat, adornment and tantric staff *khaṭvāṅga*, reflect his origins and the episodes of his life.



71. Padmasambhava with his teachers and disciples on the west wall. (IMG 0497)

72. Padmasambhava in his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise on the east wall. (IMG 0280)

Before achieving great knowledge and erudition, Padmasambhava, in one of the versions of his epic life story, the *Copper Palace* (*zangs gling ma*) attributed to the treasure revealer Nyangrel Nyima Oser²⁷⁶ (*nyang ral nyi ma 'od zer :1124-1192*), Padmasambhava was born as a prince, he then became a siddha (*grub thob*) frequenting the charnel grounds while receiving the teachings from great

²⁷⁶ Bogin 2014: p. 4. See translation by Eric Pema Kunsang titled: '*The Lotus-Born: The Life Story of Padmasambhava.*', composed by Yeshe Tsogyal, revealed by Nyan Ral Nyima Öser.'

Indian adepts. He later tamed the local spirits in the Himalaya before his departure to his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise where he resides and contains the *rākṣasa*, the demons ready to invade the world.

His opulent costume and his jewels reveal his regal origins as a prince of the kingdom of Oḍḍiyāna (Figs. 73, 74). The story of his birth is narrated in two accounts, his ‘miraculous birth’ (rdzus skyes), as told in the *zanglingma*,²⁷⁷ and his ‘birth in the womb’ (mngal skyes).²⁷⁸ His ‘miraculous birth’ on a lotus is the more commonly known though both stories attest to his royal lineage. In the story of the ‘miraculous birth’ he is the adopted son of King Indrabhūti. In the story of the ‘birth in the womb’ he is the grandson of a king of Oḍḍiyāna.



73. On the left, details of jewellery, textiles and *khatvāṅga* from Padmasambhava with his teachers and disciples painting, west wall. (IMG 0497)

74. On the right, details of jewellery, textiles and *khatvāṅga* from Padmasambhava in his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise painting, east wall. (IMG 0280)

²⁷⁷ Tsogyal p. 34.

²⁷⁸ See Cantwell, Mayer 2013: pp. 37-38, and Blondeau p. 46, who also remarks that ‘...Padmasambhava adopted one or the other form of birth depending on the nature of the beings to be subjugated...’.

In his representation, his lotus hat is a reminder of his birth when he magically appeared on a lotus. His heavy earrings, his intricate and large necklace, his embroidered boots and the rich brocade of his layers of robes indicate he is a prince. He also received ‘...a maroon cape of brocade’ when attending a banquet after taming the evil spirits and demons of Tibet.²⁷⁹ The predominant red color of his attire is a mark of power and, since red was the color of the turban worn by the Kings of Yarlung, this color links him to the Dharma kings of the old kingdom of Tibet.²⁸⁰



75. Detail of Padmasambhava's hat and facial features in semi-wrathful form, on the west wall. (IMG 0499)



76. Detail of Padmasambhava's hat and facial features in peaceful form, on the east wall. (IMG 0289)

The red lotus hat (pad zhwa) with its two folded lappets on the sides shows the symbol of the moon and the sun. It is also topped by a golden vajra. Another distinctive feature of his hat is the small bird feather (bya spu) which stands on the top of the vajra (Figs. 75, 76). This feather is generally referred to as the feather of an eagle or a vulture.²⁸¹ It can be single or in a cluster of three,

²⁷⁹ Tsogyal p. 67.

²⁸⁰ Jackson: 2011 p. 65.

²⁸¹ The feather can also be a peacock feather as seen in the next section.

symbolizing the visual acuity of the Guru who is endowed with the piercing and clear vision of these birds of prey. According to Robert Mayer this small feather associates Padmasambhava with the shamans of the Himalaya, a theme I explore further in the next section.²⁸² It confers on him the extraordinary powers and communication links between the divine and the mortal, the worldly and the spiritual.²⁸³ Padmasambhava's sharp eyes look straight into the distance and his precisely drawn brows slightly curling at their extremities reflect his profound concentration. He has grown a moustache and a small goatee, a definite identity trait of his persona.

Padmasambhava's body posture radiates power and the slight tilt of his head is a mark of compassion towards his devotees, showing his presence, attention and readiness to hear their prayers. The movements of his slightly open mouth and his furrowed brows in a transitory moment of emotion associate him closely to a siddha (Fig. 75). The semi-wrathful feature of Padmasambhava is intensified by the red color added to the internal and external corners of his eyes.²⁸⁴ Displays of emotion, generally the prerogative of the siddha, include facial expressions such as the subject furrowing their brow, as well as gesturing, talking and rolling their eyes. These traits on the face of Padmasambhava evoke the episodes of his life as a siddha. The red color bordering the inside corners of his eyes is also reminiscent of the smoke caused by the cremation of bodies in the charnel grounds. Together with the *khaṭvāṅga* these characteristics are witness to his time spent among them. These elements also function as the legitimization of the transmission of teachings from the *mahāsiddhas*, (grub chen), the *vidyādhari* from whom he received his education and profound knowledge. In his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise, Padmasambhava's face reflects peace and serenity rather than passion or wrath, though the red color around the eyes remains (Fig. 76).

²⁸² Mayer 2018: p. 6.

²⁸³ I further examine this notion in the next section dedicated to the significance of the representations of Padmasambhava in the Jowo Lhakhang.

²⁸⁴ Jackson 2011: p. 65.



77. Drawing of Padmasambhava in the seventeenth century iconographic treatise commissioned by the Fifth Dalai Lama.



78. Padmasambhava in his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise in the Jowo Lhakhang.

The seventeenth century drawing of Padmasambhava found in the treatise on the iconography of Buddhist deities (Fig. 77) influenced by the Nyingma School in a period of expansion at that time,²⁸⁵ could have influenced the depiction of the Guru on the walls of the Jowo Lhakhang (Fig. 78). Produced in about 1687, the monograph was composed at the instigation of the Dési Sangye Gyatso: (sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho: 1653-1705) the administrator of the fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso (ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho: 1617-1682). Its aim was to systemize the representation of deities. The depiction of Padmasambhava was among them and this had an impact on the codification of his image over the following decades.²⁸⁶

The treatise is the result of the collaborative efforts by three talented craftsmen and titled *Illustrations of Measurements: A Refresher for the Cognoscenti* (cha tshad kyi dpe ris dpyod ldan yid gsos). It is abundantly illustrated with

²⁸⁵ It was at that time that at the monastery of Mindröling (smin grol gling) Terdak Lingpa and Lochen Dhamaśrī were strengthening the Nyingma doctrine with the support of the Dési.

²⁸⁶ See Lo Bue 1990: p. 194 who informs that it was not the first writing on art and measurements since this theme was already discussed in the seventh century *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa*.

iconometric details, sketches, and captions. The *Illustrations of Measurements* provides measurements and proportions for artistic expression and is also very much a reflection of the interests of the Dési in the domain of science, technology and fine arts.²⁸⁷ The book was produced at a time of peace when Tibet was unified under the rules of the Great Fifth following periods of turmoil.²⁸⁸

Sangye Gyatso, the Dési, gave himself the goal to organize or reorganize the ceremonials surrounding the Dalai Lama during his reign and to continue after his death. In his establishing order and discipline for rituals and celebrations he controlled and standardized the creation of images. Referring to the historian Eric Hobsbawm, Kurtis Schaeffer suggests that the Dési's purpose to format an 'invented tradition' was based on his visionary ideas of becoming a legacy for the future within the continuity of the existing tradition.²⁸⁹ In his treatise on the *Illustrations of Measurements*, concerning the representation of Padmasambhava, the Dési certainly puts in place the subsequent codification of Guru Rinpoche's iconography.²⁹⁰

The inclusion of Padmasambhava among the figures analyzed in the iconography book published under a Gélukpa (dge lugs pa) patronage was partly due to the link of the Great Fifth with the Nyingmapa. While studying at the Drépung (bras sprungs) Géluk monastery, Losang Gyatso met Konchok Lhundrup²⁹¹ a master of Nyingmapa tradition in 1633. According to Karmay, 'This meeting was to be a turning point in his life: he received teachings and initiations into certain mystical practices and tantric rituals...'.²⁹² He later on supported the Nyingmapa, providing generous contributions to Terdak Lingpa and his brother Lochen Dhamaśrī in Mindröling (smin grol gling), in their endeavors to consolidate and

²⁸⁷ Cüppers, van der Kuip, Pagel pp. 1-6.

²⁸⁸ van Schaik pp. 120-124.

²⁸⁹ Schaeffer 2006: p. 194 and Hobsbawm pp. 1-6.

²⁹⁰ The iconometric grid governing, among others, the representation of Padmasambhava is reproduced in the facsimile of the seventeenth-century handbook, which is supplemented by an introduction and comments by Cüpper, van der Kuip and Pagel. On the caption attached to the original folio (on the recto) we can read: mdzes gtsor btön gyi dus gsum mkhyen pa padma ka ra za hor ma || paper slip: padma ka ra za hor ma || grid: tsha (black) || [Brilliant Buddha (knower of the three times) Padmākara from Zahor || Padmākara from Zahor.] p. 344 pl. 233.

²⁹¹ Mentioned as Khöntön Paljor Lhundrup ('khon ston dpal 'byor khun grup: 1561-1637) and also a 'devoted Gelukpa', Cabezon 2017 pp. 17, 18.

²⁹² Karmay 2003b: pp.69, 70.

expand the Nyingma doctrine and the shaping of grandiose ceremony rituals.²⁹³ However, a significant and perhaps the most important reason would be the link of Padmasambhava to the old Tibetan empire through his intervention at Samyé for the emperor Tri Songdétsen. The fifth Dalai Lama would have perceived in this connection the continuity of power drawn from the empire to legitimize his centralized authority as the ruler of a unified Tibet after a long and violent struggle.²⁹⁴

The grid and the proportions recommended by the authors of the treatise for depicting Padmasambhava, called on the original folio, Padmākara ‘born from a lotus’ (pad ma ‘byung gnas), from Zahor, are very precise. They also confer a feeling of great authority and splendor onto the image of Padmasambhava wrapped in layers of robes. We cannot fail to notice his hat topped by a vajra and a feather (Fig. 77). He carries a vajra and a skull as well as his tantric staff, the attribute of a siddha.²⁹⁵

This image of Padmasambhava became his canonic representation which, along the decades of reproduction and imitation, became codified, systematized and rarely modified. According to Lo Bue, it takes centuries of continuing development for an image to get established and to eventually become ‘crystallized’ into a ‘canonical’ format.²⁹⁶ The depictions of Padmasambhava on the early twentieth-century walls of Ogyen Choling reflect the iconometry that had been regulated by the Dési. Major elements are borrowed from it, among the more visible are the hat, the layers, movement and volume of the garment, the overcoat and also the posture’s corpulence, attitude and attributes. These components and their integration within the images of treasure revealers became fundamental for their identification. They also ensure their immediate recognition and their links to Padmasambhava.

²⁹³ Dalton 2016: pp. 98, 99.

²⁹⁴ Kapstein p. 162.

²⁹⁵ Cüppers, van der Kuip, Pagel p. 253 and pp. 233, 344.

²⁹⁶ Lo Bue 1990: p.175.

Images of Treasure Revealers

In the Jowo Lhakhang, Dorje Lingpa and Pema Lingpa are seen among the transmitters of the *dzokchen* teaching above the illustration of the Bardö Tödröl on the east wall, represented in positions eight and nine respectively (Fig. 79, 80).²⁹⁷ Dorje Lingpa holds his *damaru* and bell while Pema Lingpa has a golden vase of long life topped by a flower and a lotus bud in a cluster of foliage in his two hands resting in his lap. We know these two *tertöns* as being closely associated with the family in Ogyen Choling which counts them among their ancestors.



79. Dorje Lingpa, within the lineage of transmission of the *dzokchen*. (IMG 9876)



80. Pema Lingpa, within the lineage of transmission of the *dzokchen*. (IMG 0067)

The other three treasure revealers occupy the space on the opposite wall, on the west, above the entrance door of the shrine. This triad of *tertöns* is composed of Drime Lingpa, Terdak Lingpa and Ratna Lingpa (Fig. 81). They are represented between the door frame and the valance painted below the ceiling organized in two registers, the three masters at the top, and three protectors at the bottom.²⁹⁸ Terdak Lingpa: 1646-1714 the founder of Mindröling (*smin grol gling*) is in the

²⁹⁷ See also Appendix chapter 4 section 4.5 nb. 1-11.

²⁹⁸ See also Appendix chapter 4 section 4.2.

middle with Drime Lingpa: 1700-1775 on his right and Ratna Lingpa: 1403-1478 on his left. An inscription under each figure informs us of their identity. If Terdak Lingpa and Drime Lingpa both belong to the eighteenth century, Drime Lingpa being the ‘youngest’ of the three, Ratna Lingpa belongs to the far distant fifteenth century, therefore closer to Dorje Lingpa: 1346-1405 and Pema Lingpa: 1450-1521.

Below the *tertöns*, the lower register is occupied by the goddess Vasudhārā (nor rgyun ma) flanked by a Yellow Jambhala (‘dzambha la ser po) and a Black Jambhala (‘dzambha la nag po)²⁹⁹ (Fig. 81). They function as three protectors who are also dispensers of wealth. The composition of the panel respects the hierarchical position of the protectors at the bottom though their size is nearly twice as large as the masters above them, and the yellow Jambhala on the left is brimming over the length of the door frame (Fig. 81). Constrained by space, the haloes of the *tertöns* are cut at their tops and the cloud behind Terdak Lingpa disappears into the valance of the ceiling. Because the panel is set high on the wall the three *tertöns* seem to disappear behind the protectors when seen from below.



81. The treasure revealers, from left to right, Drime Lingpa, Terdak Lingpa, Ratna Lingpa with Vasudhārā underneath flanked by the Yellow and the Black Jambhala above the entrance door of the Jowo Lhakhang. (IMG 2038)

²⁹⁹ Willson and Brauen ill. 314 text 36 and ill. 317 p. 327 respectively. For information on Vasudhārā see note 298.

Above the door, the whole auspicious group has an apotropaic function. Not only do they protect against evil influences but the large size of the wealth trio shows and emphasizes their role as providers of prosperity. This function is also underlined by the particular iconography of the wealth goddess Vasudhārā and her position at the center. Vasudhārā - the goddess issued from a mantra, is generally depicted holding one ear of rice in her left hand while jewels cascade from her right hand. Her right hand can also be empty while performing the gesture of giving, in that case she sits on a vase full of jewels.³⁰⁰ On this panel she holds an ear of rice in both hands. Rice has taken the place of the jewels in a symbolic affirmation that grain, rather than precious gems, is the commodity which feeds, brings affluence and prestige to the *chöje* of Ogyen Choling and stability in their fiefdom.

To establish the link between the family and the two *tertöns* Ratna Lingpa and Drime Lingpa, I want to recall that the two wives of Ugyen Dorji, Ashi Sonam and Ashi Tsedon, were from Chusa (chu sa) in the Lhuntse (lhun rtse) district in the east of Bumthang. The district is also referred as Kurtö (skur stod).³⁰¹ Ratna Lingpa was an active treasure revealer in the region³⁰² and, according to Kunzang Choden, the two sisters Ashi Sonam and Ashi Tsedon came from a family descended from Ratna Lingpa; the family still perform a Kangso ritual based on the treasure revealer's texts.³⁰³

About Drime Lingpa, the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC) mentions a 'Collection of *terma* revelations... from the original manuscripts preserved at

³⁰⁰ Nebesky-Wojkowitz p. 77, (gzungs las byung ba'i lha mo nor rgyun ma) 'The goddess Vasudhārā, who originated from a mantra' has jewels dropping from her right hand, and her left hand holds an ear of rice. See also Willson and Brauen ill. 326 text p.331, *The Goddess Vasudhārā from the Dhārāṇī*. In that case her right hand is empty, her left hand holds prayer beads with the ear of rice and she sits on a 'golden vase full of jewels'.

³⁰¹ Pommaret 2009: p. 54.

³⁰² Pommaret 2009: p. 53.

³⁰³ I received this information during fieldwork in 2018, Kunzang Choden also explaining that this branch of the family, her cousins, still live in Chusa.

Kurtö Kabab Choling Monastery in Bhutan.³⁰⁴ Therefore his link with the eastern district of Lhuntse/Kurtö is attested.

It is also in Lhuntse that the *chöje* of Ogyen Choling owned land in this semi-tropical region providing the family with substantial harvests of rice, one of the most coveted of commodities and the basis of its affluence. It becomes therefore clearly apparent, owing to the link with Ratna Lingpa, that the representation of these two treasure revealers is not an independent motif but part of the iconography and associated with the life and history of the family.

In the twentieth century well after the painting was made, the only possible link between the family and Mindröling, therefore the link with Terdak Lingpa, is the grandson of Ugyen Dorji, Nuden Dorji (nu ldan rdo rje: 1930-1985), who was a monk in this Tibetan monastery until the 1950s. However, before that period the remembrance of this connection seems to be lost.

The Iconography of the Five ‘Lingpas’

The salient elements of the iconography of the group, represented in the temple, are their hats and their voluminous layers of robes as well as the dominance of the red color of their attire (Figs. 82, 83, 84). The hats covering the heads of these five *tertöns* characterizes the Nyingma hierarchs. The red *padma* hat (pan zhwa) with upturned lappets evocative of a lotus and generally topped with a golden vajra, is a clear echo of Padmasambhava’s headdress. With the small feather visible on the top of Dorje Lingpa’s and Pema Lingpa’s hat (Figs. 85, 86), the allusion to Padmasambhava is even clearer.

The posture, slightly bent, of the figures composing the triad tends to show their benevolent and considerate nature. Terdak Lingpa (Fig. 83) looks in front of him, his soft gaze turned upwards, his head slightly tilted while the two other masters

³⁰⁴ The item about Drime Lingpa and his connection to Kurtö in BDRC reads as follows: ‘gter chos/_dri med gling pa. Collection of terma revelations by 18th century visionary Drime Lingpa. From the original manuscripts preserved at Kurto Kabab Choling Monastery in Bhutan. Includes liturgical arrangements by the Chakzam Tulku 07 Tenzin Yeshe Lhundrub (1739-1795). Manuscript is incomplete and missing several orderions. [dri med gling pa](#); 4 volumes; 4v W9558. kunsang topgey, thimphu. 1976.’ [accessed on 17-09-2018].

look towards him. Pema Lingpa (Fig. 86) seems absorbed in meditation while Dorje Lingpa's body (Fig. 85) sways in a light movement accompanying his *damaru* and his bell. All of them sit on simple cushions with a backrest wrapped with white scarves.



82. Left, Drime Lingpa. (DSC 8296)

83. Center, Terdak Lingpa. (DSC 8298)

84. Right, Ratna Lingpa. (DSC 8303)

The gray beard of Terdak Lingpa gives him the gravitas of a sage, Drime Lingpa (Fig. 82) wears a black beard, probably in reference to his relative youth compared to the other two, and Ratna Lingpa (Fig. 84) as Pema Lingpa, are beardless. The moustache and the goatee of Dorje Lingpa is a reference to the facial ornaments of Padmasambhava.



85. Left, Dorje Lingpa.



86. Right, Pema Lingpa.

On top of their underrobes and monastic garb they accumulate layers of fine garments made of precious textiles of shimmering colors of green, blue, yellow and red punctuated with white and highlighted with gold. They also wear the vest and large belt of the monks while, in addition, Drime Lingpa and Ratna Lingpa are seen with the pleats of a white shirt at their necks in the same style as the shirt of Padmasambhava. They wrap themselves in an ample overcoat decorated with gold motifs, the robes are voluminous, their feet are hidden, folded underneath the ballooning fabric. With the exception of Drime Lingpa, who shows one foot wearing an embroidered boot like the ones worn by Guru Rinpoché.

They also hold an array of objects, a *damaru*, a bell, a vase for Dorje Lingpa and Pema Lingpa, a vajra and a *phurba* for Drime Lingpa who also has a blossoming lotus topped by a wheel close to his head, a vase of long life with a jewel for Terdak Lingpa who performs the teaching gesture, and a bell for Ratna Lingpa who performs the *tarjanī* gesture. The red color, which dominates on the garments, associates them with power and with Padmasambhava.

None of these treasure revealers carry the *khaṭvāṅga* with impaled skulls and flowing white ribbons. This tantric staff is one of Padmasambhava's major attributes and is not shown in the hands of these Masters. The *khaṭvāṅga*, belongs to the siddhas and is one of their distinctive features. Therefore it is not an attribute relevant to these *tertöns* who manifested evidence of their exceptional religious insights and aptitudes at an early age and for most of them acquired their knowledge within scholastic environments. The biographies of Dorje Lingpa, Ratna Lingpa, Terdak Lingpa, according to Dudjom Rinpoche, do not mention their visiting charnel grounds and experiencing an ascetic life in Indian cemeteries. Their formative years were spent among their religious family and they received their education from learned masters of their time.³⁰⁵ Regarding the education of Drime Lingpa, he was probably well learned, since he is referred to as one of the tutors of Jikmé Lingpa.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁵ Dudjom Rinpoche pp. 789, 793, 796, 825. See also Karmay 2005: p.121.

³⁰⁶ Jikmé Lingpa is among the students of Drime Lingpa in BDRC, [accessed on 17-09-2018], and as Trime Lingpa in Dudjom Rinpoche p. 836.



87. Full view of Dorje Lingpa in the Drölma Lhakhang. (IMG 3346)



88. The central image of Dorje Lingpa in the Drölma Lhakhang. (Detail from Fig.87)

Dorje Lingpa is represented several times in the temple, as a member of the *dzokchen* lineage, with his father and his manifestation, in the sanctum of the Jowo Lhakhang, and in the Drölma Lhakhang in the ground floor shrine. It is this remarkable depiction that I examine further.

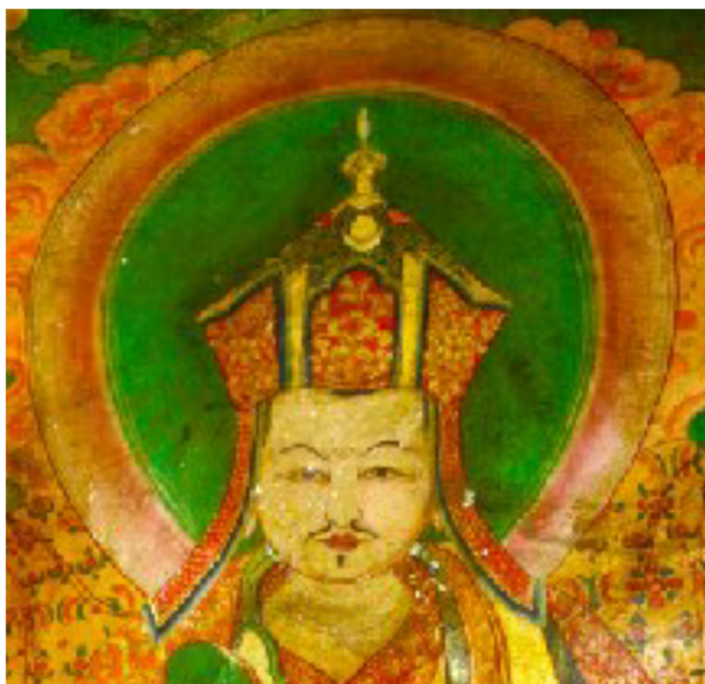
The ‘Portrait’ of Dorje Lingpa and Its Significance

My temptation to call this depiction of Dorje Lingpa a portrait seems irresistible. Is it a portrait? Richard Brilliant writes that a portrait is a ‘deliberate allusion to the original’.³⁰⁷

In between the White Tārā and the *gochor* of the entrance door of the Drölma Lhakhang, the image of Dorje Lingpa looks like the ‘official portrait’ of an

³⁰⁷ Brilliant p. 7.

enthroned hierarchy. The cushion seat has been replaced by a throne which frames the *tertön* and the gold highlights illuminate the image (Figs. 87, 88).



89. Detail of Dorje Lingpa's hat. (Detail from Fig. 87)

Represented with the elements inherent to a treasure revealer, the padma hat (pad zhwa), layers of robe, overcoat and predominance of the red color, he is identified as such. However, the verisimilitude of the man himself is resolutely an allusion to his possible bodily appearance and is rather an idea of the way a *tertön* would look; also, the moustache and the goatee seem to be a deliberate imitation of Padmasambhava. Episodes of Dorje Lingpa's life are narrated by Santem Karmay and describe his charisma as a religious teacher, a prolific writer of texts and songs, followed by numerous devotees.³⁰⁸ Nothing in Karmay's text alludes to his physical traits other than a strong health and good physical constitution - he

³⁰⁸ See Karmay: 2005: pp. 122-143, who narrates Dorje Lingpa's numerous activities and travels between Tibet and Monyul (Bhutan) in his *rDo-rje gling-pa and his Rediscovery of the 'Gold Needle' in Bhutan*. Since no *namtar* (*rnam thar*) for Dorje Lingpa exists, Karmay 2005: p. 136, he used various Tibetan sources for his article. See Karmay 2005: p. 211.

did not fear to cross passes in winter - and had a sense of humour together with a free spirit. He enjoyed dancing and singing.³⁰⁹

His attire and attributes conform to the features seen on depictions of treasure revealers, for we find the same feather on his hat (Fig. 89) as on Pema Lingpa's; though, on that representation in the Drölma Lhakhang he becomes different. The location of his depiction within the Deities of Long Life confers on him the power of these deities which they have transferred to him, therefore bestowing on him the strength of his long-lived lineage. With his large size and the magnificence of his body splendidly dressed in a hieratic pose he is set between rows of Buddhas and major protectors above and below him. From his position, he is towering over the diminutive figures of his descendants.

This *mise en scène* compares favorably with the images of Padmasambhava. Both are seated and framed in a similarly-styled backrest of a black band incrustated with colored gems. Both of them are clad in elaborate layers of textile, profusion of colors, predominantly red and gold. Since he was not a prince, Dorje Lingpa does not have rich jewels. Not being a siddha, he is not pictured with the *khaṭvāṅga* though the ritual bell (rdo rje dril bu), a symbol of the feminine principle, can be seen as having the quality of a consort as such is the case with the *khaṭvāṅga*. The presence of the *ḍamaru* as a masculine element also refers to the symbol of emptiness obtained in the bliss of the union of the masculine and feminine, means and wisdom. A closer look at the painting reveals another item that emphasizes Dorje Lingpa's connection to Padmasambhava as a *phurba* is discreetly tucked in his belt as a witness of his initiation to the Vajrakīlaya system and the fur trimming of his vest recalling the fur of the tigress on which Padmasambhava 'flew' from Tibet to the Paro (spa gro) Tiger's Den (stag tshang) as Dorje Drolö (rdo rje gro lod), one of his manifestations.

On that depiction, Dorje Lingpa wears a beautifully ornate padma hat *pézha* (pad zhwa) that is confounding in its assemblage of elements (Fig. 89). The hat is showing basically the same features as the *pézha*, the red color, the sun and the moon, the overturned panels on the sides, the vajra, worn by the *glingpas*, in the shrine; however there are major differences. The lotus panels on the sides are

³⁰⁹ Karmay: 2005: pp. 138, 139.

higher than on the standard hat, the feather is darting up on the vajra, though this appears also on Pema Lingpa's hat, the gold short bars, which seem decorative, on the side of the central lotus flower, the visible dark blue cap of the hat and the long lappets trimmed in blue that reach the shoulders, are unusual features. The very long type of lappets can be seen on Dorje Lingpa from the *dzokchen* group (Fig. 85).

This hat seems to have been designed to particularly suit Dorje Lingpa. These long lappets are those of a *paṇḍita* hat (*pan zhwa*) and recall that Dorje Lingpa considered himself as an emanation of the translator Vairocana, who is qualified to wear such a headdress and is generally depicted wearing it. The *paṇḍita* hat addresses both his affiliations to Vairocana and to Padmasambhava who can also manifest wearing such a hat.



90. Dorje Lingpa wearing a blue hat on the thangka of the temple collection.
(IMG 2290)

91. Detail of Dorje Lingpa's hat and long lappets trimmed in red. (Detail from Fig. 90)

The blue *padma* hat with long lappets seems to have been a characteristic of Dorje Lingpa. On the series of thangkas, belonging to the temple collection, he is

represented with a blue hat, with no feather on the vajra (Fig. 90, 91).³¹⁰ This series was most probably commissioned by Tshokye Dorji in the 1850s, predating the reconstruction of the temple between 1897 and 1902. It would therefore be the way Dorje Lingpa was represented at the time. It is also interesting to notice that his robe is blue as well, he wears a red shawl and his legs are wrapped in a brown overcoat. On the thangka, the blue hat that the *tertön* wears is trimmed with red edges, mirroring the hat he wears on the painting in the Drölma Lakhang, that is red with blue edges. Tshokye Dorji's grandson Ugyen Dorji, by fitting his ancestor with a red hat, would have focused on the association of his ancestor to Padmasambhava when planning the iconography of his temple. Though he would have not forgotten to add the touch of blue color pertaining to an ancient iconography.



92. The hat of Dorje Lingpa at Ogyen Choling. (IMG 4252)



93. The box in which the hat of Dorje Lingpa is kept at Ogyen Choling. (IMG 4219)

The hat which is said to have belonged to Dorje Lingpa has been preserved by the *chöje* of Ogyen Choling through the ages. It is preciousely kept in its reliquary, a

³¹⁰ This thangka, nb 25 in the Appendix, is part of a set dedicated to Dorje Lingpa and his life. The original set was composed of five thangkas, one has disappeared. The remaining four can be seen in the Appendix chapter 6 nb. 12, 15, 24, 25, 27.

wooden box modeled like a *stūpa* (Fig. 92, 93). On the last day of the Kangso ritual, the lama carries the hat in its sacred box to the temple and on his way uses it to bless the devotees gathering in the courtyard. The lama then climbs up to the Jowo Lhakhang, wears the hat and, embodied as Dorje Lingpa presides over and performs the end of the ritual.

This hat is blue, edged in red with brown sides, but might have been dark red with upturned lappets.³¹¹ The brocade looks fresh and rather new for a fifteenth-century hat. Indeed it has been mended, remade probably in whatever way the original hat was, while pieces of it were kept inside, which makes it a true relic.³¹²

When organizing the iconography of the temple, Ugyen Dorji reserved a special space for Dorje Lingpa. As with the other treasure revealers represented, he possesses all the characteristics and the attires of Padmasambhava, ensuring the worshippers see this symbolic presence. The feather on the hat, a feature that he shares with Pema Lingpa, is an additional item of recognition increasing the association with Padmasambhava.

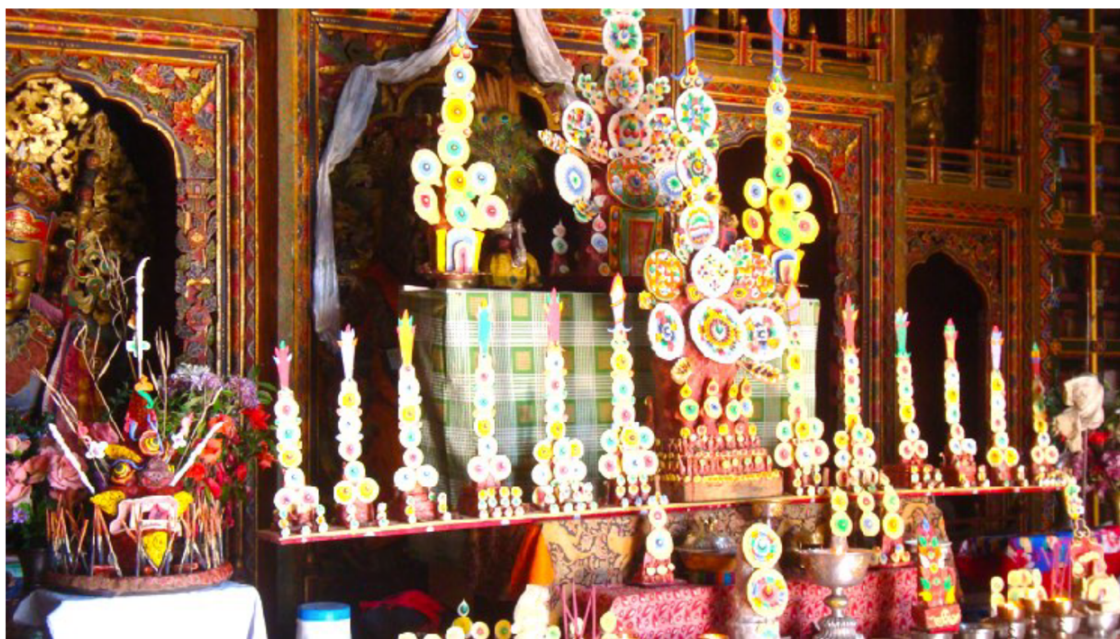
The social implication of the rich depiction of the prestigious ancestor is the firm affirmation of the identity of the *chöje* of Ogyen Choling. It is significant for Ugyen Dorji the heir of the lineage and patron of the temple who had his ancestor depicted as an enlightened being and the embodiment of Padmasambhava. I would also point to the fact that Ugyen Dorji was consecrating his temple in 1902, a few years after the earthquake. He had reconstructed it with commitment and devotion and was eager to foster confidence in his family. He also wanted to show that his family was still endowed with the necessary wealth and ample means to rebuild a remarkable monument. The depiction of Dorje Lingpa in all his glory indicates the determination and resilience of the lineage under the protection of their ancestor, the prestigious *tertön* Dorje Lingpa, invested with the full and magical power of Padmasambhava.³¹³

³¹¹ The blue-colored hat of Dorje Lingpa is locally thought to relate to his practice of the Bon tradition while being a Nyingma treasure revealer. See also Karmay 2005: p. 120.

³¹² Information given by Kunzang Choden in December 2018.

³¹³ Tshewang, Tashi, Butters, Saetreng, p.1 n.5. Dorje Lingpa is listed among the five sovereign *tertöns*.

5.3 Padmasambhava in the Jowo Lhakhang and the Kangso (*bskang gso*) Ritual in Ogyen Choling



94. The altar in the Jowo Lhakhang with the *tormas* displayed during the Kangso.
(DSC 09309)

In the Jowo Lhakhang (jo bo lha khang), Padmasambhava the Precious Guru is profusely depicted on the west and east walls, leaving a comparatively small space for the auspicious mural dedicated to the Buddha Śākyamuni.³¹⁴

The tutelary figure of Padmasambhava, who is at the apex of the Nyingma (rnying ma) hierarchy, is omnipresent and his numinous image is inescapable. Seen in his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise (zangs mdog dpal ri) among his teachers and his crowd of followers or in the sanctum, the depiction of his body occupies large surfaces. The prominence of his presence is emphasized by his gaze, the bright colors of his ample dress and the gold of his attire. The Jowo Lhakhang is the shrine where most of the liturgical part of the Kangso (*bskang gso*) ritual takes

³¹⁴ For a detailed iconography of the Jowo Lhakhang, see section 4.1 and Appendix chapter 4.

place every year. The sanctum is located on the north wall, the shrine receiving the sunlight from the windows across the room on the south. The entrance door opens on the west wall and on the opposite wall, a door leads to the *gönkhang* (mgon khang), the shrine dedicated to the local deities and particularly to Mahākāla Gönpo Maning (mgon po ma ning) the protector of Ogyen Choling.

In this section I analyze and discuss the presence of Padmasambhava in the Jowo Lhakhang and based on his representations I propose that his images amplify and support the devotion of the worshippers through the Kangso ritual which addresses, as we will see, pragmatic and soteriological aspirations. I therefore review the conflation of the magical and liturgical within the extraordinary and multifaceted personality of the Precious Guru. My purpose is not to study or analyze the Kangso ritual at Ogyen Choling: that has been thoroughly done by Françoise Pommaret and was published in 2007.³¹⁵

Padmasambhava the Himalayan ‘Shaman’³¹⁶ and the Propitiation of the Local Deities

In the Tibetan culture the world, that is the dwelling of sentient beings, is also inhabited by buddhas and deities, spirits and demons, living in visible and invisible realms. Before the arrival of Buddhism, the Himalaya was the territory of native spirits which, according to their designation, were in possession of the land, the water and the air. The acquisition of the soil for the building of religious structures led to conflicts and struggles with these spirits, lords of the land, that Padmasambhava was ready to vanquish. Invited by the Emperor of Tibet, Trisong Détsen (khri strong lde brtsan: 742-797), Padmasambhava cleansed the building site of Samyé (bsam yas) for the construction of the emperor’s monastery.³¹⁷ He then carried on with his task and freed the Himalaya from the evil presences and subdued the local spirits into protecting the Dharma. Padmasambhava travelled

³¹⁵ Pommaret 2007: pp. 135-158. For this section I have used the information from Françoise Pommaret’s 2007 article *Estate and Deities: a Ritual from Central Bhutan. The Bskang gso of o rgyan chos gling*, combined with my observations as I had the privilege to attend the Kangso during my fieldwork in 2016. The Kangso takes place every year during three days from the eighth to the tenth day of the ninth month of the Buddhist calendar.

³¹⁶ My frame of reference for using the word ‘shaman’ is specific to the Himalaya within the definition of Toni Huber and in reference to Rober Mayer’s article. See also notes 315 and 319.

³¹⁷ Tsogyal pp. 50-74.

to the southern land of Monyul that was then still in the dark before receiving the light of Buddhism.³¹⁸

Padmasambhava's splendid attire instantly attracts the attention of viewers, devotees and scholars. An interesting item of his outfit is his lotus hat (pad zhwa) and particularly the bird feather (bya spu) - it can also be a cluster of feathers - at its top that triggers diverse interpretations. The most commonly proposed suggestion is the parallel drawn between the feather and the precise and acute vision of an eagle. To continue with the bird analogy, Kenneth Douglas and Gwendoline Bays write in *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*, about a '...brilliant peacock feather...' which would symbolize the knowledge of a superior intelligence.³¹⁹ This reference to a higher intelligence is equated to Padmasambhava's knowledge of the *dzokchen* (rdzogs chen), according to Ricard, who suggests that the feather in this metaphor is that of a vulture rather than the feather of a peacock.³²⁰

Another proposition is brought forward by Robert Mayer. In his comprehensively researched recent article, *How did the Heruka get his wings? And why did the Guru have a feather in his cap? Avian symbolism in rNyingma iconography*, Mayer reaches the conclusion that the feather on the hat of Padmasambhava is borrowed from the 'shamans' of the Himalaya.³²¹

Toni Huber reports that by wearing bird feathers on their headdress, the 'shaman' would acquire, during the time of a ritual, the power of a bird to fly to the sky to clear the way for the descent of a divine king.³²² The shamanic activities reported by Huber relate to their purification rituals aimed at cleansing the ground. Taking into account that Padmasambhava was clearing the ground from local spirits and

³¹⁸ Phuntsho p. 2. The name of Bhutan at the time was Mon, Monyul or Lhomon. The land was described as being dark, 'unlit', before the arrival of Buddhism.

³¹⁹ Douglas, Bays p. 667. The reference to a peacock feather is unusual. Douglas and Bays' text is the translation of the French *Le Dict de Padma* published in 1933 by G.C. Toussaint in which he describes the peacock feather as '...la brillante plume de paon de son aigrette...', p. 417.

³²⁰ Ricard p. 324.

³²¹ With my best thanks to Robert Mayer who not only gave me the authorization to quote his article but who sent me his updated version on 10 May 2018.

³²² Mayer 2018: p.6 follows Toni Huber in his use of the term 'shamanism' in the context of the Himalaya where: '...the shaman/priest is a "bird" who can fly to the upper world, and is thus always marked in one way or another with bird attributes of various kinds, above all feathered headgear and magic wands made of a bird wing or of bird feathers.'

deities to enable the Emperor of Tibet to build his monastery, his assimilation to the power of a local ‘shaman’ would be relevant. The geographical pattern of the ‘shaman’ rituals observed and analyzed by Huber includes the region of Bumthang (bum thang), where traces of Padmasambhava’s visits abound and which are recalled in Dunhuang texts from the ninth or tenth century.³²³



95. Dorje Drakpo depicted on the west wall of the Jowo Lhakhang. (Detail of Fig. 44) (IMG 0343)



96. Heruka Vajarakilāya depicted on the west wall of the Jowo Lhakhang. (Detail of Fig. 44) (IMG 0331)

The magic power of the hat is narrated in the Dunhuang text PT44 which indicates that the Guru would seize and put under his hat the local goddesses he had subdued. He would keep them under his hat for a certain duration, until they were well under his control, and he would release them when required. This specific example would be narrated in the context of the Vajrakīla tradition which is powerful for the subjugation of tenacious local spirits and demons.³²⁴ The depictions of Padmasambhava as Dorje Drakpo and Heruka Vajrakīlaya on the west wall of the Jowo Lhakhang recall such violent episodes (Figs. 95, 96).³²⁵

After Padmasambhava’s victory over the local deities they did not disappear. Once pacified they were ‘bound by oath’ (dam can) and became the protectors of

³²³ Mayer 2018: p. 14.

³²⁴ Mayer 2018: p. 15, Kapstein pp. 158 and 265 n.105.

³²⁵ Tsogyal p. 40, 43.

the Buddhist faith (*chos skyong*). For the inhabitants of the Himalaya, preserving the peace and harmony with these protectors from the invisible world was essential and is still seen as necessary. A population of demons and evil spirits, *lu* (*klu*), *srinpo* (*srin po*), *gyelpo* (*rgyal po*), to name a few, need to be kept under control, satisfied and entertained to avoid plagues, illnesses, draughts, floods, insect invasion and other calamities.



97. Practitioners reading texts and prayers during the Kangso. (IMG 08868)

98. Practitioners playing the oboe *gyaling* during the Kangso. (IMG 08873)

It is undeniable that malevolent local spirits are also active and living on the grounds of Ogyen Choling. Anecdotes of their mischiefs abound.³²⁶ We might recall that Tsokye Dorji's lama, Jangchub Tsöndrü (*byang chub brtson grus*: 1817-1856), during one of his visits to the estate, freed Ashi Yeshe from a *lu* and a *gyelpo* which were hurting her.³²⁷

Therefore, the Kangso (*bskang so*) is performed to ensure benevolence, express gratitude and propitiate the local protectors and spirits for keeping the family and the estate safe throughout the year and for their generosity in ensuring abundant

³²⁶ Choden, Roder p. 72.

³²⁷ Pommaret 2004: p. 82.

harvests. It is also the occasion to renew the bonds with the land and with the members of the community. Every year in the autumn, the head lama of Towadrak (mtho ba drag) comes down from his monastery located on the hill at the north end of the Tang valley. During the three days of the ceremony, he leads groups of practitioners, and together they pray, chant and read the sacred. (Figs. 97, 98).

These are moments of celebration in the Jowo Lhakhang under the auspicious gaze of Padmasambhava. During the ritual, the iconography of the shrine is supplemented by thangkas from the temple collection. For that special occasion, the depiction of Dorje Lingpa on a thangka³²⁸ is displayed as well as a series depicting manifestations of Padmasambhava. This set of thangkas is said to have been commissioned by Ugyen Dorji for the consecration of the temple in 1902.³²⁹ Representations of Padmasambhava are seen around the shrine in a multiplication of images; they increase the efficacy of the prayers recited by the practitioners and the devotees.



99. Before the Kangso, practitioners prepare the dough to make the *tormas*.
(IMG 08805)



100. Before the Kangso, the practitioners make the wood structure for the *tormas*.
(IMG 08821)

The Kangso is mainly dedicated to Mahākāla Gönpo Maning, the protector of Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405). Mahākāla had followed the treasure revealer (gter ston) to Ogyen Choling and subsequently became the protector of

³²⁸ See Appendix Chapter 6 thangka nb. 25.

³²⁹ Information provided by Kunzang Choden and Ugyen Rinzin in 2016. See also Appendix Chapter 6, thangkas nb. 17 to 23.

his descendants and their land. Coming from Tibet, Dorje Lingpa was also accompanied by Kula Khari (*sku bla mkha' ri*), a deity associated with Khari (*mkha' ri*), the great Tibetan mountain range of Lhodrak (*lho brag*). It is current practice for the protectors to follow their protégés,³³⁰ as the spirit of the east (*shar btsan*) came with Aum Drolma the wife of Tshokye Dorje in the nineteenth century. Later, Kyébu Lungtsen (*skyes bu lung btsan*) the deity of the Chökor (*chos khor*) valley of Bumthang was integrated in the retinue of local protectors, because Ugyen Dorji was the Jakar *dzongpön* (*bya dkar dzong dpon*), Jakar being located in the Chökor valley.



101. Villagers lower the *lhadar* during the Kangso. (IMG 1587)



102. Women hold the rattan rope when the *lhadar* is lowered. (IMG 1574)

³³⁰ This tradition continues as Tibetans claim that the protector from Amdo, Machen Pomra (*rma chen spom ra*) has 'relocated' at Dharamsala to be near the Dalai Lama, a native from this Tibetan eastern province. See Cabezón 2010: p. 7.

Twelve names of protectors, including a group of twelve goddesses (*btsan ma bcu gnyis*) compose the list of these local deities, which makes a total of twenty-four. They are native from the Tang (*stang*) valley or from far away and all of them have been assimilated as local protectors and part of the retinue of Gönpo Maning.³³¹ They each receive offerings *torma* (*gtor ma*) that are presented on the altar. The hierarchy is respected, as a large *torma* stands in the center for Mahākāla, flanked by six smaller *tormas* on each side; all of them are different and well identified for each deity (Fig. 94). Made of flour and butter mixed with colors (Fig. 99) the *tormas* are prepared and decorated by lay practitioners during the two days preceding the ceremony. Then they are placed on wooden shapes (Fig. 100) before being carried to the altar. Food is also given to the deities including pieces of meat given to Mahākāla, signaling the wrathful side of this protector.³³²

Most of the texts read during the ritual are from a long text by Dorje Lingpa: the *Lama Kadü*, its full name is *Bla ma bka' 'dus rin chen gter spungs kyi las byang*, and the ritual compendium of Mahākāla Gönpo Maning, *Dpal Mgon po Ma ning srog gi sbu tri'i las byang*, as well as shorter texts, also composed by Dorje Lingpa (Fig. 97).³³³ The practitioners with long trumpets (*dung chen*), drums (*rnga*), cymbals (*sil snyang*) and oboe (*rgya gling*) play the musical parts (Fig. 98).

During three days the ritual takes place in different settings: inside the temple, principally in the Jowo Lhakhang, outside in the courtyard and by the high prayer flag (*lha dar*) erected outside the proper delimitation of the property between the protection wall and the village.

One of the spectacular moments during the Kangso is the lowering and hoisting of the banner of the deities, *lhadar*, here the flag of Mahākāla. (Fig. 101, 102) On the first day of the ritual, the eighteen-meter-tall wooden flagpole is lowered to be cleaned of the dirt and lichens. The long cotton flag, which is frayed after the

³³¹ Pommaret 2007: p. 139 n.14. The names of the local protectors are as follows: Ekajati, Gza', Srog bdud, Dam can (=rdo rje legs pa in this case), Lhamo, nam sgras, rgyal po(=Pe dkar in this case), Sku bla mka'ri, *gnas po* Indrabhūti, Jo bo bla bdag, dgon dkar klu dud grags pa rgyal mtshan [a white *klu*], Btsan ma bcu gnyis [twelve local goddesses].

³³² Pommaret 2007: p. 138 n.9. According to custom the sacrifice of a yak was performed during the Kangso. Trülku Nuden Dorji (sprul sku nus ldan rdo rje), the uncle of the present generation of *chöje*, put an end to this practice in the 1950s.

³³³ Pommaret 2007: p. 138.

seasonal rains, the wind, cold and heat, is detached from the pole and replaced by a new one. On the evening before the Kangso, the caretaker of the temple, the *könyer*, has prepared the new flag. In the printing room, at the top of the *utsé* (dbu rtse), using wood carved blocks and black ink, he has printed on the thirty-meter-long piece of white cloth the four auspicious mythical animals, dragon, tiger, snow lion, Garuḍa, and the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara with eleven heads, and also prayers.³³⁴

On the second day, the pole and its new flag, are placed back in their initial setting and raised. The delicate and difficult task of lowering and raising the pole is performed manually by groups of men and women using long and thick ropes made of rattan (Fig. 102). They retain or push the pole to its final position. This collective effort is performed by the villagers and family members of all ages who know their function, action and placement either in the courtyard, outside the property wall or on the roof of the outbuildings exactly. Guests are invited to join in and are assigned a place to participate in the auspicious event. It is said that holding the rope cleanses the bad deeds of the past year.³³⁵



103. In the temple courtyard, the lama blesses the participants of the Kangso with the hat of Dorje Lingpa in its box. (IMG 1834)

³³⁴ My observation in 2016.

³³⁵ See also Pommaret 2007: p. 150 for details of the social codification and function of this event.

On the third and last day of the ritual, a group of musicians led by the lama and the head of the *chöje* enters the *utsé* and goes to the private family shrine to take a red box containing the hat which reputedly belonged to Dorje Lingpa. On his way back to the temple the lama blesses the villagers, the family and guests gathered in the courtyard by touching their heads with Dorje Lingpa's hat still in its reliquary box (Fig. 103). Then the lama climbs up to the Jowo Lhakhang, and wearing the precious hat watches from the shrine window the procession taking place in the courtyard.

Another highlight of the ceremony is the circumambulation of the temple. To the sound of the long trumpets played from the opened windows of the Jowo Lhakhang, the participants in the ritual and domestic animals from the villagers' farms walk around the temple three times. A small red ribbon is fastened to the hair of the children born during the year, and to the hair or the feathers of the animals. The number and composition of the group of animals can change, but when I was there, the group included a horse, a cow, a dog, and a hen. The ribbon is a 'thread for renewing support' (*rten gso srung mdud*) and symbolizes the allegiance and devotion to Mahākāla. For the newborns it marks their entrance into the community of Ogyen Choling. Following the procession, a subjugation dance is executed in the courtyard (Fig. 104) before the final act of the Kangso that takes place in the Jowo Lhakhang.



104. The general performs a subjugation dance in the temple courtyard. (IMG 1899)

Padmasambhava is said to have initiated and choreographed the dances performed generally by monks in *dzongs* (rdong) and monasteries *gönpa* (dgon pa) during festivals *tsechu* (tshes bcu). During the Kangso, the dance is offered to Mahākāla Gönpo Maning and is called the Tibetan dance ‘*bod’ cham*,³³⁶ a name which does not add much to its meaning. The practitioner performing the dance wears the costume of a general (dmag dpon) with a helmet covered by a red panache (Fig. 104). Brandishing a sword, he jumps and sings, invoking Mahākāla. After leaving the scene for a short while, he comes back calm and serene, conceivably after having vanquished evil spirits or enemies with the help of the protector. Though this particular dance is not directly attributed to Padmasambhava, the act of subjugation is clearly rendered by the action of the dancer. In this case the choreography expresses that the ‘general’ has killed the negative forces, rather than only subjugating them. The dancer simulates his action when, after completing the dance, he cleans the sword on his sleeve, as if to wipe the blood from his weapon.³³⁷

Then, the participants assemble for their last devotion. The shrine is illuminated by flickering butter-lamps and filled with the vibration of the music. The players now put all their hearts into performing the ending act of the ceremony. To the satisfaction of all, and to accumulate more merits and blessings, the ritual has to be repeated three times throughout the days.

Everybody involved in the preparation and execution of the ceremony, the family, the practitioners and the villagers praise themselves for the perfect accomplishment and the good omens brought to Ogyen Choling. It is particularly auspicious to have seen numerous ravens circling above the estate, as the bird is associated with Mahākāla Gönpo Maning in his raven-headed form (bya rog gdong can). Participants also receive long-life pills (tshe ril) previously consecrated by the lama. These small pills, once ingested, help to clear the karma and give the assurance of a prosperous and healthy year.

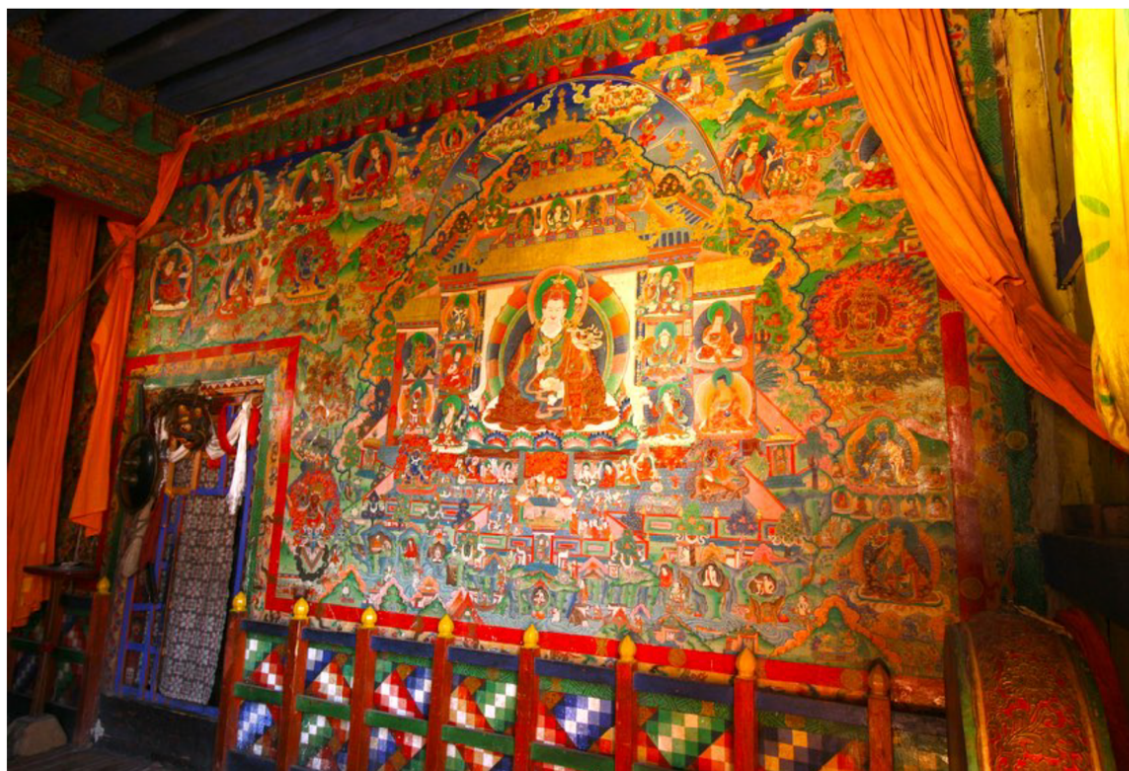
³³⁶ Pommaret 2007: p. 149 n. 22.

³³⁷ Pommaret 2007: p. 149.

In addition to addressing worldly concerns and spiritual expectations, the Kangso is the opportunity to renew the social links among the members of the community. During the feudal period, until the 1950s, it recalled the rights and duties of the *chöje* that organizes the ceremony to maintain and nurture the harmonious relationship with the local deities. The family - which provides most of the meals, the offerings and secures the services of the practitioners - must also make the necessary arrangements to ensure that the ceremony is performed with meticulous attention to details. It is the duty of the *chöje* to please the deities who in return will bestow prosperity on the estate.

The music stops, one by one the butter-lamps fade, the lama and his practitioners fold the prayer books, the excitement of the Kangso gives way to a feeling of achievement and also a light nostalgia for the beautiful moments spent in the presence of the sacred. Now emptied from the praying crowd, the silence returns to the Jowo Lhakhang and to the deities.

Padmasambhava in his Copper Colored Mountain (zangs mdog dpal ri) Paradise



105. The Copper Colored Mountain Paradise depicted on the east side wall. The entrance door of the *gönkhang* can be seen with hanging shields and colored scarves. (IMG 0855)

During the Kangso, the lama officiates from his chair that faces the sanctum. The musicians and practitioners are sitting near him along the east and west walls of the shrine. They are surrounded by images of Padmasambhava who seems to fill in the space of the shrine as he is depicted on the thangkas hanging from the ceiling and represented on the walls: on one side with his teachers and his disciples, and on the other side in his Paradise.

The representation of the Glorious Copper Colored Mountain is monumental, lavish in colors and gold (Fig. 105). In the middle of the panel, the Guru is enthroned in his palace with his manifestations, disciples and by his two consorts Mandāravā (man da ra ba) and Yéshé Tsogyel (ye shes mtsho rgyal) at his sides. Above him we see the protectors of the Three Families (rigs gsum mgon po), Avalokiteśvara (span ras gzigs), Mañjuśrī (‘jan dpal) and Varapāṇi (phyag na rdo rje), and the Buddha Amitābha (‘od dpag med) at the top under the golden roof. This alignment, reaching the top of the Paradise, represents the three bodies, *kāya*, of Padmasambhava. We see him in his Nirmāṇakāya, then in his Sambhogakāya form as Avalokiteśvara and the Buddha Amitābha his Dharmakāya form.³³⁸

The palace, with its heavenly sky full of celestial musicians, offering bearers and dancing *gings*, is well delineated by a band of dark blue color reaching its golden finial and by a rainbow above it. The space surrounding the palace and occupying the remaining surface of the painting is filled with scenes illustrating *The Prayer in Seven Chapters* (le’u bdun ma), which is a *terma* (gter ma) revealed by *tülku* Zangpo Drakpa (sprul sku bzang po grags pa).³³⁹ In most cases, the vignettes bear an inscription giving homage to the great Guru and his actions. As an example, the inscription below Padmasambhava depicted as the Medicine Buddha, reads: on sman gyi bla ma la na mo; Homage to Padmasambhava the supreme healer.³⁴⁰ The vignettes illustrate the prayer and the inscriptions as a chorus participates, in silence, with their recitation.

³³⁸ Essen and Thingo p. 125.

³³⁹ www.lotsawahouse.org [accessed on 23-05-17]. The date of birth of Zangpo Drakpa is not precisely known, he was born in either 1303, 1315, or 1326, and the date of his death seems unknown according to Jay Valentine on treasureoflives.org [accessed on 22-05-17].

³⁴⁰ See Appendix Chapter 4 section 4.4 nb. 32.

The Prayer in Seven Chapters, also called the *Supplications to Guru Rinpoché in Seven Chapters*,³⁴¹ was composed upon the request of five disciples of Padmasambhava, the Emperor of Tibet Trisong Détsen (khri srong lde btsan), the *dākinī* Yéshé Tsogyel (ye shes mtsho rgyal), the monk Namkhé Nyingpo (nam mkha'i snying po), a court official Nanam Dorje Dudjom (sna nam rdo rje bdud 'joms), and the prince Mutri Tsépo or Mutig Tsenpo (mu tig btsan po), one of the three sons of Emperor Trisong Détsen.³⁴²

*'...we request you, who are a buddha: please teach us a prayer that we can say in the morning and the evening, few in words and concise in meaning, a prayer that will inspire vivid faith and delight, infuse us with a powerful blessing, and, when ordinary people, not gifted with great intelligence, use its words as an urgent plea...'*³⁴³

They each requested a prayer according to their aspiration, to which Padmasambhava answered. The Emperor of Tibet wished to receive a prayer that would help him to reach enlightenment³⁴⁴. Yéshé Tsogyel, the Guru's highly accomplished disciple, wanted to know which supplication she should recite to ensure his return from the south island.³⁴⁵ It is in this prayer that we find a description of the Copper Mountain.³⁴⁶ The monk Namkhé Nyingpo requested instructions for meditation through a lineage at the source of the teachings. Nanam Dorje Dudjom requested the Guru to give him a '...prayer of supplication to the masters of the lineages of meditation practice'.³⁴⁷ Finally, Prince Mutri Tsépo asked how he could help his people. To that question Padmasambhava advised that he should encourage them to follow the Buddhist way of the

³⁴¹ I have consulted *The Prayer in Seven Chapters* from www.lotsawahouse.org [accessed in 23-05-2017], and the *Supplications to Guru Rinpoché in Seven Chapters*, as well as the *Notes to Supplications to Guru Rinpoché in Seven Chapters* in Ngawang Zangpo p. 217-267 and Appendix 1 p. 295-313 respectively.

³⁴² This prince has several names. He is called Mutri Tsépo or Prince Mutri Tsépo in Zangpo's text and Prince Mutri Tsenpo in the text translated from Zangpo Drakpa on Lotsawahouse website.

³⁴³ Lotsawa House, in the prologue to Chapter 1 *The Prayer to the Three Kāya Guru*.

³⁴⁴ Zangpo p. 299.

³⁴⁵ Zangpo p. 304.

³⁴⁶ Zangpo pp. 228-231, Lotsawa House Chapter 3. pp. 11-14.

³⁴⁷ Zangpo p. 306.

Dharma.³⁴⁸ The Chapter Seven of the Prayer includes, *The Supplication for the Spontaneous Fulfillment of Wishes* in Nagwang Zangpo.³⁴⁹ This last episode takes place upon the departure of Padmasambhava to the south island. This is a land populated by *rākṣasa* (srin po) that the Guru wants to restrain from invading the world, and it is where the Copper Colored Mountain is located.

In the supplication Mutri Tsépo, who inherited the charge of the kingdom at a young age after the death of his father, implored the Guru not to abandon him; he was feeling alone, burdened by his responsibilities and he asked the Guru to help him and his family. The request was favorably answered by Padmasambhava, who gave the Seventh Prayer and assured the young man that he would pay close attention to him, his family and to the kingdom of Tibet. The compassionate Guru also said that he would always be staying near to his faithful devotees and visible to them on the ‘...tenth days of the waxing and waning moons...’.³⁵⁰ The prayer continues with supplications to be used in case of several types of danger.

Although the seventh chapter was composed and offered to a prince, it addresses, in most part, the practical and pragmatic concerns facing all beings in their daily lives. The devotee can call the Guru when lost in a snowstorm, misguided by evil spirits, attacked by bandits or wild animals, or in distress when facing the pain and agony of an ailing loved one. The prayer is meant to be recited daily and it also aims at spiritual guidance. It contains as well an invocation towards the elimination of delusion for a successful passage through the Bardo after death, and for rebirth in the Sukhāvatī (bde ba can), the paradise of the Buddha Amitābha. It is easy to see how it appeased Prince Mutri Tsépo and why it has appealed to devotees throughout the ages.

³⁴⁸ Zangpo p. 311.

³⁴⁹ Zangpo p. 245.

³⁵⁰ Zangpo p. 252, Lowatsa House p. 7. See also Appendix chapter 4 section 4.4. nb. 29. At dawn towards the end of the *tséchu* (tshes bcu) festival of the tenth day commemoration Padmasambhava in Paro, the immense thangka, (mthong grol) ‘liberation by seeing’, representing Padmasambhava is unfolded. The crowd of devotees can see Padmasambhava and pray with the belief that their vision of the Guru will clean their bad deeds.



106. Depiction of Dorje Drakmar adjacent to the door leading to the *gönkhang*.
(Detail from Fig. 105) (IMG 0239)

The large depiction of the Copper Colored Mountain Paradise shares a part of the east wall with the *gönkhang* (mgon khang) which occupies the room located behind. The *gönkhang* is the shrine where Mahākāla Gönpo Maning and his retinue of local protectors are located. Within that context the impressive representation of Dorje Drakmar (rdo rje drag dmar) at the extreme left side of the Paradise and at the right side of the entrance door of the *gönkhang* (Fig. 106) is in a strategic position. At this place, Dorje Drakmar functions as a peg to protect and to set a boundary that the local spirits would not transgress. Above Dorje Drakmar, Padmasambhava under his wrathful form of Dorje Drolö (rdo rje gro lod), also contributes to the protection of this edge of the Paradise.

On the opposite side, at the extreme right side of the painting, between the central motif of the Paradise and the window, a large wrathful figure is depicted. Identified from its inscription as Vajrarākṣa (rdo rje srin po) the dark brown figure with nine heads and eighteen arms is surrounded by flames (Fig. 107). If the hatchet he brandishes in each of his right hands is a usual attribute for such a character, the keeping of humans held on leashes, as seen on his left hands, is uncommon and attracts the attention. Under his lotus pedestal, eight spirits are engulfed in a cloud of swirling dark smoke. Connected to this figure, a ritual is taking place underneath. Padmasambhava, in the guise of a tantric lama, is wearing a large blue brimmed hat topped by a green feather and his ornamental

shirt front. A group of musician monks play the long trumpets and cymbals while the lama throws a flaming *phurba* onto armed assailants riding horses. The assailants fall on the grass, vanquished (Fig. 108).

This scene of subjugation and victory over the enemies is described in the *Prayer in Seven Chapters*. Padmasambhava is invoked against enemies that want to destroy the Buddhist faith: 'O Guru Rinpoche, with your retinue of eight classes of gods and demons you will repel aggressors and their armies - of this we have no doubt!' The eight categories of gods and demons (*lha srin sde brgyad*) are among the spirits that Padmasambhava tracked down in the Himalaya³⁵¹ and that he bound and compelled to protect the Dharma. In the prayer, Padmasambhava calls upon them to defeat the enemies of the Buddhist faith.



107. Vajrarākṣa Dorje Srinpo depicted on the right side of the Paradise. (Detail from Fig. 105) (IMG 0219)

³⁵¹ The eight categories of gods and demons are mentioned several times in Padmasambhava's story of his life in Tsogyal 2004: pp. 65, 72, 73, 127, 1132, 133, 139.



108. The eight categories of gods and demons and the subjugation ritual. (Detail from Fig. 107)

The symbolic aspect of Vajrarākṣa's action is represented by his left hands holding the humans tied up and crawling like animals. They cannot free themselves because symbolically they are enchained to the poisons which taint their karma. In the scene of the tantric ritual (Fig. 108) the 'shamanic' feather on the lama's hat is green and fairly tall at the top the vajra and resembles more a peacock than an eagle feather. This metaphor reinforces the symbolic aspect of the ritual of subjugation. The peacock, a bird that is known to kill snakes and to absorb their poison, is another way to allude to the cleansing of the karma. The multiplication of heads and arms lends motion to Vajrarākṣa as if he is engaged in a fierce combat with the invisible spirits. It echoes the movements of the dancer of the Kangso who leaps and twirls, wielding his sword and simulating his fight with the enemies and against the evil dispositions and the poisons.³⁵²

In the Jowo Lhakhang, and in the context of this section, Padmasambhava and Dorje Lingpa operate through the Kangso on the same ground where pragmatism

³⁵² Pommaret 2003: p. 55. Françoise Pommaret has analyzed this representation of Padmasambhava in Bhutan in her article *Êtres soumis, Êtres protecteurs: Padmasambhava et les Huit Catégories de Dieux et Démons au Bhoutan*. She proposes that this image on the wall of the Jowo Lhakhang was meant to protect Ogyen Choling against the possible invasion from the armies of enemies gathered at the northern border of the country at the end of the nineteenth century. During this period the political situation of Bhutan was precarious and volatile, and the protection of Padmasambhava was deemed essential.

and spirituality interconnect. During three days, the cadence of the texts of Dorje Lingpa give its rhythm to the ritual. The propitiation of the local protectors works through the texts of the treasure revealer who is the embodiment of Padmasambhava and the local mediator between the realms of humans gods. The prayers are aimed at the removal of the difficulties encountered and for a better life on this earth; and are also intended to lessen the weight of the bad deeds past or present and to be rewarded with an auspicious rebirth and possibly to unite with Padmasambhava in his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise.

Padmasambhava the Precious Guru is the destroyer of evil spirits, the real ones roaming the land and the symbolic ones in the guise of the poisons which obstruct knowledge and clear vision. In the shrine, the patron Ugyen Dorji and his artists have repeatedly depicted the Guru; they have recreated on the walls his omnipresence and reenacting his actions. In the sanctum they also have displayed Dorje Lingpa within the precious lineage headed by the Buddha Śākyamuni and Padmasambhava. The feeling of their presence is intangible though noticeable and the strength of it inspires the confidence of the devotees, intensifying the spiritual energy of the collective prayers during the Kangso.

During the year, when praying in the Jowo Lhakhang, and before leaving the shrine, I like to imagine a worshipper drawn towards the Copper Colored Mountain Paradise to ponder and perhaps meditate in front of its depiction, possibly reciting the *Prayer in Seven Chapters*, using the words offered to Prince Mutri Tsépo. Within the mind a vision of hope, for one day after this life joining the Guru in his Paradise, the worshipper would return to the routine and the occupations of daily life bestowed with the blessings of Padmasambhava and Dorje Lingpa.

5.4 *The Sacred Landscape (chos 'khor)*

As she does every day, the woman removed her shoes on the narrow patch of dry freezing flagstones in the courtyard. Barefoot she bent and with her face down, performed her prostrations in front of the temple (gtsug lag khang). It had snowed the night before. The sun was shining in a deep blue sky, the temperature was still low, chilled by a cold bitter wind. The large white banner (lha dar) high on its mast was swaying. Having finished with her prayers, she put on her shoes

while swirls of smoke rose from the fumigation stove (*bsang thab*), and walked on to circumambulate the temple. She slowly disappeared in the shade and in the back of the monument, spinning the prayer bells that chimed in the silence of the early day scarcely disturbed by the crowing of a raven. Soon she was joined by villagers fingering their prayer beads and reciting their mantras. Strengthened by the presence of the deities and their daily prayer (*kha 'don*) they returned to their occupations, passing by the *riksum gönpo* (*rigs gsum mgon po*) *chorten* (*mchod rten*) and the mani wall on the path outside the estate.

This familiar scene on a wintry morning takes place in front of and around the Tsuklakkhang, the temple of Ogyen Choling (*orgyan chos gling*). The scene also illustrates the ties linking the villagers and the temple. In this final section I examine the relationships between the estate dwellers and their land. The place was shaped by ancestors and history and is engraved in the landscape. It is also through the geography of the Tang (*stang*) valley that Ogyen Choling is closely identified with a network of sacred sites and oral stories which I will consider. Over the years, the noble family of religious descent (*chos rje*) and the villagers had to adapt and reaffirm their presence and status at times when difficulties arose.

The Beginning, the Philosopher and the Treasure Revealer (*gter ston*)

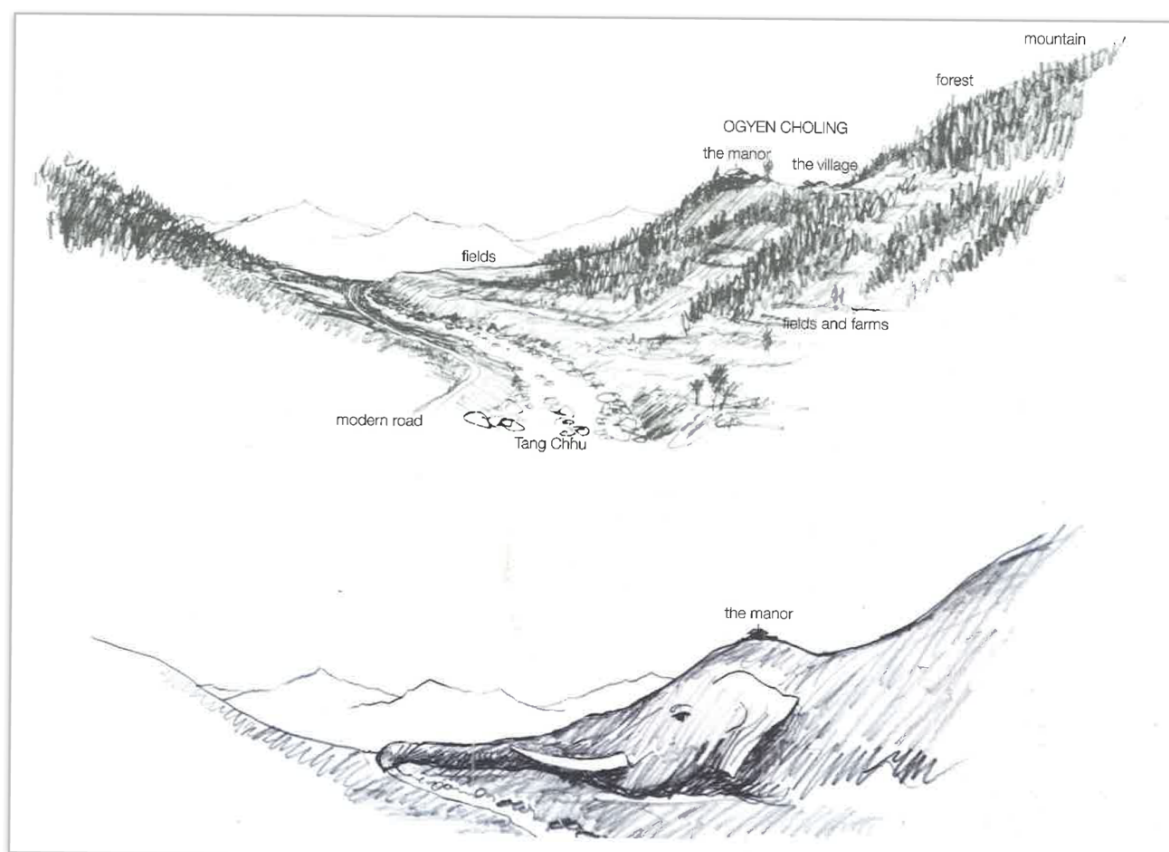
In his long poem composed in 1355 Longchen Rabjam (*klong chen rab byams*: 1308-1364) describes the Tang (*stang*) valley as ‘...charming, shaped like a jewel horse-chariot...’.³⁵³ Fleeing Tibet after a long dispute with Ta’i Situ Changchub Gyaltsen (*ta’i situ byang chub rgyal mtshan*: 1302-1364)³⁵⁴ the religious philosopher made his way to Mon, as the southern region which is now Bhutan was called at the time. Longchen Rabjam or Lonchenpa then reached Bumthang (*bum thang*) and the Tang valley as attested in his long poem.³⁵⁵ The sloping hills

³⁵³ Ura p. 10. *Longchen’s Forests of Poetry and Rivers of Composition in Bhutan* p. 26 n. 51, the ancient spelling of the Tang *chu* is (*rta chu*) the Horse river. It would explain the comparison of the shape of the river to a ‘...horse-chariot.’ made by Longchenpa.

³⁵⁴ Aris 1979: p. 155.

³⁵⁵ In his text, Lonchenpa describes and expresses his admiration for Bumthang and its valleys and writes with enthusiasm about the religious wealth of the landscape.

of Mount Kyanyai in the shape of the head of a sleeping elephant was an auspicious site (Fig. 109). On the crown of the head of the animal, where Ogyen Choling now stands, he set up his *gönpa* (dgon pa) meditation site.³⁵⁶ Ogyen Choling was one of the eight meditation sites he established in Bhutan; the most important is probably Tharpaling (thar pa gling), in the Chumey (chu smad) valley of Bumthang, where he remained for several years.³⁵⁷

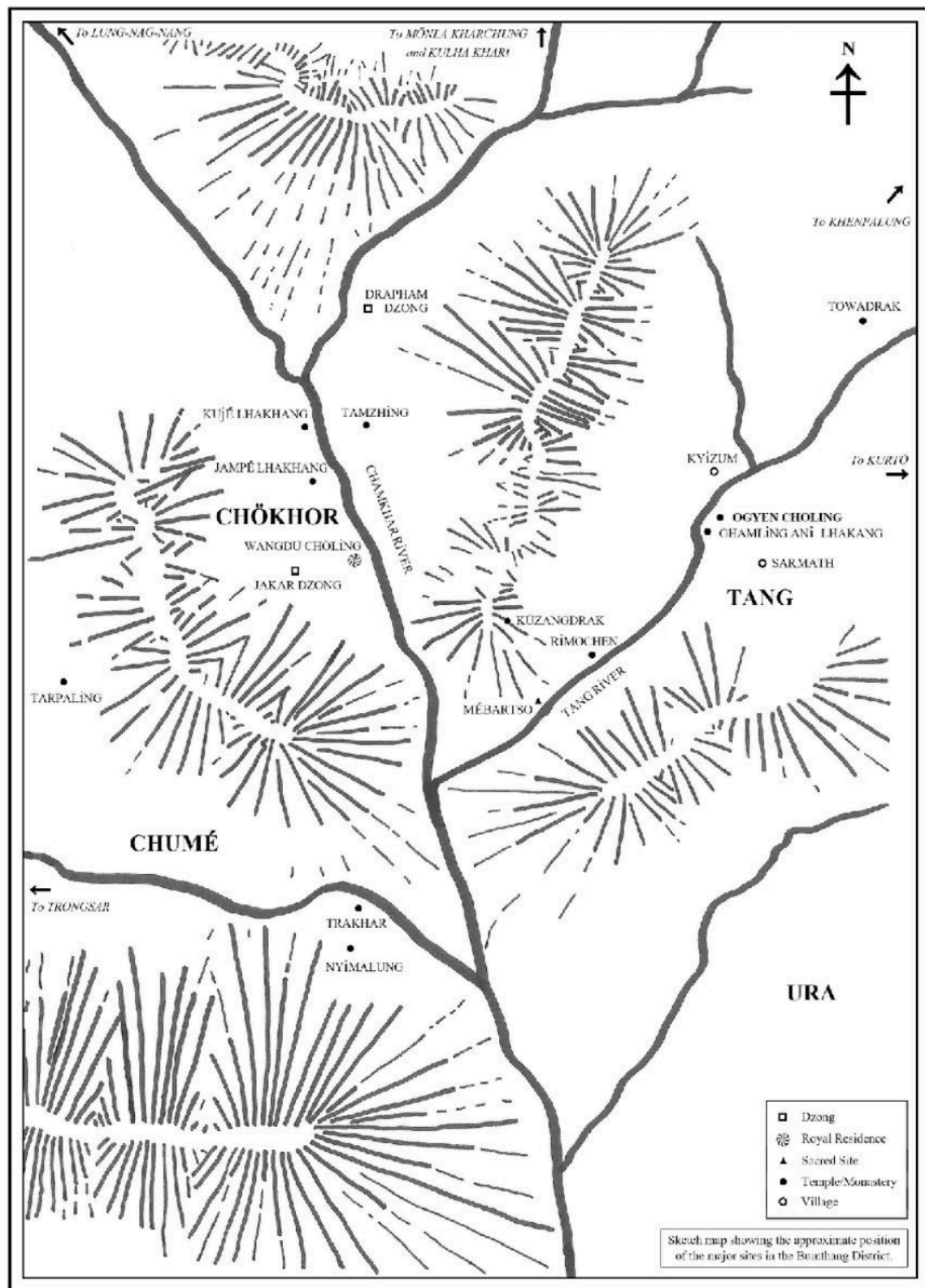


109. The hill in the shape of an elephant's head on the slope of Mount Kyanyai where Ogyen Choling is built. (Design P. Pichard)

Looking at the map (Fig. 110) we can see that Ogyen Choling is situated approximately in the middle of the Tang valley on a south-west axis. From the southern expanse of the estate the view opens towards the south. On the opposite side of the property, on the north, the valley tends to close in with hills and mountains.

³⁵⁶ Choden, Roder p. 15.

³⁵⁷ For details about Longchenpa's *gönpa* in Bhutan, see Aris p. 315 n. 19.



110. Map of Bumthang showing the four valleys of Chökhör, Tang, Chumé and Ura.
(Design Alex Vucic based on Michael Aris' map, Aris 1979: p. 4)

On Mount Kyanyai Longchenpa's meditation cave today overlooks the Jowo Lhakhang, the estate, the village, and further away the Tang river (stang chu) running down into the valley. The grassland, where the philosopher taught, is contiguous to the edge of the forest which extends to the buckwheat fields close to the village. On that stretch of land the stones from the terrace where his disciples and devotees would listen to him were still visible until the 1970s. Then the stones, a precious commodity locally, were removed and used for the house construction.³⁵⁸ Longchenpa's cave is nowadays visited by lamas and pilgrims bringing *tsa tsa* (tsha tsha), flags and statues, eager to make offerings and to meditate within the symbolic presence of the powerful teacher.

Longchenpa was a precursor. He was followed at Ogyen Choling by the Tibetan treasure revealer (gter ston) Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405) who settled at Ogyen Choling. Images of both men can be seen in the temple: Longchenpa within the lineage of the *dzokchen* (rdzogs chen) and Dorje Lingpa in all the glory of an eminent ancestor of the noble family. Another prestigious lineage was added when, in the nineteenth century, Ashi Yeshe (al ce ye shes), the daughter of the heir Tshokye Dorji (mtsho shyas rdo rje), married a noble descendant from the Bhutanese treasure revealer Pema Lingpa (pad ma gling pa: 1450-1521). Pema Lingpa is also depicted among the figures of the transmission lineage of the *dzokchen* in the temple's upper shrine, the Jowo Lhakhang.³⁵⁹ In reference to its importance and main place of worship on the estate and in the village, the temple is called Tsuklakkhang (gtsug lag khang).

The Lus (klu) the Spirits of the Subterranean World

In front of the temple and around the property, the dwellings of the serpent protectors of the subterranean and aquatic realms attract the attention. In particular, the shrines dedicated to the *lu* (klu) are noticeable and show their presence at Ogyen Choling.

³⁵⁸ Choden, Roder p. 15.

³⁵⁹ See Appendix chapter 2 section 2.4 nb. 1 and chapter 4 section 4.5 nb. 8, 10, 9.



111. The *nāgarājās* Nanda and Apananda holding the stem of the lotus where the Buddha Śākyamuni is enthroned. (Detail of Fig. 36) (IMG o6o5)

Several *lu* are represented in the temple arising from rivers or lakes. We see Nanda and Apananda, the two *nāgarājās* (Fig. 111), holding the stem of the wide lotus on which the Buddha Śākyamuni is enthroned, *lu* offering jewels to Virūpākṣa the King Guardian of the western direction on the wall at the entrance of the temple or bringing gifts to Padmasambhava at the bottom of his Copper Colored Mountain Paradise.³⁶⁰ In the courtyard, on the facade of the *lukhang* (klu khang) (Fig. 112) an image of a female *lu* with long curly hair can be seen; crowned with snakes and framed by flowers, she is emerging from the blue waves of a lake (Fig. 113)



112. The *lu* shrine in the temple courtyard. (DSC o8103)



113. The female *lu* depicted on the facade of the shrine. (DSC o8101)

³⁶⁰ Appendix section 4.1 nb. 39, chapter 1 section 1.1, section 4.4 end of Part 1.

The tall trees growing in front of the enclosure surrounding the property shelter the *lu* shrines which form a protective girdle around the estate. When exiting the estate, on the right and left side, one can see two small stone structures at the base of an impressive Himalayan oak tree (Fig. 114, 115). The same type of structure stands further under the branches of a smaller tree (Fig. 116). These are three of the shrines, the dwellings of the *lus*, out of a total of seven. Five of these stand outside the wall, one is located inside the central building *utsé* (dbus rtse) and one is in the courtyard in front of the temple. The shrines are plain, similarly built with stones, set on substructures, also made of stones, which elevate them from the ground. They are covered with white paint, bear the dark red *kémar* (ske dmar) and are covered with a roof of wood or slates. They are built under ancient trees, oaks generally, or, in one case, under a tall blue pine, or, when inside the *utsé*, in the corner of a room. The exception is the shrine in the courtyard which is a larger and more elaborate construction covered by wisteria. It is also the only shrine with a depiction of the *lu* inhabiting it.



114. *Lu* shrine on the right side of the entrance of the estate under an oak tree.

115. *Lu* shrine on the left side of the entrance of the estate under an oak tree.

116. *Lu* shrine on the left side of the entrance of the estate under a small tree.

The shrine inside the *utsé* was erected where a small white snake used to be regularly noticed by family members. This was taken as an auspicious sign and a shrine was built in the space, which is now a storage room.

The large shrine for the female *lu* in the courtyard has a story associated with Tshokye Dorje (mtsho skyes rdo rje), the fifteenth descendant of Dorje Lingpa. Returning to Ogyen Choling after a long journey, he met a woman who greeted him and told him that he was the son of a *lu*. She was probably a spirit, or even a *lu*, as she quickly disappeared. Following this encounter a pool of water would appear wherever he would stand. As of that day, he was given the name of Tshokye (mtsho skyes), lake born. His previous name was Wangchen Dorji (dbang chen rdo rje). His new name connected him to water, the natural habitat of the *lu*.³⁶¹ When Tshokye Dorje died, the oral story narrates that the pool of water that had settled in the courtyard withdrew under the temple. In its place, the shrine for the *lu* was built.³⁶² Inside, the shrine is relatively spacious, the wall is decorated with a depiction of an agrarian scene and two female *lu* holding jewels. A water container recalls the presence of the water pool which allegedly moved beneath the temple.

The *lu* living in the shrines located at the front, east side of the estate, in the courtyard and in the *utsé* are characterized as being benevolent. The *lu* on the south side under a blue pine tree and overlooking the Tang valley, has both traits, benevolent and malevolent, while the *lu* in the forest on the north side, is believed to be violently malevolent.

From my observations the *lu* act as household protectors under the care of the family members living on the estate, while the villagers propitiate their *lu* living in the shrine next to their house. When I was staying at Ogyen Choling, Ugyen Rinzin told me that he would offer the *lu* milk and ‘clothes’, their preferred gifts, upon their return from Bodh Gaya. It is believed that they go on pilgrimage and bring offerings to the Buddha Śākyamuni at the site of his enlightenment.³⁶³ Therefore, still according to the local story, they need to be fed and to be given new ‘clothes’ upon their return. The ‘clothes’ are symbolized by strips of colorful

³⁶¹ The name Tshokye Dorji recalls as well one of the names of Padmasambhava.

³⁶² Choden, Roder, pp. 72, 73.

³⁶³ Information received from Ugyen Rinzin during my 2016 fieldwork visit.

fabrics tied to the branches over their shrine while milk is poured on the ground. However, the ground around their shrine is kept clean and free from detritus. The *lu* hate pollution and annoyance, so avoiding any matter of discontent is an utmost necessity, for the *lu* bring prosperity and good health, and also maledictions when they are dissatisfied. They need to be generously cajoled to be kept in check since cases of illness provoked by their ire are well known.³⁶⁴

The care and attention brought to keep peace and harmony with the *lu* to ward off the diverse types of life-threatening disorders resonate with the concerns addressed when propitiating the Deities of Long Life represented in the Drölma Lhakhang. There, Amitāyus (tshe dpag med) the Medicine Buddha (sangs rgyas sman bla) and Uṣṇīṣavijayā (gtsug tor rnam rgyal)³⁶⁵ will help whoever prays to them to have a long span of life allowing enough time to clear the present misdeeds and the obscurations accumulated during previous cycles of life. The pragmatism that is involved in maintaining a good relationship with the *lu*, also assists with soteriological concerns.

The Kangso (bskang gso), the Local Protectors and their Role

Another group of protectors is propitiated at Ogyen Choling as the annual Kangso ritual³⁶⁶ is celebrated for the twenty-four of them. The dwelling of these local deities is the *gönkhang* (mgon khang), a shrine on the upper floor, adjacent to the Jowo Lhakhang. The protectors include Mahākāla Gönpo Maning (mgon po ma ning), the dharma protector in his raven-head form (bya rog gdong can) who is at the head of the group.³⁶⁷ The ravens flying over the estate are a constant reminder of him and are seen as auspicious omens. Among the names of the protectors recorded by Pommaret, we recognize Gza (gza') or Rahula and Lhamo.

³⁶⁴ Choden, Roder p. 72.

³⁶⁵ Appendix chapter 2 section 2.1 nb. 1, 2, 3.

³⁶⁶ For details on the Kangso see also section 5.3.

³⁶⁷ Pommaret 2007: p. 139 n.14. Name of the local protectors: Ekajati, Gza', Srog bdud, Dam can (=rdo rje legs pa in this case), Lhamo, nam sgras, rgyal po (=Pe dkar in this case), Sku bla mka'ri, *gnas po* Indrabhūti, Jo bo bla bdag, dgon dkar klu dud grags pa rgyal mtshan [a white *klu*], Btsan ma bcu gnyis [twelve local goddesses linked to the months of the year].

I suggest that in this case she is Palden Lhamo (dpal ldan llha mo dud gsol mar) as seen at the bottom register of the large representation of Dorje Lingpa in the Drölma Lakhang. Regarding the *gyelpo* (rgyal po) who is supposedly Pehar (pe dkar), it is interesting to notice the small temple dedicated to him and surrounded by pine trees on a rock knoll in the close vicinity of the estate.



117. The local protector Indrabhūti depicted on a slate on the front of a stone shrine in the forest above the village of Ogyen Choling. (IMG 2314)



118. Indrabhūti depicted in the *gōnkhang*. (IMG 2486 by P. Sochaczewski)

Though each of the protectors has its uniqueness and power, one among them, the notable *népo* (gnas po) Indrabhūti, the lord of the land, occupies a particular position in space and rituals (Fig. 117, 118). He is celebrated during the three days of the Kangso together with the other deities, and furthermore he is the subject of several rituals all through the year: a rite in spring at the inception of the sowing season, one in July for a bountiful harvest and one after the Kangso in October or November.³⁶⁸ He is also called when calamities strike should they be storms, heavy rains, draught or epidemics. Indrabhūti dwells in his ‘palace’, a

³⁶⁸ ‘...We do worship [Indrabhūti] three times a year once on the 11th day of the first lunar calendar, once in July after the harvest are in and after the last day of Kangso. But we also make extra rituals if there are adverse weather conditions or epidemics of flu or other conditions.’ Kunzang Choden’s email 6-3-2019.

small shrine made of stones located in the forest above the village below Longchenpa's meditation cave and is depicted in the *gönkhang*. His origins are enigmatic. With Kunzang Choden we have tried to ask the villagers for tales that could guide our understanding of his arrival and the source of his name, without success. The collective memory seems to have lost the root of their local protector, unless it is a well-kept secret. The name of Indrabhūti calls to mind the mythical king of Oḍḍiyāna, who adopted Padmasambhava as a child born on a lotus flower in the middle of lake Danakosha.³⁶⁹ The name also refers to King Ja of Zahor who is also referred to as Indrabhūti. He was a skilled tantric master in the transmission lineage of the Mahāyoga, and one of the Eight Great Siddhas.³⁷⁰ From these two cases the occurrence of a king or a lineage master becoming a local protector in a Bhutanese village is slim. We will probably not know more about his history. However, these two representations, one engraved on a slate on the front facade of his outdoor shrine (Fig. 117) and the other on the wall of the *gönkhang* (Fig. 118), give insights about his environment and line of descent.

Similarities can be seen on the two images. Indrabhūti is strongly built, he wears the same accoutrement as the Tibetan warriors and could qualify as a warrior spirit, *dralha* (dgra lha).³⁷¹ His armor is similar to that worn by the soldiers of King Raudra, the last king of Śambhala depicted in the temple.³⁷² The resemblance to the soldiers of Raudra stops here. While the soldiers carry weapons and wear rather simple headgear, Indrabhūti's helmet is either fitted with a geometric frame with small tassels and with two feathers high on its finial (Fig. 117) or with an aigrette with three white feathers flanking a green peacock type of feather at the front of the headgear, and a red tassel on the back

³⁶⁹ Tangdröl p. 7.

³⁷⁰ Dudjom Rinpoche p. 458, Katz p. 169, Luczanits 2006: p. 79, 80 n. 16.

³⁷¹ According to Jeff Watt's definition: 'Warrior (Drala) [dgra lha] Appearance, especially in the terminology of artists, refers to a figure having the general appearance of a Tibetan warrior - typically male, wearing armor and riding a horse. They can have a peaceful, semi-peaceful or wrathful expression. Many Tibetan and Himalayan Mountain Gods have this Drala appearance, however not all of them are defined or referred to as Drala, although they have the appearance of a Drala.' HAR Deity, Tibetan: Warrior Appearance (Drala) 5-2007 [updated 5-2011, 4-2017] [accessed on 22-3-2019].

³⁷² See Appendix chapter 3 section 3.1 nb 10.

(Fig. 118). They both hold a pennant with their right hand, and carry a jewel in their left hand, close to or apart from their chests. They also both ride a yak, an animal far too slow for a warrior who would rather gallop on a horse. Swirls of cloud and smoke surround them, and an attendant stands by the side of Indrabhūti holding a vase and a banner on the lower ground on the slate engraving. There is no attendant or worshipper in the depiction in the *gönkhang*.



119. The mountain god Amnyes Cha Kyun from Amdo. (The Rubin Museum of Art, Tibet, Eastern; 18th century, Pigments on cloth; 12 1/4x7 1/2 in, Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin, C2006.66.8 (HAR 141), Acc. nb. 1995.11.6)

120. Detail of his attendant, shown on the bottom right side of the picture. He wears the same type of helmet as Indrabhūti on Fig. 117.

These two representations of Indrabhūti (Fig. 117, 118) compare favorably with the images of the mountain gods, Cha Kyun (bya khyung) or Amnyes Cha Kyun (Fig. 119) from Amdo, and particularly with the depiction of his attendant (Fig.

120)³⁷³. Also, the similarities with the mountain god Kula Khari (*sku bla mkha 'ri*) (Fig. 121)³⁷⁴, are worth examining.



121. The Mountain God Kula Khari. (Rubin Museum of Art, terracotta and pigments, H 97/8 x W 81/4 x D 45/8 inc., C2002.7.3, HAR 65079)

Kula Khari is seen with his mountain palace visible in the backdrop. He rides a yak on a mountain and is surrounded by clouds. He wears armor, holds a pennant and a bunch of jewels in his left hand. A close look reveals a tassel at the top of his helmet of the same type as the tassel on the *Indrabhūti*'s hat from the image in the *gönkhang* and he has a scabbard hanging from his side. Scabbards are also visible on the side of *Indrabhūti* in the *gönkhang* and from the side of the attendant of Cha Kyun, these scabbards are covered by an animal skin, leopard or tiger. On the lower register, of the Kula Khari statue, (Fig. 121), a man and a woman present him with gifts while animals are grazing and galloping on the mountain escarpments.

³⁷³ Cha Kyun, see HAR 141 himalayanart.org [accessed on 22-3-2019], and Amnyes Cha Kyun from *Collection Highlights The Rubin Collection of Art* pp. 190, 191.

³⁷⁴ Kula Khari, see HAR 65079 himalayanart.org [accessed on 22-3-2019] and rubinmuseum.org C2002.7.3 [accessed on 22-3-2019].

The attendant of Amnyes Cha Kyun (Fig. 120) rides a horse, wears elaborate armor and a helmet with a triangular type of composite flag topped with a small victory banner. He holds a red pennant with his right hand while clutching a golden vajra and carries a vessel full of jewels. An element that is not part of the headgear of Kula Khari and Cha Kyun's attendant are the feathers clearly visible on Indrabhūti's helmet. I suggest that these feathers point to the 'shamanic' quality of this deity.

In the previous section 5.3 *Padmasambhava, Dorje Lingpa and the Treasure Revealers*, I refer to Toni Huber's definition of the Himalayan 'shaman' as the ritualist gathering feathers on his headdress in order to fly like a bird up to the sky to purify the descent of the king. Myths of Tibetan kings appearing from the sky to touch down on mountains are not rare. No less than seven kings have allegedly alighted on mountain heights³⁷⁵ Therefore, a mountain deity would need feathers to perform his duty as a 'shaman' if and when required.



122. Tsenchen Jakpamélen the local protector in the Trongsar *dzong*. (IMG 2723)

³⁷⁵ Nebesky-Wojkowitz p. 203 n. 2, and for the list of the seven kings and the mountains where they descended see Tucci p. 728.

A comparison can be made with another local protector seen with feathers in the Trongsar *dzong*, at a relatively short distance from Ogyen Choling where Tshokye Dorje was *pönlop*. This protector could be Tsenchen Jakpamélen (btsan chen jag pa me len) (Fig. 122). Nebesky-Wojkowitz identifies this warrior as a local protector of Bhutan. In his description he refers to him as a red ferocious warrior spirit *tsen* (btsan) wearing armor and riding ‘on a bay-colored horse.’³⁷⁶ Tsenchen Jakpamélen is depicted at the entrance of one of the shrines of the *dzong* wearing three feathers at the front of his helmet (Fig. 122). He has the characteristics of a *dralha*, the warrior spirit, and the feathers of a ‘shaman’.

The oral story narrates that Mahākāla and Kula Khari came to Ogyen Choling with Dorje Lingpa.³⁷⁷ In a dream, the *tertön* had the vision of the eighth century ‘monk’ Vairocana³⁷⁸ telling him to go south. At the time Dorje Lingpa was in central Tibet. He began his journey in 1369, and after a long and eventful trip he reached Bumthang in 1374.³⁷⁹ His deities came with him, Mahākāla Jarok Dongchen (bya rog gdong can), a protector well established in the Tibetan pantheon, and Kula Khari from the Lhodrak Mountain range to the north of Bumthang.

In the seventeenth century, the raven-headed Jarok Dongchen (bya rog gdong can) was the guide of the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal: 1594-1651). Fleeing a political conflict in Tibet, the Zhabdrung went south, also after a dream in which he saw himself ‘flying after a raven’. He regarded the bird as being the form of Mahākāla with the raven head, protector

³⁷⁶ See Nebesky-Wojkowitz p. 242, for details on Tsenchen Jakpamélen.

³⁷⁷ Pommaret 2007: p. 139.

³⁷⁸ In his text *rdo-rje Gling-pa and his Rediscovery of the ‘Gold Needle’ in Bhutan*, published in 2005, Karmay writes on the dream of Dorje Lingpa p. 122 explaining that: ‘Vairocana was an eighth century Tibetan Buddhist monk believed to have practised Buddhism and Bon...’ and p. 123, that Dorje Lingpa ‘...believed himself to be the embodiment of the monk...’, in that text there is no mention of Vairocana as being the famous translator. In his 1988 book *The Great Perfection* Karmay explicitly writes in chapter one called The Legend of Vairocana that Vairocana was ‘a great translator’ p. 35. He also writes that Dorje Lingpa ‘...believed himself a rebirth of Vairocana...’ p.36.

³⁷⁹ Karmay 2005: pp. 122-125. Dorje Lingpa returned to Lhodrak in 1376.

of the Drukpa ('brugpa).³⁸⁰ It follows that this form of Mahākāla became famous when the lama Jangchub Tsöndrū (byan chub brtson grus: 1817-1856) shaped it on Jigme Namgyal's helmet as a magical and powerful symbol of protection imbued with the holiness of the deity.³⁸¹ Jigme Namgyal won several battles against his numerous enemies and the symbolic bird's head was transmitted to his son who would be the first king. Since then the head of the raven is the symbol of the King of Bhutan, the Druk Gyelpo ('brug rgyal po), the Dragon King.³⁸²

It would be difficult to establish the chronology of the arrival of the local protectors on the estate, and one would rightly suppose that the land was inhabited by its local spirits before the arrival of Dorje Lingpa. One of the protectors who arrived with him, Kula Khari, symbolically links Ogyen Choling to the mountains of Tibet. The other one, Mahākāla Jarok Dzongchen links to the political power of the Zhabdrung, the first ruler who established a theocratic government and to the successive royal figures of the Kingdom. We have a very limited knowledge of the fate of the fiefdom during its early years though we know that the nineteenth century was a period of political apogee and prestige, and that new protectors had joined the existing cohort.

Traditionally and through several generations, the family had developed alliances within its social strata of prestigious noble *chöje*. When Ugyen Dorji married the two sisters from Chusa, in the eastern region of Lhuntse, the spirit from the east, Shartsen (shar btsan) arrived with them. And in addition to a perfect education, they also brought their connection to the treasure revealer Ratna Lingpa.³⁸³ A branch of the actual family of Ogyen Choling is still living in Chusa and performs a Kangso based on the texts from Ratna Lingpa.³⁸⁴ Political power contributed also to the extension of the retinue of Mahākāla with the arrival of Kébulung (skyes bu lung), the spirit of Chökhör (chos 'khor) in the main valley of Bumthang. Kébulung was incorporated when Ugyen Dorji was the Jakar *dzöngpon*. This

³⁸⁰ See also Aris 1979: p. 209.

³⁸¹ Jangchub Tsöndrū was Tshokye Dorji's lama before being the lama of Jigme Namgyal. Pommaret 2004: pp. 81, 82.

³⁸² Aris 1994: pp. 56, 57.

³⁸³ See also section 5.3.

³⁸⁴ Information given by Kunzang Choden during my field visit in 2018.

enumeration of local protectors illustrates the position of the family and its prestige extending from the east to Kurtö, to the north towards the Tibetan mountains and to the Chökhör valley where a range of historical, sacred monuments and sites visited by Padmasambhava are located. The most significant, in this context, being the Kujé (sku rjes) lha khang built on the site of the cliff-cave where Padmasambhava meditated and left an imprint of his body in the rock³⁸⁵. The valley also shelters the monastery of Tamzhing (gtam zhing), the seat of Pema Lingpa³⁸⁶. (See map Fig. 110).

Until the 1950s, it was the custom to sacrifice a yak during the Kangso. In the absence of details on this ritualized slaughter I can only speculate that from the herds belonging to the family livestock, a beautiful black yak would have been carefully chosen. It would have been offered to the protectors in exchange for good weather, fecund cattle, fertile soils and absence of calamity. The sacralization of the sacrifice during the ceremony would establish the communication with the deities, and ensure their involvement and benevolent attention. It also acted to acknowledge and renew the bonds between the family and the protectors. The practice was abolished by Trülku Nuden Dorji (sprul sku nus ldan), the family uncle, upon his return from the monastery of Mindröling (smin grol gling).³⁸⁷ However, the symbolic function of the sacrifice still permeates the ritual as meat and entrails are provided for Mahākāla and pieces of meat are placed on each deity's *torma* (gtor ma).³⁸⁸ The slaughter of animals has been displaced and is desacralized but the purpose remains, witnessed by some aspects of the ritual. A set of *tsakali* with depictions of animals decorates a large *torma* and a procession of animals: a stallion for Mahākāla, a white mule for Palden Lhamo, a ram for Dorje Legpa, a yak and his female, a *dri* ('dri), and various farm animals including hens and roosters, these being carried by their owners.³⁸⁹ They all have a yellow or a red ribbon tied to their hair or feathers, as a sign of belonging to the main protector Mahākāla. Towards the end of the ritual the food that has been previously consecrated and offered to the deities is

³⁸⁵ Phuntsho p. 96.

³⁸⁶ For details on Tamzhing refer to the article from Imaeda and Pommaret published in 1987.

³⁸⁷ Pommaret 2007: p. 138 n. 9.

³⁸⁸ Pommaret 2007: pp. 140, 142, 147.

³⁸⁹ Pommaret 2001: pp. 147, 148.

distributed. Each participant, members of the family, officiants and villagers receive their portion. They eat a part of it and bring the rest of the food, that has retained the power of the deities, to their home.³⁹⁰ It calls to mind the custom of sharing the meat of the sacrificed animal with the community, partaking in a ritual as an act to reinforce the bonds between its members.³⁹¹ The lama also distributes sacred pills (ril bu) ingested by the participants in their wish to clear the karmic defilements that would hinder their path to liberation.

The Spirits of the Tang Valley, Padmasambhava and the Wooden Flying Bird

The Tang valley was inhabited well before the Buddhist era. Padmasambhava is said to have travelled to Mon, subduing local spirits on his way, and also concealing *terma* (gter ma)³⁹². However, it is said that a group of minor spirits, those lower down in the hierarchy, resisted him and continue to cause havoc in the valley, including at Ogyen Choling. Among them are the (gson 'dre), (shi 'dre), and *gyelpo* (rgyal po) goblins and spirits of the dead or simply mischievous spirits that have escaped his vigilance and magic. It could also be that they were not deemed important enough by the tantric master who just let them go. These nefarious pests are not listed in sacred books nor appeased with prayers, offerings and rituals. The arduous task of wiping them out of a village, a family or a person's body, is traditionally fulfilled by the local shamans and healers.³⁹³ However in the case of particular recalcitrant specimen, a lama would be called to the rescue. Armed with the power of the Dharma and the appropriate ritual techniques he would pin them down. At the time of Tshokye Dorji, we remember how his daughter Ashi Yeshe was freed from a *lu* and a *gyelpo* by her father's lama Jangchub Tsöndrü (byan chub brtson grus: 1817-1856).³⁹⁴

³⁹⁰ Pommaret 2007: p. 143.

³⁹¹ Diemberger, Hazod p. 267.

³⁹² Notably in Taktsang (stag tshang) and in Bumthang, Tsogyal pp. 137, 138, 267, 273.

³⁹³ Choden 2009: p. 313.

³⁹⁴ Pommaret 2004: p. 82.

I had the opportunity to meet³⁹⁵ the woman living in the village of Sarmath who until recently used to propitiate the Sbizi *phola* (pho lha) the mountain protector who lives on the Mount Phola overlooking the village. Sarmath is located on the hill slope at about a forty-five-minute walk from Ogyen Choling. Now in her late eighties she can no longer climb up all the way through the forest and to the top of the mount to perform her monthly ritual. Her skills were required in case of ongoing bad weather or a harmful strain of disease affecting human or cattle, and all misfortunes brought by pesky spirits. She is said to be the last ‘shaman’ of the Tang valley. The mount Sbizi which stands in the west has its counterpart in the east, the mount Kyanyai. I would suggest that the *Kyanyai Phola* lives at its top. However, I have not heard about rituals for the *Kyanyai Phola*.

The village of Sarmath offers a view over the Tang river. To the south we see the *kakani* chorten by the river and further south we can make out the cliffs of Rimochen (ri mo can). On the right towards the north we can see, far away up the hills, the monastery of Towadarak (mtho ba brag) and, at a closer distance, Ogyen Choling perched on the hill and dominating the village of Gamling (gham ling) (Fig. 123). See map (Fig. 110).

At the bottom of the hill the houses of the village of Gamling (gham ling) are laid out by the riverside. The village possesses an old temple, the Ani or Anu Lhakhang, that could be the oldest temple in the valley. Aris writes that three temples in Bumthang ‘...could no doubt be placed in this [the] period of primary diffusion [of Buddhism in Tibet]...’. And he mentions among the three temples: ‘A-nu in the village of Gham-ling at the centre of the sTang valley.’³⁹⁶ The Emperor of Tibet Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po: 569-649?605) is credited with the construction of several temples on the boundaries of his empire. In Bhutan, the Kyichu Lhakhang (skyid chu lha khang) in Paro, and the Jampa Lhakhang (byams pa’i lhakhang) in the chos khor valley of Bumthang would be part of this

³⁹⁵ Visit with Kunzang Choden on 23-12-2018.

³⁹⁶ Aris 1979: p. 39. Aris refers to a *terma* by Pema Lingpa *mtha’ ‘dul yang ‘dul* on the protection of the borders of Tibet with temples built by Songtsen Gampo.

program.³⁹⁷ The legend of the foundation of the Ani Lhakhang is somehow different as it is widely told, in Gamling, at Ogyen Choling, and also recorded by Thinley, and belongs to the register of folk narratives. During the seventh or eighth century a nun (a ni) was travelling through the village with her cow. The cow came to a halt and refused to go further. The animal declared to the nun: 'Our dwelling place is here in Tang...' and the cow died. Hearing the cow talking the nun thought it was maybe a Buddha. She then decided to remain in Gamling and built a *chorten* to honor the animal using the pole to which the cow was tied as the inner relic.³⁹⁸ Subsequently, the temple was erected. It looks like a villager's



123. The Ani Lhakhang in the village of Gamling below Ogyen Choling that can be seen at the top of the hill in the background. (IMG 4182)

house with a copper victory banner (rgyal mtshan) on the roof. According to this legend, the Emperor Songtsen Gampo is definitely not the builder of the monument. The interior is dimly lit and several thangkas darkened by age hang on the walls. Clay statues, which have been repainted, represent the eight bodhisattvas (nye ba'i sras bgyad) and are standing by the altar. Michael Aris

³⁹⁷ Phuntsho p. 80 writes: 'In the earliest record of the scheme, Jampa Lhakhang in Bumthang is listed among the temples taming the borders and Kyerchu Lhakhang among the temples taming outer frontiers.' The 'scheme' refers to Songtsen Gampo's temple building program to subdue the 'demoness'.

³⁹⁸ Thinley pp. 245, 246.

suggests that the descendants of Dorje Lingpa in Ogyen Choling would have probably redecorated the temple several times.³⁹⁹ This indicates the ancient connection of the family to the Ani Lhakhang and the village of Gamling.

Walking to the north along the Tang *chu* and climbing up the hill, the isolated Nyingmapa monastery of Towadrak (mtho ba drag) was built on the top of a boulder shaped as a *phurba*, another of Padmasambhava's numerous meditation places. A familiar figure in Ogyen Choling, the nun Gelongma Palmo (dge slong ma dpal mo) is also said to have meditated in a cave at Towadrak.⁴⁰⁰

The monastery was administered by the Drukpa Kagyupa ('brug pa bka'bryud pa) through Lorepa Wangchuk Tsonдру (lo ras pa dbang phyug brtson 'grus: 1187-1250) who was a student of Tsangpa Gyarey (gtsang pa rgya ras: 1161-1211) who brought the Drukpa tradition from Tibet.⁴⁰¹ Later, by the end of the eighteenth century, Jigme Kundrol ('jigs med kun grol: 1750-1825), also called Changchub Gyaltshe, spent several years at Towadrak. Jigme Kundrol, a student of Jikmé Lingpa ('jigs med gling pa: 1729-1798), was instrumental in the dissemination of the *Longchen Nyinthig* (klong chen snying thig) tradition.⁴⁰² The *Longchen Nyinthig* is also celebrated in the temple of Ogyen Choling where Jikmé Lingpa is part of the *dzokchen* transmission lineage and Yéshé Tsogyel, the *Dākinī Queen of Great Bliss* who gave the text to Jikmé Lingpa is represented at the top of a mural and on a thangka hanging in the Jowo Lhakhang.⁴⁰³ The present lama of Towadrak presides over the annual Kangso at Ogyen Choling.

The history of Towadrak would benefit from a longer study, though an anecdote links the monastery to the King Khyikha Rathö (khyi kha ra thod) and the persistence of his legendary life in the local oral tradition. This story, which also involves Padmasambhava, is well known and vividly recounted in the valley.

³⁹⁹ Aris 1979: p. 40.

⁴⁰⁰ Thinley p. 260. See also Appendix chapter 2 section 2.7 nb. 3 and chapter 3, section 3.1. For details about Gelongma Palmo see section 5.1, *The Agency of the Women in Ogyen Choling*.

⁴⁰¹ Dan Martin 'Lorepa Wangchuk Tsonдру,' Treasury of Lives, accessed March 04, 2019, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Lorepa-Wangchuk-Tsonдру/6671>.

⁴⁰² Phuntsho p. 159.

⁴⁰³ Appendix chapter 4 section 4.3 nb. 4 and chapter 6 thangka nb. 30.

The legend of Khyikha Rathö comes from two treasure texts composed by Pema Lingpa evoking the king of the mythical land of Khenpalung (mkhan pa lung) who had the face of a dog and the skull of a goat, *Guide to the Hidden Lands of Sikkim and Khenpalung* and *Guide to the Hidden Land of Khenpalung*.⁴⁰⁴ In the ancient empire of Tibet, one of the wives of Emperor Trisong Détsen (khri srong lde bstan: 742-797) Queen Margyen (dmar rgyan) fell into disgrace after provoking the exile from the court of the translator Vairocana. It follows that she gave birth to Prince Murum Tsenpo (mu rum btsan po) after succumbing to sexual impulse and copulating with a dog and a goat. Murum Tsenpo was born with the attributes of his progenitors and therefore earned the name Khyikha Rathö, face of dog skull of goat. The prince and his entourage were banned and settled in the hidden land of Khenpalung as a prosperous community.⁴⁰⁵ Vowing revenge on the brother who had had him exiled, Khyikha Rathö gathered an army to attack Tibet that then was in the hands of his brother the Prince Mutig Tsenpo (mu tig btsan po). Mutig sought the assistance of Padmasambhava who through the intervention of a god who blew a tempest threw into panic the assailants who scattered away. To ensure that this army and their prince would not strike again, Mutig requested that Padmasambhava chase Khyikha Ratö and his subjects far away from the southern confines of Tibet. Padmasambhava travelled to Khenpalung under the disguise of a black man enemy of Buddhism set to destroy Padmasambhava's work. When Khyikha Ratö asked the black man to help him to build a temple larger and higher than the most beautiful temple built by the Emperor of Tibet Trisong Détsen, Padmasambhava proposed to construct something even more magnificent, a wooden bird large enough to hold five hundred people. Upon finishing the work, Khyikha Ratö with his court and subjects, invited by Padmasambhava, gathered into the wooden bird to celebrate its achievement. Then, 'the black man went on the top of the wooden bird and hit with a hammer the nail, which triggered the unsettling wind.'⁴⁰⁶ The wooden bird was airborne, Khyikha Ratö realized that he had become trapped into one of Padmasambhava's stratagems. The bird flew to Bumthang. In the meantime, Padmasambhava had

⁴⁰⁴ Phuntsho p. 101, p. 615 n. 11.

⁴⁰⁵ The hidden land of Khenpalung is allegedly located in the north eastern part of Bhutan. Phuntsho p. 101.

⁴⁰⁶ Phuntsho p. 104.

sealed the hidden land of Khenpalung where he buried all the possessions of the Prince and his court. Khyikha Rathö and his subjects settled on the right bank of the Tang river in the village of Khytsum (khyi mtshums) or Kyizum as the village is called today, facing the hill where Ogyen Choling was later erected.⁴⁰⁷ Although there are no remains of the wooden bird or physical evidence of this event, the story of Padmasambhava's 'plane' landing in the valley is still told locally.

At the end of this extraordinary story a few lines can be added recalling that one day, long after he had settled at Kyizum, homesick and burdened with remorse, Khyikha Rathö walked up to Towadrak. When there and saddened by the view far in the north of his lost paradise of Khenpalung he carved a bamboo flute and played nostalgic tunes.⁴⁰⁸

The Temple of Rimochen and Mébartsho the 'Burning Lake'

When Longchenpa, in the fourteenth century, praised the Tang valley he mentioned a site where a 'ridge has a door to a hidden land. In the middle the Pelphug cliff with a footprint and in the valley floor are many hidden religious treasures...'. The treasures would later be discovered by Dorje Lingpa and Pema Lingpa, and the footprint on the cliff belonged to Padmasambhava. The Phelphug cliff overhangs Rimochen (ri mo can) (Fig. 124), the sacred site also referred to in Longchenpa's poem.⁴⁰⁹

Rimochen in the fourteenth century was probably a natural site without construction. It had been one of the sites of activities of Padmasambhava in the valley.⁴¹⁰ Long before Longchenpa, Padmasambhava visited the 'unlit 'country of Mon to bring the light of Buddhism and to clear the ground from the marauding demons and spirits.

⁴⁰⁷ Phuntsho p. 101-105, Aris 1979: p. 69 p. 306 n. 25.

⁴⁰⁸ Aris 1979: p.307 n. 25 part 2.

⁴⁰⁹ Ura p. 26.

⁴¹⁰ Aris 1979: p. 4.



124. Rimochen with traces of the 'tiger stripes' on the cliff and the entrance to the temple.

Rimochen, or 'marked with figures', holds its name from the brown bands of traces on the cliff which compare to tiger's stripes (Fig. 124), a reminder of the tigress that Padmasambhava as Dorjé Drolö (rdo rje gro lod) rode when flying from Tibet to the Tiger's Den Taktsang (stag tshang) in Paro (spa gro). A temple was built at the bottom of the cliff where features in the rock, footprints, water pool, *garuḍa* shapes, abound and signal the passage and the presence of the Precious Guru with his consort Yéshé Tsogyel (ye she mtsho rgyal). One *chorten* stands by the road celebrating the subjugation of a demon, near the Tang *chu*.

The story, as I was told by the temple guardian *könyer* Tshering Dorji, begins with the wrongdoings of a fierce demon (*srin po*) terrorizing the neighborhood and eating villagers and animals. After discussing with the villagers the best way to get rid of the *srinpo*, Padmasambhava and Yéshé Tsogyel sat on a rock that we can still see, and engaged in vigorous sexual activities to the great surprise of the demon who was left powerless. Such was his stupor that the villagers were able to shoot their arrows right into his heart. The *srinpo* was then cut into pieces and his intestines thrown into the Tang *chu*.

It followed that Padmasambhava and Yéshé Tsogyel flew across the river above the hills and disappeared.⁴¹¹ To ensure that the demon would never return, the *chorten* was erected as a sacred deterrent. The passerby is reminded that the power of magic and dharma would conquer an evil force ready to strike.



125. Detail from thangka 25, Dorje Lingpa is at Rimochen extracting a *terma*. The Tang river is flowing nearby towards an expanse of water that could be Mébartso, the 'Burning lake'. (IMG 2289)

126. The inscription: 'ri mo can' is seen on the brown wall next to Dorje Lingpa. (Detail from Fig. 125)

The temple at Rimochen was originally a small shrine erected by Dorje Lingpa and was until the 1950s under the protection, maintenance and administration of the *chöje* (chos rje) of Ogyen Choling. In the mid-nineteenth century, Tshokye Dorji undertook a thorough program of repairs.⁴¹² The iconography of the temple as we see it now most probably dates from his intervention. Rimochen, also called Tag Rimochen (stag ri mo can) referring to the tiger stripes, or Tang Rimochen (stang ri mo can), was one of the auspicious landmarks where Dorje Lingpa discovered treasures (*gter ma*). One of these events is depicted on a thangka

⁴¹¹ I heard that story during my 2018 field visit.

⁴¹² Pommaret 1990: p. 222.

(Fig.125) belonging to the collection of Ogyen Choling.⁴¹³ It has a small but clear inscription: ‘ri mo can’, locating the discovery (Fig. 126). It is also on that site that Pema Lingpa extracted a Buddha image, though Pema Lingpa is more famous for retrieving a *terma* diving into the Tang *chu* holding a candle.⁴¹⁴

This miraculous event took place in a deep and narrow gorge of the Tang river known as the Burning Lake *Mébarsto* (me 'bar mtsho). The name is misleading as the site features a gorge with the rapidly flowing river cascading among large boulders. Pema Lingpa dived into the dark and roaring stream with a lit candle. To the surprise of his followers anxiously waiting on the riverbank, when he emerged sometime later the candle flame was still lit.

Pema Lingpa was born in Tang in the hamlet of Chel Baribrang (chal ba ri brang), and died at Tamzhing (gtam zhing) monastery, his seat in the next valley of Chökhör (chos khor). Not far from Chel, Pema Lingpa founded the monastery of Kunzandrak (kun bzang brag) on a cliff where Padmasambhava came to meditate. See map (Fig. 110).

The Chöje, the 1950s, Changes and Adaptations

The 1950s saw a period of vast programme of land redistribution and tax reform initiated by the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck ('jigs med rdo rje dbang phyug: 1929-1972). It was a gradual process bringing major societal transformations to the Kingdom. The prestige of the *chöje* (chos rje) was preserved but their economic power decreased drastically with the loss of a large part of their land and the end of the feudal system. The *chöje* of Ogyen Choling, eager to keep their religious traditions, skillfully adapted their ancient Kangso ritual to the new economic circumstances. They scaled down the ceremony to reduce the considerable cost of such an event. The downfall was perceived by the villagers as the consequence of the abandonment by the deities of the family as they could no longer attract their benevolence. Consequently, at that time the

⁴¹³ Appendix chapter 6 nb. 25.

⁴¹⁴ Aris 1989: pp. 41, 45 and n. 85 p. 230.

villagers did not attend the Kangso for fear that the misfortune would reach them, bringing disaster and leading them into poverty.⁴¹⁵

The main alteration was the merging of two ceremonies, a *tséchu* (tshes bcu) and a Kangso, previously celebrated at a one-month interval. It implied that some of the texts by Dorje Lingpa read during the *tséchu* are now read during the Kangso. Also, an attempt to reduce the length of the Kangso to one day was dismissed and the three days reinstated in 1990. The recitation of texts and prayers is the same during the three days, the accumulation of merits piling up was certainly a powerful incentive to reverse the decision. Year after year, adaptations were made due to mutations in the local way of life. For example, because of the scarcity of animals raised in the valley nowadays, the stallion had to be replaced by a mare, the ram by a goat and no yak or his female, the *dri* ('bri), are seen any longer during the procession.⁴¹⁶

Also, the physical participation of the *chöje* has increased as they now take part in the hoisting of the flag. In the old days they watched the action from their *utsé*'s windows. They also hold the ropes of the flag, it is said to clean the misdeeds of the year. Do they want to clear their karma or is it a change of attitude ascribed to their new social proximity to the villagers? Also, the topography of the place has evolved since the *chöje* have not lived in the *utsé* for quite some years and have recently moved into their new houses built outside the wall of the property. Opportunity to watch the Kangso from their windows would be very limited.

The agrarian reform, combined with misfortune, brought the estate close to the verge of breaking down. After the demise of the parents of the present generation, during the second half of the 1960s, and during the subsequent years, uncertainties loomed above the estate. In 1995, in order to preserve and to perpetuate the life and traditions on the estate, the heirs of Ogyen Choling decided to convert the *utsé*, that was the dwelling of their ancestors, into a museum. It took several years of discussions among the family members to address the numerous questions and to answer the concerns relating to the

⁴¹⁵ Pommaret 2007: p. 152.

⁴¹⁶ Ogyen Choling Annual Report 2014 p. 4.

conversion of a centenarian building into a public space and the organization of a museum. The preparation before the laying out of an exhibition involved a significant amount of work from the members of the family and help from some villagers to clean, restore and refurbish the premises, to select and polish the artefacts before planning a scheme for their exhibition as well as setting up the display.⁴¹⁷ In 2001 the Ogyen Choling museum was opened and the estate was made accessible to the public. The collection is exhibited over the three floors of the building and shows traditional artefacts that once belonged to the family, as well as traditional masks, costumes and musical instruments some of them still used for rituals.⁴¹⁸ On the top floor, it hosts a printing workshop, the library containing ancient manuscripts and religious texts and the family shrine dedicated to Amitāyus (tshe dpag med). During the year of the creation of the museum, the family established a trust fund to protect the integrity of the property. One of the focuses of the fund is to encourage local skills and crafts and the education of the young children of the village. This takes place through the possibility for the villagers to sell their weavings and textile production to visitors and the provision of financial means for meritorious though deprived children. Also, recently a preschool playground and program was set up at Ogyen Choling for children of kindergarten age.⁴¹⁹ To bring further revenue, the outbuildings previously used as workshops and storehouses were reconditioned to become a guesthouse.

The opening of the private estate to the public was a major and drastic change in the life of the family. The emotional, physical and financial investment proved worthwhile to the gradual success of the enterprise while maintaining the sacred and the solemn nature of the place. Over these past years, the confidence in the inherited prestige has been restored and the villagers have now come back to participate in the ritual. Each year, the *chöje* reaffirm their identity based on the

⁴¹⁷ The major undertaking of this project is in great part due to the hard work, the knowledge, tenacity and energy of Kunzang Choden. For details about the creation of the museum see Choden and Roder chap. 6 pp. 78-89.

⁴¹⁸ In 2018 the museum display was enriched with the donation by a Swiss collector of thirty-six masks made in the late 1970s by Yeshe Penjor the mask maker of the Jampel Lhakhang. See Ogyen Choling End of Year Report 2018.

⁴¹⁹ This program started in 2018 with the agreement of the ministry of education and the hiring of a preschool teacher.

new social rules. They renew the vows to their protectors demonstrating that even in a transformed environment the tie has not been severed. Their role of intermediaries between the mundane world and the worlds of the deities still functions for the wellbeing of their surroundings and of the valley as a whole.

In their capacity as custodians and transmitters of heritage and traditions the conservation of the sacred monuments on the estate is also part of the family's concerns. On the south esplanade, the *chorten* (mchod rten) in the memory of Ugyen Dorji faces the valley. It was moved into the property from its original placement, on a ledge of the hill. There, unprotected, it was vulnerable to bandits who raid sacred monuments and steal the valuable objects placed inside. Thefts in temples and desacralization of *chorten* started in the early 1970s. In 1979, 1,346 *chorten* were vandalized in Bhutan.⁴²⁰ Later on, in his article published in the Kuensel newspaper, Tashi Phuntsho writes about the occurrence of such transgressions which happened between 2008 and 2015. The perpetrators are condemned to prison, the severity of the sentence is given according to the gravity of the offence and can reach a sentence for life.⁴²¹

The same sense of preservation was enacted when the *chorten* erected in 1966 to commemorate the life of Ashi Dorji Drolma (al ce rdo rje sgrol ma), the wife of Kunzang Dorji (1925-1962), was on the brink of falling down after several seasons of severe weather. In 2016 it was dismantled for repairs, and the large number of statues and the impressive collection of *tsa tsa* found inside were placed back into the *chorten* before finalizing its reconstruction.⁴²²

Built to overlook the Tang valley, Ogyen Choling's *utsé* rises at the top of the hill as an impressive manifestation of history, a symbol of prestige and power. Next to it, the temple (gtsug lag khang) is the nexus of converging pantheons of deities, local protectors, Tibetan and local religious masters, as well as myths that are at the foundation of the identity of the valley and the estate. While on field visits, on

⁴²⁰ Whitecross p. 182.

⁴²¹ Phuntsho Tashi's article, *Five Chorten Vandals Appeal to High Court* in the January 2015 Kuensel.

⁴²² This *chorten* had been built for the wife of the heir of the 19th generation. See also Ogyen Choling Foundation Annual Report 2017 p. 7.

auspicious days I would see villagers making their way through the estate entrance porch and to the temple, prayer beads in one hand and a child on the other arm. They would help the child to reach and turn the prayer wheels. Some would climb up the stairs to enter and pray. In the afternoon sun the elderly would gather by the large prayer wheel, and in turn keep the wheel turning and tinkling, accumulating merits for their afterlife. The place then becomes a social gathering where news and gossip are shared. Later in the evening, after the sun had disappeared behind Mount Sbizi, the faint lights of the Ani Lhakhang, Gamling and Kyizum down the hill would shine in the dark, and far away on the mountain the dim lights of Towadrak would flicker. Throughout the years, over decades, Ogyen Choling would resonate with religious activities and major rituals in regular succession, blessed with the presence of Padmasambhava, Longchenpa and Dorje Lingpa, the tutelary ancestors.

6 - Conclusion

In the Himalaya, the Tang (stang) valley in central Bhutan was one of the places where Padmasambhava, the Precious Guru, performed his deeds. Up to now his presence has been felt wherever oral stories recount his magical and supranatural activities. Subsequently, the valley has attracted numerous religious figures giving it the characteristics of a sacred landscape. The local spirits he subdued, and the ones he let go, still roam the land either protecting, or pestering, its inhabitants.

Until the 1950s, Bhutan had thriving communication links with Tibet. Trade and commerce brought wealth and also, from early on, saw the passage of lamas and religious dignitaries who would cross the mountains, some of them becoming significant political or religious figures. They came fleeing conflicts, rivalries or drawn towards the unlit region of the south where Padmasambhava was said to have hidden treasures (gter ma). The religious philosopher Longchen Rabjam (klong chen rab 'byams: 1308-1363) and the treasure revealer Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa: 1346-1405) were among them. In 1616 the Drukpa Kagyü ('brug pa bka' brgyud) lama, the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal: 1594-1651) came from Tibet and unified the country that was at that time a collection of fiefdoms.

During his exile Longchen Rabjam established eight teaching or meditation sites (sgon pa) preferably in secluded environments, conducive to meditation and contemplation. The landscape of Bumthang (bum thang) and of the Tang valley certainly had the qualities of beauty and solitude that he extols in his long poem dedicated to the region. In Tang, he chose a site that he named Ogyen Choling (o rgyan chos gling) for one of his *gönpa*.

It then followed that Dorje Lingpa settled at Ogyen Choling, becoming the ancestor of the family living on the estate to this day. The renown of a famous religious ancestor is at the foundation of the prestige, respect, power and wealth of the local noble family (chos rje).

In the nineteenth century the Bhutanese treasure revealer Pema Lingpa (pad ma gling pa: 1450-1521), became part of the family lineage; he is also the ancestor of the royal family of Bhutan. Pema Lingpa was a native of the Tang Valley, being born in the hamlet of Shel Baribrang (chal bari brang).

In the region of Bhutan to the east of the Black Mountains, which is the mountain range between the western and eastern part of the country, the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism is predominant. Ogyen Choling is anchored in that tradition and at an elevation of three thousand meters is a beacon of religious history. The altitude has not been a factor for isolation as the estate participated in the trade with Tibet and in the hills of north India, also receiving the visits of prestigious lamas. The estate which was, according to local memories, a fortress before the nineteenth century has evolved throughout the years to become the elegant manor that we now see.

In its architecture the temple (gtsug lag khang) that was rebuilt, like most of the buildings on the estate after the 1897 Assam earthquake, is a construction showing the features of the Bhutanese heritage while also recalling the historical cultural links with Tibet. The Bhutanese are proud of a past that associates them with the ancient Tibetan Empire. Temples, in the Paro valley and in Bumthang are said to have been built by the Emperor of Tibet Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po: c. 605-650). We can see the motifs connecting with the Tibetan tradition on the decoration of the facade of the temple and in the main shrine, called locally the Jowo Lhakhang (jo bo lha khang), that is dedicated to the Jowo Śākyamuni, as an acknowledgment of the Jokhang in Lhasa.

Internally, the temple is organized on two floors with a shrine on each floor. The shrines receive the daylight from the large windows placed on the front facade facing south, the entrance door to the temple being on the south facing facade as well. The *gönkhang*⁴²³ (mgon khang), assigned to the local protectors, and the entrance hall (sgo khang) to the shrines on the ground and upper floors, are located on the east and west liminal spaces of the building respectively.

⁴²³ Being restricted to male from the family and villagers, I do not include the *gönkhang* in my study.

The temple was designed to serve the religious needs of the family and people from the adjacent village; it therefore does not host a monastic community. The Jowo Lhakhang upstairs is used predominantly for the more official ceremonies. Its decoration exhibits elaborate motifs and an iconography suited for formal rituals. The Drölma Lhakhang (sgrol ma lha khang) on the ground floor displays a more subdued decoration and is the shrine available mostly for daily and worldly concerns. The Four Great Kings (rgyal chen bzhi) of the cardinal directions are represented, tall and powerful, in the entrance hall on the ground floor while a large and rare representation of the kingdom of Śambhala covers the surface of the north wall of the landing of the upper floor.

The iconography reflects the religious themes according to the usages of the shrines. Padmasambhava is omnipresent on the walls of the Jowo Lhakhang. His statue is also seen in the sanctum next to Jowo Śākyamuni who is represented in the center of the Dorje Lingpa lineage. With illustrations of *terma* (gter ma) texts on the walls, the shrine's visual images emphasize the legitimization of the Nyingma *terma* tradition, initiated by Padmasambhava and, in the case of Ogyen Choling, transmitted by Dorje Lingpa, who is represented as his embodiment.

The Drölma Lhakhang is, in a large part, the realm of the goddess Tārā (sgrol ma) represented in her different forms and of the Deities of Long Life (tshe lha) propitiated to protect the gift of life bestowed to the family, to the members of the household and to the villagers. The fasting ritual (smyung gnas) is also celebrated on the wall of that shrine on a mural where a splendid depiction of Avalokiteśvara (spyen ras gzigs) with eleven heads and one thousand arms is exhibited. The painting also features the nun Gelongma Palmo (dge slong ma dpal mo) who initiated this ritual.

An impressive depiction of Dorje Lingpa is displayed in the Drölma Lhakhang. Sitting on his right side on a lower register, Ugyen Dorji (o rgyan rdo rje), the seventeenth-generation descendant and patron of the temple is seen with his two wives. The attitude of the women denotes their active nature, a posture that departs from the generally submissive bearing of the depictions of the spouses of donors. The female members of the family of Ogyen Choling were running the household and were in charge of its assets; they also received a good religious education. Though they did not appear much in public affairs, women could be influential behind the political scenes. I also suggest that the women of Ogyen

Choling had an impact on the iconography of the Drölma Lhakhang, in asking Ugyen Dorji for the presence of the goddess Tārā in the shrine.

The representation of Padmasambhava, the symbolic father of the treasure revealers, is unmistakable in the Jowo Lhakhang. He is the focus of the murals where he is depicted according to his prevailing iconography. The artist, or the group of artists, working in the temple, have seemingly represented a group of treasure revealers, allowing their immediate assimilation to Padmasambhava. In the Drölma Lhakhang, the image of the *tertön* Dorje Lingpa has another signification. Positioned among the Deities of Long Life, he is magnified through the wealth of the ornamentation of his depiction, and the details of his attributes brings him even closer to the Precious Guru. His importance as the prestigious ancestor of the *chöje* of Ogyen Choling is therefore enhanced.

During the Kangso (bskang gso) ritual the presence of Padmasambhava and of Dorje Lingpa in the Jowo Lhakhang is amplified. For that occasion, thangkas showing his manifestations and a thangka of the treasure revealer surrounded by scenes of his discoveries are exhibited. This selection of portable paintings that belong to the collection of Ogyen Choling is exhibited for the duration of the ceremony. The Kangso that is based on Dorje Lingpa's texts is performed annually as an act of propitiation to Mahākāla with a raven head (bya rog gdong can) and a large retinue of local protectors. Local protectors were mostly native spirits tamed by Padmasambhava whose vast power as a tantric master was supplemented by shamanic qualities borrowed from the Himalayan shamans. The feather on his lotus hat (pad zhwa) points to this ability. The Kangso is an invocation that functions on the soteriological and pragmatic layers that constantly intermesh during the ritual. At the end of the three days of the Kangso, Dorje Lingpa's hat, that is preserved as a relic on the estate, is unveiled, rendering his presence tangible.

Mahākāla with a raven head was the protector of Dorje Lingpa and went with him on his journey to Ogyen Choling. Throughout the decades, the local protectors, already on the site or arriving with the new members of the family, joined forming the retinue of Mahākāla. Ogyen Choling is very much part of the sacred landscape of the Tang valley and the protectors arriving from different places, act as territory markers, linking the estate to the Lhodrak in Tibet, from where Dorje

Lingpa came, and to the eastern Bhutanese region of Kurtö that saw the origin of the spouses of Ugyen Dorji and of his grandmother.

The Kangso ritual tells about the changes in society. In 1902, the date of the consecration of the temple, the structure of this agrarian society and its system of government was on the brink of major transformation. The first king was elected in 1907, an event that put an end to the theocratic rule established by the Zhabdrung in the seventeenth century. Fifty years later after the land reforms initiated by the third king, the traditional social environment was drastically modified. Through the difficulties of the new circumstances the *chöje* had to reinvent its way of life. The family has managed to preserve its estate, its temple and also the rituals performed throughout the years, eager to transmit their precious heritage.

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88. The central image of Dorje Lingpa in the Drölma Lhakhang. (Detail from Fig. 87)
89. Detail of Dorje Lingpa's hat. (Detail from Fig. 87)
90. Dorje Lingpa wearing a blue hat on the thangka for the temple collection. (IMG 2290)
91. Detail of Dorje Lingpa's hat and long lappets trimmed in red. (Detail from Fig. 90)
92. The hat of Dorje Lingpa at Ogyen Choling. (IMG 4252)

93. The box in which the hat of Dorje Lingpa is kept at Ogyen Choling. (IMG 4219)96. The altar in the Jowo Lhakhang with the *tormas* displayed during the Kangso. (DSC 09309)
94. The altar in the Jowo Lhakhang with the *tormas* displayed during the Kangso. (DSC 09309)
95. Dorje Drakpo depicted on the west wall of the Jowo Lhakhang. (detail from Fig. 44)(IMG 0343)
96. Heruka Vajarakilāya depicted on the west wall of the Jowo Lhakhang. (Detail from Fig. 44) (IMG 0331)
97. Practitioners reading texts and prayers during the Kangso. (IMG 08868)
98. Practitioners playing the oboe *gyalings* during the Kangso. (IMG 08873)
99. Before the Kangso, practitioners prepare the dough to make the *tormas*. (IMG 08805)
100. Before the Kangso, the practitioners make the wood structure for the *tormas*. (IMG 08821)
101. Villagers lower the *lhadar* during the Kangso. (IMG 1587)
102. Women hold the rattan rope when the *lhadar* is lowered. (IMG 1574)
103. In the temple courtyard, the lama blesses the participants of the Kangso with the hat of Dorje Lingpa in its box. (IMG 1834)
104. The general performs a subjugation dance in the temple courtyard. (IMG 1899)
105. The Copper Colored Mountain Paradise depicted on the east side wall. The entrance door of the *gönkhang* can be seen with hanging shields and colored scarves. (IMG 0855)
106. Depiction of Dorje Drakmar adjacent to the door leading to the *gönkhang*. (Detail from Fig. 105) (IMG 0239)
107. Vajrarākṣa Dorje Srinpo depicted on the right side of the Paradise. (IMG 0219)
108. The eight categories of gods and demons and the subjugation ritual performed underneath. (Detail from Fig. 107)
109. The hill in the shape of an elephant's head on the slope of Mount Kyanyai where Ogyen Choling is built. (Design P. Pichard)
110. Map of Bumthang showing the four valleys of Chökhör, Tang, Chumey and Ura. (Design Alex Vucic based on Michael Aris' map, Aris 1979: p. 4)
111. The *nāgarājās* Nanda and Apananda holding the stem of the lotus where Śākyamuni is enthroned. (Detail from Fig. 36) (IMG 0605)
112. The *lu* shrine in the temple courtyard. (DSC 08103)
113. The female *lu* depicted on the facade of the shrine. (DSC 08101)

114. *Lu* shrine on the right side of the entrance of the estate under an oak tree.
115. *Lu* shrine on the left side of the entrance of the estate under an oak tree.
116. *Lu* shrine on the left side of the entrance of the estate under a small tree.
117. The local protector *Indrabhūṭi* depicted on a slate on the front of a stone shrine in the forest above the village of Ogyen Choling. (IMG 2314)
118. *Indrabhūti* depicted in the *gönkhang*. (IMG 2486 by P. Sochaczewski)
119. The mountain god *Amnyes Cha Kyun* from Amdo. (The Rubin Museum of Art, Tibet, Eastern; 18th century, Pigments on cloth; 12 1/4x7 1/2 in, Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin, C2006.66.8 (HAR 141), Acc. nb. 1995.11.6).
120. Detail of his attendant, shown on the bottom right side of the picture. He wears the same type of helmet as *Indrabhūti* on Fig. 117.
121. The Mountain God *Kula Khari*. (Rubin Museum of Art, terracotta and pigments, H 97/8 x W 81/4 x D 45/8 inc., C2002.7.3, HAR 65079)
122. *Tsenchen Jakpamélen* the local protector in the *Trongsar dzong*. (IMG 2723)
123. The *Ani Lhakhang* in the village of Gamling at the bottom of Ogyen Choling that can be seen at the top of the hill in the background. (IMG 4182)
124. Rimochen with traces of the ‘tiger stripes’ on the cliff and the entrance to the temple.
125. Detail from *thangka 25*, *Dorje Lingpa* is at Rimochen extracting a *terma*. The Tang river is flowing nearby towards an expanse of water that could be Mébartso, the ‘Burning Lake’. (IMG 2289)
126. Detail from Fig. 125, the inscription: ‘ri mo can’ be seen on the brown wall next to *Dorje Lingpa*.

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