

FATHER ESTEVAO CACELLA'S REPORT ON BHUTAN IN 1627

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Abstract

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

Introduction

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

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Father Estevao Cacella's Report on Bhutan in 1627

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

REPORT WHICH FATHER ESTEVAO CACELLA OF THE
SOCIETY OF JESUS
SENT TO FATHER ALBERTO LAERCIO,
PROVINCIAL OF THE PROVINCE OF MALABAR OF EAST
INDIA¹,
ABOUT HIS JOURNEY TO CATHAY [CHINA],
UNTIL HE CAME TO THE KINGDOM OF BHOTANTA²
[BHUTAN/TIBET].

(Fol. 1) In my letters to Your Reverence last year, I wrote of all that happened concerning our journey until we reached Bihar [Koch Bihar], principal city of the kingdom of Koch but as I do not know if your Reverence has received those letters, I shall refer in this one to all our travels until reaching this kingdom of Cambirasi³ [Bhutan] which is the first of the kingdoms of Bhotanta [Bhutan/Tibet]; I shall be brief in my references to Bihar as I do not wish to repeat myself and I shall therefore describe in greater detail what happened during the rest of the journey.

Dhaka

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Koch

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As the time to continue our journey was approaching, Father Cabral still being ill, I went to say good-bye to Prince Gaburra and obtain the permits for the captain of Rangamati and the men from Bhotanta [Bhutan]; the papers were ordered without delay, and the Prince was also generous enough to give us a horse, seeming concerned about handing us over to the men of Bhotanta because the people of Koch are very much afraid of them from observing how proudly they go about Rangamati without fearing anyone; I took my leave and said how very pleased we were. We remained the whole of January in Bihar [Koch Bihar] waiting for the arrival of Brother Bartolomeu Fonteboa, whose death we did not know about, and for the interpreter who had gone to fetch him whom we required to be with us because the two servants were still sick and one of them was supposed to return to Hugli; however, as no one had come by the 2nd of February, feast of the Purification of Our Lady ⁷, we left for Rangamati to wait there a few more days and buy provisions for our journey which we hoped to begin on the 20th of February; on the 19th, the interpreter arrived from Hugli; it was as if an angel from heaven sent by the Lord on the last day of our stay in Koch, a sign of His particular concern for our journey, allowing the interpreter to hurry with the things he had brought for us, otherwise he would not have found us in Rangamati and he would not have been able to follow us; we waited one more day and entered these kingdoms on the 21st of February, the first Sunday of Lent⁸, being comforted

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

Entering Bhutan

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

our journey and in fact, after crossing a stream, they left me a little behind, the soldiers shared their weapons with the natives and all four left in such a hurry that they were soon out of hearing. Finding myself without my interpreters in the middle of mountains frequented by thieves, without a guide, I thought it best to return to the village and find another way of continuing the journey, but because we faced the same risks going back to the village, we did it that night, the Christian lad and myself, walking in the cold, wind and snow, normal in these parts in the month of March; in the darkness of the night, we struggled sometimes on hands and knees, up and down, along the narrow paths of those steep valleys, my former companions having relieved me of all possessed except my breviary⁹ and walking stick. We arrived at the village the following day, where I found Father Joao Cabral negotiating with the travellers I had met on the way, and it was God's compassion which moved the people who were holding us to let us go and help us negotiate our advance - thus we all continued the journey on the 16th of March.

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

Paro

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

walls and decorated windows and balconies; these buildings are not arranged along streets but are separated from each other at random throughout the plain and along the foothills of the mountains, thus forming a town, but so long that we walked for about three leagues without seeing the whole of it; the plain continues as I have described, till it reaches a mountain which divides the town in two; the rivers flow down on each side of the mountain and irrigate the plain, and hugging the sides of the mountain, two long arms of the town climb up following the course of the rivers. It seems a lot of people live there and I would guess more than five hundred thousand¹⁰; it helps to find living space in the way they share the buildings because in each there are many tenants spread out among the floors and divisions created for accommodation; we arrived in the town on the 25th March, day on which the Eternal Word¹¹ was made flesh, [Feast of the Annunciation], and we hoped that His infinite goodness would allow our entry in that place on that day, to contribute to those people's acceptance of Him as their Saviour. We were not able to reach the house of the guide accompanying us that day, and when we arrived the following morning we found he had robbed us of everything we had brought for our sustenance; his house was so dark that even at midday we couldn't see each other - it seemed more like a prison than anything else. We asked him to go and get what we were in need of, as it was his duty as guide to be responsible for our safety; but he, very sure of himself, replied that he would first rest and then do what we asked, showing very clearly how little he cared for having betrayed us after we had trusted him, and was annoyed at our mentioning the subject (Fol. 7) saying that the job would not take one day, rather months, and that once the man from Rangamati arrived, he would do as he thought best.

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

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

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

At the end of three days, we came to a village where we found a lama, a relative of the King who had come to meet us with men and horses to accompany us; he immediately wrote to the King that we were about to arrive and the King ordered other lamas to be waiting for us at the next stop, with two very well harnessed horses for our use; travelling thus with all this company, sometime before our arrival he sent more of his men to offer us tea which he and his people drink much of; we continued along a track in very high mountains and getting close to the place where the King was he sent other young lamas on horseback, to entertain us with many races in a spot where the terrain allowed this, and soon we saw through the trees a great number of people waiting to welcome us and we heard the sound of (Fol. 8) cornets and trumpets similar to the instruments used in their festivals. Here there were a hundred young lamas between the ages of twelve and twenty lined up in two rows to receive us - in the middle were three small lamas carrying incense in their thuribles¹², an honour only given to the King.

Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel

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

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

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

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

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

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

For two months we accompanied the King through these and other mountains until we reached his house which is situated in the mountain where he went on retreat¹³; he keeps no more than his lamas with him because the place cannot hold more people as in order to build a house one would have to cut many rocks and work very hard to level some space in that very steep mountain; he had chosen that place to protect himself from a King who lives some eight days distance from here, Demba Cemba [sDe pa gTsang pa], the most important king of Bhotanta [Tibet] who had fought him [the Shabdrung] some years previously, as he told us, for not wanting to give him a bone¹⁴ from his late father and for which reason he left his town of Ralun [Ra-lung], a large and important one, which is five days walk from here. He made us very comfortable in

part of his house where we found space to put up a well decorated chapel to which we invited him on the feast of our Saint Father Ignatius¹⁵, and it was God's will that in spite of two robberies we still had everything we needed for the altar and all the images - even a picture of our Virgin Lady¹⁶ that had been stolen in the first robbery was recovered by a lama who found it in the hands of one of the thieves and brought it back to us here, together with a bible that had also been stolen; the King came to see the chapel with his master¹⁷ who is a very old lama and scholar he has great respect for, and with the other lamas, who were all very pleased with what they saw, spending some hours looking and asking about everything.

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

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

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

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

and first cousin of another lama who is the whole government of the King¹⁸; he would then give us two more, followed by many others and he also said that he would build a house for us and a church in Paro. Seeing the resolution of the King we said we wanted to please him as it was his pleasure that we should stay in this kingdom and because of the hope he gave us of spreading the faith of the Lord here; we thanked him for the lamas he gave us who wanted to become Christians and for the church he wanted to build in Paro; we said that on the matter of his dying immediately for accepting the faith of the Lord, he would see the opposite in those that would become Christians, because Christ being the true life of our souls did not kill our bodies, rather in Him would be found all that was good of body and soul.

On Buddhism

I will inform Your Reverence about the religion of this kingdom which we learnt from the conversations we had with the King and his old master; first, they say they were never Christians and that they have not found in their books any reference that their ancestors in the whole of Bhotanta had a knowledge of Christ our Lord or of the gospels; they say they are not pagans, rather they laugh and mock pagan beliefs like the worship of animals and they abominate the killing of cattle in the temples and other rituals of the pagans; they are very critical of the muslims and muslim is a word they use to describe a very bad man. They say they worship only one God and have well made images of him - the King showed us one of yellow metal, very well made, simple and artistic, holding between his hands a vase with water, and he told us that the water was the symbol of how God washes our souls from sin. He also showed us a painting of God on dark blue cloth; when we remarked that it was a strange colour he explained that God was painted thus, not because He was of that (Fol 11) colour but because his abode was in heaven and therefore He was portrayed in the colour of the sky; he also showed us another painting of the sky with a square house¹⁹ in the middle where God lives; it is generally believed that

God is infinite and that therefore he is everywhere; they say there are three persons [manifestations] in one God - two do not have a body, but one has and he is known as Trulku which means son, and from the way they speak of his birth the implication is that he was born to a virgin mother and they showed us an image of a woman who is said to be the mother of God²⁰. They believe in heaven where the good go, and in hell where the bad are punished and where they suffer the torments of fire and cold. It is quite clear to us that somehow the light of the Holy Gospel ²¹ reached this place, and from other ceremonies and blessings they perform, there are many similarities with Christianity; but they also have other very far fetched beliefs - they say that six hundred years ago no one existed in this kingdom of Bhotanta, that there was only water everywhere and when it dried up, there were trees on the earth and only two monkeys and from these two descend all the inhabitants of Bhotanta; the monkeys then went to heaven; when these kingdoms first came into existence there was a King who had twelve heads²². When we laughed at this and said that it was all false and derisory, he very seriously replied that it was written in the books. They also believe in three paradises where the good pass from one to the other till they are completely spiritualised, and that those who go to heaven enter the same God and become gods themselves; thus they worship their masters and kings who they believe become saints, like God, after they die; this is the reason why this King uses his imagination and artistic ability to make well crafted images of his father and celebrates him in festivals - he built a shrine, where he prays, to house only a large image of his father in a beautiful silver casket²³. On hearing us say that it was only in the law of Christ our Lord that we could find salvation, they declared that many ancestors of this King had risen to heaven in body and soul witnessed by many people and that this was not something that happened a long time ago but only a few years back - also that the father of the Dharmaraja (Zhabs-drung Ngag-dbang rNam-rgyal) was so holy that when he stepped on a rock there would sometimes appear the imprint of his foot; they also related stories about their ancestors, the work of the

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

Regarding the Son of God they believe he is Sakyamuni whose image is found in a very famous temple in these parts twelve days walk from here - they say he was borne two thousand years ago and that his mother carried him in her womb for twelve months; this was told to us by the principal lama who governs the King's house; previously, the King had told us that Sakyamuni was not God and that the educated lamas did not worship him, only the common people who were ignorant; the King, however, hearing what the lama said did not contradict him, both becoming embarrassed and confused, apparently not knowing who this son of God was who they seemed to know but did not know much about - we told them the many things we knew about the son of God - they have not shown, up till now, that they have any idea of the other mysteries of the life of the Lord, nor have we found here any signs of the Holy Cross²⁴, except a similarity in the name because what we call cross they call *cruca* (*sku-ru-kha*) but they do not recognise that this sign has a sacred significance. Everyone has great esteem for this King and high lama and they give him what they can so that when they die, he may send them to heaven; when very near death, the King is called to preside at a ceremony where he assists the person dying with his prayers, and after death the King pulls their hair²⁵ and thus performs what they call the great act of mercy, that is the sending of the soul to heaven. I asked one of the lamas if he had pulled the hair of a lama who died, before or after his death; he was very surprised at the question and said that pulling the hair before death was a very serious sin. After a man dies they divide his belongings between as many people as possible to help his soul get on well in his other life, and those that are absent at the death of a relative, take the most important belongings of the deceased to the King for him to pray over. Such, more or less, are the religious ceremonies (Fol 12) practised in all these kingdoms of Bhotanta [Bhutan] as we understood from the King and the lamas who are here from all these kingdoms.

China/Shambala

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

Teaching Christianity

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

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

The King offered us the two more lamas he had promised - one is a twelve year old candid and able boy and the other is nineteen and applies himself very well to what he is taught; we are teaching the catechism²⁶ and instructing all three in the things of our Holy Faith. Also, there is another lama, 27 years old, from an important family with many relatives, who has been helping the King during all these months in the interests that occupy him like painting, sculpture and cabinet-making for the adornment of the image of his father; he has also promised me many times that he will become a Christian as soon as he finishes the work he is doing for the King, which will be in a month and a half from now - he helps me to put down correctly in writing our prayers and Christian doctrine; a few days ago as he was writing the chapter in the catechism on the Holy Cross being the sign of Christ and other items about the birth of Christ our Lord and the purity of the immaculate Virgin, Our Lady, he was very pleased and told me afterwards that it was close to his heart and that it made him very happy.

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

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

All this happens inside the house of the King, next to his temple where the devil wages a continuous war against souls²⁷ with the singing and praying of the lamas of the King's school and the sound of the various instruments which they always use during their ceremonies in the presence of the King him- self who knows about everything that goes on here; the people compare our ceremonies with his and prefer ours, and it is quite obvious that he does not like it; thus, from these beginnings, we think it likely that we will make better progress in winning souls, having faith in God our Lord that once we leave this fortress held by the devil, He will help us win many victories dispossessing the devil of the many souls now subject to him.

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

service²⁸; the freedom that exists in this fairly large and well populated kingdom will greatly help to achieve our ends, as the people willingly submit to the King, without feeling any obligation to defer to him or follow his doctrine, nor does he have the power to force anyone to do anything; rather, his main revenues come from what the people voluntarily give him - he does not wish anyone to be unhappy and everyone is free to do what he wants, as the King himself told us many times when speaking of his lamas who are the group most dependent on him.

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

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

servants to the success of this enterprise; however, there you care, whereas here we see and experience, and in this matter it is indeed appropriate to say that it is one thing to care and quite another to experience; but it is also true that care and expectations do not always match reality. Yet, he who will deeply feel spiritual consolation in the preaching of the Holy Gospels, once involved in the work, will experience it very strongly, being able to speak clearly to kings about the teachings of the Lord, putting doubt even in the minds of the learned about their belief in sects from Hell, showing them the errors of their ways, helping many to escape from the mouth of Hell inside which they already are, assisting them to honour the real God, persuading them to come to know and adore Him and to make war on Hell by winning vassals; Heaven will thus be pleased at the sight of infidels gradually reaching understanding and showing willingness to enter Heaven, and, ultimately, co-operating with the most precious blood of Jesus Christ³⁰, Redeemer, Lord and all that is good for us, as proof of the love that his faithful have for Him, He will use them to give testimony to the infidels that He is their Saviour. All this will create such a rich treasure of consolation for the soul, that the cost of whatever hard work there might be, and of sacrifices made, will be nothing in comparison. For myself, I particularly ask Your Reverence to grant me the favour of your prayers, so that no impediments are put in the way of these blessings and also, that I may be able with other faithful servants to enter the enjoyment of the Lord, earning many souls for Him, with profits, for in His infinite goodness, He has seen fit to profit from this enterprise.

The Land of Bhutan

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

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

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

This kingdom [of Bhutan] is a little over one month's journey from the kingdom of (Fol. 15) Tsaparang [Western Tibet] and since we've been here we have had news of the priests³¹ who live there, not directly as it seems they do not know of our arrival in these parts, but through some lamas who came from there via other lamas who have gone that way, we have written to the priests three times, and I also sent them letters to be sent via Goa to Your Reverence.

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

Shabdrung's Physical Appearance

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

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

Prayer

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

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

Your son in Christ our Lord, Estevao Cacella.

Notes

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

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

²⁶Catechism - book of instruction in Catholic religious doctrine.

²⁷The Jesuits believed that the devil tempted the people to practice the wrong religion.

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

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

³⁰Blood of Jesus - reference to the suffering of Jesus on the cross.

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

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GYALSE TENZIN RABGYE AND THE FOUNDING OF TAKTSANG LHAKHANG

*John A. Ardussi**

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

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

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

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

Historical Background

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Foundation of Taktsang Lhakhang in 1692

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

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

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

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

The Biography of Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye

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

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

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

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

Tenzin Rabgye and the Miracles at Taktsang

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Like bees swarming about the lotus⁵⁷.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

Notes

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

² *Lho'i chos 'byung*, f. 54.b.

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

⁴ *SDE-SRID* 4, f. 23.a-26.b, 53.a-b.

⁵ *SDE-SRID* 4, f. 330.b-331.a.

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

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

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

⁹ *SDE-SRID* 4, f. 63.a-b.

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁴ *SDE-SRID* 4, f. 312.a.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁴ *brag char* - unattested term.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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THE RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN BHUTAN AND TIBET UNDER THE ENLIGHTENED RULE OF SDE-SRID XIII SHES-RAB-DBANG-PHYUG (R.1744-63)

John A. Ardussi

Introduction*

The story is by now well known, of how a dispute over recognition of the legitimate rebirth of Kun-mkhyen Padma-dkar-po led to its split into a Northern and Southern branch, and to the founding of an independent 'Brug-pa state in Bhutan. The struggle, whose seeds were sown during the 15th century, pitted the claimants for supremacy by reincarnation against the supporters of the traditional pattern of "uncle - nephew" succession, and culminated in the flight to Bhutan in 1616 of the man who founded the modern state, Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal (1594-?1651)¹.

From 1616 until Tibet's intervention in the Bhutanese civil war (1732-35), the dispute and its aftermath poisoned the relationship between the two countries. It is therefore all the more interesting how, out of its defeat in that war (the first ever at the hands of Tibetan troops), there emerged in Bhutan a small group of leaders with the vision and will to heal the rift between the two countries, and within the 'Brug-pa church, through a positive process of reconciliation. The most celebrated of these leaders was the 13th Bhutanese *sDe-srid* (regent) Shes-rab-dbang-phyug (1697-1767), a monk turned civil ruler who, building on the work of predecessors, and through mastery of uniquely Himalayan forms of the

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diplomatic art, guided Bhutan towards the posture of a “responsible” and respected Himalayan state.

The 17th Century Background

On seven occasions between 1616 and 1679, the central Tibetan government launched war against Bhutan, first under the banner of the gTsang-pa kings and, after 1642, under that of the dGe-lugs-pa establishment. On each occasion the Tibetans came out the worst. As the new Tibetan and Bhutanese political entities grew in strength, the struggle evolved from its purely sectarian origin into a series of conflicts over territory and national prestige, along their common Himalayan border and beyond.

Even after Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's flight to Bhutan in 1616, the two 'Brug-pa factions continued to struggle for control of the Tibetan properties, particularly the home monastery of Rwa-lung. In the dispute over recognition of the rebirth of Padma-dkar-po, the Tibetan political authorities sided with Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's rival dPag-bsam-dbang-po (1592-1641). However it was not until the new year's festival of 1647², following their humiliating defeat in Bhutan in 1646, that the Dalai Lama's regents formally confirmed Mi-pham-dbang-po (1642-17), the child incarnation of dPag-bsam-dbang-po, as head of the 'Brug-pa church and all of its Tibetan properties³. Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's agents were forcibly expelled from Rwa-lung, and for more than eighty years following this event, Rwa-lung monastery became off limits to Bhutanese pilgrims and officials⁴.

The struggle between Tibet and Bhutan during these decades is noted for both its ferocity and macabre tactics. One of the earliest recorded uses of gun powder and firearms in Himalayan warfare occurred during the sack of the Bhutanese monastery of gSang-sngags-zab-don in 1634, which exploded in a fireball and killed the Tibetan invaders to a man⁵. Sorcery was another weapon widely used. One of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's epithets was mThu-chen (“Great

Sorcerer”), and through this means he claimed to have caused the deaths of the *sDe-pa gTsang-pa* Phun-tshogs-rnam-rgyal and his wife in 1621⁶. He also allegedly prophesied the death in 1641 of his Tibetan incarnate rival dPag-bsam-dbang-po:

“Whichever of us is the true re-embodiment of Padma-dkar-po will remain living and the false one will die, as you shall see!”⁷

Bhutanese sorcery is also cited in connection with the death in 1658 of the 5th Dalai Lama’s controversial regent bSod-nams-chos-’phel, and that of the great Mongol champion of the Yellow Hats, Gushri Khan, in 1655⁸. In a final act of revenge, however, the sickness leading to the “retreat” (and presumed death) of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal in 1651 was attributed by the 5th Dalai Lama to destructive magic sponsored by the Tibetan government⁹.

In the decades that followed 1616, important government institutions in Bhutan originated in commemoration of victory in the wars with Tibet. Indeed, the state seal of the Zhabs-drung Rin-po-che bears the text of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal’s remarkable “*Nga bcu drug ma*” declaration, composed to proclaim his validity as the true reincarnation of Padma-dkar-po and to boast of his invincibility over the gTsang-pa army in the battle of 1618¹⁰. The fortress Dzongs from which the Bhutanese government still administers the country were originally constructed by Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal to defend against Tibetan invasion. The famous Tshechu festival of modern Bhutan was inaugurated by him in celebration of Padmasambhava and of the protective deities who successfully supported Bhutan in the war with Tibet of 1644/46¹¹.

Conflict Continues Following Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's Death

Armed hostilities between Bhutan and Tibet continued after Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's disappearance from the scene in 1651. Indeed, superstitious awe surrounding the mystery of his decades-long retreat ("taken to assure the victory of the protective deities in his cause against Tibet") contributed to the potency of his reputation throughout the Tibetan-speaking world. Prophecies began to circulate in Tibet (though rejected by the 5th Dalai Lama as fakes: *zog-po gter rdzus*) foreshadowing the country's conquest by Bhutan¹². The Tibetan war of 1656-57 against Bhutan ended in defeat, in spite of a prediction of victory by the oracles of bSam-yas and gNas-chung¹³.

Strife between the two countries culminated during the regency of the third *sDe-srid* Mi-'gyur-brtan-pa (r.1667-1680), who vigorously pushed the borders of the Bhutanese state into Sikkim, the Chumbi Valley, and eastwards towards the Mon-yul corridor separating Bhutan from modern NEFA. These actions and other unresolved differences precipitated the war of 1675-79, again won by forces under Mi-'gyur-brtan-pa. Ironically, an expatriate Tibetan monk in service to the Bhutanese state, he was forced from office in 1680 by a *coup d'état* of disgruntled Bhutanese rivals. His death the following year was greeted in Lhasa by a three-day celebration and thanksgiving to the protective deities of the Yellow Hat church¹⁴.

The peace treaty of 1679 marked the last major Tibetan invasion of Bhutan during the 17th century. From 1682 to 1696, the 5th Dalai Lama's death was also being kept secret by his regent Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho, who was preoccupied for much of that period by political problems with China and Mongolia¹⁵. Under the reign of the 4th *sDe-srid* bsTan-'dzin-rab-rgyas (r.1680-94), Bhutan consolidated and defended its geographical boundaries with Tibet and Sikkim, while broadening its political connections with neighbouring states.

Diplomatic and monastic ties were cultivated or renewed with sDe-dge, Nepal, Mustang, Ladakh, Sikkim and Cooch Bihar, as described in various sources of the period¹⁶.

The Emergence of Reincarnate Successors: 1694-1728

The succession problems in Bhutan attending Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's passage from the scene have been discussed briefly by Michael Aris, although more remains to be written¹⁷. The ostensibly temporary form of the initial successor government saw the appearance in Bhutan of parallel civil administrators or regents (*sDe-srid*) and spiritual heads of state who were the "representatives" (*rGyal-tshab*) of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal. The early *rGyal-tshab*, however, were drawn from Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's extended family, and it was only with the end of all male descent lines that the decision was reluctantly made, in 1695, to select "exalted rebirth" (*mchog-sprul*) heads of state from among his rebirths and those of the early *rGyal-tshab*¹⁸. These four lineages included the Speech (*gsung-sprul*) and Mind (*thugs-sprul*) incarnations, as well as two "Precious prince" (*rgyal-sras*) lineages deriving from Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal's son 'Jam-dpal-rdo-rje (1631-80/81) and from his distant nephew the 4th *sDe-srid*, bsTan-'dzin-rab-rgyas. However, the early failure to establish a universally-accepted hierarchy among the competing incarnation lineages emerged as a new structural weakness of the Bhutanese state, opening the door to a more effective form of Tibetan interference than the warfare and monastic sorcery of the 17th century¹⁹.

The Bhutanese Civil War (1729-35) and its Impact on Relations with Tibet

The Bhutanese civil war was the bitter culmination of factional struggles between district chieftains who supported rival incarnate candidates to become *rGyal-tshab*, in order that they themselves should be promoted to the throne of *sDe-srid*. However, we are less concerned with the

complicated events of this civil war than with the outcome for future relations between Bhutan and Tibet²⁰.

Practically, from 1729 until 1735, district chiefs of the Paro valley in western Bhutan had seceded from the central authority, and twice called upon the Tibetan ruler Pho-lha-nas to support them against the Bhutanese central government. Although Pho-lha-nas distrusted the motives for these appeals, by early 1730 events forced him to a decision to invade. Owing much to Bhutan's disunity, the Tibetan campaign was for once successful, earning for Pho-lha-nas promotion and recognition from the Manchu emperor. The treaty required the Bhutanese combatants to send hostages to Tibet and offerings to China²¹. Nevertheless, a second invasion in 1732 was needed to bring finality to the situation, following which Bhutanese representatives of the two warring sides were escorted to China to formally pay tribute, whence they returned in 1735 with imperial patents (*gser-yig*) and seals of office²².

Although one Bhutanese scholar of the time saw in the conclusion of this mission to China "the fulfillment of our hopes,"²³ the reality was perhaps not quite so sanguine. Bhutan was constitutionally at a crossroad, and the prospects for domination by Tibet and China must have seemed daunting. Whereas the peace treaty resulted in the eventual reunification of Bhutan, the terms were dictated by Tibet, and by war's end both of the child incarnations of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal were in Tibetan hands. The Speech incarnation Phyogs-las-rnam-rgyal (b.1708) died during the civil war, and in the confusion of border skirmishes between Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet, his Bhutanese rebirth was taken under Pho-lha-nas' protective custody to Phag-ri²⁴. Even more difficult was the situation of the Mind incarnation 'Jigs-med-grags-pa (1725-61), born into a 'Brug-pa family of Grwa-nang in Central Tibet²⁵. Securing Tibetan permission to bring this youth to Bhutan became a critical factor motivating Bhutanese leaders in their rapprochement with Tibet which began to emerge after 1735.

The Rapprochement with Tibet

The normalization of relations between Bhutan and Tibet was made possible by changed political realities in both countries, and by the existence of leaders on each side able to see reconciliation as a policy of mutual political advantage. However, the complex lines of political and religious authority in both countries meant that diplomatic initiatives had to adequately address the sentiments of their conservative monastic establishments and general population. The steps taken by both sides to move this process forward is an interesting study of diplomatic method among the Himalayan countries during the 18th century. These steps included the appointment of ecclesiastic intermediaries, cross-border temple restoration projects, the use of religious exchange students, and participation in mediation activities.

As Petech has observed, Pho-lha-nas' greatest skill as ruler of Tibet was the craft of diplomacy²⁶. The civil war in Bhutan presented him with the opportunity to end the border conflicts which had periodically consumed Tibet's resources, and which had the potential, if left unchecked, to attract unwanted attention from China. This apparently could best be accomplished by mediating the rulership dispute in Bhutan, enforcing the annual *lo-phyag* requirement, and by carefully managing the circumstances under which the incarnations of Ngag-dbang-rnam-rgyal should return to Bhutan.

The early Bhutanese leaders in the reconciliation process included the 10th *sDe-srid*, *rGyal-sras* Mi-pham-dbang-po and the 7th *rJe* Mkhan-po (Lord Abbot of the state monastery) Ngag-dbang-'phrin-las (1671-1746). The former was not only the civil head of state, but also the rebirth of *bsTan-'dzin-rab-rgyas*, and was thus one of the four *mchog-sprul* incarnates who could claim the right to be appointed *rGyal-tshab*. But his brother Mi-pham-'jigs-med-nor-bu (1717-35) was the other *rGyal-sras mchog-sprul*, and was in fact the reigning *rGyal-tshab* at the time of his death.

Although Mi-pham-dbang-po's position had been upheld by terms of the civil war settlement, his brother's death and continued internal factionalism led him to abdicate and flee to Tibet at the beginning of 1736²⁷.

Whether by design or by chance, Mi-pham-dbang-po's self-imposed seven month exile became the turning point in the reconciliation process between Tibet and Bhutan. Coming at the season of the *lo-phyag* mission, his visit offered the opportunity to re-establish personal ties with his Tibetan counterparts. The policy thinking of Bhutanese leaders is never explicitly laid out in any source, but many significant changes appear to date from this visit. The futility of continued sectarian strife, the isolation from the religious shrines of Tibet, the potential threat posed by China, and the need to resolve the constitutional question must have become clarified in Mi-pham-dbang-po's mind at this time.

The Bhutanese entourage was cordially received, and was hosted to numerous state dinners by Pho-lha-nas, the cabinet ministers and the Manchu ambans. Mi-pham-dbang-po had lengthy audiences with the Dalai Lama and other leading church dignitaries, and received an extensive guided tour of the religious sites of Lhasa and nearby districts. In particular, he paid the first ever formal visit to Rwa-lung monastery by a Bhutanese head of state. There he met two of the leading prelates of the Tibetan 'Brug-pa church, namely the 7th rGyal-dbang 'Brug-chen dKar-brgyud-'phrin-las-shing-rta (1718-66) and Grub-dbang Rin-po-che g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje (1721-69), both of whom were to play key roles in the reconciliation process²⁸.

From this event onward, there unfolded a warming of relations between the heads of the Tibetan and Bhutanese branches of the 'Brug-pa. As if to symbolize the mutual intent to repair the 120-year old sectarian split, the two sides agreed to jointly sponsor a major restoration of Rwa-lung monastery. Funded largely by the Tibetan government, but with contributions from the Bhutan treasury as well, the 18-year

restoration project became an important, publicly visible acknowledgment of the intent to mend the old dispute²⁹. The restoration of Rwa-lung was the first instance of “temple diplomacy” followed several more times in later decades, by secular rulers wishing to influence the ‘Brug-pa reconciliation.

This process was encouraged by Pho-lha-nas. He also reaffirmed his support for Mi-pham-dbang-po by insisting that, upon the latter’s return to Bhutan, he be installed to succeed his younger brother as *rGyal-tshab*³⁰. But Pho-lha-nas did not permit repatriation at this time of the Zhabs-drung *thugs-sprul* ‘Jigs-med-grags-pa, the legitimacy of whose incarnate status Mi-pham-dbang-po confirmed following an examination of the child at the Jo-khang. We must assume that the motivation for this refusal was to retain leverage over the still tense situation in Bhutan.

Mi-pham-dbang-po returned to Bhutan late in 1736 and was installed as *rGyal-tshab*. But his death shortly thereafter could have effectively derailed the warming of relations with Tibet, had not the effort been picked up by the retired rJe Mkhan-po Ngag-dbang-‘phrin-las. Ngag-dbang-‘phrin-las was determined to gain the return of the *thugs-sprul* incarnation, and used as a means the opening of an extended and warm correspondence with g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje, whom Mi-pham-dbang-po had met in Tibet.

The Tibetan lineage of the Grub-dbang Rin-po-che, with their seat at Dre’u-lhas near Mtsho-sna (north of the eastern Bhutanese border with Tibet) were the incarnations of ‘Brug-smyon Kun-dga’-legs-pa (1455-1529), the famed Tibetan “crazy” ‘Brug-pa yogin and libidinous baud, whose most famous descendant in Bhutan was the illustrious 1st *rGyal-tshab* (and simultaneous *sDe-srid*) bsTan-‘dzin-rab-rgyas³¹. g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje was also an eclectic religious master and a favorite at the court of the 7th Dalai Lama, who had blessed him with a name as a child³². Thus, because of his personal charisma and the legendary importance of ‘Brug-pa

Kun-legs in both Tibet and Bhutan, g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje was particularly qualified to fill the role of ecclesiastic intermediary³³.

In an event of enormous symbolic importance, g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje was invited to visit Bhutan in 1739 to officiate at two important events, the coronation of Mi-pham-dbang-po's successor as *rGyal-tshab* and the consecration of a new golden Spyian-ras-gzigs image at Punakha. Yet so high was the level of residual public distrust of Tibet's motives that his journey to Punakha was marked by bands of protesters taunting him as a false incarnation and Tibetan spy. By the time of his departure, however, the public attitude had shifted to the point that his passage was marked only by groups of adulating women, praying to this reincarnation of the libidinous 'Brug-pa baud for the blessing of pregnancy³⁴.

Another important element of the diplomatic reconciliation process was government sponsorship of religious "exchange students". When g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje returned to Tibet in 1740, the Bhutanese government selected a group of students to travel with him to undertake higher studies in Tibet. This group included two of Bhutan's brightest young monks, who were later to become rJe Mkhan-po and important authors of books on religion and history. The personal accounts of these youths' experiences in Tibet, preserved in their *rnam-thar*, form a remarkably vivid perspective on the awkward reopening of ties between the two countries. During 1740 - 48, we find them entered into 'Bras-spungs, as candidates for the Geshe degree. The presence of Bhutanese 'Brug-pa theology students at a leading dGe-lugs-pa monastery in Lhasa was so startling as to attract enormous attention throughout their sojourn. They had numerous audiences with leading Tibetan scholars, and at the conclusion of their studies were personally tested in logical debate by the 7th Dalai Lama himself³⁵.

The Career of the 13th *sDe-srid* Shes-rab-dbang-phyug (r.1744 - 63)

In 1744, while the above events were under way, the 13th *sDe-srid* Shes-rab-dbang-phyug was installed in Bhutan. His 19-year reign may fairly be called the high point in the history of secular rule during this era. Shes-rab-dbang-phyug was an energetic, creative diplomat who, even more than his near-contemporary Pho-lha-nas, was a master politician and initiator on many fronts³⁶. Youngest of eight children from an obscure family of western Bhutan, he spent his early career in the state monastery. During the civil war years, however, he was recruited out of the monastery by *sDe-srid* Mi-pham-dbang-po to serve as *mgron-gnyer* (chief steward) at several government dzongs. His success in this role got him appointed as the governor of Paro dzong, a commission in which he brilliantly led the military campaign against the secessionists who had taken that district, but then, unlike most earlier *sDe-srid*, treated the rebels with sensitivity and leniency during their repatriation. During his second term in this post, at the war's conclusion, he continued to nurture local support for the central Bhutan government by sponsoring extensive restorations at Paro, a gilt dome for its central keep, and the construction of many new images. For *sDe-srid* Mi-pham-dbang-po's funeral ceremonies in 1739, Shes-rab-dbang-phyug personally paid for a mass distribution of coins (*mang 'gyed*) to the more than 300 attending monks, an act of personal charity he was to repeat seven more times during his career³⁷.

Shes-rab-dbang-phyug, more than any other civil ruler of this era in either Bhutan or Tibet, demonstrated the leadership qualities of valor, diplomacy, honesty, and dedication. Here, however, we can only briefly review how he drew upon these traits to continue the reconciliation activities of his predecessors.

The first requirement was to settle the confusing question of legitimacy and hierarchy among the Bhutanese *mchog-sprul*

incarnation lineages. While the details are complex, he basically accomplished this by conciliatory tactics similar to those which had worked in achieving the post-war reunification of the Paro valley. All of the incarnations were declared to be legitimate, although not of the same rank³⁸. All of the incarnations were to receive generous government support. Competition among them was further minimized by an orchestrated program of teaching assignments and spiritual retreats which kept them fully occupied in separate activities. The *Lho'i chos 'byung*, Bhutan's first national history, was published at Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's behest in part to declare the government's official position on the question, and early prints were distributed in Tibet³⁹.

Shes-rab-dbang-phyug next successfully petitioned the Tibetan government for the return of 'Jigs-med-grags-pa. The payback for Bhutan's friendship towards g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje was his active intercession with the 7th Dalai Lama, whose decision to grant the request was apparently the deciding factor. Pho-lha-nas could hardly refuse a request supported by all of the church leaders in both countries. 'Jigs-med-grags-pa arrived in Bhutan in 1746 and was installed as *rGyal-tshab* in the following year⁴⁰.

In the area of church-state relations, Shes-rab-dbang-phyug followed policies which were much more politically astute and liberal than his predecessors. The political options available for purely secular leaders to sway monastic sentiment were always limited, in a system where the highest theoretical authority lay with monks. But one particularly effective activity was the construction and restoration of temples and monasteries. Pho-lha-nas had also used this tactic occasionally⁴¹. But Shes-rab-dbang-phyug greatly increased the scale of "temple diplomacy" to improve church-state relations, and even began to outshine the Tibetan leaders.

The restoration at Rwa-lung had dragged on for 13 years when, in 1749, Shes-rab-dbang-phyug with characteristic energy dispatched a party of artisans with money and

supplies to hasten its completion. Perhaps embarrassed by Bhutan's leadership, and in the interest of patching relations with the lesser sects, the Dalai Lama ended up paying most of the costs. But the Tibetan 'Brug-pa hierarch was so appreciative of Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's effort that his portrait was painted on the wall as one of Rwa-lung's leading patrons⁴².

The next major international project was restoration of the ancient frontier chapels of Bum-thang and Paro, associated by revered tradition with kings of the early Tibetan monarchy. The 7th Dalai Lama was an avid sponsor of a massive project to restore all 108 such temples throughout Tibet. In 1751, the first year of his independent rule following Pho-lha-nas' death, he allocated more than 38,000 silver *srang* to the effort, with similar amounts in subsequent years⁴³. His antiquarian interests therefore coincided with Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's policies, which resulted in significant sums of Tibetan money flowing into Bhutan. Almost certainly, it was during these years that the custom was begun for Tibet to pay contributions to Bhutan for the regular performance of rituals at its ancient frontier chapels, a custom which continued down to the 20th century⁴⁴.

The grandest project of all was Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's construction of the golden dome of Punakha, and the simultaneous fabrication of an enormous appliqué hanging of Spyran-ras-gzigs. Beginning in 1752, he solicited annual support from the Dalai Lama, until its consecration at the new year's festival of 1756. In addition to more 20,000 silver coins to pay for the construction work, the Tibetan government also sent a large supply of muskets, swords and other weapons for inclusion in the Punakha armory. One can hardly imagine a clearer symbol of the changed political climate⁴⁵.

A final element in Shes-rab-dbang-phyug's external policies represented a diplomatic forward policy characteristic of his growing political maturity and self confidence. We refer here

to his efforts to mediate political disputes in Tibet. For governments intending to play a significant role in regional politics, such missions provided an opportunity to augment national prestige, as well as a training experience for future leaders. The mission which Shes-rab-dbang-phyug dispatched in 1749 to mediate the succession dispute among the sons of Pho-lha-nas has already been reviewed in an earlier publication⁴⁶. It was, as we know, unsuccessful in preventing the bloody tragedy which followed. Yet in mimicking Pho-lha-nas' mediation of Bhutan's own succession crisis twenty years earlier, Shes-rab-dbang-phyug did more than merely repay a favour. The adoption of a posture of interested neutrality, while providing gifts to all of the disputants, served as a clear announcement that Bhutan intended to be counted as a serious political entity in Himalayan politics.

A second attempt at dispute mediation came in 1751, in connection with the end of the Ladakh civil war⁴⁷. Tibet and Bhutan each had historical interests in Ladakh, and therefore dispatched mediation parties. The Bhutanese contingent was led by bSod-nams-lhun-grub, the Dzongpön of Wangdiphodrang and future *sDe-srid* during the Anglo-Bhutan border war of 1773-74. In the outcome, however, Bhutan's contribution to the final settlement was much overshadowed by that of the principal Tibetan mediator, the revered Lama Kah-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang-nor-bu (1698-1755). Even so, the mission served the intended function of ensuring Bhutan's involvement in shaping events within its sphere of religious and political interests.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we may say that the resolution of Bhutan's long dispute with Tibet required the vision, diplomacy and persistence of leaders able to reach beyond narrow sectarian interests. Circumstances during the early 18th century offered an opportunity to break with the past. Shes-rab-dbang-phyug represented the very best of his era, and upon his retirement

in 1763 left Bhutan in a strong position from which capable successors could build. Unfortunately, the political stability and direction which Shes-rab-dbang-phyug brought to Bhutan were severely disrupted by events following his death, particularly by the 1773-74 war with the British, discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Notes

¹ Smith (1968): 2 - 4; Aris (1979): 206.

² [I have corrected the erroneous date 1747, inadvertently included in the original version of this article].

³ It is important to distinguish between the 6th Rgyal-dbang 'Brug-chen Mi-pham-dbang-po and the 10th Bhutanese sDe-srid of the same name. [The latter was born to a family in the village of Bon-sbis, north of Tongsa Dzong in central Bhutan.]

⁴ The date and details of these events are found in *RGYAL-DBANG* 6: 53b-55a, and *LKDLG*: 93a-95a. In spite of the peace treaty of 1687, a Bhutanese embassy to sDe-dge in 1688 had to pass through Tibet wearing disguises (*LNDRM*: 81b - 86b). The visit to Rwa-lung in 1736 by the 10th sDe-srid Mi-pham-dbang-po seems to have marked the reopening of this shrine to Bhutanese pilgrims (*SDE-SRID* 10: 52b-53b; *SDE-SRID* 10a: 19b-20a).

⁵ *LCB*: 34a-b; *NDRR*, Nga: 94a. The gunpowder must have been left by the Portuguese Jesuits.

⁶ *LNDRR*, vol. Nga: 29b-31a.

⁷ *LNDRR*, vol. Nga: 111a-b.

⁸ *LNDRR*, vol. Nga: 145a.

⁹ *L5DL*: vol. 1: 154a.

¹⁰ Translations in Aris (1979): 214, and Rahul (1970): 24-25; text at *LNDRR*, vol. Nga: 31a-b.

¹¹ *LNDRR*, Vol. Nga: 133b; *LCB*: 42b.

¹² *L5DL*, vol. 1: 259b-260b.

¹³ *L5DL*, vol. 1: 250b-251b; *LCB*: 51b.

¹⁴ *LNDRM*: 59b-61a; *L5DL*, vol. 3: 197a-b.

¹⁵ Ahmad (1970): 230 - 301.

¹⁶ *LCB*: 54b - 61b; *SDE-SRID* 4: 383a-b.

¹⁷ Aris (1979): 233-62.

¹⁸ The decision was made by bsTan-'dzin-rab-rgyas following his retirement as the 4th sDe-srid, as recorded in his biography (*SDE-SRID* 4: 330b).

¹⁹ The disruptive potential of the reincarnation recognition process became evident numerous times during the 17th century. To prevent

recurrences of what happened to the 'Brug-pa sect following Padma-dkar-po, the 5th Dalai Lama stepped firmly into the recognition process of both the 6th Rgyal-dbang 'Brug-chen and the 2nd Panchen Lama (*L5DL*: vol. 1: 133a-b; vol. 2: 17a-b). It became common practice for important *sprul-sku* of central Tibet to receive confirmation from the Dalai Lama during the era of the Great 5th.

²⁰ Brief descriptions in L. Petech (1972a): 203-13; Aris (1979): 259-61; Aris (1994): 31.

²¹ Petech (1972) is the only detailed published study of the civil war period, but much additional information is now available. It was also covered in detail in my PhD dissertation (Australian National University, 1977), which I plan to edit for publication.

²² For the Chinese accounts, see Anon., *Wei-tsang t'ung-chih* (1896): 15, 9b and Chiao Ying-ch'i (c.1737), *Hsi-tsang-chih*: 3, 11b-12.

²³ *SDE-SRID 10a*: 19a.

²⁴ *LNDPD*: 31a-b.

²⁵ *LCB*: 67a.

²⁶ Petech (1972): 196.

²⁷ *SDE-SRID 10*: 51b-52a; *SDE-SRID 10a*: 19b-20a; see also Aris (1979): 259-260.

²⁸ *SDE-SRID 10*: 52b-53b.

²⁹ *SDE-SRID 10*: 66a; *L7DL*: 439b-440a.

³⁰ *SDE-SRID 10*: 68b; *RJE MKHAN-PO 9*, part Ja: 18a.

³¹ On the life of 'Brug-pa Kun-legs see Stein (1972); also a translation of his Bhutanese biography in K. Dowman & Sonam Paljor (1980), *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley*. London.

³² *L7DL*: 108b.

³³ Yon-tan-mtha'-yas, the 13th rJe Mkhan-po of Bhutan, lived and studied with g.Yung-mgon-rdo-rje during an extended sojourn in Tibet, and provides fascinating insights into his life and activities (*RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 27a-b).

³⁴ *RJE MKHAN-PO 9*, part Ja: 14b-15a; part Nya: 4a, 6a-b; *RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 22a.

³⁵ *RJE MKHAN-PO 9*, part Nya: 1-24a; *RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 23a-38b; *L7DL*: 311b, 327b-327a.

³⁶ The following section is a summary of various parts of the biography of the 13th *sDe-srid* (*SDE-SRID 13*).

³⁷ *RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 29.b.

³⁸ The evidence for this is found in many sections of his biography and other sources. Perhaps the clearest evidence is seen in the protocol for coronation of *rGyal-tshab* 'Jigs-med-grags-pa in 1747 (*RJE MKHAN-PO 13*: 31a-34a).

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³⁹ *RJE MKHAN-PO* 10: 78a. See also M. Aris (1994), *From the Land of the Thunder Dragon*, Peabody-Essex Museum, p. 38-39.

⁴⁰ *RJE MKHAN-PO* 9, part Ja: 12a; *L7DL*: 329b.

⁴¹ Petech (1972): 122, 158.

⁴² *RJE MKHAN-PO* 13: 49a-b; *L7DL*: 439b-440a, 513a.

⁴³ *L7DL*: 402a-b, 435a, 513a, 545a-546a.

⁴⁴ Charles Bell (1906), *Report on the Government of Tibet*. Calcutta (Great Britain Foreign Office Confidential Print *9735): 14, 41.

⁴⁵ *SDE-SRID* 13: 69a-70b; *L7DL*: 409b, 429a, 460b.

⁴⁶ Aris (1994).

⁴⁷ Described in Petech (1977), pp.103-106, although the Ladakhi sources contain no mention of Bhutanese involvement. See also the forthcoming study of Peter Schwieger, *Teilung und Reintegration des Konigreichs von Ladakh im 18. Jahrhundert*. The Bhutanese account is in *RJE MKHAN-PO* 13: 53a-b.

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COINAGE IN BHUTAN

*Nicholas Rhodes**

Introduction

In Thimphu, and elsewhere in Western Bhutan, it is still possible to find many examples of the old copper coins, known as Matam, Chetam and Zangtam. Old silver coins can also be found, although less frequently. Very little, however, has been written about the background to these coins - who made them, where and when, and how they were used. The purpose of this article is to set out what I know about these old Bhutanese coins, not only to present the information more widely, but also in the hope that there will be people in Bhutan who will be encouraged to provide additional evidence from oral tradition, written records, or from any other sources. Elderly people may still be alive who remember such coins being struck, but unless their memories are recorded soon, the information will be lost forever.

Before the 1950's, there were no urban communities in Bhutan, and coins only played a small part in the economy of the country, serving mainly as a store of value, and as ceremonial gifts or donations. Silver coins, usually foreign coins, also served as the raw material from which jewellery and "pan" boxes were made. Day to day life mainly involved subsistence farming, supplemented by barter. Taxes were paid either in kind or in services, and land rent was paid as a share of the produce, again in kind.

Some insight into how coins were used in the old days can be obtained from Karma Ura's books, *The Hero with a Thousand*

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Eyes and The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi. For example, Pemi Tshewang Tashi gave a silver coin, called *norzangphubchen*, to Aum Jayshing Jaymo as a thank you for the hospitality given¹. Then in 1944, Dasho Shingkar Lam offered a silver coin to His Majesty, when he was first registered as a *tozep*, and noted that previously the customary gift on such an occasion had been three copper coins². In 1947, when the King was travelling to Ha, at several points villagers greeted His Majesty with the customary gift of a basket of rice with three hard-boiled eggs, and they received a coin in exchange³. Only in 1952 were moves taken to increase the role of money in general, and coins in particular, when senior courtiers and secretaries began to be paid in cash, rather than in kind⁴.

Coins in Bhutan before 1800

The earliest references in Bhutan that mention coins date from the time of the Shabdung Ngawang Namgyal. In about 1619, the Shabdung went to Chapchha to preach, and received presents from the Raja of Cooch Behar, including silver and gold coins. At the same time, he was offered "lots of silver coins" by the local people⁵. On his return from Chapchha, the Shabdung began the construction of a new monastery called Cheri Dorji-dhen. In this monastery he placed a double storied silver stupa, containing the ashes of his father, which had been made from the silver coins brought from Chapchha.

In another account, relating to the period about 1640-43, there is a lengthy description of gifts received by Shabdung, including "several thousand *ma-tang* coins" collected as *brgya-'bul* (hundred offerings), from districts between Rtse-rag dum-bu and the palace of the Rgya-chu-bar Raja, and from the district of Dar-dkar (now Dagana) as far as the place called Bye-ma in India⁶. The use of the term *Ma-tang* is interesting, and will be explained below.

When Tenzin Rabgye was enthroned as the 4th Druk Desi in 1680, he apparently received presents of 1000 gold and 1000 silver coins from the Raja of Ladakh, and 700 gold coins and 1000 silver coins from the Raja of Cooch Behar⁷. These presents were distributed to the general public, including one silver coin to each family⁸. The terms used to describe the coins in these accounts were *'ngul-tam* and *gser-tam* for the silver and gold coins respectively⁹.

On the enthronement of the 8th Druk Desi in 1707, the gift of one silver coin was given to each of the monks and to the general public of Bhutan¹⁰. Similarly the 13th Desi, Sherab Wangchuck (1744-63), distributed gifts of one silver coin (*ma-tam*) to each citizen eight times during his reign. This made him very popular in the country¹¹. Furthermore, in 1747, on the occasion of the coronation of the second Shabdung, Jigmed grags-pa (1725-61), gifts were described in detail and valued in *Ma-tam*. For instance, gifts presented to the Gyalse Rinpoche Mi-pham 'brug-sgra rnam-rgyal included images, coins, horses, clothing, brocades, etc., the total value of which was listed at 2,290 *Ma-tam*¹². This passage is particularly interesting, as it indicates that the *Ma-tam* was used at this time, not only as the name of a coin, but also as a common unit of value.

The first outside reference to coins in Bhutan is in a letter from the Deb Raja to the Governor General of India, dated 17th January 1785. In it the Deb Raja requests help in recovering Rs.5000 of silver that had been sent to Cooch Behar some years before, to be struck into coin, and which had not yet been returned¹³. This letter shows that in the late eighteenth century, the Deb Raja occasionally sent surplus silver to Cooch Behar to be struck into coin, as there was no mint in Bhutan itself. A parallel can be found in the relationship between Tibet and Nepal, when until about 1753, the Tibetan government sent silver to Nepal to be struck into coin for circulation in Tibet¹⁴. This use of coins struck in Cooch Behar is confirmed by the earliest European visitors to

Bhutan. When Turner visited Bhutan in 1783, he noted that:-

"The narainee is a base silver coin, struck in Cooch Behar, of the value of about ten-pence, or one third of a rupee. The commodiousness of this small piece, the profits that the people of Bootan derive from their commerce with Cooch Behar, and some local prejudices against the establishment of a mint, have given the narainee in these regions, as well as in those where it is struck, a common currency, though both countries are perfectly independent of each other, and totally different in their language and manner. The name of the coin is derived from the Hindoo mythology; Narrain being no other than the favourite god Krishna."¹⁵

and Samuel Davis, who accompanied Turner, observed in his diary :-

"That the absence of money in a society excludes, in a proportionate degree, depravity of morals and vices of various kinds, is in some measure exemplified in Boutan, where there is no other coin than the Beyhar rupee, which finds its way into the country in so scanty a portion, as to leave the natives possess almost of the same advantages as those to whom money is wholly unknown."¹⁶

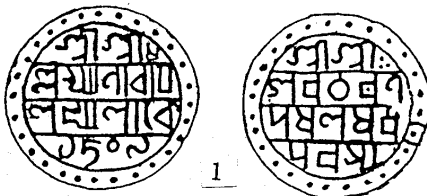
The pattern of coin use in Bhutan prior to 1800 seems, therefore, clear. Silver coins from Cooch Behar reached Bhutan in three different ways, first as gifts from the Raja of Cooch Behar to Bhutanese dignitaries, secondly through the course of trade, and thirdly in exchange for silver bullion sent by the Bhutanese to the Cooch Behar mint. Once in Bhutan, the coins were occasionally used as ceremonial donations to the public, who probably kept them as a store of value, and then, at least during the nineteenth century, such pieces would be required, when appropriate, as customary gifts.

However, the coins also circulated as currency, although to a limited extent.

The Coinage of Cooch Behar

Since Cooch Behar coins circulated in Bhutan prior to about 1800, it is worth describing that coinage in some detail¹⁷. The first king of Cooch Behar to strike coins was Nara Narayan (c1555-1587), who issued a large number of fine silver rupee sized coins. Although all the coins are dated 1477 Saka (=1555AD), this date merely represents the accession year and the coins could have been struck at any time during the reign. Indeed, from other evidence it is likely that the rupees were struck from about 1562 until the last years of the reign in 1587. During the reign of this king, a British traveller, Ralph Fitch, visited Cooch Behar in 1583, and commented on the profitable trade that was carried on between Cooch Behar and Tibet. It is probable that this trade passed through Bhutan, and some of the first Cooch Behar silver coins may have reached Bhutan as early as the sixteenth century.

During the reign of Nara Narayan's successor, Lakshmi Narayan (1587-1627), the Portuguese travellers, Cacella and Cabral, passed through Cooch Behar on their way to Bhutan in 1626, where they met the Shabdung Ngawang Namgyal¹⁸. No eference to coins is made in their account of either country, but fine silver rupees were struck during the reign of Lakshmi Narayan, and I have seen several specimens in old accumulations of coins in Bhutan.



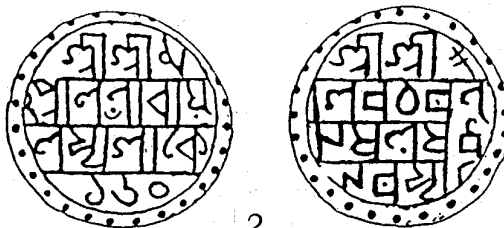
Rupee of Lakshmi Narayana (1587-1627)

Obv. *Sri Srīma/t Lakshmi Naraya/nasya Sake/ 1509*

Rev. *Sri Sri/ Shiva Charana/ Kamala Madhu/karasya*

(Coin) of the twice exalted Lakshmi Narayana,
in the Saka year 1509 (=1587AD). A bee on the
lotus at the feet of the twice exalted Shiva.

Only a few coins are known of the next ruler, Vira Narayan, but his successor, Prana Narayan (1633-66), struck large numbers of half rupees, and a few full rupees. During this period relations between Cooch Behar and Bhutan were cordial, and indeed when Cooch Behar was occupied by Moghul forces from 1661-63, Prana Narayan sought refuge in Bhutan. From then on, the half rupee, or Narayani Rupee, became the coin commonly struck in Cooch Behar, the name "Narayani" presumably being given because that word was written, as part of the King's name, on all the coins. Interestingly, when these rupees and half rupees of Cooch Behar are looked at by Bhutanese, one letter stands out as being immediately recognisable, the "Ma" at the top right of the obverse. This is almost certainly the reason why coins were known as *Ma-tam* in Bhutan, and indeed some of the earliest coins to be struck in Bhutan do show a clear *Ma* in Bhutanese script in this position on the die.

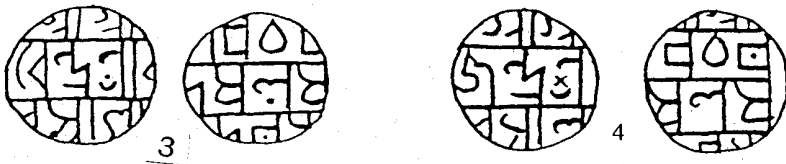


Rupee of Prana Narayana (1633-66)

Obv. *Sri Srīma/t Prana Naraya/nasya Sake/ 130*
(=1640AD) Note the letter *Ma* at top right.

Rev. *Sri Sri/ Shiva Charana/ Kamala Madhu/karasya*

Cooch Behar continued to strike large numbers of Narayani Rupees until the British ordered the closure of the mint in about 1780. Throughout this period of about one hundred and fifty years, the Narayani rupee hardly changed in fabric or design, and the reason for its popularity was its consistency of weight, about 4.7g, and silver content, about 80% fine. Indeed, as most rulers had names ending in "...ndra", the only distinguishing feature was the initial letter of the king's name, which was often off the flan. Even after the closure of the mint, the Narayani rupees continued to be the most popular circulating medium in the areas of North Bengal that surrounded Cooch Behar itself, and in particular along the Duars south of Bhutan, as far east as Guwahati. It was only in the middle of the nineteenth century that the Narayani rupee was finally replaced by British Indian coins.



Devendra Narayana (1763-65)

Rajendra Narayana
(1770-72)

These Narayani rupees, a couple of which are illustrated above, can be commonly found today among old Bhutanese silver coins. The coins of Rajendra Narayana are the only ones to have a "x" to the right of the letter *ndra* on the obverse.

The First Coins Struck in Bhutan

Exactly when coins were first struck in Bhutan is not certain, but it was certainly before 1815. Kishenkant Bose, a Bengali civil servant, visited Bhutan in that year, and commented that:

"there was formerly no mint in Bhutan, but when the Bhuteas carried away the late Raja of Cooch Behar, they got hold of the dies, with which they still stamp the Narainy rupees. Every new Deb Raja puts a mark upon the rupees of his coinage, and alters the weight. The Dherma Raja also coins rupees, and besides them no one else is permitted to put their mark upon the rupees, but there are mints at Paro, Tongsa and Tagna." ¹⁹.

It is clear from this account that coins had been struck in Bhutan for several years before 1815, and that they were close copies of the Narayani Rupee of Cooch Behar, with only very minor modifications of the original design distinguishing the early Bhutanese productions from the Cooch Behar originals. This indeed agrees with the designs found on early Bhutanese coins, which have many minor varieties of the basic Cooch Behar type.

Kishenkant Bose also describes several instances of how coins were used at that time. Taxes were payable to the Deb Raja by most of the local Penlops and Dzongpens in cash, as well as in goods, with the cash element ranging from Rs.800 to Rs.4,000 per annum. His total income from these sources amounted to over Rs.12,000, and only the Punakha Dzongpen did not have to pay a cash element. Fines were, in some cases, payable in cash, with that for murder amounting to Rs.126. He implies that coins had corrupted the officials, and states that "as officials always found an excuse for extracting money from anyone who appeared to have become affluent, people were afraid to wear fine clothes, or to drink and eat too well".



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It is difficult to determine precisely which varieties of coin were seen by Kishenkant Bose, but the pieces illustrated above are possible candidates. These pieces differ from the Cooch Behar originals in having a small hook, or numeral "1" in the centre of the prominent letter *cha* on the reverse, there is a clear Bhutanese letter *Ma* on the obverse and there are a number of small errors in the calligraphy. For example the central line on the reverse extends to the right of the vertical line on nos.5 and 6, although that does not occur on the prototype. No.5 is an exceptionally large piece, struck with the same dies as were used for the normal "Narainy" rupees, but of the full weight of a British Indian rupee, 11.5g. Bose's comment that each Deb Raja "alters the weight" may refer to the silver content, rather than the weight of the coins, as most known early specimens are of a rather consistent weight standard of about 4.5g. As regards the taking of the dies from Cooch Behar, this is a nice story, repeated in 1838 by Pemberton, which may or may not be literally true, but dies were certainly being made in Bhutan before Kishenkant Bose's visit, and what is more likely, is that the Bhutanese kidnapped some of the metalworkers who struck coins at the Cooch Behar mint, and put them to work in Bhutan.

As regards Bhutanese sources for the early nineteenth century, it is recorded that Desi Chhoki Gyaltsen (1823-31) distributed gifts of one silver coin to each citizen of the country four times during his reign²⁰, repeating the ceremonies recorded during the previous century²¹. Significant numbers of coins were probably struck on these occasions, perhaps using silver obtained from India or Tibet,

as it is unlikely that the Treasury would have contained sufficient stocks for such generosity.

British Indian Accounts of Bhutanese Coins in the mid-nineteenth century

The Bhutanese Penlops continued to strike coins in the years after 1815, but the alloy became even more debased. Captain R.B.Pemberton, who visited Bhutan in 1838, described the currency as follows:-

The coin which circulated in the country is almost entirely confined to a silver one called "Deba", nominally of the value of the company's half-rupee. A prejudice appears to have at one time existed against the introduction of mints or any modification of systematic coinage; but when by the invasion of Coos Beyhar, the Bootan Government had obtained possession of the dies which were used by the Rajahs of that province in their coinage of the Narainee Rupee, the practice was introduced into the hills, and being found profitable, gradually extended from Poonakha and Tassisudon to the castles of the Soobahs, where the Deb rupee is now coined; but as the degree of purity of the metal is entirely dependent on the personal honesty of the Soobah, so great a variety is found in the standard value of the coin, that it is altogether rejected by the inhabitants of the plains and Dooars, in which the latter Narainee Rupees still circulate extensively; they are daily, however, becoming more scarce, for the Booteahs whenever they can obtain them, carry them into the hills, re-melt and alloy them, and in the deteriorated form of the Deba rupee, they are again circulated in the hills²².

Pemberton's account differs in a few particulars from that of Bose, in that he notes that the silver alloy is significantly lower than that of the Narainee Rupee, and that as a result, the "Deba Rupee" is not accepted in the plains. Fortunately,

some correspondence has survived in the National Archives of India, giving a few further details of the Deba Rupees. When Captain Pemberton was in Bhutan, he tried to settle some of the outstanding issues between the two governments, one of which centred around the payment of rent for certain land in the Dooars. In earlier years, Bhutan had paid rent to the Assam Raja, but since India had annexed Assam after the first Burma War of 1821, the tribute had lapsed. During Pemberton's visit, the Deb and Dharma Rajas accepted the requirement to pay tribute, but only in Deba Rupees, as the Narainnee Rupees in which the tribute had been demanded, were not available²³.

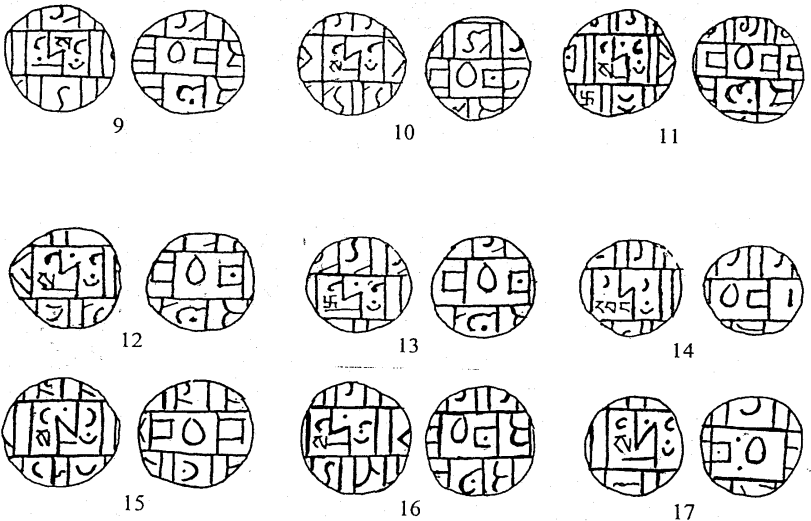
Soon afterwards, a consignment of Deba Rupees reached Calcutta from Capt. Jenkins, in Assam. Apparently the Bhutanese had tried to pay certain dues using these coins. A number of pieces were sent to H.J.Princep, Secretary to the Government of Bengal in the Political Department, who arranged for 1044 of them to be melted and analysed. The result of this analysis was that three ingots were produced that were 80, 83 & 85 dwts. worse than standard, or between 56.25% and 58.33% fine²⁴. This compares with an analysis done at the Calcutta Mint in 1832 of some "Narayuny" rupees, said to be "current in Rungpoor". On this occasion, the coins proved to be between 79.2% and 86.7% fine²⁵. These latter coins were probably sent to Calcutta by the Collector of Rangpur, as examples of the Narainnee Rupees that circulated in his territory, to determine the value at which they might be accepted for the payment of taxes. It is interesting that the only one to be illustrated in the 1834 publication, is an early Bhutanese coin (of type no.1). It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that this Bhutanese coin was actually retrieved from circulation in the plains before 1832, and that it was about 80% fine, a much better standard than was being used in 1839.

The outcome of the analysis of Deba Rupees undertaken in Calcutta was that Captain Jenkins was permitted to exercise his discretion about accepting Deba Rupees into the

Government Treasury at a rate of 60 rupees per 100 tola weight, but it is not clear whether he did exercise his authority in this regard. In 1841, an agreement was reached with Bhutan, whereby the East India Company paid Rs.10,000 per annum to Bhutan in respect of the management of the Kamrup Duars²⁶. This would have removed much of the excuse used by the Bhutanese for having to pay tribute in Deba Rupees. Furthermore, as correspondence in the papers of the Company regarding the fineness of Deba Rupees seems to have ceased, it is likely that, from 1841, the Bhutanese coins ceased to be sent, officially at least, to the plains. This is consistent with the numismatic evidence that the silver content of the coins struck in Bhutan reduced rapidly in the years around 1840. After 1840, there was no external pressure on whoever in Bhutan was striking coins, to maintain a standard silver content.

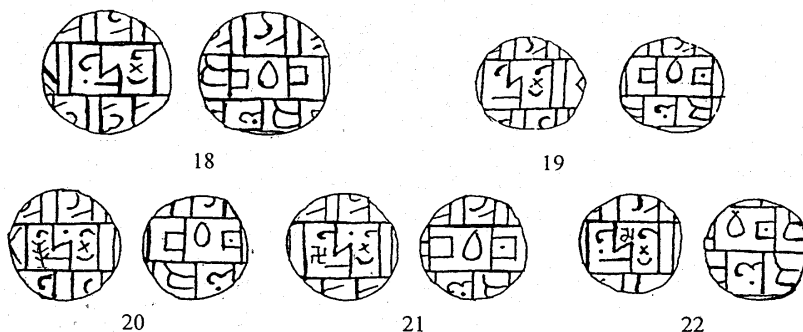
The next mention of coins that I have found, is a clause in the 1865 Treaty of Sinchula, under which the Bhutanese could demand the extradition from British territory of Bhutanese subject accused of "counterfeiting current coin, or knowingly uttering false coin". The existence of this clause implies that in 1865, the right to strike coins was a jealously guarded privilege, vested only in those powerful enough to demand it, although it is equally likely that this clause was merely added to mirror a similar clause that was demanded by the British, to allow them to extradite anyone in Bhutan who was counterfeiting Indian coins.

The coins that it is reasonable to attribute to this period from about 1820 to 1870, or even later, fall into two main groups. The first group has a dot to the right of the letter *ndra* and the second group has a cross. Typical specimens of the first group are illustrated below:-



Most of the coins of this group have a letter *Sa* on the obverse, and of those that don't, nos.12 and 13 above are struck with the same reverse die, proving that they were struck in the same mint at the same time. The silver content of the coins is very variable, and ranges from apparently fine silver, through pieces that are made of base metal with a silver wash, to the majority of specimens that make no effort to disguise the fact that they are copper or brass coins. In both silver and base metal, the coins with *Sa* are the most common of all Bhutanese coins, and are found in large numbers, struck from innumerable different dies. The common features are the horizontal lines, the prominent letters *ndra na* () on the obverse, and the *va chara* () in the centre of the reverse. The parts of the legend above and below the horizontal lines, and on the left and right extremities of the design vary, and often depart from the original prototype in a more or less illiterate manner, and even parts of the common features of the design are occasionally engraved in mirror image. Nos.15 to 17 are typical of the base metal varieties that can be easily found. A few specimens of No.12 are found in copper, struck to twice the normal weight standard, i.e. 9g compared with 3.5-4.5g.

The precise significance of the letter *Sa* is unknown, but it must have something to do with "land". Many old personal seals of Bhutanese officials have the letter *Sa*, so it was probably intended to distinguish coins issued by one of the most important issuing authorities, possibly the *Desi*, or one of the *Dzongpens*. The rare coins with the legend *dBang*, meaning "power", are only found in copper and are of light weight, so they were probably struck late in the period. It is possible that this variety was struck by the Wangdiophodrang *Dzongpen*, who was particularly powerful in the late 1870's.



A selection of coins of the second group, with the cross, are illustrated above. No.18 is a rare example of a double weight base silver specimen (c9.5g), and no.19 is the basic type that is very commonly found, in alloys ranging from relatively fine silver, to debased with a silver wash and then to pure copper or brass. None of them are ever found with the letter *Sa*, but rare varieties have a branch, a swastika or the letter *Ma*. These rare varieties are only in base metal with a silver wash. In other ways the coins are similar in standard to the coins of the first group, with a similar pattern of debasement and corruption of the legends beyond the common features in the centre of the flan. Again, many of these coins must have been struck by one of the most powerful penlops, but they were not necessarily all struck in the same mint.

In 1870, there was another correspondence between the Deb Raja and the British. On this occasion, the Deb Raja sent samples of the Bhutanese coin to Colonel Haughton, then stationed at Cooch Behar, and asked the British to provide him with a die, so that further examples could be struck. The Company refused to supply such a die, on two grounds; firstly providing Bhutan with the means of coining in imitation of Koch coins would result in base money finding its way into British territories and secondly they assumed that the reason for requesting dies might be because of a shortage of small change. In order to solve that problem, British offered to make the payments due to Bhutan in any denominations the Bhutanese wished. In this way, rather than supplying the means to strike coins, they hoped that British Indian coins would begin to circulate in Bhutan, in preference to the debased local coins.

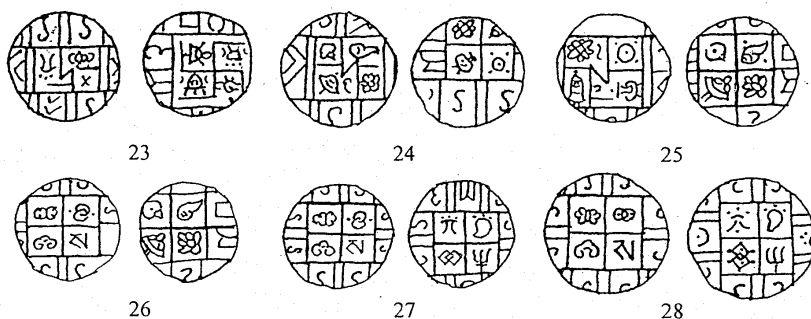
A few specimens of copper Bhutanese coins, common copper and brass pieces of the groups described above, were given to the British Museum during the last century, including some by Colonel Haughton himself. So, it may be assumed that these particular pieces were collected around the 1870's, while Haughton was in Cooch Behar.

Bhutanese Evidence for Coins in the Nineteenth Century

The only evidence that I have managed to collect from local sources about coins in nineteenth century Bhutan, is limited to a very few personal memories, and family traditions. In all probability there is much more evidence available in the country, and I hope that there will be some people reading this article, who may be prompted to record knowledge that they have of local traditions of minting.

The general consensus of opinion seems to be that coins were only struck in the central and western areas of Bhutan, up to Tongsa, but not in Bumtang. Although, at times, coins were used further to the east, these were Indian or Tibetan coins. Another common factor seems to be that most of the metal

working in Bhutan, including the minting of coins, was carried out by slaves, often Muslims, captured from the Cooch Behar area. Some of these slaves lived near to copper mines, where they both mined the copper, and struck coins. Presumably, they worked for local landlords, who were powerful enough to control the mines. It is likely that such owners of mines paid taxes in copper or coin to the local Penlops, and later to the King. The existence of old copper mines can therefore be an indication of where mints may have been located, as can a tradition of paying taxes in metal.



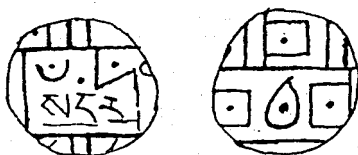
A particularly detailed account of coin striking was given to me by Dasho Karma Gayleg, from accounts passed down in family tradition. In the 1860's, Tongsa Penlop Jigme Namgyal apparently captured some Muslim metal workers from Cooch Behar, and brought them as slaves to Bhutan. They were set to work making coins at Yudrong Choling, in the forest just opposite the winter palace of the Tongsa Penlop, 47 km south of Tongsa. Jigme Namgyal had inherited the property from his father-in-law, Tongsa Penlop Ugyen Phuntso. Apparently the Cooch Beharis settled in the area and married local girls, and there are still (1998) about sixty families in the area that claim descent from the original slaves. After 1881, when Jigme Namgyal died, coins continued to be struck by the Cooch Behari slaves, under the direction of his son Ugyen Wangchuck, then Tongsa Penlop, who later became the first King of Bhutan. At this time, it was the son of the original

mint master who was in charge, and he improved the artistic quality of the coins considerably, and introduced Bhutanese emblems into the designs. He struck not only copper coins (*Ma-tam*), but also coins of similar design in silver (*Norzang phubchen*). Dasho Karma Gayleg has preserved in his family treasure, examples of some of the silver coins struck during the time of Ugyen Wangchuck, some of which were struck while he was Tongsa Penlop, and some that were struck after he became King. These particular types, examples of which illustrated above, are rather scarce, but they are very distinctive varieties. Nos.20 to 24 are found in both base silver and copper, and some examples of no.24 are also found struck in brass. Varieties of no.25 are also known in fine silver, and these were probably struck after Ugyen Wangchuck became King in 1907²⁷.



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Two other areas where coins are reputed to have been struck are at Sisina, in the Thimphu Valley, just north of the confluence, and at one or more locations south of Wangdiphodrang. One die has survived as a family heirloom in the possession of Mr.Kuenga Tshering (currently working in Central Statistical Organisation), who is descended from Alo Dorji, the Thimphu Dzongpen in the early 1880's. A rubbing of the die is shown above²⁸, and should a coin be found that was struck from this reverse die, the design of coins struck in the Thimphu area could perhaps be identified.

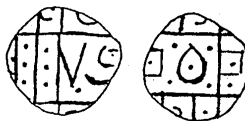


30

Accounts of coins struck in Paro or in the south of Bhutan are less specific, but it seems to be generally accepted that minting was widespread in Western Bhutan. In particular, those Penlops or Dzongpens in the middle to late nineteenth century, who gained any significant power in the area west of Tongsa, almost certainly had coins struck for them. It is also likely that each such ruler would choose designs that were acceptable to the public at large, but which also allowed him to recognise the products of his own mints. I illustrate above, as no.30, a coin with the inscription *Dar-Sa*, which may mean “the land of Da(ga)”, implying that it was struck by the Daga Penlop. In addition, a number of illegal minting operations took place, which struck substandard, light coins for profit, and judging by the number of such inferior coins that are found today, such forgery was widespread.



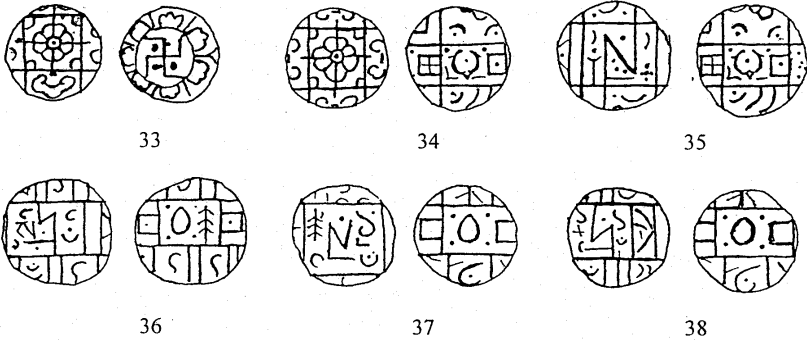
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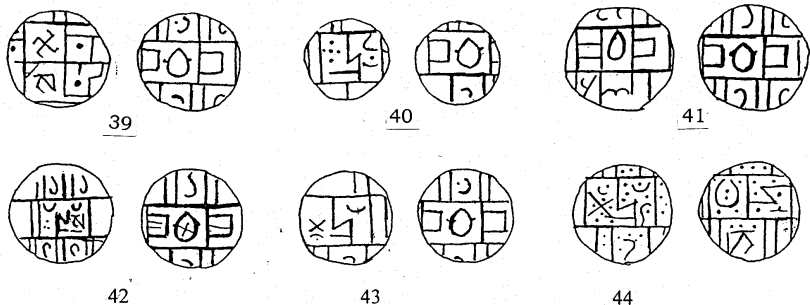
I illustrate above, as nos.31 and 32, a rubbing of a pair of dies²⁹ and a drawing of a coin actually struck by the dies. This shows how the dies were much larger than the flan used, so only a small proportion of the full design actually appears on the coins struck. The workmanship of this die is so poor

that it is reasonable to assume that it was used to strike forgeries in an "unofficial" mint.

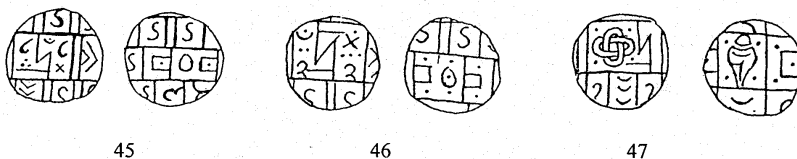


Late nineteenth century local rulers who almost certainly issued coins are the Penlops of Paro, Daga and Tongsa, and the Dzongpens of Thimphu, Wangdiphodrang and Punakha. It is also probable that there was a mint under the direct control of the Desi or the Shabdung. I illustrate a few examples of coins that were probably struck during the late nineteenth century, but late varieties of some of the types described earlier may have continued in production. It can be seen that nos.33-35 must have been struck in the same mint, as they represent a die-linked group; the varieties with the swastika and double dorji are very rare, and are only struck with a very limited number of dies, whereas the types with the fishes on the reverse in place of the letter *Cha* are very plentiful, and are struck with a large number of dies, with many minor variations in details of the design.

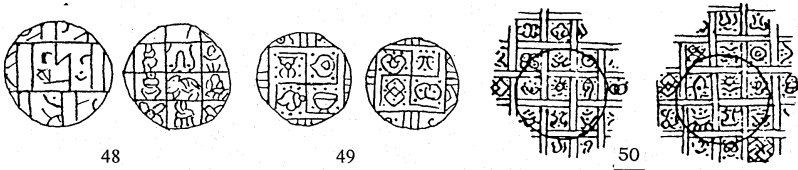
Nos.36 and 37 are examples of rather scarce varieties with a tree in the design, and no.38 is a variety that happens to be found struck with the same reverse die as no.37. It is interesting to speculate whether the tree on no.20 above, or any of the other varieties that have this symbol, were struck by the same issuing authority or in the same mint?



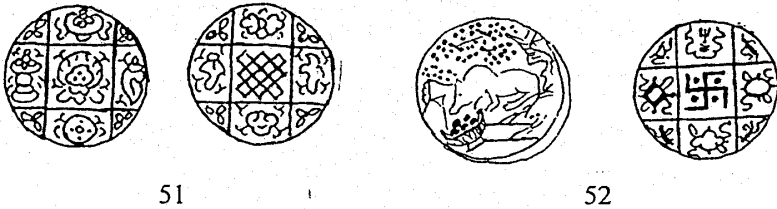
A further selection of rather crude coins is illustrated above. These pieces probably date from the late nineteenth century, and form a heavily die-linked group that must have originated from a single mint. Most have a very distinctive reverse die, with little "ears" on the letter *Cha*. On no.42, the reverse die has had several additional lines engraved on it. No.44 is struck from the same obverse die as no.40, but it has been heavily reengraved, which is not clear from the drawing. No.41 seems to be struck from two reverse dies, which is unusual. One remarkable feature of this group is the weights, with specimens ranging from 1.3g to 4.9g, although I have no reason to believe that more than one denomination was intended.



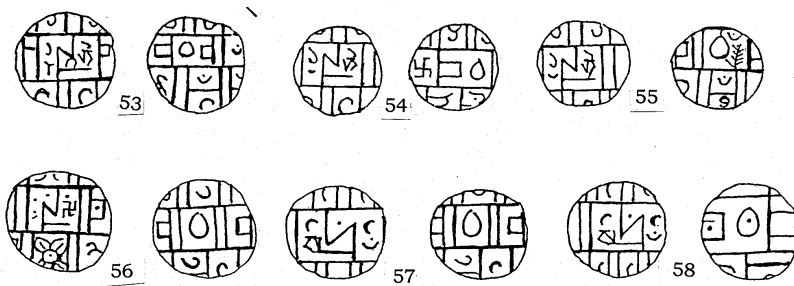
The three pieces illustrated above are probably struck in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. All three are of relatively fine style, and it is reasonable to assume that they were official issues, but I have no idea as who may have been responsible for their issue.



After Ugyen Wangchuck became King in 1907, only two other individuals were powerful enough to have retained the right to strike coins officially, the Paro Penlop, and Gongzim Ugyen Dorji, in Ha and Kalimpong. The Paro Penlop, Tsering Penjor who retained the position from 1918 to 1949 was a very artistic man, and it is reasonable to assume that the coins he was responsible for would have had imaginative designs. I illustrate above, as nos.48 to 50, some varieties that may have been struck in a mint under his control, although I have not been able to find any direct evidence of this.



As regards the Dorji family, I was told by Ashi Tashi Dorji that when she was young, she saw an old minting machine in Bhutan House in Kalimpong, but she never remembers it being used. However, I illustrate above as nos.51 and 52, two coins that may have been struck using such a machine.



It is very likely that controls were not rigorously exercised, and that several “unofficial” mints still operated. I illustrate above a group of coins that are rather common, are heavily die-linked, and are often found in uncirculated condition. Furthermore, the dies that were used to strike no.57 were also used to produce a silver coin weighing 8g, by using as a flan a Tibetan coin struck by the Chinese in Lhasa in 1910. It is therefore reasonable to assume that some or all of this group of coins was struck after 1910, but I have no suggestions as to where these particular coins may have been struck, or under whose authority.

The use of Foreign Coins in Bhutan

Apart from the Cooch Behar coins that have already been described, other foreign coins were also used in Bhutan at various times. Foreign coins had the advantage of being readily accepted for foreign trade, whereas the Bhutanese coins were of irregular fineness, and were only useful within the country.

Between 1755 and 1763 there was a French outpost at Goalpara, which was set up primarily to trade with Assam, but it is possible that some transactions also took place with Bhutan³⁰. As evidence of this trade, some French Indian rupees from the Arkot mint can still be found in Bhutan, although not in large quantities, see no.59 below. I have seen specimens ranging in date from about 1748 to 1773³¹, after which period the British were able to assert their supremacy

in the region, and the French were forced to cease their trading activities in northern Bengal. However, their coins were prized in Bhutan, presumably because of their fine silver content, although many would have been melted down over the years.

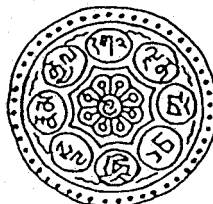
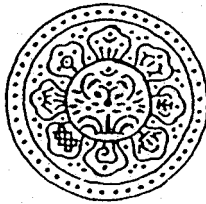


59



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I have been told that octagonal Assamese rupees can occasionally be found in Eastern Bhutan. These were common currency in the area south and east of Bhutan until the Burmese war of 1821, and could have found their way to eastern Bhutan, although I have never found any in Bhutan itself. A typical example of such a coin, dated 1785, is illustrated above as no.60. Again, these Assamese rupees are of fine silver content, and many may have been melted down for use in jewellery.



61

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, debased silver coins were struck in large numbers in Lhasa, and some of these found their way to Bhutan, particularly to the Bumthang area where, known as *betam*, they formed the main coin in circulation until well into the reign of the second King. A typical example datable to about 1895, is illustrated

above as no. 61. These coins, which average about 50% fine, were generally not worth melting for bullion, but could readily be used for trade with Tibet. Also, it is possible that some of them may have been melted down by Ugyen Wangchuck, when he was Tongsa Penlop, and converted into his own silver coins at his mint at Yudrong Choling. Unfortunately, because of the varying quality of these coins, and hence the different values given to them by the shroffs in Kalimpong and Lhasa, the Bhutanese could have been easily cheated. For example in about 1930, Sonam Tshering, an attendant of Shabdrung Jigme Dorji, was granted 2000 *Betam* as death compensation by the second King. Later he discovered that half of them were not of full value, and when he had the temerity later to ask the King for good pieces, the King replied "I did not mint them, the Tibetans did. If they do not want them, so be it"³². On the other hand, this variation in value did present trading opportunities to those who were knowledgeable, and around 1955, Dasho Shingkar Lam was able to buy *betams* at two rupees each in Guwahati, and sell them at four rupees each in Kalimpong³³. Partly because of this uncertain value, large numbers of these *betam* can still be found in Bhutan, some still in the possession of old families, but others are for sale in the market.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, British Indian rupees certainly found their way to Bhutan, where there were known as *Gor-mo*, or "round coins". They provided a popular and readily convertible currency, of a reliable standard, and known fineness. These rupees found their way to Bhutan, both through trade, and as the "compensation" paid by the British for the annexation of three hundred square miles of Dooars land in 1865. This compensation, which was always paid in silver rupees, was initially set at Rs.50,000, but was increased to Rs.100,000 in 1910³⁴. Such silver rupees were readily acceptable, both in India and in Tibet, and can still be found in large numbers in Bhutan, although many of them have been melted down to make silver jewellery or pan boxes, particularly since 1947, when their silver content became worth more than their face value. Indian rupees are still in

everyday use, and they are accepted on a par with the Bhutanese ngultrum.



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After the Chinese tried to assert their supremacy over the Government of Tibet, and the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1910, the Chinese attempted to persuade the Bhutanese to use Chinese rupees³⁵. These were silver coins, struck in Szechuan Province, to the same standard as, and using a design copied from, the British Indian rupees, but bearing the bust of the Chinese Emperor as no. 62. The coins were widely used in Eastern Tibet³⁶ at the time, but the Bhutanese, under pressure from the British, officially refused to allow them to circulate in Bhutan. However, some of these rupees can be found in Bhutan, particularly from sources in the east, where they are also called *Gormo*. Whether they were used in Bhutan as early as 1910, or whether they were only imported in more recent years, is not certain. Certainly, many Chinese silver coins of various types, can be found in eastern Bhutan, and although Tibetan refugees must have brought most of them after 1950, they are accepted locally with a standard value. Most common are the dollars of Yuan Shih K'ai, some of which were struck in the mid-1950's specifically for use in Tibet, and in both Tibet and Bhutan they are known as *Da-yuan*.

Machine struck Bhutanese Coins

In 1906, Ugyen Wangchuck, accompanied by about three hundred retainers, travelled to Calcutta, where he visited

many places of interest, including the Mint. He took a lively interest in everything he saw, and returned to Bhutan with many ideas for the development of the country. In particular, he must have considered the possibility of improving the standard of the coinage, and in 1909, Gongzim Ugyen Dorji, presumably on the King's instructions, asked the Government of India for permission to have a Bhutanese coin die prepared in Calcutta. The request was agreed to, and the Calcutta mint was instructed to supply dies from a design supplied from Bhutan³⁷. I have not been able to confirm exactly what this design was, but it is possible that the coins produced from this die were the machine struck copper coins described as nos. 48 and 49 above. This order for dies was almost certainly not repeated, as the copper coins are rather scarce, and are only known to have been struck from two pairs of dies. This was presumably because the British insisted that the coins struck should not conform with those struck by the Government of India. They generally opposed neighbouring states having coinages of their own, which might be used as coin within Indian territory. Shortly before this time, some fine medals were struck in Calcutta for Bhutan, with a portrait of the first King on the obverse, and a view of Punakha Dzong on the reverse. These medals were produced in gold, silver and copper, although the vast majority were struck in silver. One of these medals was presented to Sir Charles Bell on 25th January 1910, just after the supply had been delivered to Bhutan, but silver versions were presented to Bhutanese officials until at least the 1940's, when Lyonpo Sangay Penjore received his medal from the second King³⁸.

In 1928, the second King asked the Calcutta mint to strike some silver half rupees, and some copper pice, for use in Bhutan. The coins were designed by Mr A.P.Spencer, the Chief artist/engraver to the Calcutta mint, from a rough design supplied from Bhutan³⁹. Some 20,000 half rupees were supplied in 1929, but it was noticed that there was a small mistake in the legend, and this was corrected when a further 30,000 pieces were sent in the following year. At the

same time, 10,000 copper pice were sent, with the correct legend.

In 1950, and again in 1954 and 1967, half rupees were supplied by the Calcutta mint to Bhutan, by now they were made of nickel or cupro-nickel, but using the same dies. Initially the unchanged date (Earth-dragon year, 1928) was used, but was later replaced by a new year (Iron-tiger year, 1950). In both cases, however, the incorrect obverse die was used, with the error in the legend, but this raised no objections, and the error was never corrected again. Also in both 1950 and 1954, some copper pice, of a new design, reminiscent of the copper coins of the first King, with the quartered square, were struck in Calcutta.

From 1974, a number of new coins have been struck, both at Indian mints and at various foreign mints, but few have circulated to any significant extent, most having been ordered by outside agencies, and marketed internationally. In practice, coins have ceased to have any local relevance in Bhutan, and I will not list such recent pieces in this article. The coins have been almost entirely replaced by bank notes, which were introduced in 1974.

The Purchasing Power of Bhutanese Coins in Circulation

Until the 1950's, the old copper coins were used widely in Bhutan, together with both Indian rupees, Tibetan *betam*, and the old silver Cooch Behar coins and the fine silver Bhutanese copies (*Nying-tam Gatikha*). The exchange rates that prevailed at that time were:-

24 Che-tam (the thin copper coins)
= 12 Ma-tam
= 1 Betam

3 Betam = 1 Ti-ru (Indian Rupee)

2 Betam = 1 Nying-tam Gatika

1 Ma-tam would buy two apples, one cup of milk, or a pile of pan leaves⁴⁰.

Summary

In this article, I have tried to give an account of the development of the use of coinage in Bhutan, illustrated with representative examples of the coins concerned. I sincerely hope that additional numismatic evidence will surface in future years, so that a more comprehensive account can be prepared of the various mints that were in operation, describing which coins were struck in each mint, when, and under whose authority. In addition, it may in future be possible to prepare a comprehensive catalogue of the coins themselves, but at this stage readers should merely be aware that there are innumerable varieties of the coins illustrated here, and even some major types have been omitted from this brief overview of the coinage of Bhutan. In conclusion, I should like to thank all those who have helped in my studies of Bhutanese coins over the years, and in particular Karma Ura, Adam Pain, John Ardussi and Dasho Karma Gayleg.

Notes

¹*Karma Ura, The Ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi: A Wind Borne Feather*. Thimphu 1996, p.42

²*Karma Ura, The Hero with a Thousand Eyes*. A historical novel. Thimphu 1995, p.34

³*Ibid*, p.108

⁴*Ibid*, p.192

⁵Dr.C.T.Dorji, *History of Bhutan Based on Buddhism*, p.75.

⁶from The Biography of Shabdrung Rinpoche Ngawang Rnamgyal (1594-1651), written c.1674, reprinted in Dolanji, India, in 1974, Section 4, ff.113b-114a. My thanks to John Ardussi for giving me this information.

⁷Ladakh had no coinage at this period, but a few commemorative gold and silver coins were struck in Ladakh in the name of Aurangzeb in 1665, so it is possible that some of these were sent as gifts to Bhutan on this occasion. Until recently none of these Ladakhi coins had been seen, but a gold piece recently appeared on

the London market, c.f. N.G.Rhodes, "A Tibetan Coin struck in the name of Aurangzeb" *ONS Newsletter* No.156 (1998), pp.19-20.

⁸ Dr C.T.Dorji, *op.cit.* p.108.

⁹ My thanks to John Ardussi for this information.

¹⁰ Dr C.T.Dorji, *op. cit.* p.113.

¹¹ Dr C.T.Dorji, *op. cit.* p.118.

¹² The Biography of the 13th Deb Raja Sherab Wangchuck (r.1744-65), ff.30b-39b. My thanks to John Ardussi for this information.

¹³ Calendar of Persian Correspondence, Vol.VI No.1583.

¹⁴ N.G. Rhodes, Gabrisch & Valdetaro, *The Coinage of Nepal*, , London 1989, pp.204-6)

¹⁵ S.Turner, *Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama*, London 1800, pp.143-44.

¹⁶ M.Aris, *Views of Mediaeval Bhutan*, London 1982, p.54.

¹⁷ N.G.Rhodes "The Coinage of Cooch Behar", *ONS Inf. Sheet* No.10, 1974.

¹⁸ For Cacella and Cabral's journey to Bhutan, see Luiza Baillie's article in this issue of *Journal of Bhutan Studies*.

¹⁹ *Asiatic Researches*, vol.XV (1825), p.152.

²⁰ Dr.C.T.Dorji, *op.cit.*, p.131.

²¹ John Ardussi tells me that these traditional ceremonies were called *Mang-'gyel*, when specified items, often including coins, were given to each person, each household or each monk. Amounts were usually recorded, giving a valuable insight into the population of the country at the time. Apparently this was also a Tibetan custom. For distribution of goods among the Thakali of Nepal, see Vinding 1998, p.314-316

²² Capt. R.B.Pemberton, *Report on Bhutan*, Calcutta 1839, pp.64-65.

²³ Foreign Dept., Political, 12.9.1838, No.109 &110.

²⁴ Foreign Dept., Pol. 7.8.1839. No.77, P.C. - letter from E.Morley, the Accountant General to H.J.Princep, Esq.

²⁵ *Useful Tables*, Calcutta 1834, p.46 & Pl.II No.6.

²⁶ S.K.Bose, "In Search of a Die", *Oriental Numismatic Studies*, Vol.I, 1996 (ed. by D.Handa), p.166.

²⁷ Two uncirculated examples of this type in silver were given by the second King to Mr and Mrs Williamson when they visited Bhumtang in 1933. A variety struck in copper, but die-linked to fine silver examples, has a slightly different obv. design, with a large letter *Sa* in the centre, and the word *dBang* in a panel below. Dasho Karma Gayleg told me that he had heard about this variety, and that according to family tradition, it was struck by Ugyen Wangchuck, after he was made King, and that the legend should be interpreted as meaning that the King had "power over the land (of Bhutan)".

²⁸ My thanks to Karma Ura for bringing this die to my attention, and giving me a rubbing of it.

²⁹ I obtained this pair of dies from a collector in Austria, although I understand that it was purchased in Bhutan by a tourist. It is regrettable that I have not been able to find out where the die came from, and who may have used it. The crudeness of the design, and the light weight of the coins struck from it, leads me believe that it may be a forger's die.

³⁰ Jean Deloche, *Les Aventures de Jean-Baptiste Chevalier dans l'Inde Orientale (1752-65)*, Paris 1984. Until 1757, Chevalier worked for the French, but after the battle of Plassy, he was employed by some British traders, but remained based at Goalpara.

³¹ Private collection of Dasho Karma Gayleg.

³² Her Majesty the Queen, Ashi Dorji Wangmo, *Of Rainbows and Clouds*, Thimphu 1997, p.27.

³³ Karma Ura, *The Hero with a Thousand Eyes*, Thimphu 1995, p.222.

³⁴ Peter Collister, *Bhutan and the British*, Serindia, London 1987, p.162 to 167. See also the illustration between pp.146 & 147, showing the boxes containing the subsidy, photographed on 19th December 1907 at Bumthang. A similar photograph of the same scene is in Michael Aris, *The Raven Crown*, London 1997, p.9.

³⁵ Sir Charles Bell, *Tibet Past and Present*, Oxford 1924, p.114.

³⁶ Some of these rupees are known countermarked with the letter, *Sa*, which appears on so many Bhutanese coins. However, no such countermarked coins have been found in Bhutan, and it is likely that the countermark was applied in Eastern Tibet, and has no connection at all with Bhutan.

³⁷ National Archives of India, Foreign Dept, Intl. Nov.1909, Nos.50-51.

³⁸ For medals and decorations of Bhutan, see Karma Ura's article, Remembering the 'Heart Sons' of Bhutan in Kuensel dated March 6, 1999

³⁹ Mr Spencer's work is fully described by F.Pridmore in "Notes on Colonial Coins", *British Numismatic Journal*, Vol.XXXVII (1968), pp.158-74, where the Bhutanese half rupee is stated to be "unquestionably his finest work in relation to coins".

⁴⁰ Dasho Karma Gayleg, personal information.

BHUTAN: POLITICAL REFORM IN A BUDDHIST MONARCHY

Thierry Mathou^{}, March 1999*

The Fifteenth Day of the Fourth Month of the Year of the Male Earth Tiger, corresponding to 10th June 1998, will probably stay as a milestone date in Bhutan's modern history. HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth King of Bhutan, known to his subjects as the *Druk Gyalpo*, has issued a *kasho* (royal edict) that could bring profound changes in the kingdom's everyday life. By devolving full executive powers to an elected cabinet, the authority of which will be defined by the National Assembly during its 1999 session, and introducing the principle of his own political responsibility, the King has opened a new page in Himalayan politics.

Although being a small country which has always been very cautious on the international scene, Bhutan, as a buffer state, nested in the heart of the Himalayas, between India and China, has a strategic position in a region where the divisive forces of communalism are vivid. The kingdom, which has long stayed out of the influence of such forces, is now facing potential difficulties with the aftermath of the so called ngolop¹ issue and the impact of ULFA-Bodo activity across the border with India, that threatens its political stability and internal security. The process of change in Bhutan is not meant to fit in any regional model that could be inspired by Indian or Nepalese politics. However there is a clear interaction between national and regional politics. Whatever happens on the internal political scene, can have repercussions outside the kingdom, and vice-versa². As a

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genuine Buddhist kingdom, which has chosen a unique path towards development, Bhutan, while preserving its cultural heritage, has to meet new and specific challenges that relate not only to social and economic factors, but also to a broader approach of development that includes political changes. In order to understand the rationale and the impact of the current reform, we must place it in its historical, economic, social and cultural context.

The process of change

Even if many Bhutanese, including civil servants and members of the National Assembly have been most stricken by the suddenness and the amplitude of the changes introduced by the King³, the reform must not come as a surprise to close observers of Bhutan's modern history. On the contrary, it can be considered as a new and logical step in an ambitious program of guided political, economic and administrative change, which was initiated by the former *Druk Gyalpo* back in the mid- 1950s. It should also be noted that contrary to most countries where monarchy is assimilated to immobility, the Bhutanese monarchy has always been the leading force of change. The history of modernisation in Bhutan can be broadly divided into two phases that correspond to the rule of the last two kings, including the present one.

The third *Druk Gyalpo*, HM Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, (1952-1972) was the architect of modern Bhutan⁴. His rule has been dedicated to reform and restructuring of the existing political and economic system to allow the kingdom, in a world that was changing rapidly outside, to adapt to new challenges. As far as institutions were concerned, he separated the judiciary from the executive by establishing a High Court and re-organised the judicial system on modern lines. After creating the *Tshogdu* (National Assembly) in 1953, he progressively increased its role and powers. In 1965, the King also established the *Lodoi Tshogde* (Royal Advisory Council) and in 1968, he created what became the first

council of ministers in Bhutan. Major social and economic reforms were also introduced by the third *Druk Gyalpo*. After abolishing serfdom and promoting a land reform in 1952, HM Jigme Dorji Wangchuck developed a mass education system that became one of the key element of further development process. This system has been able to generate a highly educated and qualified bureaucracy that forms the core of the modern ruling elite. Thanks to the financial support of India, Bhutan also managed to organise a very efficient planning system that allowed the country to meet ambitious objectives. Under the first Five-Year Plan (1961-66) priority was given to the creation of basic infrastructural facilities like roads, power, communication system, transports, agriculture and animal husbandry. The second Five-Year Plan (1966-71) was the occasion of further development in agriculture and education but also in national health.

The fourth *Druk Gyalpo*, HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck, since his accession to the throne in 1972, has followed the same path left by the former king. During the past twenty seven years, the Bhutanese economy has undergone dramatic structural changes evinced by the export of electricity, one of the most significant natural resources of the country. The monetized sector has grown rapidly. Social indicators have improved significantly. The expansion of basic health services and primary health care throughout the kingdom has had a major impact on the overall health and well-being of the population. Life expectancy has risen from 37 years in 1960 to 66 years in 1994. Achievements in education have also been impressive, with more than 80% of primary age children in school. At the same time, Bhutan has adopted a cautious but constructive policy of participation in international affairs and socio-economic co-operation with the outside world. Eventually, one of the most significant systemic reform introduced under the present king has been the decentralisation of administration initiated in 1981 through the establishment of 20 District Development Committees (*Dzongkhag Yargye Tshochung* or DYT) followed by further decentralisation to the block (*Gewog*) level in 1991 with the

introduction of 202 Block Development Committees (Gewog Yargye Tshogchung or GYT). The King has been keen in strengthening these local institutions that enhanced the capacity of traditional local fora by developing people's participation in the socio-economic decision process.

In formulating national goals and policies not only on the basis of socio-economic progress but also by taking in account less quantifiable factors like emotional and spiritual well-being of the people, the King, who has proposed to promote the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) instead of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), has made an explicit commitment to preserve Bhutan's cultural heritage and natural environment. Although this choice has given Bhutan a unique opportunity to view modern advancement in the context of genuine sustainable human development rather than just income growth, the kingdom has not escaped from patterns that usually come with development. Spread of education on modern lines, foreign travel, influence of western behaviours, improved communications, modernised economy have transformed Bhutan's social structure. At this point of its modernisation process, the kingdom is ready to embark into further political reforms.

Political consciousness has always been very low among the general Bhutanese populace. The politicisation process that had significant impact on large sections of Indian and Nepalese population, had not mobilised Bhutanese crowds, except for Nepali Bhutanese in the southern districts. This situation has been the result of various factors. Bhutan's ability to insulate itself over many decades from the influence of social and political forces that dominated South Asia, has been decisive. Also determinant has been the low level of education of the average population which priorities clearly stand out of the political sphere. The existence of a ruling elite, largely unchallenged by adverse forces, and willing to keep the initiative leadership as far as modernisation is concerned, has prevented the emergence of organised factional politics. Eventually, consensus politics, which is one

of the major characteristics of Bhutanese traditional society, have provided little scope for popular participation in the decision making process, apart from organised decentralisation⁵.

While the modernisation process is going on in the socio-economic sphere, all these traditional factors are becoming less relevant, even if they still keep some importance. As already stated, Bhutan, once the most isolated country in the world, has decided, in the early 1960s to open to the worldⁱ. Although it only made cautious and calculated moves to enlarge its approach to the international scene, the growth of diplomacy has already affected Bhutan's social and political life. Today, the kingdom maintains diplomatic relations with 18 countries and has 6 missions abroad. It has joined more than 150 international organisations, including the United Nations⁶. Only India and Bangladesh have embassies in Thimphu, but more than 50 international agencies are involved in development projects in Bhutan. Such evolution had many repercussions both on the government itself and on the population.

As far as the government (the monarchy and the bureaucracy) is concerned, ideological influence coming from abroad is an interesting subject to consider. One should first notice that global political concepts like socialism or liberalism are totally irrelevant to Bhutanese politics. The fact that Bhutan is in contact with these concepts through new channels of communication like embassies and programmes of co-operation, has not changed anything. Political behaviours in the kingdom have always been difficult to relate to pre-determined patterns. Because the Buddhist theocratic tradition prevailing before the establishment of monarchy, provided little ideological support to the new regime other than religious principles, there has been no apparent dominant political ideology in modern Bhutan. This does not mean however that ideological considerations cannot be used to describe new political behaviours. The monarchy, under the leadership of the present King has

developed a very articulated policy based on decentralisation and protection of national identity. In some respect, this policy has been theorised through the concept of Gross National Happiness which proclaimed objectives are the preservation of cultural heritage and natural environment, the development of human resources, and the nation's financial self sufficiency. This policy is inspired by traditional principles like conciliation, pragmatism and compassion. The welfare of the public is a modern version of Buddhist doctrine's (fundamental need for harmony in human relations)ⁱⁱ. If not ideological in a western sense, such approach is providing a coherent political basis to the regime, which is rather new to Bhutan⁷.

Although there is a certain degree of incompatibility between the western derived rhetoric relating to politicisation and Bhutanese practice, since the former may be irrelevant to the latter, we can assume that the development of a (look-like) nationalist ideology in Bhutan is the first step of a broader politicisation process which will have influence in all sectors of the society. Such a process will probably generate its pros and cons. Education has already introduced major changes, particularly among young Bhutanese who are absorbed into both the national system and the international mainstream. While the ancient elite had been socialised under traditional cultural principles, a growing number of young Bhutanese are educated abroad. The impact among young generations of western influence⁸, even minor, could be a challenge to the national ideology that needs to be addressed on the political level. The creation of opposition political parties in exile, even limited to an ethnic context, has also to be addressed. The introduction of a new government system is the occasion to encourage and prepare the people, especially youngsters, to participate in the decision making process in order to enlarge the base of government.

The content of the reform

The Bhutanese monarchy has always been very flexible in its attitude towards political structures. Pragmatism and a predilection for gradualism seem to be the main characteristics of its approach. In this respect, the current reform is coherent with previous changes that have occurred in the kingdom since the early 1960s. It not only represents a significant step in the process of adapting political structures to new challenges, but it also strengthens some aspects of tradition by refusing to comply with any international standard. We could discuss at length about the Bhutanese regime's nature. Most observers will be tempted to describe the current reform as a move from an absolute monarchy towards a constitutional monarchy. Both attributes, when used to describe monarchical systems in the West, have specific meanings. None of them however seems to correspond to the Bhutanese system which is best described as a "Buddhist monarchy", assuming that such a category, if not totally consistent in terms of western constitutional criteria, is borrowing from many different models including democracy. As presented in the King's *kasho*, the constitutional reform adopted by the National Assembly during its last session is three-fold.

Structure and designation of the Lhengye Zhungtshog (Cabinet)⁹

Two different aspects of the reform must be considered under this heading. The first one is new to Bhutan, while the second is more traditional in its content. From now on, Bhutanese ministers (*lyonpos*) will not be appointed by the King. They will be voted in by the National Assembly. An executive body called *Lhengye Zhungtshog* (Cabinet) will henceforth comprise of elected ministers (Co-ordination Committee) and the members of the Royal Advisory Council (*Lodoi Tshogde*) who are themselves elected or designated under specific rules¹⁰.

The idea of electing ministers came as a surprise to most Bhutanese who are not familiar with such a concept ¹¹. Before the reform, ministers were appointed by the King who had the discretion to remove them at any time. The National Assembly had the capacity to approve their appointment by a simple majority vote on the recommendation of the King, and to force the resignation of any of them by a two-thirds vote of no-confidence. These powers however were largely theoretical. The Tshogdu has never challenged the King's choice, neither has it forced a minister to resign. Although answerable to the National Assembly, ministers were mainly responsible to the King himself.

The National Assembly endorsed the reform proposed by the King only after vigorous deliberation among the members. Considering that an election process could result in partiality, vested interests, corruption and divisive politics, most of them defended the status quo. A consensus was eventually reached assuming that the King would keep some of his former prerogatives. Under the new system, the *Druk Gyalpo* has first to short-list¹² and to nominate the candidates for the Co-ordination Committee of the Council of Ministers, along with their portfolios, before the election. Candidates have to be selected from among persons who have held senior government posts at the rank of secretary to the Royal Government or above. It is then up to the National Assembly members to elect or reject the nominees by casting their votes through secret ballot. According to the King's *kasho*: "Cabinet ministers should serve for a term of five years after which they should face a vote of confidence in the *Tshogdu Chhenmo* "ⁱⁱⁱ.

Following the endorsement of the King's proposition, the members of the National Assembly elected six cabinet ministers nominated by the *Druk Gyalpo*¹³. All of them secured a large majority of the votes cast. Votes against the nominees ranged between 4 and 20 members of the Assembly among a total of 140. If not significant in terms of opposition to the King's choice, such result gives credibility to the overall

procedure. In the future, in the event a nominee would happen to fail to secure a majority of the votes cast, the King will have to propose a new candidate. Although not realistic in the present context, such an evolution could be a decisive step in the politicisation process of the National Assembly. As stated by many members of the *Tshogdu* during its 76th session: "power and responsibility go hand in hand". Giving to the National Assembly the power to elect ministers, even on a pre-selected short list base, will introduce a larger sense of political responsibility among its members. For that reason, the current reform must be seen as a follow up to the process of modernisation of the Assembly already initiated many years ago by the former King. The *Tshogdu*, which has emerged as a key player in the Bhutanese political system, is largely conservative. Being directly involved in the designation process of the Council of Ministers will not change its attitude towards fundamental political issues. However, it could force it to adopt a new perspective. Considering that the *Tshogdu*, in the future, will be probably more involved in national politics, not only as a traditional forum of discussion but more and more as a western type Parliament, the election of cabinet ministers could be a prelude to further reforms within the National Assembly itself.

As far as the structure of the Cabinet is concerned, the reviving of a large horizontal executive body is a clear sign of cultural tradition prevalence in Bhutanese politics. It is also a way to introduce checks and balances within the executive branch itself.

Two different structures would have been possible for the new Cabinet. One is the proposed form of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* with the members of the Royal Advisory Council (*Lodoi Tshogde*) in it. The other would have been a smaller and somewhat more cohesive committee consisting only of ministers, with the *Lodoi Tshogde* staying a consultative body, separated from the Cabinet. Bhutan has already experienced both structures. The *Lhungye Shungtshog* then

translated as "State Committee"^{iv} created after the establishment of the first council of ministers in 1968, consisted of the ministers, the *Lodoi Tshogde* members and the speaker of the *Tshogdu*¹⁴. Although not formally abolished, this body ceased to meet when a co-ordination committee consisting primarily of ministers and high ranking officers with executive responsibilities, was created in 1975^v. This tendency was confirmed with the development of central administrative structures and the extension of ministers' authority. A cabinet consisting only of ministers under the leadership of the King, has progressively become the core of the executive branch. In the chart presented in September 1996 in the Eight Five-Year main document, the *Lodoi Tshogde* is not mentioned as a part of the executive branch, but as an advisory body distinct from the Cabinet which is assimilated to the Council of Ministers^{vi}.

Such a small structure with elected members would have been very close to a western type cabinet, but the inclusion of the *Lodoi Tshogde* in a larger body can be seen as a typical Bhutanese structure. Although the *Lodoi Tshogde* was formally introduced in the mid 1960s as an advisory body to the King, its history can be traced back to the State Council (*Lhungye Tsok*) that was created in 1651 by the first *Shabdrung*¹⁵. The principle of tripartite participation involving representatives of the people, the administration, and the monk body, which is prevalent in all Bhutanese traditional political bodies, is a balance to the bureaucratic structure of the committee of elected ministers. Having in the same body high ranking civil servants who made all their careers in the administration, former *chimis* (elected members of the National Assembly) who also had responsibilities at the village and the block levels, businessmen and monks, is a good way to give opportunity to various channels of influence, representing the diversity of the society, to participate in the decision making process.

Devolution of executive powers of governance to the Council of Ministers

The *kasho* and the minutes of the Assembly do not provide clear evidence about which of the two executive bodies (the Co-ordination-Committee or the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*) will formally be vested with full executive powers. According to the *Kasho*'s wording¹⁶, devolution is apparently proposed in favour of the Co-ordination Committee (elected ministers alone) and not in favour of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* (Cabinet) as a global body. Assuming that there was an initial confusion about the exact meaning of the terms (Cabinet), and (Council of Ministers), this interpretation is not conclusive. Moreover, if *Lodoi Tshogde* members are supposed to fully participate in the executive function, as it is implied by the translation of *Lhengye Zhungtshog* by the term of (Cabinet), such an interpretation is in contradiction with the fact that decisions adopted by the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* will be based on consensus. In that case the whole *Lhengye Zhungtshog* (Cabinet) should be vested of executive powers. Although acceptable in theory, this solution is difficult to implement. It could result into criticism equivalent to those that led to the replacement of the old State Committee, back in the early 1970s, by a smaller body. Such a structure could complicate the functioning of governance in some respect. Confusing the division of powers and responsibilities between a consultative body (the *Lodoi Tshogde*) and an executive body (the Co-ordination Committee) could cause some problems. On the contrary, if powers of governance are devolved only on the elected ministers, the conduct of executive functions would be easier.

Discussing this issue is interesting in terms of constitutional law. However, such a debate is rather academic. The powers and functioning of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* have still to be defined. The *kasho* provides that (a decision should be taken on the role and responsibilities of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*). A constitutional committee comprising of 36 members¹⁷ representing the people of the 20 Dzongkhags, the clergy and

the government, has been charged by the King to prepare a *chathrim* (rules and regulations) that will be presented for enactment by the National Assembly during its 77th session in the summer of 1999. One of its major tasks is to define the role and the responsibility of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*.

The solution will be probably to present the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* as a global executive committee, like the former State Committee used to be, but in a rather more modern form. Since the adoption of the reform in July 1998, the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* has only met a few times, on once a month basis, while the Co-ordination Committee meets every Tuesday. It seems that while the latter would be in charge of everyday governance, the former would deal with more global and systemic issues like economic and social reforms recommended or approved by the National Assembly, or proposed by the Co-ordination Committee. Security and sovereignty matters would also be discussed within the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*¹⁸. Reviving such a structure is coherent with Bhutanese tradition. Establishing a cabinet, larger than the committee of elected ministers itself can prevent some of the potentially disruptive consequences of the election of ministers, to destabilise the executive branch. Implicating more directly the members of the *Lodoi Tshogde* in the governance activity is an interesting idea. However, a clear balance will have to be defined within the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* itself, between consultative deliberations and formal executive decisions. Considering that the Bhutanese system does not follow western institutional lines, we can assume that the *chathrim*, while defining some general principles, will not give all the answers as far as rules and regulations of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* are concerned. Bhutanese politics have always been functioning along informal lines. Tradition and practice will have to fill in the blanks left by constitutional texts. As far as devolution of executive powers is concerned, a compromise solution could be to consider that such powers formally belong to the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* that delegates its competence to the Co-ordination Committee.

Whatever be the final articulation between elected ministers and *Lodoi Tshogde* members, the devolution of full executive powers of governance by the King is a very significant change in Bhutanese politics. Since the establishment of the monarchy in 1907, the King, who has been both Head of State and Head of Government, had been vested with all the executive powers. He has also shared with the National Assembly the legislative power. According to the *Thrimzhang Chhenmo* (Supreme Law) that was enacted in 1957, the King's *kashos* (edicts) and *kadyons* (ordinances) are even above the law enacted by the *Tshogdu*.

How large will be the devolution of powers has still to be seen. The King's reply to the conservative arguments presented during the *Tshogdu's* deliberation about the reform is in favour of a large devolution. Although many *chimis* pleaded for the King to keep the chairmanship of the Cabinet, the *Druk Gyalpo* insisted on renouncing his function of Head of Government. Neither he accepted to appoint a member of the royal family as the chairman of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* as suggested by some members of the Assembly¹⁹. Henceforth it has been decided that the chairmanship of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* will be assumed by elected ministers on a one year term rotational basis²⁰. Without any experience in prime ministership or any approaching form of government²¹, Bhutan will have to go through a transitional period. As reported by Kuensel^{vi}, new cabinet ministers, during the ceremony of devolution of executive powers, submitted to the King that they could seek his guidance from time to time. Although the Druk Gyalpo made clear that he had "no intention to indirectly control the functions of the Lhengye Zhungtshog and that members of the Cabinet must instead work closely together to strengthen the efficiency of the government and provide good governance to the country", it is clear that the Council of Ministers will have to adjust to a rather new situation²². As stated by a Bhutanese popular saying frequently used by members of the National Assembly referring to this situation, "chickens do not go without a mother hen". Cabinet members, even unwillingly, will have to

learn to emancipate from the King's guidance. It might be a rather long process. This does not mean that the King will lose all kind of influence over the Cabinet. As stated by the new chairman of the Council of Ministers: "while His Majesty would not be present in person at the meetings of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*, the Cabinet members would continue to be guided by His Majesty in spirit and would depend on his moral support in dealing with issues beyond their understanding"^{viii}. Such a statement is not pure rhetoric. Assuming that "the command of the King is heavier than the mountain and more precious than gold"²³, the devolution of executive powers to the Cabinet will not change by itself the way Bhutanese, including Cabinet members, consider the *Druk Gyalpo*. While the King had not necessarily to refer to a political ideology because his legitimacy was not in question, the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* will certainly have to justify its fidelity to the monarchy, in order to strengthen its authority vis-à-vis the National Assembly. It is clear that new cabinet members who pledged their allegiance to the Tsa-Wa-Sum (the King, the Country, the People) and to the Bhutanese system will keep the King's action as a permanent reference.

While the Cabinet shall be vested with full executive powers, the *Kasho* provides that "it must also keep the *Druk Gyalpo* fully informed on all matters that concern the security and sovereignty of the kingdom"^{ix}. As the Head of State, the King has a high and natural responsibility as far as national security and sovereignty are concerned. The Royal Bhutan Army has always been administrated directly by the King through the Chief Operations Officer and not from the Cabinet²⁴. The current reform is not meant to change anything in that situation. The *Druk Gyalpo* has claimed the full responsibility of solving national issues like the ULFA/Bodo problem²⁵. While the Cabinet will obviously share some of this burden, the King's authority allows him to keep the leadership on security matters. Whatever be the outcome of possible changes on the Bhutanese political scene, the King is supposed to be above vested interests that could result from the emergence of political factions based upon

ideological, ethnic, regional, familial or any economic or social factor. The fact that the King is primarily responsible for security and sovereignty matters will enhance the monarchy's legitimacy.

Introduction of a vote of confidence in the King

As part of the reform, the *Druk Gyalpo* has also proposed to introduce a mechanism for the National Assembly to register a vote of confidence in the King. Although most unusual in a monarchy, such a proposition is not new to Bhutan. It had been already introduced in 1969 on the initiative of the third *Druk Gyalpo*. Under this provision, the king had to abdicate in favour of the next successor in the hereditary line, if two-thirds of the National Assembly's members supported a vote of no-confidence²⁶. Although this procedure, which was only used once in 1969 on the insistence of the King himself, was slightly modified in 1970, it was eventually abolished in 1973 by the *Tshogdu*. This reform was clearly too radical in its concept for the National Assembly to accept as a normal rule of procedure. Considering that similar causes produce identical consequences, a parallel can be drawn between the 1969 vote of confidence and the current reform. While the precise content of the latter has still to be defined as far as rules of procedure are concerned, the former was introduced with similar objectives. The present King's *kasho* aims to "further enhance and strengthen a system of government" that would "be best suited for the needs and requirements of a small nation like Bhutan to ensure its continued well-being and security, and safeguard its status as a sovereign, independent country". The former King, during the 1968 session of the *Tshogdu* had expressed similar concerns. His desire was "to form a government combining the monarchical and democratic systems in order to ensure the stability and solidarity of the country"^x. Assuming that Bhutan's "sovereignty may be endangered by the fact that the kingdom was placed between two powerful and big countries", he also considered that the time had come to "think of forming a stable government for maintaining the peace and tranquillity

of the country in the future". The idea of reviving a vote of confidence in the king is not meant to abolish the system of hereditary monarchy or to weaken in any manner the role and the influence of the *Druk Gyalpo*. On the contrary, it can be seen as a contribution to the legitimisation process of the Bhutanese monarchy which is very young compared to the Thai or the Nepalese monarchies of which the origins are deep rooted in the political and religious history of their respective country. "Legitimation under any political system is not achieved so much by the capacity to gain power as it is by the ability to maintain and regularise the use of power over an extended period of time and to have the system broadly accepted"^{xi}. The capacity and the right of the *Druk Gyalpo* to rule are not questioned for the time being. However accepting such hypothesis for him and his successors is a guaranty of stability not only for the regime but also for the country itself. It is a concrete answer to those who could doubt inside and outside the kingdom of the King's determination to adapt the government structures to changing realities. Because the historical legitimacy of the Bhutanese monarchy is rather recent compared to other monarchies in the world²⁷, the kings of Bhutan have to be judged primarily upon their performance record. Such record largely depends on their ability to master reforms.

The reviving of a vote of confidence in the *Druk Gyalpo* can be seen as a symbol. It is an implicit reference to the *genja* (oath of allegiance) that was adopted in 1907 by the most important civil and monastic officials together with people's representatives, who pledged their support to Ugyen Wangchuck and proclaimed him as the first King of Bhutan. While some members of the National Assembly considered the introduction of a vote of confidence as an infringement of the spirit of the founding fathers, it can be sustained on the contrary that such a reform represents an opportunity given to the National Assembly to re-endorse the nation's pledge to the King as long as his rule is not questioned. Assuming that hereditary kingship was inaugurated on an "electoral basis"²⁸, the current reform enhances the contractual link existing

between the King and the people. It is also consistent with Buddhist tradition^{xii} where kings are often referred to, as "ruler by convention"²⁹.

The perspectives of further change

In the long term the possible influence of the reform on Bhutanese politics must be analysed from three different perspectives: the executive branch (the King, the Cabinet, and the administration); the National Assembly and the people itself.

As far as the executive branch is concerned, the current reform is not expected to have any influence on the status of monarchy itself which will stay, at least in a foreseeable future, the centre of Bhutanese politics. As the primary domestic agent of modernisation, the monarchy will certainly benefit from the reform. Should political parties emerge in the future as possible consequences of the current politicisation process, the King who has chosen not to be involved anymore in everyday politics, would still be considered as the symbol of national unity. Such role would be particularly important should Bhutan be put under the pressure of the divisive forces of regionalism and communalism. Since the appearance of the 'southern problem', the *Druk Gyalpo* has resisted conservative circles which advocated radical solutions. The current reform will probably contribute to enhance his image as a mitigating factor, advocating for a policy of reconciliation among all Bhutanese factions. Should national consensus happen to be challenged by further political changes, the King would be in good position to stay the last recourse as far as national unity and stability are concerned. Such position can be compared to the current status of monarchy in Thailand³⁰.

The reform will probably have some impact on the king's personal image. Immediate changes have already occurred at the protocol level. While adjustment has still to be done, the current evolution will enhance the King's sacred dimension.

Although the monarch will probably stay as accessible to the people as he used to be in the past, the reform could create a new distance between the Palace and outer circles. While the King is supposed, as Head of State, to continue to receive the credential letters from incoming ambassadors, the Palace has to draft new rules as far as other foreign visitors are concerned³¹. According to the new political setting, the appearances of the monarch on the local scene, are also expected to differ slightly from the past. Until last year, the King used to attend the sessions of the National Assembly and to participate on debates. According to the spirit of the reform, his appearance could be limited in the future to the opening ceremony and to specific debates when security and sovereignty issues are discussed. This evolution has still to be seen during the next summer session. The program and the activity of the King will also adapt to new realities. While he will probably keep touring the country in order to stay in contact with the people, some, within the government, wish he takes some time to travel abroad in order to make Bhutan more widely known³².

As far as the government itself is concerned, the consequences of the current reform will largely depend, as already mentioned, on the balance between elected ministers and other members of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*, but also on the ability of the Cabinet to master its new responsibilities. With the King out of the everyday decision process, at least theoretically, the question of governance must be asked in terms of leadership and content.

As far as leadership is concerned, Bhutan seems to have solved this rather delicate problem encountered in most regimes, by deciding that consensus will apply to the decisions of the Cabinet and that the presidency of the Council of Ministers will be attributed on a rotational basis. Such mechanisms are supposed to prevent factionalism and personal interest among Cabinet members to take the lead on good governance. Without the King's arbitration however, ministers will have to forge their own stature not only vis-à-

vis their colleagues within the government but also vis-à-vis the National Assembly. This process is a natural consequence of full executive power devolution and political responsibility. While the King was able to impose consensus as a normal procedure of governance under the old system, Cabinet members will have to resist external forces coming from the *Tshogdu* and other circles of the society that will tend to introduce divisive lines within the government itself. Such a process known as lobbying is a by-product of democracy. Although ideal in their objectives and functioning, consensus politics are very difficult to implement, especially in a rapidly changing society, unless a mediator is able to incarnate consensus or at least to convince others to approve his own choices. While the King will indirectly keep this function for some time, new mediators will necessarily have to emerge within the government itself. Such process, that can only take place in the long term, will probably draw the lines of future Bhutanese politics.

The process will necessarily lead to a more politicised form of Government. While the members of the *Lodoi Tshogde*, who have to go through a very competitive election process at the *gewog* and the district levels, can be considered as politicians according to local standards, Cabinet ministers have been mainly bureaucrats. Things will have to change in future as the government becomes more and more independent from the King. On the long term, elected ministers will probably become politicians in a western sense. We cannot even exclude the emergence of "opinion leaders". For the time being, such leaders are not expected to come from outside the administration³³. In the long term, solutions will have to be found to allow civil society representatives who might be interested in joining the government, to have access to the Co-ordination Committee. Although the present *kasho* limits the access to the committee to senior civil servants, adaptation of that rule will probably have to be considered as the influence of the private sector grows and the politicisation of the society increases. As noticed by the king himself while "Bhutan has many qualified and capable officials, most of

them are still very young and do not have enough seniority in keeping with (Bhutan's) tradition and culture, to stand as candidates for the post of cabinet minister". No doubt that the current reform will create some sort of competition within the administration, that will also generate an emulation outside the civil service. Competition as such is not necessarily a bad thing. One of the problems of the Bhutanese administration during the last years had been the lack of mobility at the senior posts level. Former cabinet ministers had held their posts for very long periods of time³⁴. While a reason for the civil service to be attractive to young Bhutanese was the opportunity it gave them to rapidly get high responsibilities, it was becoming, at some point of their career, more and more difficult to foresee any promotion. With the perspective of becoming, if selected by the King and elected by the National Assembly, members of the Cabinet, qualified candidates will be more motivated. High educated people who preferred to join the private sector because of the lack of responsibility posts in the administration will also be interested. Some of them could adopt a western style approach as far as candidacy is concerned. Cultivating friendships with National Assembly members and campaigning for election could become a more regular pattern within and outside the civil service.

As far as the presidency of the Cabinet is concerned, we should not expect the emergence in Bhutan of a Prime Minister or a Head of Government in a western sense of "primus inter pares" that does not correspond to the local tradition of consensus. This is the reason why it has been decided to elect the chairman of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* on a rational basis. Without considering his personal influence within the government, which can be more or less prominent depending on his seniority and charisma, the chairman of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*, who also chairs the Co-ordination Committee, has two basic roles. One is a protocol function, particularly oriented towards the outside world. As the new Head of Government, he is entitled to meet with foreign dignitaries who hold similar position³⁵ and to receive

representatives of foreign countries and international organisations who want to address Bhutan as a whole and not necessarily to a specific department. Although the tradition of this protocol function is new to Bhutan, it is also intended to play a role on the local scene as the chairman of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*, who symbolises the action of the cabinet, will have to reach local people and explain new policies through meetings and visits to the districts. His second main role is to prepare and co-ordinate the activity of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* and of the Co-ordination Committee³⁶.

The contents of future policies is difficult to predict. Now doubt that the ideas that inspired the King's policy until now will stay the guiding principles of the new cabinet. In that respect minor changes are to be expected, at least in the coming years. In the long term however, the government will probably have to adapt to new economic realities and new demands coming from the society. Its capacity to translate these trends into coherent policies will determine the future of the Bhutanese regime. Its ability to find a negotiated solution with Nepal to the problem of refugees will also be decisive in terms of acceptance of its legitimacy, especially within foreign circles.

As far as the National Assembly is concerned, the current reform must be seen as the first step of a global process that could end up in further changes. Although the *Tshogdu* has become a key element of the Bhutanese political system, it is more a forum of discussion and a consultative body in a traditional sense than a legislative body. The *Tshogdu* will necessarily have to adapt to its new responsibilities. Electing cabinet members who are vested of full executive power of governance implies that the National Assembly fully exercises its power of decision and control. In this respect the *Tshogdu* will have to overcome its relative political weakness. One of its major handicap is the gap existing between well experienced and highly qualified administrative officials capable of dealing with complicated issues and the relatively

modest level of political and economic consciousness of most *chimis*. Although recent sessions of the *Tshogdu* have demonstrated that its members are more and more concerned by national issues, including security and diplomacy, the interest of the *chimis* is more locally than nationally oriented. This is a rather normal situation, as the issues raised by them necessarily reflect concerns expressed by the people at the local level, both in the *GYTs* and the *DYTs*. However, *chimis* would gain authority and credibility in being more involved in global issues. As noted by the Home Minister^{xiii}, "in comparison to the past, the quality of *chimis* has been improving every year due to the success of the education system and the fact that many retired government servants are interested in serving their country as *chimis*". Progress still needs to be made. A better access to information could be promoted. Posts of parliamentary administrators could be created under the authority of the secretariat of the National Assembly. These administrators would be independent from the executive branch. They could be used as assistants and advisors to the *chimis*. A second source of weakness is the absence of "long-term programmed policies with a stable support base within the Assembly". As noted by Rose^{xiv}, "under the *Tshogdu's* electoral system, there is a limited continuity of membership, and only a small proportion of the people's representatives in the Assembly at any one point in time would have a lengthy experience in government". Considering that the responsibilities of *chimis* have increased with regard to implementation of developmental programmes under the Five-Year Plan and to their specific role in the decentralisation process, increasing their term from the present three years to five years, that seems a reasonable duration, could motivate capable and educated *chimis* and held them to acquire enough knowledge about their responsibilities³⁷. Creating specialised committees within the *Tshogdu* could also enhance its ability to play its role in the check and balance system of government. Eventually, increasing the duration of the National Assembly session, which is currently convened once a year for periods

between two weeks and one month³⁸, could also enhance its leadership³⁹.

On the long term, the current reform can be expected to have some impact on the people itself. Such impact will largely depend on the changes already underway within the Bhutanese society. The politicisation process, even embryonic, is already taking place because of a higher level of education of the population. Even if they do not reveal fractional politics structured along either horizontal or vertical lines, some social groups are progressively emerging from the development process. Individual behaviours have profoundly changed during the last twenty years^{xv}. This evolution has direct impact on collective behaviours. Although Bhutan is still a rural country, a new category of citizens, mainly involved in urban activities like industry and services, is taking more and more importance. While civil servants have become the elite of modern Bhutan, the private sector is a growing force of the Bhutanese society with many highly educated and influential people. Although the model of development proposed by the government is widely accepted, the emergence of divisive lines based on differences of opinion and interest cannot be excluded in the future. The opposition between private sector and administration, rural and urban society, young and old generation, modernists and conservatives is a usual pattern in all developing societies. Although multi-party system does not correspond to Bhutanese tradition, the day will probably come when political parties will have to play their role in the Bhutanese political system. For the time being, considering that political parties, even a government party, do not exist in Bhutan, whether or not opposition parties should be legalised is not on the agenda of the government. Considering the still low level of education and political consciousness of most people, the risk would be real that such parties be based only upon ethnic and regional factors. Such evolution could be disruptive of Bhutan's polity which must keep a minimum consensus as far as national unity is concerned⁴⁰. Instead of importing foreign models, the philosophy underlying the

reform introduced by the King seems to allow a blending of Bhutanese tradition with foreign concepts that are found adaptable and conducive for the strengthening of the Bhutanese system of government⁴¹. In that respect, decentralisation must be seen as the most significant contribution to the politicisation process of the society. While the planning commission keeps its role of co-ordinating planning activities, the planning ministry has been abolished⁴² in the new cabinet structure. This is both a symbol and a signal to local people to take more responsibilities through *GYTs* and *DYTs* in order to orient and implement local and national policies. Whether political parties will be structured along the lines of local politics has still to be seen. Should such an evolution correspond to the people's need, nothing in the attitude of the King seems to be against it.

There is a certain degree of uncertainty in assessing Bhutan's political future, because the kingdom is located in a region given to potentially disruptive changes. The economic, political and diplomatic environment to which Bhutan must adjust is versatile. As a small and vulnerable society the kingdom has to survive by learning to cope. The reform introduced by the King is a pragmatic step towards that direction. Eventually, the National Assembly, while discussing the content of the awaited *chathrim*, could decide to transform it in a broader basic rule that could be the basis of a written constitution.

Notes

¹ The word *ngolop* means (anti-national). It refers to people who are accused by the government to organize activities against the security and the sovereignty of the country. Such activities have been associated with the protestation movement that started in 1990 when an ethnically related social disquiet erupted in the southern districts where ethnic Nepalese have settled. Demonstrations were followed by sporadic violence and terrorism activities in the border areas which led the government to enforce security laws. Several thousands people have left the kingdom, either to avoid political uncertainties, or because they could not meet Bhutan's immigration

requirements. About 100,000 are now located in refugees camps in south-eastern Nepal. It is unclear however how many effectively come from Bhutan. This movement has generated the creation of several political parties settled in exile. More recently, some individuals seem to have established relations with ULFA-Bodo militants whose presence in Bhutan's border areas poses a grave threat to the security and the sovereignty of the kingdom.

²One of these repercussions is the long term echo that the reform will have among opposition movements in exile. Some of them have claimed the credit of the institutional changes proposed by the King.

³ Former cabinet members have held their posts for very long periods of time. Even if a reshuffling of the cabinet was predictable, because of the age of some ministers, the replacement of the whole cabinet came as a surprise to the people.

⁴ In the political history of modern Bhutan "that is, post-1907, corresponding to the establishment of an hereditary monarchy", the founding father is the first *Druk Gyalpo*, Ugyen Wangchuck (1907-1926). Although essential in the establishment of a strong and highly centralized monarchy which was a more modern form of government than the traditional theocratic polity, his rule was not consistent with the concept of modernization as we use it.

⁵ Organized decentralization is rather new in Bhutan. The objective of the first two kings was to enhance centralization in order to strengthen the monarchy.

⁶ Bhutan became a member of the United Nations in 1971 and opened a permanent mission in New-York in 1972.

⁷ If not socialist as such, the welfare system is quite developed in Bhutan.

⁸ Junk food, western music, cinema and fashion are becoming more and more popular among youngsters.

⁹ The term Cabinet or Council of Ministers has corresponded to different structures in the kingdom's modern history. Until recently, it was assimilated to a western type structure comprising only of ministers and deputy ministers selected by the King. The recent *kasho* and Kuensel articles (July 11, 1998) have proposed different and sometimes confusing interpretations. While the term Council of Ministers sometimes refers to elected ministers, the confusion is still present in the minutes of the 76th session of the Assembly where Council of Ministers and *Lhengye Zhungtshog* are assimilated. The term (Cabinet) is also proposed by Kuensel (July 11, 1998) as a translation of "*Lhengye Zhungtshog*". Although some adjustment has still to be found "yet, the committee consisting of the 6 elected ministers has not a dzongkha name" the correct interpretation is currently as follows:

- the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* (15 members) can be called either Cabinet or Council of Ministers, while the committee consisting of the 6 elected ministers is referred to as (Co-ordination Committee) of the Council of Ministers. Both structures are chaired by the same person who is formally called chairman of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*.

¹⁰ The *Lodoi Tshogde* was formally established in 1965. It is a nine-members body consisting of a representative of the government (currently the former Dzongda of Trashigang who also chairs the *Lodoi Tshogde*), appointed by the King, six people's representatives elected for three years by the National Assembly among candidates elected on the block (*gewog*) and district levels, and two representatives of the monk body. The last election of people's representatives was held in July 1998. The *Lodoi Tshogde* works as an advisory body to the King and the ministers. As a watchdog of the overall political and administrative structure, it also safeguards the implementation of National Assembly resolutions and serves as a supervisory body of the administration. It also act as a judicial adviser to the King who has the power to review the decisions of the High Court.

¹¹ In 1968, the third *Druk Gyalpo* had already proposed that all appointments of ministers "be decided by the National Assembly which would also decide their number and portfolios" (Rose, *ibid.*, p. 155). The *Tshogdu* rejected this proposition.

¹² This short list system was used for the election of the newly elected cabinet, only because it was the first time the reform was implemented. We can assume that another system for selecting candidates will be introduced in the future. The Royal Civil Service Commission or a similar body could be associated with the selection process.

¹³ On July 1, 1998, the National Assembly elected six Cabinet ministers who are as follows: Minister for Agriculture (Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji); Finance Minister (Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba); Home Minister (Lyonpo Thinley Gyamtsho); Minister for Health and Education (Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup); Foreign Minister (Lyonpo Jigmi Thinley), Minister of Trade and Industry (Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk). The head of the ministry of communications is a deputy minister (Dasho Leki Dorji).

¹⁴ In 1972 the two sisters of the king, who served as his representatives in the ministries of finance and development, were also members of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*.

¹⁵ Shabdrung is the term used to refer to the Founder of Bhutan, Ngawang Namgyel (1594-1651/1705) and to his reincarnations.

¹⁶ The *kasho* provides: (full executive powers of governance should be devolved to an elected Council of Ministers).

¹⁷ This constitutional committee, that held its first meeting on 26 February 1999, is chaired by the Speaker of the National Assembly. Its members are as follows: the vice speaker of the National Assembly, 20 *chimis* (people representatives at the National Assembly) elected on the base of one for each *dzongkhag* (district), 1 representative of the clergy, 3 representative of the government (2 *dzongdas* (district officers) and the secretary of the Royal Civil Service Commission – RCSC), the 9 members of the Royal Advisory Committee, and the Chief Justice as observer.

¹⁸ Although the respective role of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* and of the Co-ordination Committee is still in debate, it is clear from current practice that the later is the driving force of the new government. The agenda of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* is drafted by the Co-ordination Committee itself.

¹⁹ In 1975, the Co-ordination Committee was presided over by the King's sister Ashi Dechen Wangmo Wangchuck. During the 76th session of the *Tshogdu* a Royal Advisory Councillor proposed that the chairmanship of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog* be handed to the Crown Prince, Dasho Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck.

²⁰ The King formally handed over the reins of governance to the Lhengye Zhungtshog on July 20th 1998. The Foreign Minister, Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, became the first Chairman of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*, since he won the largest number of votes (136 (for)) during the ministerial elections. According to the results of the voting, the next chairmen of the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*, under the current 5 years term government, should be as follows:

1999-2000: Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup (Minister of Health and Education) [133 votes]

2000-2001: Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba (Minister of Finance) [132 votes]

2001-2002: Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk (Minister of Trade and Industry) [127 votes]

2002-2003: Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji (Minister of Agriculture) [126 votes]

²¹ The post of *lyonchen*, previously called *gongzim*, that was held by members of the Dorji family, from 1908 to 1965, was the closest to a Prime Ministership. The *lyonchen* however was more a councillor with high responsibilities equivalent to a state minister, than a Head of Government.

²² One of the first act of the new Head of Government on the international scene was to represent Bhutan to the SAARC summit in Colombo.

²³ Although Bhutanese kingship is not of a sacred nature as it is for instance in Nepalese tradition, such a popular saying is often used in Bhutan where people reverence to the King is close to worship.

²⁴ The situation is slightly different for the police. The police, like the army depends on the Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army, whose deputy is the Chief of the Royal Bhutan Police. However, as far as operations of maintaining law and order in the Dzongkhags are concerned, the police also report to the Home Minister. It should be noted that the Army and the Police are not represented in the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*.

²⁵ The ULFA/Bodo problem is described by the Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army and by the Home Minister as "the most serious threat to the country's security in Bhutan's entire history" (Kuensel, 25 July 1998). It is a problem not only of internal security, but also of political stability should *Lhotshampa* militants seize the opportunity to join hands with the ULFA and Bodo militants. It might eventually affect the close friendship between India and Bhutan should it become a major trans-border regional issue.

²⁶ Such votes had to be taken as a matter of procedure at least once every 3 years. Motions of non-confidence could be moved against the King at any time on a petition submitted by one-third of the membership (Rose, *The Politics of Bhutan*, p. 155).

²⁷ Technically speaking, the monarchy in Bhutan as we know it today, only dates back to 1907. However, Bhutanese historians insist on the cultural and historical continuity existing between the previous systems and the current monarchy. Kingdoms were established in Bhutan long before the country was unified during the 18th century. From 1751 to 1907, the *druk desis*, who held secular powers in the dual system known as *chhoesi*, have been compared to kings, although their status were slightly different.

²⁸ Although there is "no evidence in available sources, that anything resembling an election was actually used in 1907 in the events that preceded the recognition of Ugyen Wangchuk as *Druk Gyalpo*" (Rose, *ibid*, p. 147), "the decision to establish monarchy appeared to have been genuinely popular not only among those responsible for taking it but also with the public at large" (Aris, *The Raven Crown*, London, 1997, p. 98). The concept of "elective basis" is used both by Nagendra Singh (*Bhutan: a Kingdom in the Himalayas*, New -Delhi, 1972, p.96) and by Bikramat Jit Hasrat (*History of Bhutan*, Thimphu, 1980, p.123).

²⁹ Although HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck is not a Buddhist king in a religious sense, the Wangchuk dynasty has been using various symbols previously associated with the Shabdrung.

³⁰ Although the King of Thailand is not involved in everyday governance, he is widely considered as a national reference and has been able to recommend solutions to national crisis.

³¹ Readers of the weekly paper, Kuensel, can notice that the King, who was frequently portrayed on the front page, with local dignitaries or foreign visitors, has rarely appeared since the introduction of the reform.

³² Apart from short visits to India and other SAARC countries, the King does not travel abroad.

³³ Cabinet ministers have to be elected among officials who have held senior government post in the Royal Government.

³⁴ The idea has been put forward by some members of the constitutional committee to limit the mandate of elected ministers to a single five years term. Ministers, who would like to run for a second term, would have to wait five years between two mandates. A similar rule applies on a three years basis to the members of the Royal Advisory Committee.

³⁵ For the first time since the establishment of the organization, Bhutan was not represented by the King during the SAARC annual summit held in Colombo in July 1998, but by the chairman of *Lhengye Zhungtshog* who joined the other heads of government attending the conference.

³⁶ He is assisted in this function by a government secretary. This post is currently held by the Foreign Secretary, Dasho Ugyen Tshering.

³⁷ This issue has been addressed by some *chimis* during the 76th session of the National Assembly.

³⁸ Special emergency sessions can also be convened.

³⁹ It should be noted however that the involvement of the *chimis* in the legislative process is not limited to their participation to the annual session of the National Assembly which agenda is largely prepared and discussed at the *gewog* and the district levels where people representatives are fully associated.

⁴⁰ As noticed by Rose (ibid.p.115): "the government of Bhutan has not formally banned political parties, but is well understood by the Bhutanese elite that the formation of such organizations at this time is still discouraged". For that reason political parties have always been created in exile. In 1952, a "Bhutan State Congress" was founded in Patgaon in Assam, but was rapidly discontinued. Various political parties and organizations have been created since the early 1990s, in relation to the "southern problem". A "Bhutan People Party" (BPP) was created in Garganda in India in 1990 by militants from the Nepal based "People Forum for Human Rights". A "Bhutan Democracy Party" (BNPP) was created in 1992 by dissidents from the Bhutanese civil service. In 1997, the "Druk National Congress", created in 1994, joined other organizations to form a "United Front for Democracy in Bhutan" (UFD). The primary objective of these

organizations is the redress of the grievance of people now living in refugees camps in Nepal. This has been expanded to include demands for political reforms in Bhutan.

⁴¹ In his *kasho*, the King indicates that "he has observed the political systems of other countries". Although importing foreign systems of government is not a pattern of Bhutanese politics, the third and the fourth *Druk Gyalpo* have been keen in adapting foreign concepts to Bhutan. It seems to be the case with the designation of the Head of Government on a rotational basis which is inspired from Swiss politics. Recently, the judiciary of Bhutan has also institutionalized the process of drafting laws and regulations with support from foreign experts provided by UNDP.

⁴² The Planning Commission was created in 1971 and was initially chaired by the King who later on delegated this responsibility to a Planning Minister.

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^{xiv} Rose (Leo), *ibid*, p.165.

^{xv} For examples of changes in individual behaviours, see in Pommaret (Francoise), *Traditional Values and New Trends in Bhutan*, paper presented in Wein, 17 March, 1998, (Publication: Austrian Development Cooperation)

