

THE CULTURAL MONUMENTS OF TIBET

Volume II





MICHAEL HENSS

**THE CULTURAL
MONUMENTS OF
TIBET
THE CENTRAL REGIONS**

VOLUME II
THE SOUTHERN TIBETAN PROVINCE OF TSANG

PRESTEL
Munich · London · New York

Contents

Volume I

Foreword by Loden Sherab Dagyap Rinpoche	13
Preface	14
Introduction	16
The Central Tibetan Province of Ü – A definition of its historical geography	23
I Lhasa and Its Historical Monuments	
1 Lhasa through the ages – An outline of its sacred and secular art and architecture	26
2 Barkor and Lingkor – The way of the pilgrims	39
3 Jokhang and Tsuglagkhang – The Diamond Throne of Tibet	45
3.1 History and architecture – From Jokhang to Tsuglagkhang	45
3.2 The early sculptural decoration	60
3.3 Wall-paintings, 11th to 20th century	64
3.4 The Jowo sanctum	68
3.5 Important images and cultural relics at the Jokhang	77
4 Ramoche Temple – The “Smaller Jokhang”	89
5 The Potala Palace – Sacred and secular residence of the Dalai Lamas	97
5.1 The Potala before the Potala Palace, 7th to 16th century – History, buildings, images	97
5.2 The Potala Palace of the Dalai Lamas, 17th to 20th century	106
5.2.1 <i>The White Palace – Audience halls and private rooms</i>	106
5.2.2 <i>The Red Palace – Sanctuaries and mausoleums</i>	110
5.2.3 <i>Divine palace and government fortress – The architecture of the Tibetan theocracy</i>	133
5.3 The Shöl quarter – The downtown Potala village	135
6 Lukhang – The shrine in the Naga Kings’ Lake	144
7 Chagpo Ri – Cave sanctuary and Temple of Medicine	148
7.1 Draglha Lu cave sanctuary	148
7.2 Mentsikhang – The sacred medical college	150
8 Norbu Lingka – Summer Palace of the Dalai Lamas	155
8.1 Kelsang Podrang – Palace of the Seventh Dalai Lama	157
8.2 Chensel Podrang – Palace of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama	158
8.3 Takten Migyur Podrang – Palace of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama	161
9 Monasteries and temples in Lhasa	168
9.1 Meru Nyingpa – An ancient power-place reconstructed	168
9.2 Pabongka monastery – From tower to temple	171
9.3 Gyüme – The Lower Tantric College for esoteric teachings	172
9.4 The Four “Regency Monasteries” – Tengye Ling, Künde Ling, Tsemön Ling, Shide Ling	173
9.4.1 <i>Tengye Ling – Residence of the Demo Tulkus</i>	173
9.4.2 <i>Künde Ling – “Where all lived peacefully”</i>	174
9.4.3 <i>Tsemön Ling – A Regent Monastery “for long life”</i>	174
9.4.4 <i>Shide Ling – Destruction and reconstruction of a landmark building</i>	175
10 The Tibet Museum – Selected cultural relics	177

II The “Three Great Seats” of Learning: Ganden, Drepung, Sera Administration and Architecture

Introduction	208
1 Ganden – The first monastery of the Gelugpa School	210
2 Drepung – Origin and power-place of the Tibetan theocracy	218
2.1 Tsuglagkhang – The main assembly hall	220
2.3 The four college temples: Ngagpa, Loseling, Gomang, Deyang	224
2.3 The Ganden Palace – Residence of the Gelugpa hierarchs and early Dalai Lamas	228
3 Nechung – The monastic residence of Tibet’s State Oracle	229
4 Sera – The principal academy for Mahayana studies	235
4.1 Ngagpa – The Tantric Faculty	236
4.2 Sera Me College	238
4.3 Sera Je College	239
4.4 Tsuglagkhang – The main assembly hall	241

III Monuments of the Kyi Chu Valley and Beyond

1 Nyethang Dölma Lhakhang – In memory of Atisha	258
2 Tsel Gungthang monastery – A religio-political power-place of the Mongol-Tibetan period	268
3 The Drag Yerpa hermitages – Meditation and retreat in a sacred landscape	271
4 Gyama Trikhang – The legendary birthplace of King Songtsen Gampo	273
5 Katsel Monastery – A “Border-taming Temple” of the Lhasa Mandala	275
6 Zhayi Lhakhang – Doring pillars and royal edicts of Tibet’s early history	276
7 Drigung Thil monastery – A treasure house of Tibetan art	277
8 Radeng monastery – The origins of the Kadampa school	281
9 Taglung monastery - The Golden Age of early Tibetan art	287
10 Langtang and Nalendra – Sacred sites in the Phenpo Valley	290

IV Tshurphu Monastery – The Seat of the Karmapa Lamas

1 The Seat of the Karmapa Lamas	300
---------------------------------	-----

V Historical Sites in the Yarlung Valley

1 From myth to history – Divine rulers and early monuments	312
2 The Royal Necropolis at Chongye – From divine kingship to Buddhist faith	314
3 Early Sculptures and decorative arts of the royal dynastic period	319
4 Chongye Dzong and beyond	323
5 Yumbu Lakhar – Royal fortress and sacred shrine	325
6 Tradrug monastery – The earliest temple of Tibet	327
7 Ancient Tsetang – A Tibetan power-place during the 14th and 15th centuries	335

VI Monuments of the Tsangpo Valley

1	Chagzam Chuwo Ri – The iron-chain bridge at the Tsangpo-Kyi Chu confluence	344
2	Gongkar Dzong and Gongkar Chöde monastery	346
3	Dorje Drag – The Vajra Rock monastery	351
4	Monuments of the Dranang Valley	353
4.1	Drathang Temple – A treasure house of Tibetan painting	353
4.2	Jampa Ling – Once Tibet's largest kumbum chörten	364
4.3	The early tombs of Serkhung	365
5	Mindröl Ling – Nyingma stronghold in Central Tibet	366
6	Namse Ling Manor House – An urban palace in the countryside	374
7	Samye – Architectural universe and the foundation site of Tibetan monasticism	377
7.1	Samye Chökhör – A three-dimensional imago mundi of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism	377
7.2	Khamsum Zankhang Ling	397
7.3	Samye Chimpu – Hermitages and holy caves	399
8	Ön Keru Lhakhang – The earliest monumental statues in Tibet	400
9	Densa Thil – The origins of the Kagyü School	405

VII Lhodrag – Temples and Towers in the South of Central Tibet

1	Riteng and Drongkar – Unknown temples between Yarlung and Lhodrag	424
2	Mawochok – The Treasure-Finder's gömpa	425
3	Lhodrag Khomting Lhakhang	426
4	Lhodrag Kharchu monastery	427
5	Sekhar Guthog – Mila Repa's Tower	429
6	Lhodrag Lhalung monastery	438
7	The Lhodrag rock inscriptions	441
8	Watchtowers	443

VIII Dagpo and Kongpo – The "Far East" of the Central Regions

	Introduction	448
1	Chökhör Gyel – The Oracle Lake's monastery	449
2	Daglha Gampo – A Kagyüpa power-place	452
3	Lhagyari Palace – Manor house and dzong of the "Royal Family of God"	453
4	Leb Ri – The princely necropolis	454
5	Early rock inscriptions and edict pillars	458
6	Bön and Buddhist sites at Sacred Mount Bön Ri	461
7	The towers of Kongpo	465

IX Sacred Sites Around the Yamdrog Lake

1	Nakartse Dzong	472
2	Samding monastery – Where female monks reincarnated	473
3	Yamdrog Taglung monastery	476

Volume II

The Southern Tibetan Province of Tsang – A definition of its historical geography	491
X Ralung – Principal Seat of the Drugpa Kagyüpa	494
XI Gyantse and its Monastic City	
Historical Introduction	498
1 Gyantse Dzong and the beginnings of Tibetan fortress architecture	501
1.1 The palace temple Sampel Rinpoche Ling	502
2 The Pelkhor Chöde monastic enclave	504
2.1 The enclosure wall	505
2.2 The silken images of Gyantse	505
3 The Gyantse Tsuglagkhang – The main assembly hall of the Pelkhör Chöde monastic enclave	512
3.1 The central sanctuary	514
3.2 Vajradhatu Lhakhang – The Five Tathagata Mandala	515
3.3 Chögyel Lhakhang – The chapel of the Dharma Kings	516
3.4 Göngkhang – The protector’s shrine	520
3.5 Lamdré Lhakhang – Siddhas and Sakya masters	521
3.6 Neten Lhakhang – Sacred abode of the Sixteen Arhats	526
3.7 Shelye Khang – The mandala shrine	528
4 The Great Kumbum Stupa	533
4.1 History	534
4.2 Architecture – Plan and symbolism	534
4.3 Sculpture and painting – Iconology and iconography	537
4.4 Style and artistic traditions	546
4.5 A brief chronology of the Gyantse monuments	548
XII Monuments in the Nyang Chu Valley and Gyantse Region	
1 Tsechen Chöde – Symbol of political power and monastic authority	554
2 Nenyng monastery – The “Bodhgaya of Tibet”	556
3 Yemar Lhakhang temple at Iwang – Monumental temple art a thousand years ago	560
4 Drongtse monastery – An early Gelugpa monastery reconstructed	574
5 The Pala Family Manor House	576
XIII Shalu Monastery	
1 Serkhang – The Golden Temple Mandala	582
1.1 The monastic history of Shalu	582
1.2 The ground-floor: Architecture and images, 11th – 14th century	587
1.3 The entrance hall: From Gokhang to Gönkhang – The Six Chapels and the Traverse Gallery	590
1.4 Gosum Lhakhang and Segoma Lhakhang	597
1.5 The Great Korlam	604

1.6	The “Hidden Chapels” of the Great Korlam	608
1.7	The upper sanctuaries: Yumchenmo Lhakhang – The shrine of transcendent wisdom	609
1.8	The Yumchenmo Korlam	612
1.9	Stylistic profiles of the Shalu paintings, 11th to 14th century	614
1.10	The four Mandala Temples	616
1.10.1	<i>The central Sukhavati Lhakhang</i>	616
1.10.2	<i>The northern Amitayus Lhakhang</i>	618
1.10.3	<i>The southern Arhat Lhakhang</i>	619
1.10.4	<i>The eastern Tanjur Lhakhang</i>	622
1.11	The roof architecture of the Serkhang Mandala	625
1.12	Painted scrolls and manuscripts	629
2	Shalu Ripug Hermitage – Retreat and retirement	630

XIV Shigatse – The Heart of Tsang

1	Shigatse Dzong – A milestone of Tibetan civic architecture	640
2	The residence of the Panchen Lama	642
3	Tashi Lhünpo monastery	644
3.1	The Great Sutra Hall (Tsuglagkhang) and affiliated chapels	648
3.2	The Great Courtyard and its buildings	653
3.3	The mausoleums of the Panchen Lamas	656
3.4	The Great Maitreya Shrine	660
3.5	The image galleries	662
3.6	Ngagpa Dratsang – The Tantric College	665
3.7	Silken images at the Great Wall-Tower	665

XV The Tsangpo Valley and Beyond

1	Rinpung Dzong and Rinpung Chöde	672
2	Bön Monasteries in Southern Tibet – The art and architecture of the Swastika tradition	674
2.1	Menri monastery – An early centre of Bön monasticism	675
2.2	Yungdrung Ling – The Swastika monastery	677
2.3	“Hidden Places” of Bön in Ü and Tsang	679
3	Namling Chöde – The unexplored Shang Valley	682
4	Narthang – Kadampa seat and printing centre	682
5	Ngor Ewam monastery – Famous for its painted mandalas	689
6	Jonang Püntsoq Ling –Taranatha’s Tushita Paradise	695
7	Jonang, the Great Kumbum Stupa – “Synthesis of the world, the essence of the Buddhas”	705
8	Chung Riwoche – The Auspicious Stupa of Many Doors and the iron-chain bridge of Thangtong Gyelpo	709
8.1	The Great Kumbum – Architectural mandala and cosmic mountain	710
8.2	The iron-chain bridge of Thangtong Gyelpo – The “King of the Empty Plains”	712
9	Lhatse and beyond	715
9.1	Ancient Lhatse – History reconstructed and modern archaeology	715
9.2	Gyang Kumbum – A ruined tashigomang chörten	717
9.3	Ngamring Chöde – the far west of Tsang	719
10	Monasteries of the Bodongpa	719

XVI Sakya – Monastic Fortress and Palace Temples

1	The monastic and architectural history of Sakya	730
2	The Sakya-Yuan system – Monastic organization and administration	733
3	The sacred town of Sakya Densa	735
	3.1 The North Monastery Chöde Chang	735
	3.2 The South Monastery Chöde Lo – Lhakhang Chenmo, the Great Temple	738
	3.2.1 <i>The Great Sutra Hall</i>	740
	3.2.2 <i>The northern Ngüldung and Changma Lhakhang</i>	746
	3.2.3 <i>The southern Phurba Lhakhang</i>	749
	3.2.4 <i>The Chenmo Lhakhang Library</i>	753

XVII Castles and Monasteries along the Himalayan Range

1	Shekar Chöde and Shekar Dzong – A sacred and secular site north of Mount Everest	760
2	Kyirong – The “Happy Valley” and its shrines	764
3	Chumbi Valley – The gateway to the Central Regions of Tibet	768
4	Gampa Dzong and other fortresses	771
5	The Nyejel Chemo Caves – Early sculpture in the Indo-Tibetan borderlands	775

XVIII The Changtang and Tibet’s Pre-Buddhist Past

1	Megalithic sites and sacred geography of ancient Zhang Zhung	780
---	--	-----

	To the Reader	786
--	---------------	-----

Appendices

	Chronological list of dated and datable sculptures and paintings in the Central Regions of Tibet	793
--	--	-----

	Index-Glossaries	795
--	-------------------------	-----

I	Place names and geographical terms	797
---	------------------------------------	-----

II	Personal and deity names, titles and schools	813
----	--	-----

III	Art and Architecture	829
-----	----------------------	-----

IV	General terms	839
----	---------------	-----

	Sanskrit terms	847
--	----------------	-----

	Abbreviations	853
--	---------------	-----

	Bibliography I: General Literature	857
--	------------------------------------	-----

	Bibliography II: Tibetan Language Sources (TLS)	873
--	---	-----

	Illustration Credits	879
--	----------------------	-----

	Imprint	880
--	---------	-----



The Southern Tibetan Province of Tsang – A definition of its historical geography

Dividing a topographically orientated reference book on the cultural monuments of the Central Regions of Tibet into the two parts **Ü** and **Tsang** necessarily entails defining their historical geography. The existence of these two major Tibetan provinces as recorded in the written text sources can be traced back to at least the early “Sakya-Yuan dynasty period” of the 13th century. Ü (dBus), Tsang (gTsang), Upper and Lower Do-Kham (mDo Khams, Amdo and Kham) were at that time, as the Fifth Dalai Lama says, the “three districts (chol ka) into which the great Tibet was then divided”. Contemporaneous Yuan records confirm the territorial districts of Ü, Tsang and Ngari (Western Tibet) at a time when the Mongol administration was set up in Tibet around or sometime before 1268. This myriarchy system of altogether 13 territorial and political units (khri skor) comprised basically Ü (six myriarchies) and Tsang (six myriarchies, including three in Western Tibet) plus an additional small myriarchy at Yamdrog Lake “across the border” between Ü and Tsang, which after 1290 came to the local Nakartse rulers and was not originally part of Tsang nor of Ü.¹ Both historically and geographically – the natural barrier formed by the largely uninhabited high mountain area between the Gampa La and Kharu La passes – the region around this lake has long marked the frontier of Tibet’s two main provinces. The easternmost part of Tsang was defined when the first ruler of the rising Gyantse principality, Palden Sangpo (1318–1370), in his late years extended his territorial sovereignty as far as to Ralung near the source of the Nyang Chu (Myang Chu).

The land “beyond the high passes” stretching westbound towards the Nyang Chu kap V: Valley² is the East of Tsang, where only in the cultivable plains and valleys of Gyantse and Rinpung could secular and monastic centres develop and so establish a “historical geography”. The south of Tsang is clearly defined by the geographical and political borderlands with India and Nepal, such as the Chumbi Valley and the Himalayan range, while its westernmost areas reach as far as Ngamring and beyond, Dingri and Kyirong in northern and southern Latö (La stod). To the north, the province of Tsang may be defined by the side valleys of the Tsangpo river and by the sparsely populated southern parts of the vast Changtang plain. With the rise of the Tsangpa rulers in 1565, the new “Kings of Tibet” succeeding the Pagmo Drupa (c. 1354–1435) and the Rinpung princes (1435–1565) and their religious allies of the Karmapa Kagyü school, the principal political power over the Central Regions was centred on Shigatse until 1642, when the increasing power-play between the two provinces ended in the dominance of the new Lhasa theocracy of the Dalai Lamas.

Notes

- 1 For the myriarchy system, see Petech 1990, pp. 50f, 58; Tucci 1989, p. 85.
- 2 Another spelling for Myang and Myang Chu is Nyang or Nyang Chu, see Tucci 1989 (1941), IV.1, with more details of the historical geography of the rGyal rtse (Gyantse) area.



Chapter X

Ralung – Principal Seat of the Drugpa Kagyüpa



Ralung – Principal Seat of the Drugpa Kagyüpa

Halfway between Nakartse and Gyantse at the foot of Mount Gang bzang and not from the Kharu La pass is the high mountain monastery of Ralung (Rva lung or Ra lung, alt.: 4,500 m), located some 8 km south of the highway and at a similar distance east from Ralung village. Already part of Tsang Province during the Sakya-Yuan administration, this site came under the rule of the Gyantse princes in the 1360s and was listed by the Fifth Dalai Lama as part of the Chang (Byang) and Lho myriachies (khri skor) extending to the north and south of Ralung.¹ The name Ralung, the “Auspicious Goat’s Omen Valley”, is by tradition associated with a legend of a great goat (ra), which miraculously left behind some milk dried on a stone in the form of the three syllables OM A HUM. When Ling Repa (Gling Ras pa Padma rDo rje, 1128–1188), a disciple of Pagmo Drupa and the spiritual founder of the Drugpa Kagyüpa school, heard of this auspicious event and omen he named this place “Ra lung” (Rva lung).²

A first religious site at Ralung is recorded a few years before 1188, when Ling Repa, “residing at Ra lung”, had consecrated a larger “caitya”³ near his meditation hermitage. The actual foundation of this monastery and the establishment of the Ra Drugpa (Rva ’brug pa) lineage in the years after can be attributed to the great siddha and tertön *Tsang-*

pa Gyare (gTsang pa rGya ras Ye shes rDo rje, 1161–1211) from the Gya (rGya) clan. In 1189 the same master had also founded the Drug Jangchub Ling (’Brug Byang chub gling) monastery in the upper sNam Valley, a side valley of the Kyi Chu river south of Nyethang,⁴ which is said to have given its name to the Drugpa (’brug pa) school and to Drug Ralung (’brug Rva lung) monastery.

Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje designated his nephew Önre Darma Senge (dBon ras Dar ma seng ge, 1177–1237) as his heir, with whom began the incarnation lineage of the Drug (or Gya). They settled in Ralung, which henceforth became the headquarter of the “northern” Drugpa tradition in Tibet. The ninth lineage holder Gyelwang Künga Peljor (rGyal dbang Kun dga’ dPal ’byor, 1428–1476) claimed to be the rebirth of Tsangpa Gyare, whose most famous reincarnation was *Pema Karpo* (Padma dKar po, 1527–1592), the fourth Drugchen Rinpoche, who like his predecessor was born outside the ruling Drug family. This eminent Drugpa monk-scholar, author of an important history of Tibetan Buddhism (*’Brug pa’i chos ’byung*, 1575), of a biography of the founder Tsangpa Gyare, and of a guidebook to Ralung, lived here before he established Sangag Chöling (gSang sngags Chos gling) as the new principal seat of the Drugpa Kagyüpa lineage in Tibet, to this day a major pilgrim-



713a

713a | Ralung monastery, the easternmost cultural site of Tsang Province, west of pass. Founded in the 1180s, it became the centre of the “northern” Drugpa Kagyüpa tradition. The main assembly hall of the completely destroyed site (1966–) was rebuilt after 1984. Photo 2001

age area not far from the Indian border in Lhoka Prefecture, where Tsangpa Gyare had spent many years of his life.⁵

After Pema Karpo's death, a serious dispute arose over the recognition of his new incarnation between two candidates: the heir of the local Drug family and the son of a Chongye prince from the Yarlung Valley. The latter was supported by most of the Drugpa monks and by the Tsang ruler Desi Tsangpa (sDe srid gTsang pa), who finally settled the struggle in favour of the Chongye nominee Pagsam Wangpo (dPag bsam dbang po, 1593–1641). The Ralung candidate, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rNam rgyal, 1594–1651), installed on the Drugpa throne in 1602 and subsequently appointed the 18th prince-abbot of the Drugpa Kagyüpa at Ralung (1606), had in 1616, after years of conspiracy against him, to flee to Bhutan, where he established the southern branch of the Lho Drugpa school and became known as Shabdrung Rinpoche of Bhutan, who introduced here the double institution of a religious “Dharma Raja” and a secular “Deb Raja”. His reincarnations henceforth became the spiritual and the worldly rulers of Bhutan.⁶

After complete demolition during the Cultural Revolution (► fig. 713a), a smaller dukhang and the Pearl Temple (Mu tig lHa khang, 1992) were rebuilt after 1984 near the former main assembly hall (lHa khang chen po), which once housed a principal Maitreya statue and images of Ling Repa and Tsangpa Gyare, life-size metal images of the lineage lamas (Bla ma'i rgyud), and precious metal objects such as an Indian Pala-style lotus mandala of the 12th century.⁷ One of the most precious cultural relics to have survived at Ralung is an ancient three-dimensional *Chakrasamvara Mandala* reliquary in repoussé work (with a new top portion and cold gilding) adorned by an elaborate figural and ornamental decoration.⁸ Other remarkable ancient treasures are preserved in the Kelsang Podrang, including a superb stone image (ht.: 7 cm) of a ten-armed female deity with four heads in a pure Indian Pala style (11th/12th century), a gilt-copper *Chakrasamvara* (ht.: 13 cm) dating to the c. 15th century, and a small votive image (schist) of the



713b

Bodhgaya Mahabodhi temple of the kind brought to Tibet from India in large numbers by pious pilgrims.

Some 500 m apart from the monastic compound are the ruins of the large **Kumbum Chörten Chenpo** (sKu 'bum mChod rten Chen po) once “slightly smaller than the Gyantse one” (Tucci), whose former 44 chapels were adorned with paintings and statues up to the harmika dating to the 1740s, when this tashigomang stupa was apparently constructed⁹ (► fig. 713b). The stepped storeys once containing the image chapels between the base and the dome were probably of an octagonal plan and included on the southern ground-floor level a shrine with a lion throne of the Vairochana Buddha (ht.: 20 m (13 'dom)) and the other four tathagatas. The upper chapels of the bumpa section were dedicated to the Four Supreme Yoga Tantras. A “Caitya of Ralung” is recorded for the period of Ling Repa in the 12th century. Part of the bumpa still exists.¹⁰ By 1992, 16 monks had returned to Ralung, while about 40 inmates and another 40 nuns are said to have been here in 1938.

713b | Ralung. The Great Kumbum Chörten of the 1740s, now ruined since 1966. Photo 2001

Notes

The author visited this site in 1992 and 2001

1 Tucci 1989, p. 85.

2 For the legend, see Tucci 1956, p. 177 and n. 18; for the spelling of Ra lung, see BA (*Blue Annals*), Wylie 1962, Aris 1979: Rva lung; TPS, KG.

3 BA, pp. 665, 670. This caitya was apparently built and consecrated before 1184.

4 Or, to give it its full name, 'Brug se ba Byang chub Chos gling. For a map, see Dowman 1988, p. 133 (Jangchub

Chöling); KG, p. 72 and n. 667; Aris 1997, pp. 172, 205f.; BA, pp. 664, 672.

5 For a photograph, see Lhoka in Tibet 2000, p. 82. According to another tradition, Sangs sngags Chos gling (Sangag Chöling) was founded by his predecessor, the Third 'Brug chen Rin po che (Drugchen Rinpoche), in 1512; see Chö-Yang 1991, pp. 50f with a pre-1959 photograph. See also Chan 1994, pp. 218f., for a brief note on this traditional seat of the 'Brug chen Rin po che (whose present monastic seat is at He mis (Hemis) in La dvags (Ladakh), India), which, due to its location near the Indian border, is inaccessible to foreign visitors.

6 See Aris 1979, pp. 206–211.

7 Tucci 1956, pp. 60ff. with brief descriptions of some other sanctuaries at Ralung; KS, pp. 373ff.

8 Batcheler 1987, ill. p. 278. According to the monks at Ralung (oral information in 2001), the reliquary contains some mortal remains of the fourth 'Brug chen Rin po che Pad ma Gling pa.

9 See Tucci 1956, pp. 62f. A wall-painting depicting the Tibetan “king” (since 1740) and regent Pho lha nas bSod nams sTobs rgyas (r. 1728–1747) indicates a date, at least for the wall-paintings, in the 1740s. See also KS, pp. 373ff., where the renovation is attributed to the Fifth Ralung sPrul sku dPag bsam dbang po (1593–1641).

10 BA, pp. 668, 670.



Chapter XI

Gyantse and its Monastic City



Historical introduction

While Sakya monastery represented the pinnacle of Tibetan art and architecture in the 13th century and Shalu in the 14th century, the Gyantse temples and their treasures were the unrivalled masterpieces of the 15th century. Located at the crossroads of Tibet's principal trade and pilgrimage routes from Bhutan, India, Sikkim, Nepal and from the far



714

west of Ngari, Ladakh and Kashmir, Gyantse (rGyal rtse), the “Royal Peak”, or, to give it its full name, Gyelkhar Tse (rGyal mkhar rtse), “Peak of the Royal Castle”, dominates the eastern plains along the Nyang Chu (Myang Chu) river in the land of Nyang (Myang). At an altitude of 4,000 m, this “golden line” (gser gzhung ri mo) is the most extensive continuous fertile valley in the Central Regions of Tibet. Once the third largest city of the country, Gyantse has largely preserved its traditional urban character. The art and architecture of the Pelkhor Chöde monastic complex (► figs. 714, 715), both created in a relatively short period between the late 14th and mid-15th century, represent many of the most precious cultural treasures in the whole of Tibet.

While an early palace is said to have been erected by King Relpachen in the 9th century, the recorded and “visible” history of Gyantse does not begin until the rise of the local dynasty towards the middle of the 14th century. After the fall of the Mongol Yuan empire, and the subsequent loss of power of their political allies in Tibet, the Sakya rulers had increasingly to transfer authority and titles to the princes of Gyantse. Thus the Gyantse principality became the new political and cultural centre, now closer to Lhasa and Central Tibet in a double sense. Geographical, economic and historical factors contributed to the Golden Age of Gyantse from around 1370 to 1450. The founder of this rising power in Tsang, Pagpa Pel[den] Zangpo (’Phags pa dPal [ldan] bZang po, 1318–1370),¹ was a Khön Sakya and Shalu descendant by birth, who remained closely connected to

714 | Gyantse as it was. The old town and the Pelkhor Chöde monastic complex surrounded by an enclosure wall 2,240 m long built between c. 1420 and 1435 in mud brick with (now) 14 stone-reinforced turrets and (once) six gates. Of the once 18 individual monastery buildings (seven Gelugpa units were added in the late 17th century) only two remained after 1966/1967, around the central Tsuglagkhang and Great Kumbum Chörten. A few structures have been rebuilt or renovated since then. The new living quarters and the modern road to the left date from the 1980s. Photo Spencer Chapman 1936

714a | Gyantse Pelkhor Chöde and old town today (c. 2000). Photographer unknown



714a



715

Sakya monastery throughout his life. Here he became chief attendant (Nye gnas chen po) of the whole Sakya administration in 1360 and was successively appointed Supreme Adviser (Nang so chen mo) and head of that prominent institution. During his reign (1351–1370) and under his powerful political influence, building activities started in Gyantse in 1365 with an early fortress-palace on top of Gyantse hill. After Pelden Zangpo's successors had supported the Pagmo Drupa, then the ruling dynasty in the Central Regions (1350–1478), against the Rinpung lords in Tsang, the Gyantse princes became completely independent in 1406. They now ruled over a territory reaching as far as Phari in the south, Lhatse in the west, and Ralung monastery towards the province in Ü, and thus controlled the trade routes to India, Bhutan, and Western Tibet and its borderlands.

Special attention was also paid to maintaining close Sino-Tibetan relations with the Yuan dynasty. Contacts with the imperial court were maintained via prominent travelling lamas, whose political and other connections with the Chinese Yuan and Ming emperors proved to be useful for Tibetan hierarchs and rulers. In 1367 Pelden Zangpo received gifts from the Yuan Emperor and the title of Tai Situ (Ta'i Si tu).² In the following year, the Sakya master Künge Tashi Gyeltsen (1349–1425) visited Gyantse on his way back to

Tibet from the Yuan court, and such contacts with China became even more regular during the early Ming dynasty. Gyantse apparently did not belong to the 13 districts ruled by the Sakya Khön family and thus was under the direct suzerainty of the Chinese emperor.

In 1412 and 1413, high-ranking imperial delegations came from the Ming court, and this period marked the beginning of the heyday of the cultural monuments in Gyantse: the reign of Pelden Zangpo's grandson Rabten Künzang Pagpa (Rab brtan Kun bzang 'Phags pa, b. 1389/r. 1412–1442), "the great King ruling according to the Law ... as famous as the sun and the moon, both in China and in Tibet", as it is recorded by contemporaneous inscriptions in the bumpa and harmika of the Kumbum.³ Immediately west of Gyantse at the site of the once very important monastic academy of Changra (lCang ra, no longer extant), Rabten Künzang had in 1414 built "on the great river **Nyang Chu** [Myang Chu] an extraordinary **bridge**, having in the centre six arcades and a mchod rten ... through whose middle the road passed".⁴ The passageway stupa on top of the central section of that remarkable cantilever bridge was decorated inside with nine large painted mandalas on the ceiling and with Buddha and bodhisattva figures on the sidewalls. The consecration ceremony was performed in 1414 by

715 | Old Gyantse. View of the old town and Pelkhor Chöde from the dzong hill of the ancient town and Pelkhor Chöde. Photo 1981

715a | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde with Tsuglagkhang and Great Kumbum Stupa. Blessing ceremony by the Seventh Panchen Lama, 11 October 1985. Photo 1985



715a

the Indian abbot of the Mahabodhi temple, Mahapandita, Shakya Shri Shariputra (Sakya Śrī Śāriputra), who, invited by the Yongle Emperor in 1413, had, on his long way from Bodhgaya to Nanjing, stayed for two months at Chandra (lCang ra) monastery opposite Pelkhor Chöde.⁵ Further highlights during the rule of the eminent Rabten Künzang include the construction of Pelkhor Chöde with its main assembly hall and Kumbum stupa, the commission of a new Kanjur, and the invitation to the monastery of the Indian scholar Vanaratna sometime after 1426, and of Khedrub Je, the first Gelugpa hierarch in the succession of Tsongkhapa. Other eminent masters contributed to the brilliant cultural milieu in Gyantse during those years, including the famous and powerful abbot of the very important nearby Nenyang monastery, Jamyang Rinchen Gyeltsen (’Jam dbyangs Rin chen rGyal mtshan, 1364–1422), who consecrated the main assembly hall and its principal statues, and Pelden Zangpo’s son or brother, the “Mahasiddha” Künga Lodrö Gyeltsen (Kun dga’ Blo gros rGyal mtshan, 1366–1436), Butön’s first reincarnation, who from 1371 was in charge of Tsechen, the secular and religious seat of the Gyantse princes before they moved to their new palace-fortress and monastic centre on the other side of the Nyang Chu river. Many of Tibet’s best architects, painters, sculptors and textile workers co-operated over three decades in a unique joint artistic venture never seen before, which can be compared only with the grand Potala enterprise in the 17th century.

However, the political power of the Gyantse rulers declined during the second half of the 15th century. In the late 1480s the Gyantse territory became part of the Ndong-based Pagmo Drupa administration, whose new al-

lies in Tsang, the lords of Rinpung, put an end to Gyantse’s independence with an attack in 1488. The authority of the Gyantse princes was reduced to local rule in the shadow of their residential and religious centre. Controlled by the Tsang rulers from 1612, Gyantse came under the influence of the ascendant Lhasa theocracy after 1642. Towards the end of the 17th century, seven Gelugpa colleges were established in Pelkhor Chöde compared with only four of the once dominant Sakyapa. Though the political significance of Gyantse declined, as a main trading centre between Tibet and India it remained especially famous for woollen cloth and carpets until the 20th century.

Two ancient Tibetan texts are of inestimable value for the documentation of Gyantse’s historical monuments: the *History of the Gyantse Princes* composed by the monk Jigme Dragpa (’Jigs med grags pa) between 1479 and 1481, and the *Historical Guide to the Myang Valley Area* (*Myang Chos ’byung*) attributed to the famous Jonang Taranatha and thus dating to the early 17th century (see TLS, GyCh and MyCh).

The Gyantse rulers c. 1350–c. 1450:

- Pelden Zangpo (dPal ldan bZang po, 1318/r. c. 1350–1370)
- Pagpa Rinchen (’Phags pa Rin chen, 1320/r. 1370–1376)
- Rabten Künga Pagpa (Rab brtan Kun dga’ ’Phags pa, 1357/r. 1376–1412)
- Rabten Künzang Pagpa (Rab brtan Kun bzang ’Phags pa 1389/r. 1412–1442)
- Tashi Pagpa (bKra shis ’Phags pa, 1395/r. 1442–1447)
- Tashi Rabten Pel Zangpo (bKra shis Rab brtan dPal bZang po, r. 1447–?)

XI | 1 Gyantse Dzong and the beginnings of Tibetan fortress architecture

In 1365 Pelden Zangpo “laid the foundation of the great fortress called the “Peak of the Victory Castle” (rGyal mkhar rtse) on top of the rocky hill in front of the old city, or Gyelkhang Tsemo (rGyal khang rtse mo, the “Royal Peak Palace”) (► figs. 716–718), where once, as tradition has it, a much earlier castle had been built in the 9th century by a royal descendant of the Yarlung dynasty. A royal palace of the Gyantse princes is said to have existed here before new construction began. This record in the Gyantse chronicle from 1481⁶ marks the early phase of the Tibetan *dzong administrative system* and dzong architecture (rdzong, “district”, also the name for its central office building). The new palace-fortress was built as the residence of the Gyantse princes after they had moved from the neighbouring Tsechen Chöde fort in order to establish here the central seat of their rising territorial power. In 1390 the palatine temple Sampel Rinpoche Ling was erected within the fortified building complex, whose present overall structure may date back to this second construction period. After the raids of the Dzungar invaders, the fortress was restored and enlarged in 1719/1720.⁷ Severely damaged and partly destroyed on 6–10 July, 1904, during the British invasion, Gyantse Dzong subsequently no longer served as an administrative centre and remained in a dilapidated condition until 1966/1967, when during the Cultural Revolution it suffered further destruction and then neglect. Restoration work on the secular structures was carried out in the 1980s.

The Tibetan system of using various dzongs as regional administrative units governed from a central fortified castle (usually located on high places) was introduced under the Pagmo Drupa rulers in the middle of the 14th century. In 1358 the charismatic “lama-king” Changchub Gyeltsen (1302–1364), the actual ruler (khri dpon) in the Central Regions, had reorganized the governmental system by con-



716



717

716 | Gyantse Dzong. Gyelkhang Tsemo (rGyal khang rtse mo), the “Royal Peak Palace” of the Gyantse princes, founded in 1365. The present building complex appears to date largely from the late 14th century, when in 1390 the palatine temple Sampel Rinpoche Ling was erected (the cubic structure with the sacred penbey (scrub) frieze on the right). Partially destroyed in 1904, the dzong was no longer used for administrative purposes after that date. Following further decay and destruction (1966/1967), it was restored in the early 1980s. Photo Hugh Richardson 1936 (or later)

717 | Gyantse Dzong. A view from south (compare fig. 716). Photo 1984



718

718 | Gyantse Dzong. South wall of the building above Sempel Rinlung Ling. Photo 1993

719 | Gyantse Dzong. Sempel Rinlung Ling temple. Pillar capital, late 14th century. Photo 1993

verting the 13 myriarchies of the Yuan-Sakya period into individual dzong (“district”) units.⁸ His “basic conception was the undermining of the power of the various (Sakya) tripön (khri dpon) and the establishment of a net of local stewardships based on forts (rdzong).”⁹ Each dzong was supervised by one or two dzongpön (rdzong dpon), the prefect and the administrative head of a district, usually a layman appointed for three years who also exercised judicial functions and was responsible to the provincial government or to the ruling house, in this case to the princes of Gyantse. Major dzongs were usually run by two of these district officials, one of whom could be a monk. To each dzong belonged approximately 500 families. In the late 19th century, Sarat Chandra Das counted in the Central Regions 53 principal districts and fortresses and 123 sub-prefectures with minor forts administered by a dzongpön, while for the pre-1959 period the figure of 120 dzong units has been estimated.¹⁰ Each dzong also had one or two civil officials, chosen from among the noble and well-to-do families, who were respon-



719

sible for the accounts and the treasury, the best of whom were appointed dzongpön. The “store keeper” (rdzong gnyer) took care of the repository of the dzong (rdzong mdzod) and of the reserve store (bkar ’jug rgyag), comprising arms and armour, treasures, food stuffs, and so on.

If we can trust the historical texts, the earliest dzong to have survived in Ü-Tsang until the 1950s are the now ruined Gongkar Dzong (1350 or earlier) and Lhündrub Dzong (Lhun grub rdzong) in Gampa, usually known as Gampa (or Kampa) Dzong (Gam pa rDzong), which was founded by Pelden Zangpo probably in 1352.¹¹ Other early dzong foundations of the 1350s were Samdrub Tse (Shigatse), Rinlung, and Nedong (Tsethang).

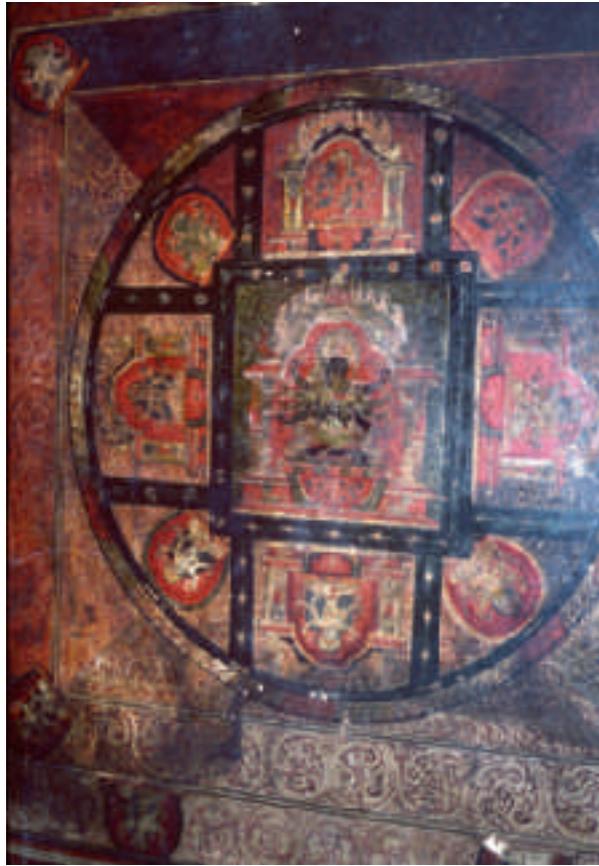
Unlike the much later dzong units in Bhutan, the district fortresses in Tibet were not at the same time a monastic institution, although they comprise a palatine temple, or palace chapel. This pattern remained unchanged from the very beginnings at Gyantse Dzong to the grand “Lhasa state dzong”, better known as the Potala Palace. An interesting exception is the former 16th-century “Drigung Dzong” (’Bri gung rDzong gsar) at the confluence of the Kyichu, Mangra Chu and Zhorong Chu rivers in Central Tibet, a fortress-like monastery which served mainly as the administrative headquarters of a district controlled by the Drigungpa and as the winter residence of both Drigung Kyabgöns.¹²

XI | 1.1 The palace temple Sempel Rinpoche Ling

According to the historical texts, in 1390 the Gyantse prince Künga Pagpa (r. 1376–1412), “this great lord of men”, established a palace shrine known as Sempel Rinpoche Ling inside the dzong complex on top of the hill. By 1397 he had “completed the lofty temple of rGyal mkhar rtse, called bSam ’phel Rin po che [Gling].”¹³ When Giuseppe Tucci made his field research in the 1930s, the dukhang had already been “destroyed to great extent” by the Younghusband expedition in 1904. Sempel Rinpoche Ling suffered further destruction in 1966/1967 and neglect thereafter. The main image in the tsangkhang was a statue of the eight-year-old Shakyamuni, which was surrounded by *wall-paintings* depicting the Sakya Lamdré lineage masters, a Gurgyi Gönpö (Gur gyi mgon po) Mahakala in the Göngkhang, and by a circumambulation corridor with paintings of the Five Buddha families. Some wall-paintings of the foundation period are recorded in the text sources or have survived, including the Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession, Amitabha’s Sukhavati paradise, Medicine Buddhas, arhats, Sakya masters, and several rows of the “many Buddhas” on the rear wall of the sanctum, and a few elegantly drawn standing bodhisattvas in a refined Newari-Tibetan style flanking the largely destroyed Buddha figures along the southern section of the main hall,¹⁴ whose beautifully carved pillar capitals (► fig. 719) can be dated to the late 14th (or early 15th?) century.



720



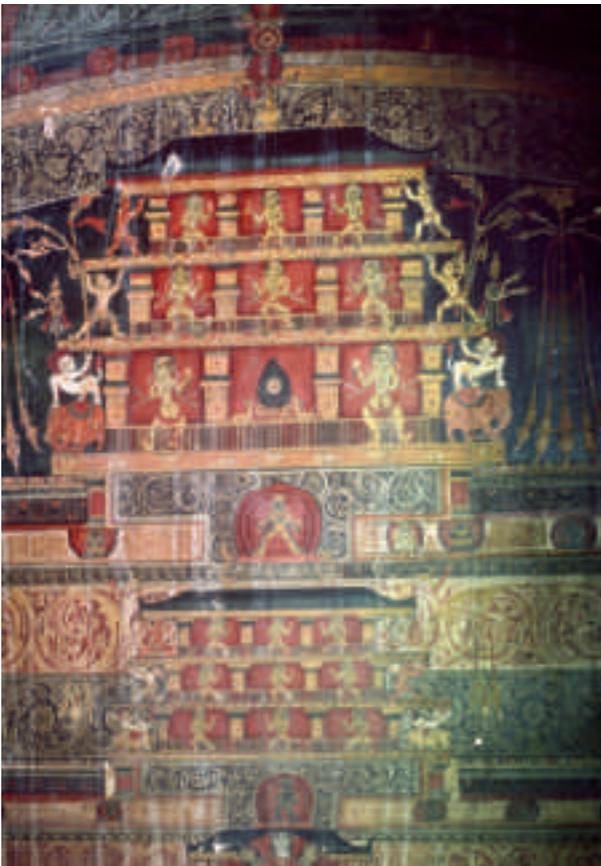
721

720 | Gyantse Dzong. Sampel Rinpung Ling temple. Wall-painting of a teaching Buddha in the dukhang. Late 14th century. Photo 1993

721 | Gyantse Dzong. Sampel Rinpung Ling temple. Shelye Khang, the small mandala sanctuary on top of Sampel Rinpung Ling temple: Guhyasamaja mandala. Despite the painting's poor condition, the style clearly points to Newari artists, late 14th century. Photo 2006

722 | Gyantse Dzong. Sampel Rinpung Ling temple. Shelye khang, detail of the central Kalachakra mandala. Late 14th century. Photo 1993

723 | Gyantse Dzong. Sampel Rinpung Ling temple. Shelye khang, detail of a mandala. These important images depicting the four Highest Yoga Tantra systems, and recalling the pure and finest 14th-century painting style of the Kathmandu Valley, have never been documented so far. Late 14th century. Photo 1993



722



723

The style of the Buddha wall-paintings in the tsankhang (► fig. 720) recalls that of similar 14th-century paintings on the upper floors at Shalu monastery. In 1993 new statues of the Buddhas of the Three Ages were installed in this chapel.

The most precious paintings are in the *Shelye Khang* (gZhal yas khang), now called Lhakhang Serpo (lHa khang ser po, “Yellow Temple”), the “divine palace” of the uppermost chapel above the main sanctum.¹⁵ In this small shrine (only 7.90 x 5.20 m), which, like the “mandala temple” of the Pelkhor Chöde Tsuglagkhang, served for occasional initiation rituals, four of the originally nine large *mandalas* have survived on the main wall. They are, from left to right: Guhyasamaja (► fig. 721), Kalachakra (centre) (► fig. 722), Chakrasamvara, and, on the side wall to the right, a smaller and more damaged Hevajra Mandala. Although less well preserved than the Pelkhor Chöde mandalas, these high-

ly important wall-paintings are of a very similar style and of the same extraordinary quality. This mandala cycle was either completed at the consecration of the dukhang in 1396/1397 or in the years after, though at the latest before the presumed final completion of Sampel Rinpoche Ling in 1427, at about the same time as the large mandalas at Pelkhor Chöde were painted. Both series at Gyantse represent the very best of Tibetan mandala painting and may give us an idea of the famous and nearly contemporaneous mandala wall-paintings that once existed at Ngor Ewam monastery (founded in 1429).¹⁶ The painting style of these earliest wall-paintings at Gyantse clearly points to Newari artists of the 14th-century tradition (► fig. 723).

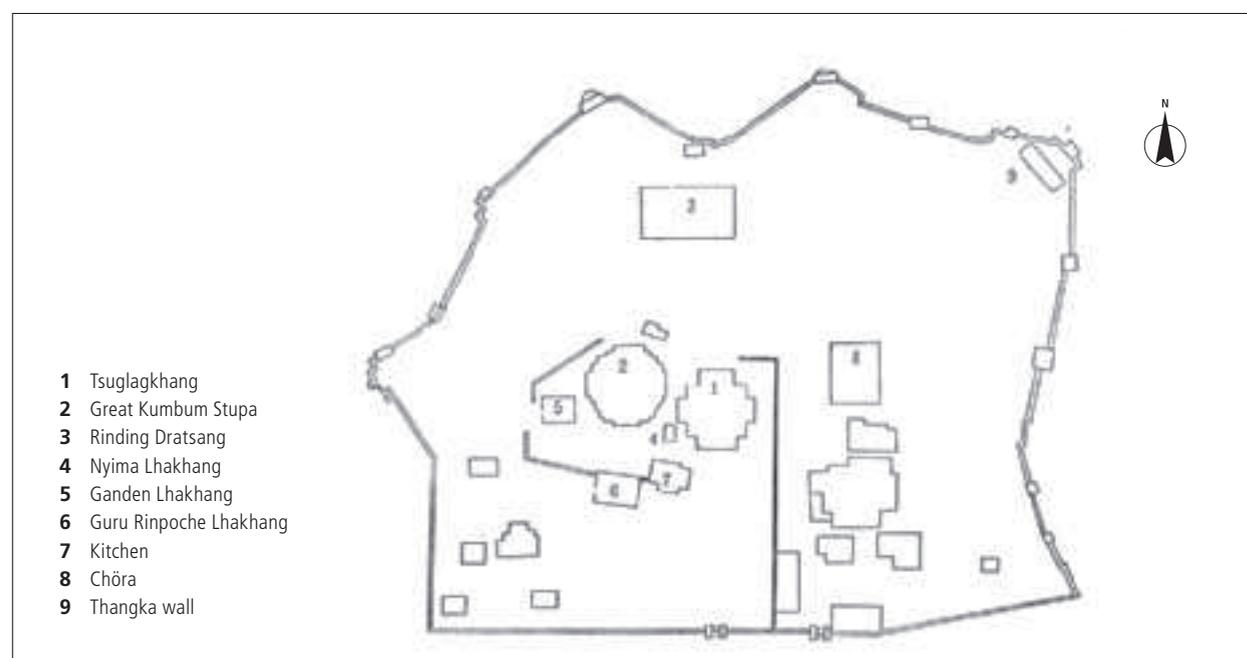
The small three-storey mandala-like pavilion (now empty) on top of the entire building complex is dedicated to the (as yet unidentified) protector deity of the dzong.

XI | 2 The Pelkhor Chöde monastic enclave

As if entering a huge three-dimensional mandala around the central “palace” of the main assembly hall, one passes Pelkhor Chöde via the southern section of its enclosure wall, which surrounds this monastic city on all four sides (► figs. 715, 724). Originally called Pelkhor Dechen (dPal ’khor bde chen), the “Glorious [dharma] Wheel of Great Bliss”, the monastic complex was later named Pelkhor Chöde (dPal ’khor chos sde), the “Sacred Site of the Auspicious [dharma] Wheel”, as it is written in the *Nyang chung* (*Myang chung*) chronicle and in an inscription on the fourth story of the Kumbum stupa. This name also seems to be associated with an early Tibetan king, Pelkhor tsen (dPal ’khor tshan), who is supposed to have ruled over the area in

the early 10th century.¹⁷ Soon after its foundation or reconstruction in today’s form in 1418, it became a unique “federation” of Tibetan-Buddhist schools and colleges, in which the Sakya and Shalu traditions were instrumental during the early period. In the late 17th century, Pelkhor Chöde comprised 16 colleges (grva tshang): four Sakyapa (said to belong to the Ngor sub-school), three Shalupa (also known as dus ’khor pa, Kalachakra school), and nine Gelugpa colleges, which were all presided over by the Pelkhor Khenpo (dPal ’khor mkhan po), a Gelugpa head-lama appointed by the Lhasa government after 1642.¹⁸ His abbatial residence (Bla ma’i pho brang, or Bla brang), the white building on the hill behind, is, along with the Tsuglagkhang, the Kumbum

724 | Gyantse. Plan of Pelkhor Chöde. Modified after *Southern Ethnology*, 1991, p. 234. The entrance is at the central southern enclosure wall on the north-south axis of the main assembly hall (1). Different school traditions in one and the same monastic community have existed not only at Gyantse, but also at Tsechen, Namling Chöde, Ngamring Chöde, Shekar Chöde, Samding, Drag Yerpa, Ne-chung, and Meru Nyingpa (Lhasa).



and the enclosure wall, the only major structure at Pelkhör Chöde to have survived the destructions of 1966/1967. In the early 19th century, two additional colleges for the Dri-gungpa and Karmapa were established for some time.¹⁹ Today only the Gelugpa, Sakyapa and Nyingmapa are represented, with one faculty each. Most of the former 16 college buildings were destroyed in 1969, and only a few buildings were reconstructed after 1978 and then in the late 1980s during a general restoration.

In the late 17th century, a total of 746 monks belonged to Pelkhör Chöde, while around the year 1900 about 500 to 700 inmates stayed there permanently.²⁰ The unusual coexistence of different Tibetan-Buddhist traditions in one and the same monastery has been explained as the result of the tolerant non-sectarian policy of the lay religious king Rabten Künzang Pagpa, who welcomed all Buddhist schools.²¹ Comparable though not really similar forms of such “ecumenical” monastic communities can be found at very few other places, notably at Ganden Chökhör Ling at Namling township, Shang Valley, at Ngamring Chöde near Lhatse with colleges for Sakyapa and Gelugpa monks at least from around 1434 until the late 17th century (see Ch. XV 3 and Ch. XV 9.3), and at the “national” Samye monastery, where from the 11th century onwards – with changing majorities – Nyingmapa inmates lived together with monks of the Kadampa, Sakyapa and Gelugpa schools.

XI | 2.1 The enclosure wall

Another characteristic feature of Pelkhor Chöde is “outside the temple an enclosure wall encircling it, which measured 200 gzhu on each side, ornamented with 16 turrets ... with great gates on the North and South, and a couple of gates both on the East and West, namely six gates in all”. This almost contemporaneous record from the *Gyantse Chronicle* (1478/1481)²² does not, however, give any details with regard to the specific function of this 2,240-m long wall around the sacred enclave (with now at least 14 surviving turrets). Were there any political reasons which may have motivated the construction of this fortified boundary wall, in view of the potential conflict between the clergy at Pelkhor Chöde and the civil government at the dzong? A similar “monastic wall” with bastion towers already encircled the earliest stronghold of the Gyantse princes at Tsechen monastery (c. 1364–1368), vis-à-vis their successive power-place at Gyantse Dzong and Pelkhor Chöde. The originally six gates were reduced at an unknown later period to a main portal building (sGo khang) at the eastern section of the southern wall, from where it was shifted to the central area to align it with the new main road in 1986. Its statues of four guardian kings, which were still in situ in 1960,²³ must have been destroyed around 1966. While the wall was built in the traditional mud-brick technique, the turrets were mostly constructed of, or at least partially reinforced by, layers of stone. While at the southern sections the wall was erected

on level ground and thus served as a guideline for the pilgrims’ korra, its inner front had been decorated with paintings and relief carvings of the Thousand Buddhas, the life-story of the eminent Sakya lama Pagpa, and so on.²⁴

There are no textual records for the date of the enclosure wall, which must have been erected after the completion of the main assembly hall in 1425 and before 1437, when the three giant silk-brocade appliqué thangkas (gos sku chen mo, or btags sku, “woven image”) for the “tower to display the cloth-image” (gos sku spe’u, or simply gos sku thang sa, “the place for presenting the silken image”) – a dominating structure of the upper enclosure wall – were commissioned.²⁵ The probably earliest architectural “image support” of this type, built around or sometime after 1368, is located at the nearby Tsechen monastery. If this structure is not a much later addition, it would confirm the practice of displaying huge silken thangkas at the very beginning of the “Gyantse period”.

XI | 2.2 The silken images of Gyantse

The extraordinary and unique monumental silk thangkas, which have been displayed at the huge image tower of Pelkhor Chöde since 1439, still exist. Once a year one of the two intact banners (c. 23 x 23 m, measurements of the Shakyamuni panel taken by the author in 2001), respectively depicting Shakyamuni as Buddha Vajrasana and Maitreya with entourage, is presented in front of this gigantic towering structure for about four early morning hours at Saga Dawa, the festival to commemorate the birth, the enlightenment and the nirvana of the Buddha in the fourth Tibetan month. The third silken image, representing Dipamkara, the Buddha of the Past, and also the left-hand side-banner, are reportedly still preserved at Gyantse,²⁶ though since at least the early 20th century they have not been shown because of their poor condition. All three banners would have once formed a set depicting the Buddhas of the Three Ages displayed one after the other on three successive days as it has been, and still is, the practice at Tashi Lhünpo monastery.

The **Shakyamuni thangka** (► figs. 725, 726) depicts the historical Buddha in vajrasana posture and seated on the Diamond Throne. He is shown surrounded by a magnificent Six Ornaments prabha (rgyan drug) and assisted by a brownish-yellow bodhisattva Maitreya, a white Avalokiteshvara, and by his two main disciples Shariputra and Maudgalyayana (seated at the throne base). Significantly, the iconography also includes, next to a white Vairochana (top left) and a red-brown Prajnaparamita goddess (top right) possibly alluding to Rabten Künzang’s 8,000-verse Prajnaparamita edition, two significant religious hierarchs in the roundels next to them. Both of these hierarchs were abbots of the important nearby Nenyang monastery: Jamyang Rinchen Gyeltsen (’Jam dbyangs Rin chen rGyal mtshan, 1364–1422, right), one of Tsongkhapa’s teachers, who consecrated some

725 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. The Shakyamuni Vajrasana silk-fabric thangka (gos sku, c. 23 x 23 m), 1437–1439. Here displayed for a few hours in the early morning at the Saga Dawa Festival in 1981, on the façade of the Tsuglagkhang, for the first time for at least 25 years. Photo Galen Rowell 1981, after Diemberger 2002, p. 181



725

principal chapels at Pelkhor Chöde in 1421,²⁷ and his predecessor Sempa Chenpo Chökyi Rinchen (Sems dpa' chen po Chos kyi Rin chen, 1199–1255, left).²⁸ The monk-scholar Jamyang Rinchen Gyeltsen is especially known for having promoted and edited the Perfection of Wisdom teachings (Prajnaparamita), whose four-armed embodiment is represented in the upper right corner. He had supervised the manufacture of a monumental göku at Nenyng before 1413.

The **Maitreya thangka** (► figs. 727, 728) depicts a richly adorned yellow Maitreya in vitarka and dhyana mudra posture. There is a longevity flask on the left-hand lotus, he wears a white antelope skin around his neck and a stupa on top of his crown (► figs. 730), and he is surrounded by the same standing bodhisattvas (► fig. 729), with two disciples seated at the lotus base, as on the Shakyamuni göku. Above a yellow Shakyamuni to the left and a red Amitayus to the right are represented the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, composed in two groups of five tathagatas each and encircling a yellow sun emblem with a three-legged

bird (left) and (right) a white moon disc with a hare, ancient Chinese symbols of power and authority (Chin.: jin miao, yu tu) symbolizing the permanent auspicious twin unity of the cosmos. Both motifs can also be found on the Shakyamuni Vajrasana banner, though as plain yellow and white emblems only without the animal design. Of special interest are the two historical figures just below the upper lintel frieze. The red-hat monk-scholar on the right can be identified as the Indian mahapandita and Bodhgaya abbot *Shakya Shri Shariputra* (Śākya Śrī Śāriputra) (► fig. 732), who on his journey to the Chinese Ming court was invited by Rabten Künzang to stay at Gyantse in 1414. His portrait is painted in the Lamdré Lhakhang of the main assembly hall inscribed as “Paṅ chen Śrī Śā ri putra”.²⁹

As on the Shakyamuni thangka, the monk portrait on the left depicts the earlier Nenyng abbot *Sempa Chenpo Chökyi Rinchen* (Sems dpa' chen po Chos kyi Rin chen, ► fig. 731), whose special interest and activities for the Prajnaparamita tradition were continued under his 15th-century successor Rinchen Gyeltsen and sponsored by Rabten Künzang,



726

726 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. The same thangka shown in fig. 725, unrolled at the huge wall tower (gos sku thang sa) at Saga Dawa in 2001. Photo 2001

727 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. The Maitreya göku (gos sku) and one of the two preserved side-banners, 1437–1439. Photo 2000



727

and thus may have motivated the portrayal in both thangkās. Both **side-banners** depicting the ten seated bodhisattvas, each c. 23 m in height and c. 5.5 m in width, were originally unrolled in order to frame the central image as a kind of triptych. For a long time only the side-banner on the right could be displayed (► fig. 727), while of the one to the left, which was reportedly taken to Calcutta by the Younghusband expedition in 1904, only the canvas support

is said to have been preserved. In recent years, two newly made side-banners have been displayed at the annual ceremony in order to frame the principal image at both sides, as in former times. According to the Gyantse chronicle, the master artist was Pönmoche (dPon mo che, “chief artist”) Sönam Peljor (bSod nams dPal ’byor), who “in the Fire-Serpent Year (1437) made the sketch of the great silken image of Maitreya, which was completed in the Earth-Sheep Year



728



729

728 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. The Maitreya thangka also seen in fig. 727. Photo 2000

729 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. Detail of the Maitreya thangka seen in fig. 727: Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, to the left of the central Maitreya. Photo 2000

(1439).³⁰ Sönam Peljor was one of the painters working in those years in the Kumbum, partly in collaboration with his teacher (and father?) Rinchen Peljor (Rin chen dPal 'byor), who had himself made the design for two other fabric images in Gyantse and Nenyng in 1418 and in the 1420s. So quite naturally the same style and motifs can be recognized in the “silken paintings” and in the wall-paintings at Gyantse: in the proportions and drawing of the figures, jewellery and textile patterns, the characteristic flower design and rainbow-coloured nimbus, the abstract graphic grids of the clouds, the fine variety of colours, and the decorative lent-sa (lan tsha) script borders;³² and, last but not least, in several distinctive Chinese-style novelties in Tibetan painting art, such as the elaborate early Ming textiles copied in the Kumbum wall-paintings and woven onto these giant fabric thangkas as original silks made in China in a specific Tibetan brocade-appliqué technique (► fig. 733). A large amount of silk had been brought from China to Gyantse with several imperial missions in the early 15th century.³³

While small Tibetan-style cloth thangkas in tapestry (kesi), embroidery or woven technique are known from 13th- and 14th-century production centres in the Tibetan-Chinese borderlands (Tangut Kingdom of Xi Xia) and in China proper (Yuan dynasty court; Hangzhou?), the characteristic “patchwork” *appliqué of multi-coloured silk brocades* (lhan 'drub, or dras 'drub ma, “cloth-cut-out”, or 'drub ma, “glued appliqué”) “for open-air” use is very probably of genuine Tibetan origin, although the basic materials, like the plain brocades, embroidered silks and the lampas-weave sections with grid lattice-work patterns were imported readymade from China. Textual records according to which a giant appliqué Shakyamuni göku (flanked by the bodhisattvas Manjushri and Maitreya) produced in Min-



730 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde.
Detail of the thangka seen in
fig. 727: the head of Maitreya.
Photo 2000



731



732



733

731 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. Detail of the Maitreya thangka seen in fig. 727, upper section, left: Nenyng abbot Sempa Chenpo Chökyi Rinchen. Photo 2000

732 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. Detail of the Maitreya thangka seen in fig. 727, upper section, right: Bodhgaya abbot Shakya Shri Shariputra (opposite fig. 731). Photo 2000

733 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. Detail of the Maitreya thangka seen in fig. 727: original embroidered brocade-applique Chinese Ming textiles, before 1437. Photo 2000

734 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. Detail of the Shakyamuni thangka seen in fig. 726: here the iconometric grid beneath the silk appliqué is visible. Photo 2000



734

yag (Xi Xia, former Tangut Kingdom) and measuring almost 19 m (!) “from its right to left ear”,³⁴ which the Fourth Karmapa Rölpai Dorje would have brought to Central Tibet (Kongpo?) in 1363, may (!) have some real background, but appears to be based – with regard to its commission, later whereabouts, and its sheer size – more to fiction than facts. If another Tibetan text source from 1782 is more reliable, the earliest “silken appliqué gos sku” was made in or for Tsel Gungthang monastery near Lhasa around 1360. Historical records seem to confirm Gyantse’s leading (or at that time even exclusive?) role in this field. An interesting technical detail of the working procedure can be recognized on the Shakyamuni Vajrasana banner: the partially preserved *iconometric grid* of five horizontal and four diagonal lines of the head and upper body section, which once served in its complete composition as the correct preparatory drawing of the Buddha according to the canonical proportions³⁵ (► fig. 734).

In view of the fact that each of these silken scrolls has been unrolled for the annual display more than 500 times, they are, with the exception of the side-banner, remarkably well preserved. Some minor tears in the upper and lower sections of the Maitreya thangka reveal a number of short prayers and mantras written onto the supporting fabric in Uchen script, corresponding to those sacred silken figures, which, now partly damaged, uncover their “spiritual background”. Similar inscriptions can be seen on the outer linen border.³⁶

The Maitreya and the Shakyamuni göku (gos sku) both represent various artistic idioms of the “Gyantse style” and indicate the slightly different “hand-writing” of its individual chief-designer. Taking into consideration the fact that, based on textual records, several hundred artisans needed between one to two years to manufacture such a cloth image, it is feasible to suggest for monumental enterprise a joint-venture of two or three workshops working alongside each other though in their individual artistic traditions techniques. If this was not the case for the Gyantse silks, and all three banners were made in exactly the same style in terms of outlining, design and colouring, then the present Shakyamuni Vajrasana may not have belonged to the original set of the three silken banners from 1437–1439, but would have replaced a lost original fabric scroll of the same iconography and thus completed the set at a later period.³⁷

Preparations for displaying the silken image and its side panel at the Saga Dawa festival begin after 4 am the Tsuglagkhang, where these scrolls are stored in heavy leather bags throughout the year.³⁸ After 5 am they are carried by many lay people up to the **göku khang** (gos sku khang, or gos sku thang sa, which is 32 m high, 42.5 m wide at the bottom, 28 m at the top, and 3.5 m thick in the upper part), the tower or wall for the display of the giant image overlooking the entire Pelkhor Chöde compound. Here the two banners



734a



734b

are prepared for being raised (and thus unfolded) in a few minutes, the central panel first, by 15 lay-workers standing on the uppermost floor and invisible from the front, each holding a rope fixed to the top border of the image scroll and running over a wooden roller. At about 6.30 am the two banners are on full display until, after about another four hours, the sun rises over the upper ridge of the eastern hills.

When the Gelugpa monks have finished reciting sutras and prayers, their dungchen horns announce the end of the ceremony. And for the benefit of countless pilgrims doing the kora in view of these monumental icons, the Gyantse chronicler Jigme Dragpa may, over 500 years ago, have seen the essence of the great liberation through viewing (mthong grol chen mo) “the Buddha, which as soon as created beings see it, frees from the pain of evil destinies”.

734a | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. Lower section of the Maitreya göku seen in fig. 727: lotus frieze of Maitreya’s throne. Photo 2000

734b | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde. The lower edge of the Maitreya göku as seen in fig. 727. After display, the silken image is taken down and rolled up for storage. Photo 2000

XI | 3 The Gyantse Tsuglagkhang – The main assembly hall of the Pelkhor Chöde monastic enclave

The Tsuglagkhang or Tshogschen of Pelkhor Chöde was constructed and furnished between 1418 and 1425 (► fig. 735). As the main assembly hall of Pelkhor Chöde, the present building replaced and apparently enlarged a smaller temple structure which had been constructed by the founder of the Gyantse dynasty, Palden Zangpo (1318–1370), before 1370. According to an inscription on the eastern wall, when the wall-paintings depicting 125 images of the Bhadrakalpa paradise were sponsored by “the king of the law Pelzang (dPal bzang)” (alias dPal ldan bzang po), parts of that early temple and its wall-paintings from before 1370 were integrated into the new building and so have survived. Probably the inner vestibule of the building complex was the original entrance hall (sGo khang) of the first temple before the latter has been enlarged and completely redesigned on all four sides to its present mandala plan. Text records confirm an early shrine at Pelkhor Chöde which, after 50 years during the heyday of the Gyantse principality, had become too small and so was reconstructed to its present size.³⁹ From 1418/1419 onwards, the large 48-pillar assembly hall (dukhang; 22 m north-south, 28 m east-west) and its main sanctum (gtsang khang) surrounded by a circumambulation corridor (bskor lam) were erected (► fig. 737, nos. 4, 6, 7). The consecration was presided over by the Nenyang abbot Jamyang Rinchen Gyeltsen (’Jam dbyangs Rin

chen rGyal mtshan, 1364–1422) in 1421. In the same year the western Vajradhatu Lhakhang was built and consecrated in 1422, then shortly after, in 1423, the opposite Chögyel Lhakhang (nos. 5, 8). The entire upper floor can be dated to 1424/1425, although some final works, such as roof decorations and the painting of a shrine’s ceiling, were apparently completed only in the 1430s, and included “a ganjira in the Indian style on top of the Eastern chapel” (Neten Lhakhang?) in 1437.⁴⁰

In a short time span of only seven years, one of Tibet’s largest and most extensively decorated ancient temple buildings was constructed and furnished with numerous precious statues and wall-paintings, which all have survived, almost without any later repainting or additions. Thus the actual history of Pelkhor Chöde (including the Kumbum Chörten) as seen in terms of the existing art and architecture, and also as recorded in the ancient texts, extends for not much more than 20 years. Rarely has a comparable treasure house of Tibetan art remained in such authentic condition.

The south-facing Tsuglagkhang, built over a mandala-like plan with a total side-length of c. 53 m, represents a new concept in Tibetan temple architecture (► figs. 736, 737). Although the four symmetrical shrines of the cardinal directions may recall the layout of the late-13th-cen-



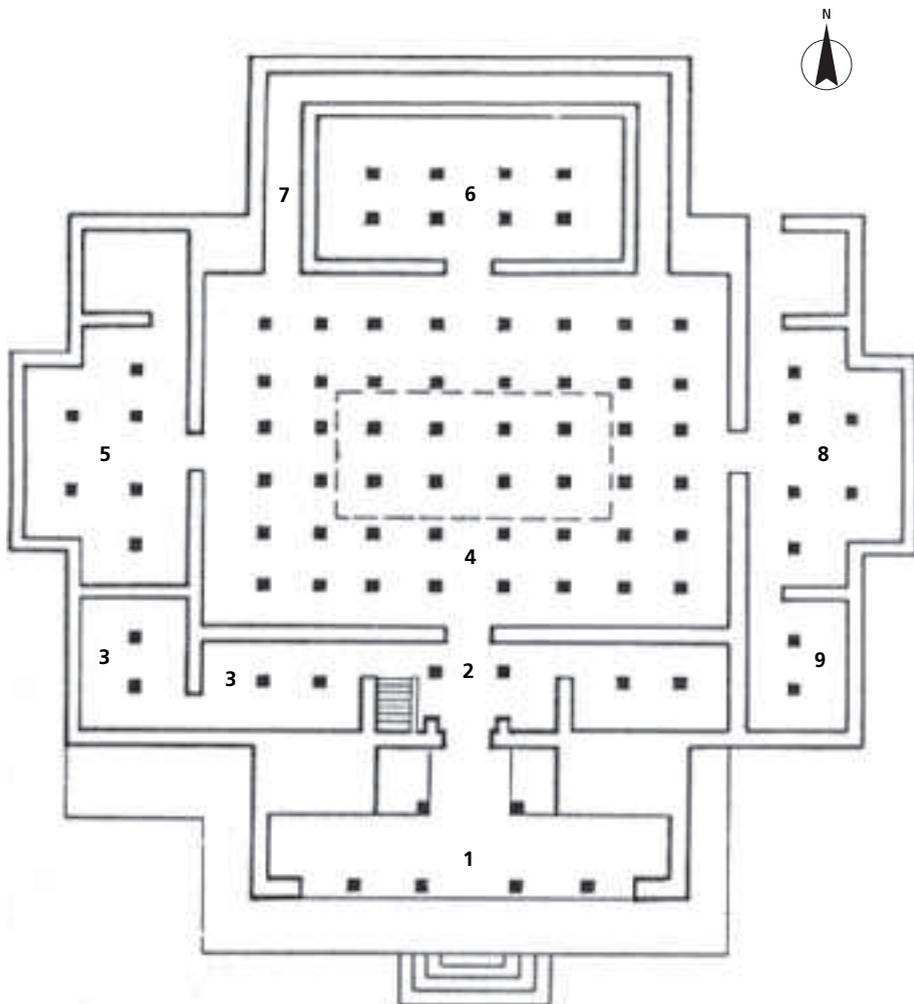
735 | Tsuglagkhang, 1418–1425. The white building behind is the Gelugpa community temple, Rinding Dratsang (see fig. 724, no. 3).



736

736 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde, Tsuglagkhang. View from the Kumbum Chörten. The sanctuary on the second upper floor to the left is the “mandala shrine” Shelye Khang (see fig. 761). Photo 1994

737 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde, Tsuglagkhang. Plan of the ground-floor. After *Tibet und seine Architektur*, Beijing 1992, p. 97



- 1 Entrance portico
- 2 Inner vestibule
- 3 Gönkhang (1418/1419)
- 4 Dukhang (1418–1421). 22 m north-south, 28 m east-west. Probably incorporating earlier structures of an assembly hall built before 1370 (see Pure Land wall-paintings of the Bhadrakalpa (“Auspicious World Period”) cycle in the eastern and southern sections)
- 5 Vajradhatu Mandala Lhakhang with central statue of Vairochana-Sarvavid (1422)
- 6 Tsangkhang (main sanctum 1420/1421) with the principal Mahabodhi Buddha statue
- 7 Korlam (circumambulation corridor 1420–1422)
- 8 Chögyel Lhakhang (Dharma Kings chapel, 1422/1423) with statues of the central Maitreya and of the three Dharma Kings)
- 9 Chapel with the memorial chörten of Rabten Künzang’s mother (after 1423)

737

738 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde, Tsuglagkhang. Wall-painting of the goddess Mahamayuri (?) in the dukhang of the main assembly hall, 1421/1422. Photo 1984

739 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde, Tsuglagkhang. Central sanctuary: crowned Buddha (Jowo?) Shakyamuni (of a Three Ages Buddha triad), 1420/1421, gilt copper, ht. (complete image): c. 8 m. The crown of the present statue was exchanged in the late 20th century. Of special note are the exquisite decorative carvings behind the statue. Photo 1993



738

tury Shalu Serkhang, its structure forms a real three-dimensional mandala, which one enters via the protruding portico structure (sGo khang). The building's north-south orientation, which accords with that of the entire sacred complex, is unusual and may have been determined by topographical factors. Architectural elements like the Chinese dougong bracket system⁴¹ have become more sophisticated and decorative than in Shalu. The wall-paintings in the dukhang dating to 1421/1422 are largely destroyed, or no longer identifiable under thick layers of dirt (► fig. 738). Slightly better are the preserved parts of the contemporaneous paintings (1422) in the circumambulation corridor surrounding the inner sanctum, which feature life-sized figures of Jowo Shakyamuni (inner wall, north), Amitayus, Aksobhya, Vajrapani, Vajrasattva, Vairochana, Amoghasiddhi, and Amitabha. Other panels can be identified according to the historical texts, such as paradise cycles from the Manjusrinamasangiti with images of Maitreya, Avalokiteshvara-Sadaksari, Manjushri, Ratnasambhava, the Green Tara, Achala and Hayagriva as guardians, the Naga kings, and the Sixteen Arhats.⁴²

XI | 3.1 The central sanctuary

Built in 1420/1421, the main sanctum or tsangkhang of the Tsogchen, which still has its original furnishings, represents one of the most beautiful and authentic temple interiors in Tibet (► figs. 737, no. 6). The eight-pillar sanctu-

ary is dedicated to the Buddhas of the Three Ages: three huge gilt-copper statues of a *central Shakyamuni* c. 8 m high (► figs. 739) flanked by two smaller bodhisattva images of Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara, Dipamkara to the left and Maitreya to the right, both seated in the “European” or “auspicious” bhadrasana posture (► fig. 740), and all dating to the foundation period. Along the two sidewalls are 16 over life-size copper images of the Great Bodhisattvas according to the Manjusri-Mulakalpa Tantra.⁴³

As recorded in the historical texts, the principal Buddha statue was made from 1,000 khal of copper (a rather unlikely figure corresponding to 13,000 kg!) and 800 zho of gold (which is about 4.8 kg) were used for the gilding.⁴⁴ Gyantse King Rabten Künzang himself, “who rules according to the law” (inscription in the Kumbum), placed the wooden “life-pole” (sogshing) inside the image. Relics of Shakyamuni and sacred objects belonging to the early Tibetan kings and to the monastery were reportedly also enshrined in its interior, as well as many dharani texts brought by the Bodhgaya abbot Shri Shariputra to Gyantse in 1414. The Indian connection with the principal site of the Buddhist faith also became instrumental for the iconology of this “Gyantse Mahabodhi” Buddha (Byang chub chen po), which was made by the sculptor Kyabpa (sKyabs pa) and his assistants “in the manner and likeness of the image kept in the Mahabodhi temple at Bodhgaya”.⁴⁵ This presumed Vajrasana iconography is further illustrated in Pelkhor Chöde by a Buddha under the Bodhi tree painted at the central section of the inner wall of the korlam, just behind the Shakyamuni statue in the main sanctum, and by the clay Buddha in the Kumbum (bum pa, south). This iconographic identification of the principal image at Gyantse also applies to the crowned Buddha, irrespective of whether a diadem existed in 1421 or has been – quite unlikely – added only later. However, the



739



740

Great Enlightenment Buddha at Gyantse – in *bhumisparśa* and *dhyana* mudra posture – is holding in his left hand the alms bowl, which does not correspond to the iconography of the “Bodhgaya Buddha”. Thus it seems that the idea of the Diamond Throne Buddha has been combined with the image of the Jowo Shakyamuni as it is known from the Lhasa Jokhang.⁴⁶ The facial features and the proportions of the head correspond to those of other monumental images of the 15th century, such as the Maitreya at Tashi Lhünpo (dated 1461). The rich decorative work surrounding the statue and at its throne base (clay and wood), as well as the double lotus (copper), likewise indicate the style of the first half of the 15th century. The lavishly designed Shakyamuni torana with its elaborate arched nimbus and rows of Buddha statuettes, its various ornamental and *lentsa*-script friezes, its finely carved throne architecture adorned with lions, the emblems of the wheel and deer, lotuses and vajras, and the exquisite foliate scrollwork *prabha* around Dipamkara and Maitreya illustrate the high standards reached by the Pelkhor Chöde artists. The largely blackened wall-paintings in this chapel can no longer be properly identified.

Remarkable among the ritual objects and images are an extraordinarily long *purba* (c. 150 cm), a 15th-century Gyantse-style Shakyamuni *thangka* with the Eighteen Arhats, a set of 64 embroidered *thangkas* from the early-20th-century workshops in Hangzhou, and some outstanding *tormas* with beautiful figural decoration, all on display until the early 1990s.



741

XI | 3.2 Vajradhatu Lhakhang – The Five Tathagata Mandala

The central image in the Vajradhatu (*rDo rje dbyings*) Lhakhang (► fig. 737, no. 5) to the left (west) of the *dukhang* is a large gilt-copper statue of the four-armed “all-knowing” **Vairochana** (*Kun rig rNams par snang mdzad*), the embodiment of the absolute Buddha nature (► fig. 741). His four heads are meant to give light to the four directions of the universe. He is the principal divinity of the *Vajradhatu Mandala*, the Diamond World Mandala as described in the *Sarvatathagata-Tattvasangraha Tantra* and illustrated here in a three-dimensional architectural, sculptural and painted form by this sanctuary, which was consecrated by the prince-abbot (*sku zhang*, “maternal uncle”) of Shalu in 1422. Like the ornamental vocabulary of the throne of the central Buddha in the *tsangkhang*, the magnificent large wooden *prabha* has integrated specific design elements used for Tibeto-Chinese gilt-copper images in the early Ming dynasty, predominantly in the Yongle reign period (1403–1424), which must have become known and popular via those regular missions sent from the imperial court to the princes of Gyantse. The other *four tathagatas* of the mandala are represented as painted clay images on the rear wall of the chapel, from left to right: Ratnasamb-

740 | Gyantse, Pelkhor Chöde, Tsuglagkhang. Crowned Buddha Shakyamuni (as in fig. 739). Photo Leslie Weir 1910

741 | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang. Vajradhatu Lhakhang. The central image of the four-headed Sarvavid-Vairochana (the two faces to the right and left are covered by textiles).. Gilt copper and gilt wooden *prabha*, 1422. Photo 1999

742 | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang.
Vajradhatu Lhakhang: Ratnasambhava, painted clay, 1422.
Photo 1984



742

hava (► fig. 742), Akshobhya, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi, each flanked by four minor figures of their manifestations. The iconography and composition of a multi-headed Vairochana and the four other mandala Buddhas surrounded by large filigree-style aureoles was inspired by much earlier statue cycles, such as those at Kyangpu south of Gyantse (11th century, no longer extant).⁴⁷ Through their elegant composition, their fine details, and their expressive human-like physiognomies, the Vajradhatu statues at Gyantse are by among the finest in Tibetan Buddhist art. The *wall-paintings* (of 1422) of the Thousand Buddhas are supposed to depict 249 various manifestations of one of the four tathagatas, in total 996, enclosing another painted by the Cosmic Buddha on each wall. The iconological programme can probably be traced back to the Vajradhatu Lhakhang at Shalu monastery (ground-floor, south), where the central Vairochana is, however, part of the painted panels and the chapel's plan has not yet been conceived as a square mandala.⁴⁸

Two highly significant **text treasures** are preserved in this chapel, both dating to the second quarter of the 15th century. Based on the famous 14th-century Narthang edition, a new Kanjur written in golden letters was completed in Pelkhor Chöde probably in 1431, known as the *Them Pangma Kanjur* (*Them spangs ma bKa' gyur*), which is very likely identical with the volumes presently kept here.⁴⁹ This famous Gyantse Kanjur served as a model for later handwritten and block-printed editions. The other important cultural relic is a huge 296-folio 8,000-verse *Prajnaparamita* manuscript, the “perfection of knowledge”, written in gold-

en letters on indigo-blue paper and dating from about 1442, which was carried in procession during certain religious festivals. This basic scripture of Mahayana philosophy contains the ten “perfections of realization”: liberality (*dana*), good morals (*sila*), patience (*ksanti*), energy (*virya*), meditation (*dhyana*), perfection (*prajna*), skilled means for the salvation of sentient beings (*upaya kausalya*), resoluteness (*pranidhana*), transcendent power (*bala*), and knowledge (*jnana*). These virtues have to be realized as a bodhisattva's ideal in order to guide all suffering human beings on the way to enlightenment. The richly carved wooden manuscript cover (14.5 cm thick!) depicts Prajnaparamita (centre), Shakyamuni (left) and the crowned Vairochana (right), and on the front sides the Five Tathagatas and a Green Tara.

XI | 3.3 Chögyel Lhakhang – The chapel of the Dharma Kings

The opposite Chögyel Lhakhang (*Chos rgyal lha khang*), which was built and consecrated in 1422/1423 as the eastern extension of the Tsuglagkhang (► fig. 737, no. 8), is also known under its present name, Jampa Lhakhang, referring to the central **Maitreya** (Tib.: *Byams pa*) (► fig. 743) image in this sanctuary. This clay statue, however, was not added much later, as suggested by some modern scholars.⁵⁰ Dating from the foundation period are the large wooden *prabha*, the decorative wood carvings of the throne, and the copper double lotus. A 15th-century date is also indicated by the central leaf of the crown and by the head of the statue, whose facial features can be compared with those of other monumental sculptures at Gyantse, such as the two Skakyamuni images in the Kumbum bumpa. Only some minor accessories were replaced or added during a later period, including the lateral crown blades, the golden ornaments covering the upper body, and the lotuses on both sides of the figure. The *Religious History of the Myang Valley Area* (*Myang chos 'byung*) describes the “Chapel of the dharma kings” (*Chos rgyal lHa khang*) as being dedicated to the thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, whose magnificent clay statue marks the central axis of the rear altar side⁵¹ (► fig. 744), flanked by a seated Manjushri to the left – one of the finest clay sculptures in Gyantse (► fig. 747) – and by a wrathful standing Vajrapani to the right. Another 11-headed bodhisattva is painted on the opposite entrance wall, also dating to 1423 (► fig. 745), and there is one in the Gyantse Kumbum (► fig. 746) of around the same date. These three principal bodhisattvas are incarnated by the **three great early Tibetan kings**⁵² seated in front of the southern wall, from left to right: Songtsen Gampo, Trisong Detsen (► fig. 748), and Ralpachen. Like most of the other clay statues in the Tsuglagkhang, they have preserved their original surface colour. Since the royal statues in the Lhasa Jokhang of the 14th century have not survived, and the well-known images in the Potala Palace date to a much later period, the Gyantse triad represents the earliest known mon-



743

umental group of the Tibetan dharma kings (dated 1423). Their presence at Pelkhor Chöde goes beyond mere veneration of Tibet's monarchic history. The three kings were seen in a historical line and continuity as the antecedents of the Gyantse princes, who hundreds of years later associated their political and religious role with those bodhisattva-rulers. The chronological line appears to have been completed by Shakashribhadra, "the great scholar from Kashmir" (Kha che Paṅ chen, 1127–1225), whose lineage was connected with the Gyantse princes and whose teachings were especially appreciated at Pelkhor Chöde. His statue is on the eastern wall to the right of the wrathful Vajrapani. The bare-headed master to the left of Manjushri on the same wall is the great Indian Buddhist teacher Shantaraksita, the founder of Samye, together with Padmasambhava (north, right), in the late 8th century, followed by the contemporaneous Madhyamika scholar Kamalashila (north, centre) and Atisha (► fig. 749), the foremost Buddhist promoter during the Second Diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet (north, left). Thus the origins and development of Buddhism in Tibet are illustrated by the iconographic programme of this shrine to the benefit of its patrons and pilgrims. The *wall-paintings* of the alternating figures of Amitabha, Amitayus, Avalokiteshvara, and Vajrasattva and their acolytes in the Chögyel Lhakhang, which are partly covered by ritual furniture, deserve more attention and – like most of the other chapels in the Tsuglagkhang – a systematic photographic documentation.

While all statues and wall-paintings in the dzong temple and on the ground-floor of the Tsuglagkhang are execut-



744

ed in a more or less Newari and Nepalo-Tibetan style, or in a Shalu-inspired Tibetan tradition, the "portrait" statues of Buddhist masters and kings in the Chögyel Lhakhang recall life-like Chinese lohan (arhat) and monk statues, which became well known and popular in Tibet during the 14th century. Perhaps from the same period, or from around 1400, date the now lost Chinese-style clay images of the Sixteen Elders at Norbu Khyungtse (Nor bu khyung rtse), a former castle about 40 km east of Shigatse, which is described as a second royal palace in Jigme Dragpa's Gyantse chronicle.⁵³ Other sets of similar (in style and iconography!) Chinese arhat images were sent by the Yongle Emperor to Sera monastery after Jamchen Chöje's visit to the Ming court in 1415, or were made after the Chinese fashion for the Lamdré and Neten Lhakhang on the upper floor, or in the Kumbum during the following years (1425, c. 1425–1435). This naturalistic Chinese "*arhat style*" was no doubt an essential influence on portrait-like statues such as those in the Chögyel Lhakhang. The soft and sumptuous curvilinear garment style ("Faltenstil") of the Tibetan kings was obviously inspired by similar patterns of Tibeto-Chinese Yongle reign (1403–1424) "bronzes", many of which had been sent to Tibet in the early 15th century, a fact that clearly documents the close ties between the Gyantse princes and the Chinese court.

A small southern side chapel enshrines a large **memorial stupa** in decorative gilt-copper repoussé work for the deceased mother of the temple's founder Rabten Künzang, which dates to the years after 1423.

743 | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang. Chögyel Lhakhang. The central Maitreya image. Gilt copper and gilt wooden prabha, 1422/1423. Photo 1982

744 | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang. Chögyel Lhakhang. An 11-headed thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, the principal clay statue at the eastern back wall, with original polychromy, 1423. Photo 1982

745 | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang.
Chögyel Lhakhang. An 11-headed
thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara.
Wall-painting at the entrance wall,
1423. Photo 1994





746



747

746 | Gyantse, Kumbum. An 11-headed thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara. Wall-painting, c. 1430. Photo 1994

747 | Gyantse, Kumbum. Bodhisattva Manjushri of the Vajradhatu mandala. Clay with original polychromy, 1423. Photo 1981

748 | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang, Chögyel Lhakhang. King Trisong Detsen, central statue (clay, original polychromy) of the Three Dharma Kings group, 1423. Photo 1985

749 | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang, Chögyel Lhakhang. Atisha (982–1054), clay with original polychromy, 1423. Photo 1985



748



749



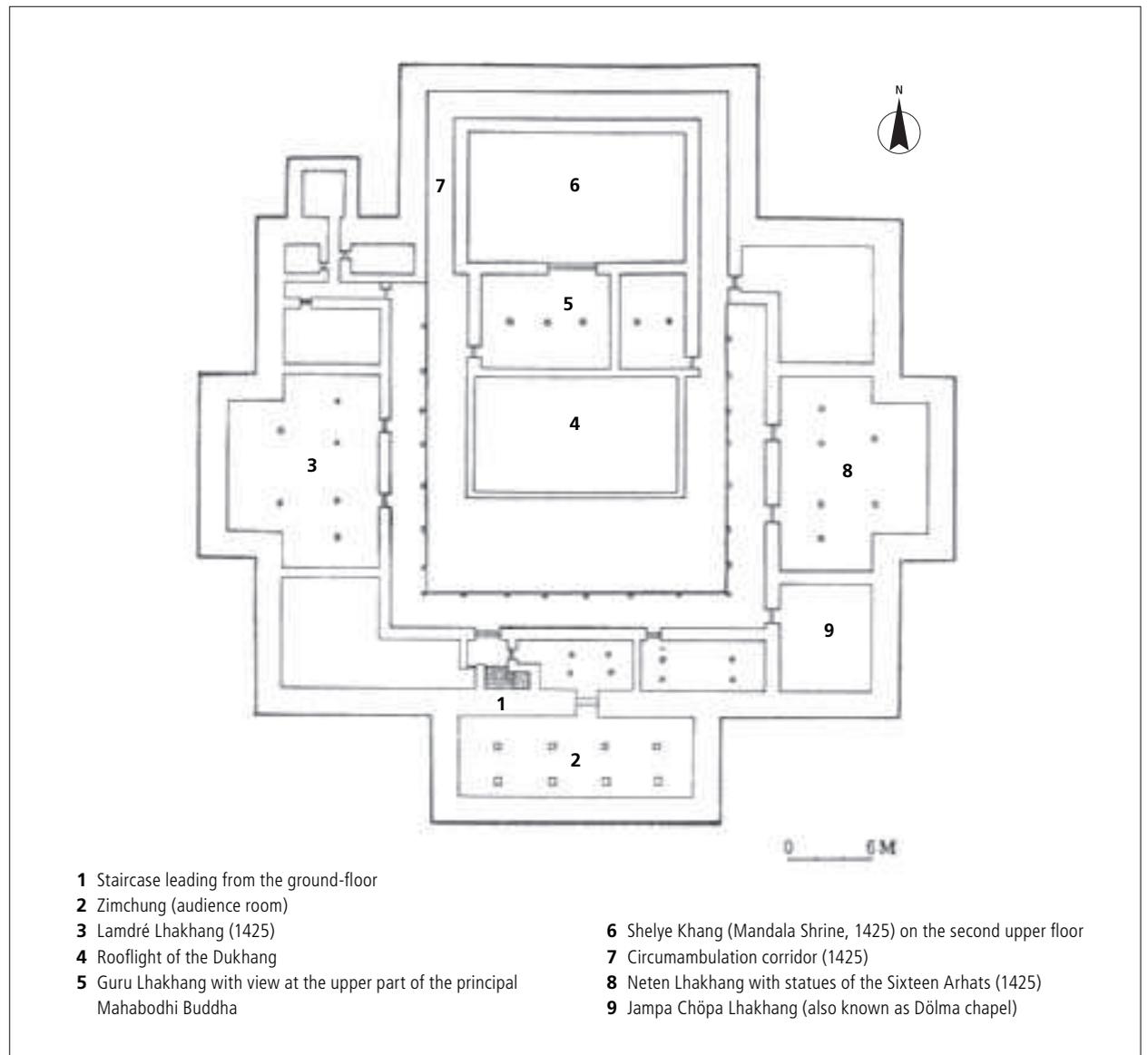
750

750 | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang. Gönkhang. Wall-painting of two siddhas, a Sakya lama and Vajradhara. 1418/1419. Photo 1992

751 | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang. Plan of the upper floor. After *Southern Ethnology and Archaeology*, 4/1994, p. 236

XI | 3.4 Gönkhang – The protector's shrine

A very authentic sanctuary is the Gönkhang on the left, before one enters the dukhang, datable to 1418/1419 when construction work of the present assembly hall began. More than in other protector chapels in Tibet, the archaic and esoteric atmosphere that characterizes these exclusive power-places has been preserved here. And in hardly any other gönkhang in Tibet have survived the original 600-year-old *paintings* (► fig. 750). The iconography is predominantly influenced by the Sakya tradition. Mahakala Gurgyi Gönpö (Gur gyi mGon po), Pelden Lhamo, and the one-eyed Eka-jata are the principal statues. Wall-paintings in the small corridor depict charnel grounds with Surya-candra-Gauri holding Mount Meru with the four continents, Kamadhatvishvari, the black Dükyi Gyelpo (bDud kyi rgyal po), and other pre-Buddhist deities, dvarapalas with lion or bear heads⁵⁴ and, in the main room, several Sakya hierarchs,



751

such as Sonam Tsemo and other. Cham masks, weapons, and stuffed animals complete the mystical character of this sacred energy room, which is supposed to reactivate and permanently “reload” the monastic compound and community with life-power beyond space and time. As Giuseppe Tucci observed: “In this mgon khang one breathes that fearful atmosphere which is peculiar to Lamaist art and which imprints its creation with specific fascination.” Several exquisite painted scrolls of the 18th and 19th centuries were displayed here in the 1980s.

The entire *upper floor* of the assembly hall was built and furnished within a very short time in 1424/1425 (► fig. 751). Four shrines are especially remarkable for their precious and authentic statuary and wall-paintings: *Lamdré Lhakhang* in the west for its sculptural cycle of the Lamdré teaching tradition, its mahasiddha paintings, and its three-dimensional Samvara Mandala, the opposite *Neten Lhakhang* in the east for its statues of the Sixteen Arhats, the neighbouring Maitreya chapel for its many ancient metal images, and the central *Shelye Khang* “mandala shrine” (north) for its complete set of large mandala paintings.

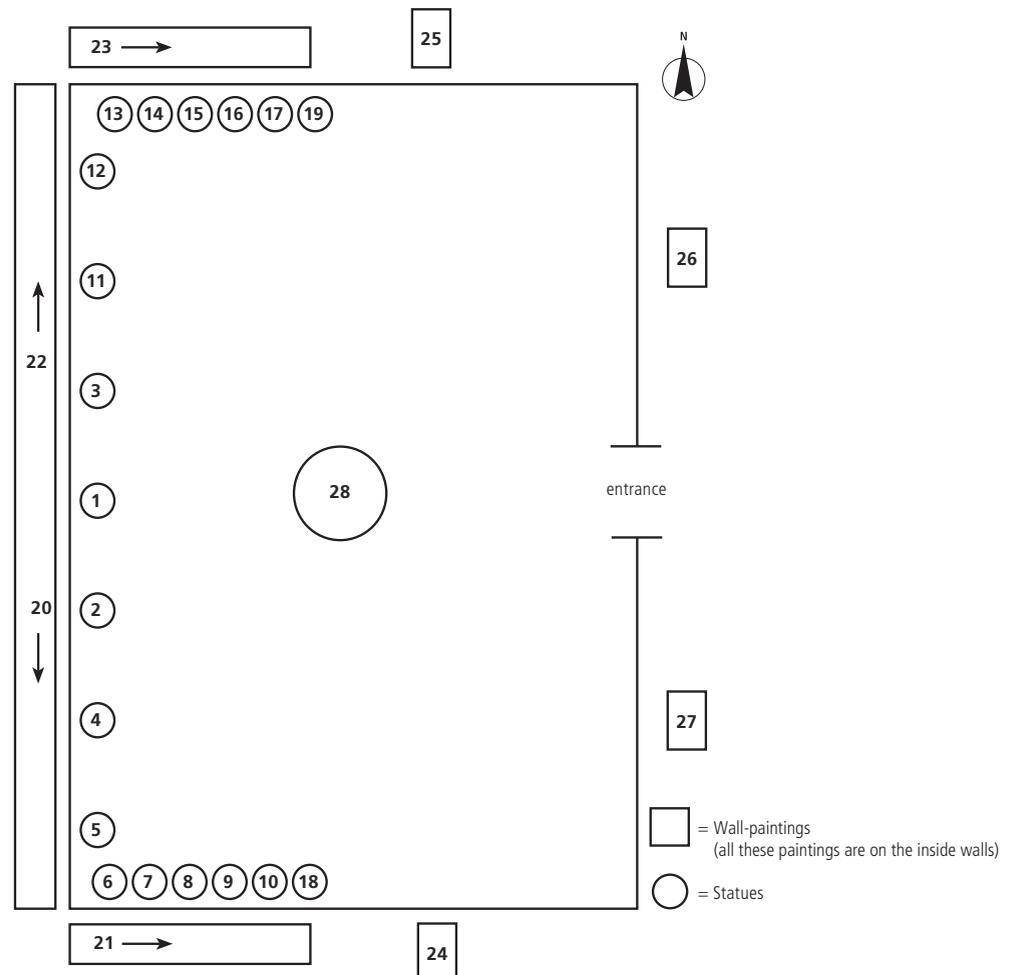
XI | 3.5 Lamdré Lhakhang – Siddhas and Sakya masters

This “Temple of the Path and the Fruit” (Lam ’bras lHa khang) was built by Rabten Künzang’s brother Rabjor Zangpo (Rab ’byor bZang po) in 1425 (► fig. 751a). Its name refers to the principal teachings of the Sakya school, Lamdré (lam ’bras), the “Path [to Liberation] with the Result”, which in view of its fundamental importance for Tibetan Buddhism can be compared with Tsongkhapa’s Lamrim (lam rim) of the emerging Gelugpa. In the words of Giuseppe Tucci: “It is the process of meditation and of purification through which man transforms himself into the eternal overcoming of the world of appearances.”⁵⁵ It is to this very Sakya teaching that the iconological programme of the statues, wall-paintings, and the central ritual mandala object refers directly. The iconographic core of the chapel are the 19 painted **clay images** (ht.: all c. 90–100 cm), in largely original condition, of the Indian and Tibetan Lamdré lineage

751a | Gyantse, Tsuglagkhang.
Plan of Lamdré Lhakhang.

Statues: 1–19, wall-paintings: 20–27 (all 1425)

- 1 Central image of Vajradhara with two assisting bodhisattvas, Vajrasattva (left) and Danyama (right)
- 2 Virupa, like Nairatmya (no. 3), the principal and “primordial” transmitter of the Lamdré teachings
- 3 Nairatmya dakini
- 4 Nagpopa (Skt.: Kanhapa)
- 5 Damarupa
- 6 Avadhutipa
- 7 Gayadhara
- 8 Drogmi Shakya Yeshe (Drogmi Lotsawa)
- 9 Setön Künrig
- 10 Zhangtön Danyö Chöwar
- 11 Sachen Künga Nyingpo
- 12 Sönam Tsemo
- 13 Dragpa Gyeltsen
- 14 Sa skya Pandita
- 15 Pagpa
- 16 Zhang Könchogpa
- 17 Drag phugpa Sönam Pel
- 18 Lama Dampa Sönam Gyeltsen Pel Zangpo, author of the *rGyal rabs gsal ba’i me long* chronicle (1368)
- 19 Lama Künga Tashi Gyeltsen Pel Zangpo, Lamdré master and an important figure in Sino-Tibetan relations of the early Ming dynasty
- 20–23 Wall-paintings of the Eighty-four Mahasiddhas (1425). See fig. 753
- 24 Wall-paintings depicting the life of the great Sakya Lama Pagpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (1235–1280), sitting in the centre opposite the Mongol-Chinese emperor Khubilai Khan (1215–1294, left), whom he initiated into the Tibetan Buddhist rituals (1254). See fig. 755
- 25 Wall-painting of Pagpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (centre, right) and of his Sakya predecessor Sakya Pandita Künga Gyeltsen (1182–1251, left)
- 26 Wall-painting depicting Vaishravana
- 27 Wall-painting depicting the goddess Suryacandra Gauri holding Mount Meru, Pelden Lhamo, and bDud rGyal
- 28 Three-dimensional Samvara Mandala (1425). See figs. 757, 757a, 757b, 758





Michael Henss

The Cultural Monuments of Tibet

Gebundenes Buch mit Schutzumschlag, ca. 880 Seiten, 24,0x30
967 farbige Abbildungen, 240 s/w Abbildungen
ISBN: 978-3-7913-5158-2

Prestel

Erscheinungstermin: Oktober 2014

Dieses reich bebilderte Werk dokumentiert in zwei Bänden die Kunst und Architektur der vergangenen 1.400 Jahre im heutigen Tibet. Es ist das Ergebnis eingehender wissenschaftlicher Forschung sowie zahlreicher Besuche des Autors vor Ort seit 1980.

Architektur, Kunst und Einrichtung aller wichtigen Klöster und Profanbauten werden detailliert beschrieben und interpretiert, unter Berücksichtigung historischer Quellentexte und der gesamten bisherigen Forschung im Westen und in China. Die meisten der über 1.200 Abbildungen, Karten und Grundrisse werden erstmals veröffentlicht, darunter viele historische Fotografien, die kulturelle Stätten zeigen, die der Zerstörung anheimgefallen sind.

Bisher unerreicht in Umfang und Tiefe ist dieses Werk die erste systematische Darstellung des Themas und eine einzigartige Quelle für Fachleute und interessierte Leser gleichermaßen. Zudem überzeugen die beiden Bände durch ihre opulente Ausstattung und einen prachtvollen Schuber mit Goldprägung.