The Temple of Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling and the Legacy of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521): An Iconological Study

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

One of the most influential Buddhist masters in the Himalayan nation of Bhutan is the illustrious treasure-revealer Pema Lingpa (padma gling pa, 1450-1521), a very charismatic and controversial figure. His corpus of religious teachings became a key locus of Bhutanese Buddhism, and his extensive lineages gave rise to a succession of important masters as well as the modern royal family. Pema Lingpa’s revealed teachings were expressed and transmitted in part through the complex iconography of Tantric Buddhist art. This dissertation analyzes the art, particularly the mural iconography, that Pema Lingpa personally conceived, commissioned, and supervised in his home temple in eastern Bhutan, the Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling (gtam zhing lhun grub chos gling). This iconological study of the art and architecture of Tamzhing thus examines how Pema Lingpa artistically expressed his revealed religious visions, gained widespread religious legitimacy, and transmitted them both throughout the lands that became Bhutan roughly two centuries later.

Specifically, we will demonstrate how Pema Lingpa used the iconographic imagery in Tamzhing to express his own unique religious experiences as well as his close affiliation with prestigious Vajrayāna Buddhist traditions in nearby Tibet. Much of Tantric Buddhist
ritual and meditative practice involves sequences of visualizations of Buddhist ‘deities’ who represent enlightened qualities or states of mind; but these can differ considerably from tradition to tradition. By infusing Tamzhing with both commonly-known iconographic programs and otherwise unattested forms originating in his treasure revelations, Pema Lingpa could both preserve the long-standing practices and imagery of the Nyingma Buddhist tradition to which he belongs, as well as assert his own place within it. Following Pema Lingpa’s own, as of yet untranslated, autobiography as our guide, the dissertation analyzes in detail how the specific layout of the dozens of tantric deities within the temple not only serve as a step-by-step guide to awakening, but also strategically incorporate Pema Lingpa’s own revealed teachings at a very high level within the pre-existing Nyingma system—effectively claiming, and eventually receiving, his place within the tradition. Due to their perceived effectiveness, Pema Lingpa’s distinctive practices would eventually be incorporated into official state rituals performed throughout the country, transmitting his tradition far beyond the borders the master himself established in the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

In sum, this dissertation is an iconological study of Pema Lingpa’s mural program, analyzing the political and socio-cultural milieu behind the site’s conception, construction, and ritual use, and examining how Pema Lingpa’s followers would understand and transmit his teachings and their imagery behind his own time and place. It further explores Tamzhing as a mark of Pema Lingpa’s progressive development as a Buddhist master, and as a repository for the sources of his authority. This analysis of the
iconography of Tamzhing incorporates history, text, art and architecture to provide a fuller picture of a man and his temple, and of the interactions between the dynamics of Pema Lingpa’s terma treasure tradition, its innovative iconography, and its significance in pre-unification era Bhutan.
Dedication

For Aileen, Jim, Brandon, Patti and Deb, with love.
Acknowledgments

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Few words can encapsulate the appreciation I have for the late E. Gene Smith, who shared with me a number of sources and suggestions for my work in Bhutan. His presence is sorely missed, though his myriad contributions will continue to fuel the field for years to come. I also appreciate the insights of Himalayan Art Resources Director Jeff Watt, with whom provocative discussions were shared on the Tibetan plateau and the streets of Chelsea alike. While on fellowship at the Rubin Museum of Art, fellow staff members not only enabled my access to Bhutanese works but brought forth countless enjoyable conversations about the nuances of Himalayan art, especially Dr. Karl Debreczeny, Dr. Martin Brauen and Dudu Etzion. Dorji Penjore of the Centre for Bhutan Studies also provided significant food for thought along with his trademark incisiveness. My thanks are also extended to Dr. Leonard van der Kuijp for his thoughtful suggestions in the early phases of the project. Terese Tse Bartholomew, Curator Emeritus of the
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Vita

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As one of the most important figures in Bhutanese Buddhism, Pema Lingpa (pad+ma gling pa, 1450-1521; Figure 1)\(^1\) is credited with revolutionizing Buddhist practice through his doctrinal innovations and spiritual revelations. Although his early adult years were spent working as a blacksmith, a career considered ‘unclean,’ an unexpected prophecy inexorably altered the rest of his life. This prophecy began the process that eventually revealed Pema Lingpa to be one of five prophesied to become key masters of the ancient Nyingma tradition by Guru Rinpoche (gu ru rin po che; Skt., Padmasambhava), the 8\(^{th}\) century Indian master credited with bringing Buddhism into the greater Himalayan region.

During the remaining forty years of his life, Pema Lingpa would reveal more than thirty spiritual ‘treasures,’ known as terma (gter ma). These terma provided the basis for unique approaches to Buddhist practice, present new ritual dances and songs, and impart new teachings and initiations to Buddhist practitioners. Further, Pema Lingpa’s distinctive

\(^1\) Tibetan and Dzongkha words are rendered phonetically, followed by a parenthetical transliteration according to the Extended Wylie Transliteration Scheme (EWTS) as systematized by The Tibetan and Himalayan Library (THL) and followed by its Sanskrit equivalent, when applicable (http://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/#essay=thl/ewts). A glossary of terms is found in Appendix G.
practices would, thanks to their perceived effectiveness, eventually be incorporated into official state rituals performed throughout the country, bringing the Pema Lingpa tradition far beyond the regional borders that the master himself established in the late 15th century.

Figure 1: Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), ground floor main shrine antechamber, Tamzhing
Yet despite this importance and the high regard with which he is held in Bhutan, to date Pema Lingpa has often been a controversial figure. Studies have categorized Pema Lingpa as everything from a saint acting with “divine purpose”\(^2\) to a “fabricator”\(^3\) on a “Napoleonic quest”\(^4\) to secure his place in history at any cost. This dissertation does not seek to explore the validity of Pema Lingpa or the treasure-revealing tradition to which he belonged. Rather, the primary objective of this study is to place Pema Lingpa as one of the pivotal actors in Bhutanese Buddhism, whose doctrinal innovations and spiritual revelations were codified and systematized in the painted and sculpted forms that adorn his home temple in central Bhutan, and how that visual imagery communicates the key tenets of the tradition to the initiated viewer. While scholarship on Pema Lingpa has thus far emphasized textual translation, this study will provide an art historical analysis of the art and architecture associated with his hagiography at the main seat of Pema Lingpa, Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling Lhakhang (gtam zhing lhun grub chos gling lha khang; Figure 2).

This research will explore how Pema Lingpa employed visual culture, using the paintings and sculptures within Tamzhing as documents of the spiritual and political relationships that dominated central Bhutan in the late 15\(^{th}\)-early 16\(^{th}\) century, linking together significant local and regional individuals alongside depictions of highly advanced Buddhist practices. As Bhutanese Buddhist art remains comparatively under-explored,

\(^3\) Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35.
\(^4\) Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35.
Pema Lingpa will ideally offer a point of contact from which scholarship can begin to approach this body of material on its own terms, expressed through the otherwise unattested iconographic forms, particular lineages and distinctive practices unique to Pema Lingpa’s tradition, all openly displayed at Tamzhing.

Figure 2: Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling Temple, view from south, Bumthang, Bhutan

While to date there has been some scholarship on the murals of Tamzhing, this study diverges in that it provides a systematic analysis of the iconographic program based on Pema Lingpa’s own account of the images as preserved in his autobiography. Pema Lingpa’s autobiography provides evidence of the original form of the temple and the

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5 Aris, in “gTam-zhing According to Its Founder,” provided translations of some Tamzhing-related portions of the autobiography; however, this work moves a step beyond that contribution to analyze the meanings of the murals and the significance of their placement for the initiated viewer.
compositions within its walls, and provides a primary source for this research, which elucidates the ways in which he both adhered to and departed from mainstream Buddhist practice. Unlike many other Himalayan temples, where the narrative imagery is dominated by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, Pema Lingpa instead emphasizes modalities and practices originating in the Vajrayāna (rdo rje theg pa), or Tantric, tradition. His choices for the iconographic program at Tamzhing both use unique images drawn from his tradition as well as employ familiar themes that serve to situate him within the larger Vajrayāna tradition. Pema Lingpa chose to illustrate the walls of his temple in part with imagery from his doctrinal innovations, revealing practices that stem from his own teachings, thereby forefronting his most significant contributions to Himalayan Buddhism. His inclusion of other important masters in the program revealed not only his understanding of Buddhist praxis, but also for the lineage transmissions that provide the doctrines with their legitimacy. As had been the case throughout Buddhist history, followers of different traditions sought out the initiations and empowerments available in other Buddhist schools, setting a precedent for cross-fertilization that would eventually reach its culmination in the late 19th century. In his mural program at Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa provides visual and textual testimony that such cross-traditional impulses were openly sought out and perpetuated; in his case, his ties with the Karmapa, the leader of the Karma Kagyu (kar+ma bka’ brgyud) tradition. This study will explore the mechanisms of their interactions, and how they came to play a prominent role in the mural program of Tamzhing.
In Pema Lingpa’s time, Tamzhing provided him a home temple from which to provide teachings, grant empowerments and welcome students. By the time he oversaw the temple’s creation, Pema Lingpa had been consolidating a variety of doctrinal treasures for nearly three decades, and in order to sanctify the site, he imbued the murals and sculptures with the sacred substances he had gathered from around the region, inserting small scrolls into the plaster behind the murals, and placing precious substances and other relics into the sculptures. These actions, accounted for in the autobiography, provide additional evidence of Pema Lingpa’s intention to make the environment of Tamzhing as efficacious as possible and the key role that its visual program played in his goal. This research uses Pema Lingpa’s own account of the construction and consecration of Tamzhing to decode the meaning of the monument and provides an in-depth analysis of how this meaning is communicated through its paintings and sculptures.

Finally, this work analyzes how the artistic program of Tamzhing offers initiates a guide to their practice. It furnishes depictions of the ritually purified practitioner, a form necessary to undertake advanced visualizations, as well illustrating the heaven realms of a variety of deities, all of which assist the adherent in making particular realizations. Surrounding the space are wrathful protective figures, which function to ensure the meditator’s environment is protected from any obstacles that could arise in their practice. Also included are a series of teachers, or gurus, who are the real conduits for initiations and empowerments, and therefore are the guides toward enlightenment. This study also explores the program at Tamzhing from this, individual-oriented perspective, with special
attention paid to how ritual movement within the space impacts the viewer’s understanding of it.

In these ways—presenting Pema Lingpa as a doctrinal innovator, as an upholder of Vajrayāna tradition, and as a conduit for advanced practice—the visual program of Tamzhing provides a singularly significant snapshot of how a master conceived of himself and of sacred space. As will be shown in the course of this study, though much has been written about Pema Lingpa, it is through the concrete, physical space of Tamzhing that provides evidence of what Pema Lingpa considered as his role, his contributions and his legacy, as well as his place in the larger Nyingma Buddhist tradition.

Methodology

Pema Lingpa’s autobiography provides a contemporary account of a Buddhist master building one of the key temples of his tradition; in its detail, the text also delivers a remarkably individualized framework through which an iconographic study can take place. By focusing on the temple in the context of this master’s own personal perspective, it is possible to better situate him in his time and place and understand how he remained solidly within tradition while also identifying his unique contributions. Thus, this work will focus on the temple within the chronology presented within Pema Lingpa’s
autobiography, and how the monument functioned within the context of his life and activities, as well as what messages are revealed to its visitors.

This dissertation is primarily based on field research in Bhutan, conducted over the course of five visits to Tamzhing between 2007 and 2011 (See Appendix A for map). These stays included a detailed study of the layout and iconography of Tamzhing, including extensive photographic documentation of the temple. Additional phases of research and comparative study took place at other Pema Lingpa-related sites in the area, including Kunzangdrak (kun bzang brag), Kenchogsum (mkhan mchog gsum), Mebartsho (me ‘bar mtsho), Nyimalung (nyi ma rlung), Sumdrang (gsum ‘phrang) and Tharpaling (thar pa gling). A series of interviews were conducted with the current head of Tamzhing, Lam Tsetan, and with Drungchen Pema Kuenchab, both of whom provided vital information regarding the temple’s significance in modern times, recent phases of patronage, and insight concerning the older material contained within its walls. Pema Kuenchab also shared abundant assistance regarding the history and present state of the annual festival, the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa. The bulk of this study is an examination of the extant murals and sculptures at Tamzhing, the contents of which were assessed by

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6 Photography of Tamzhing was undertaken with the kind permission of Dasho Dorjee Tshering, Director General, and Dasho Tshewang Gyalpo, Chief Cultural Properties Officer, Department of Culture, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, as part of the Tamzhing Lhakhang Conservation Project, with which I was affiliated beginning in late 2010. However, the project would not have been possible without the kind permission of Lam Tsetan, head of Tamzhing Monastery.

7 These interviews took place between 2009 and 2011, and were graciously facilitated by Ms. Ugyen Tshomo of the National Museum of Bhutan and Mr. Karma Rigzin of the Institute of Language and Culture Studies.

8 A short analysis of the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa can be found in Appendix F, which is an expanded version of research on the festival presented at the 2012 Association for Asian Studies annual conference in Toronto, Canada.
comparative stylistic analysis, detailed iconographic investigation, and inscriptions, when present. In addition, the placement of each composition is analyzed, with special attention paid to how their content and comparative positions emphasize their inter-relationships, taking into account religious hierarchy, Buddhist praxis, and chronology. The murals of the assembly hall, which were originally executed under Pema Lingpa’s direction between 1503 and 1505, provided a visual display of the sources, both from the human realm and beyond, upon which Pema Lingpa based his own authority. The current study relies upon the autobiography of Pema Lingpa, which provides a contemporary account of the phasic construction and consecration of the temple, as well as the creation of the paintings and sculptures that imbue the building with its ritual power and efficacy. By elucidating the significance of and motivations for the placement of each composition, this study seeks to provide a rationale that underlays Pema Lingpa’s deliberate choices, as well as to delineate those deities that are unique to Pema Lingpa’s Buddhist ritual practices. By juxtaposing this analysis with careful investigation of the murals chosen for the site, this research will trace the ways in which the visual program communicates the key tenets of Nyingma Buddhist practice in the Pema Lingpa tradition, while concurrently presenting a mechanism by which Pema Lingpa and his legacy were promulgated and legitimized.

State of Scholarship

Primary Sources
The modern temple complex, along with the autobiographical account of its inception, construction and consecration, provide the main sources for this study. Pema Lingpa’s autobiography details the earliest phases of the temple as it took shape between 1501 and 1505, and constitutes portions of one volume of Pema Lingpa’s twenty-two volume collected works.\(^9\) As Pema Lingpa is one of the most important figures in Bhutanese history, over the centuries multiple editions and redactions of his life story have been produced. Karma Phuntsho has compiled and edited these various editions into the forthcoming Dzongkha language *Biography of Pema Lingpa*, a source that was particularly useful for the present study.\(^10\) The Dzongkha text *The Clear Mirror of the Nyö Clan in Bhutan* (‘brug gi smyos rabs yang gsal me long) by Dasho Lam Sangngag provided a concise and careful account of Pema Lingpa and the Sungtrul (gsung sprul, or Speech Incarnation) lineage that descended from the master up to the present day.\(^11\)

Additional use is made of an unpublished UNESCO report on the architectural phases of Tamzhing, prepared by Pierre Pichard based on field visits in 2004.\(^12\) Interviews with the leaders of Tamzhing monastery, Lam Tsetan and Drungchen Pema Kuenchab, provided valuable information on Tamzhing’s modern history, oral traditions regarding the site, and insight to the rituals and dances performed there today.


\(^10\) Phuntsho, *gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar*, forthcoming. Deepest thanks to Dr. Karma Phuntsho for sharing an advance copy of his remarkable work.

\(^11\) blam gsang sngags, ‘brug gi smyos rabs yang gsal me long, 1:190–460.

\(^12\) Pichard, Pierre, “UNESCO Mission to Tamshing Monastery, Bhutan: 02-12 July 2004.” Many thanks to Dr. Françoise Pommaret for kindly providing a copy of this report.
As the present study spans the fields of art history, Buddhist studies and Tibetan studies, a variety of works have contributed to the current understanding of Bhutanese art, Pema Lingpa as a person, terma revelation as a phenomena, and Tamzhing as a significant site. Regarding Pema Lingpa as an individual, while he is mentioned in almost every survey of Bhutan, only a few monographs are devoted to him. In 1979, Blanche Olschak dedicated one section of her book *Ancient Bhutan: A Study on Early Buddhism in the Himalayas* to Pema Lingpa, describing a number of his sacred sites in Bumthang. Her presentation of Pema Lingpa (transliterated by Olschak as “Pämalingpa”) is largely a recounting of oral traditions associated with the terton and short descriptions of those places associated with him, rather than a scholarly study of the chapter’s subject. However, Olschak does provide a number of remarkable images from inside the Tamzhing guardian deity shrine, or *gonkhang* (mgon khang). In Bhutan, the gonkhang is almost invariably off-limits to women, yet Olschak manages to present six images taken from inside the shrine, individually credited to either herself or Ursula Markus-Gansser. This access was, and continues to be, quite unusual, and provides women an otherwise unpublished glimpse into the Tamzhing gonkhang.

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13 A number of articles discuss his progeny and later incarnations of Pema Lingpa, for example, Lham Dorji, “Religious Life and History of the Emanated Heart-Son Thukse Dawa Gyeltshen” in *Written Treasures of Bhutan*, 143-172.
15 Olschak’s work is a product of its time, and is reflective of the nascent field that then constituted Himalayan Studies. Subsections include “Künzangda and the Legend of the Fairy of Wisdom,” “The Story of the Heavenly Flowers,” and “The Mystic Keys to the Future.” (103-109)
16 These images appear on pages 83, 104, 105, and 107.
In 1979 Michael Aris published *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, a groundbreaking book based on his doctoral dissertation. This monumentally important work introduced a large readership to the history of Bhutan extending from the late Tibetan imperial period (ca. 6th-8th centuries CE) and to the establishment of the monarchy in 1907. While Aris would explore Pema Lingpa in far greater depth in a later work, in *Bhutan*, he incorporates Pema Lingpa throughout the text, which is reflective of the ubiquity with which Pema Lingpa is encountered in Bhutanese history and tradition. Aris celebrates the survival of the terton’s autobiography, yet seems to clearly doubt his authenticity as an individual: “Although [Pema Lingpa] is certainly the first among the very few figures in Bhutanese history to come to life in the surviving literature, the whole question of his [terma] discoveries remains something of an enigma. If the view is taken that the saint indulged in a long series of elaborate and cynical hoaxes, sustained with great effort over many decades, this seems to run against the overall picture of his character conveyed in the texts.”\(^{17}\) Later, Aris would present a far more negative perception of Pema Lingpa, and of the terma revelations tradition as a whole, although he recognized that in the Nyingma tradition, adherents considered these later ‘additions’ to the doctrine as valid since at least the 10th century.\(^{18}\)

This question of the legitimacy of the terma tradition must seems to have had a lasting impact on Aris, who provided one of the full-length studies on Pema Lingpa in the English language when he published the controversial *Hidden Treasures and Secret* …

\(^{17}\) Aris, *Bhutan*, 62.
\(^{18}\) Aris, *Bhutan*, 62.
Lives: A Study of Pema Lingpa (1450-1521) and the Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706) in 1989. His assessment of the terma tradition, and to those who claim to reveal them, is made clear in his Introduction:

However, while seeking to disclose the human motivation in the lives of these saints I am conscious of having had to go to the other extreme by using some words that have pejorative connotations in any language: “charlatan”, “rogue”, “impersonator” and the like. No amount of verbal or mental wriggling can help one to escape the fact that the people to whom these descriptions apply sought to disguise their true nature in the interests of self-advancement.¹⁹

With this approach, it would be challenging to view Hidden Treasures as an objective study of the terma phenomenon, and had the author not been so well versed in Tibetan language texts, it might be feasible to suggest it was unfamiliarity with the language of the original sources that he found so alienating. Aris does mention the difficulties that can be encountered in Himalayan texts²⁰ devoted to the lives and actions of significant persons, noting, “Often the language of Tibetan religious texts, particularly some types of hagiography, are so convoluted and abstruse as to elude me completely. At other times I think one can hear truly human voices speaking directly across the barriers of time and culture, and it is upon those that I have tended to focus.”²¹

The frequent use of lengthy epithets and often-fantastical accounts of events in these types of texts can foster a sense of incredulity in the reader; after all, how frequently in the modern world has one witnessed the birth of an important spiritual master and the

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¹⁹ Aris, Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives, 5.
²⁰ Bhutanese classical texts and religious writings are in Choekey (chos skad), or ‘language of the [Buddhist] Dharma,’ which is in essence Classical Tibetan.
²¹ Aris, Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives, 4
wide variety of celestial and terrestrial phenomena that accompany it? However, it is commonly known that this type of language is ubiquitous in Himalayan hagiography, and this phenomenon is not limited to descriptions of Pema Lingpa’s birth. Yet the autobiography of Pema Lingpa employs comparatively simple and uncomplicated language, even when the scenes described tend toward phenomena that are less-frequently encountered. The relatively straightforward syntax may be due to Pema Lingpa’s lack of formal education and possible illiteracy—explored further in Chapter Two—or perhaps the result of Pema Lingpa employing the everyday language of his time, rather than a highly sophisticated literary style. Nonetheless, Aris provides his own assessment regarding the autobiography’s tone, declaring, “Some of his contemporaries would certainly have looked on the language [Pema Lingpa] used as a sort of semi-barbarous dog-Latin.” Beyond the affront that Aris’ language brought to some, the work did offer a provocative starting point from which other scholars could engage in a debate about the relevance and legitimacy of the terma tradition. A larger

For example, Pema Lingpa’s birth is described as follows: “At the time of his birth, three suns shone in the sky, flowers fell like rain, and rainbows clustered all around. For a long time after the birth, both mother and son were surrounded by rainbows day and night. Many heroes and dakinis offered ablation water and danced, sang, and sported with him, and other unimaginable, marvelous sights such as these manifested as well.” Translation by Sarah Harding, The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa, 40.

As Aris points out, Pema Lingpa’s autobiography frequently utilizes the honorific to refer to its subject. I would like to posit that this may not entirely be Pema Lingpa’s doing, but rather may reflect those years when Pema Lingpa dictated his autobiography to a scribe. The scribe would automatically—and understandably—use honorific form(s) of language when referencing the life and deeds of Pema Lingpa, who by this time was an important and renowned Buddhist master.

See Aris, Hidden Treasures, 20-21

Quite understandably, given the importance of Pema Lingpa in the historical narrative of Bhutan and his significance to the Nyingma Buddhist tradition, the tone and content of Aris’ book elicited a strong response. This was particularly true in Bhutan, where Aris had been a tutor to the royal family for six years, 1967-1972, a position that had brought him unprecedented access in the country.
number of terma-focused studies began to appear,\textsuperscript{26} and, while reviews of Aris’ work tended to respond at least in part to the tome’s overall tone, the book seems to have acted as a catalyst for well-researched and useful studies of the treasure-revealing phenomena.\textsuperscript{27}

The study at hand builds upon Aris’ valuable contributions\textsuperscript{28} while providing additional information, analysis and new interpretations of Pema Lingpa and his temple of Tamzhing. In both Aris’ article on Tamzhing and in Hidden Treasures, the reader might have been led astray through Aris’ misunderstandings of Buddhist practice and

\textsuperscript{26} Though some studies predated Aris’ Hidden Treasures, a number of significant terma-centered works emerged subsequent to its 1988 publication that sought to better place the tradition within its ritual, religious, social and political contexts. These include, but are not limited to: Tulku Thondup’s “The Terma Tradition of the Nyingmapa School” (1990); Davidson and Goodman’s edited volume Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation (1992); Cabezón and Jackson’s Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre; “Vast as the Sky: The Terma Tradition in Modern Tibet” by Hanna (1994); Gyatso’s “The Logic of Legitimation in the Tibetan Treasure Tradition,” (1993) and “Drawn from the Tibetan Treasury: The gTer ma Literature” (1996); Lopen Pema Tshewang’s The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan (1995); and more recent works, including Martin’s Unearthing Bon Treasures (2001); Doctor, Tibetan Treasure Literature: Revelation, Tradition and Accomplishment in Visionary Buddhism (2005).

\textsuperscript{27} Richard Sherburne was generally accepting of Aris’ perspective on the terma tradition in his brief review of Hidden Treasures, noting that “Aris’ psychologico-cultural study of the personalities seems valid enough for me,” (205) before continuing to say “Whether Aris finds his own premise entirely acceptable is not altogether evident…” (205-06). In his review, Robert Thurman takes on a harsher tone towards Hidden Treasures, saying it “suffers from a fundamental confusion of approach” (376) and not only lacks “any factual evidence to refute” Pema Lingpa’s autobiography, but that the work is “not solidly grounded either in Tibetan Buddhist thought or in religious studies’ methodology” (375). Thurman’s review continued, stating that Aris’ intent to disprove the terma tradition “—in the absence of any new data—is a waste of time. And when pursued so aggressively, using language sharply offensive to the Bhutanese and Tibetan believer, it is also deplorable” (377).

\textsuperscript{28} For example, Aris presents the paintings according to the biography: “Three passages in the autobiography describe the whole programme of painting in chronological order. In the translation which follows, the main sequence of numbers corresponds to the numbering of panels given in figure 1” (“gTam-zhing,”35). Aris included the numbering systems proffered by both Lauf and Pommaret/Imaeda as well to help readers correlate the different reckonings.
occasional misreading of source material. In more than one instance, his strong ‘anti-Pema Lingpa’ viewpoint distracts from the point at hand, and seems to have caused Aris to overlook key features of both temple and text that reveal that Pema Lingpa was not necessarily the megalomaniacal, impulsive trickster he imagined.
Figure 3: Plan of ground floor, showing the sūtra (assembly) hall (mdo khyams), main shrine (btsan khang) and circumambulation path (bskor lam) of Tamzhing temple. From Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 34.
The mural numbered ‘1,’ located immediately west (left) of the end of the circumambulation path, was the first composition described in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography, which details the creation of the murals, beginning: “Then on the 9th day of the Dragon (3rd) Month in the Year of the Pig (1503), the day when the Punarvasu star and the Jupiter planet were in the ascendant, the iconometric lines (thig) were laid out on the left-hand side of the courtyard (mdo-khyams) and so the [artist Tsepa Tshering] began the drawings (ri-mo)…” before providing a list of the panels that constitute the iconographic program. In the course of the description, the autobiography clearly uses the terms ‘left (g.yon)’ and ‘right (g.yas)’ five additional times. For Aris, who visited the site at least once, in 1970, and presumably moved through it in the ritual, clockwise manner, the directional terms used by Pema Lingpa were backwards, leading Aris to believe Pema Lingpa was incapable of properly describing his own temple, and felt that the disconnect between the textual description and his experienced reality was a reflection of Pema Lingpa’s “carelessness”:

Several observations can be made and conclusions drawn from a reading of the above passages. First, a comparison of Padma-gling-pa’s own indications of where each panel is to be found with their actual locations as seen in figure 1 shows that he is more often wrong than right. What, it may be asked, does this carelessness say about the man himself? In truth, it says little about Pema Lingpa, whose use of directional terms is perfectly correct. Rather, the passage reveals Aris’ lack of understanding of Buddhist ritual space. As is encountered throughout in the Himalayas, the temple is described from the

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29 Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 36.
30 Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 37.
perspective of one standing in the main shrine and looking out; in other words, from the point of view of the main image. Had Aris realized this, he would have likely also recognized that if one were in the main shrine, facing the door, the “left-hand side of the courtyard” is the left being referenced by Pema Lingpa. This study intends to approach its subject with the aim not of proving or disproving an individual or his tradition, but rather to focus on how that person was able to communicate his legacy through his art, his words and his home temple. During the course of this work, Aris’ contributions and other previously produced scholarship will be re-evaluated and, where necessary, clarified.

Aris’ treatment of Pema Lingpa drew immediate attention both within and outside Bhutan. While a number of reviewers took note of Aris’ tone, Bhutanese scholar Lopen Padma Tshewang authored a full text on the matter: the Dzongkha language Annals of Pema Lingpa in Plain Language (pad gling lo rgyus drang gtam). This direct response to Aris’ work was followed by his substantive contribution to an English language work entitled The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan, which sought to further systematically address issues raised by Aris in Hidden Treasures. In all, four authors contributed to The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan, which includes an abbreviated biographical account of Pema Lingpa and discussions on multiple aspects of the terma tradition. Chris Butters wrote on the history of terma and also provided prescient essays on “The Issue of Proof in Buddhism” and “Terma and Its Critics, while Sigmund Sætreng presented a short

31 Interestingly, Aris’ diagram provides a birds-eye perspective of the shrine, yet the relationship was still overlooked.
commentary entitled “Mother Earth’s Treasures and Their Revealers: An
Ecophilosophical Perspective.” These scholars provide a useful balance and provide a
number of alternative interpretive models for the terma phenomenon, as well as
suggestions for how those outside the tradition can approach it.

While the works presented thus far emphasize the spiritual function and historical role of
Pema Lingpa, *The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa* presents translations from a
biography of Pema Lingpa authored by one of his later incarnations, the Eighth Peling
Sungtrul Kunzang Tenpa’i Nyima, translated by Sarah Harding.32 The selected works
provide a short account of Pema Lingpa’s previous embodiments, key life events and a
series of dialogues between various female disciples and Guru Rinpoche. While the latter
exchanges provide useful perspectives on the comparative status of women and the
societal limitations on their aspirations and goals of practice, for the purposes of this
study, the biographical account was the most useful aspect of Harding’s work. This later
biography provides useful comparative material when juxtaposed with the autobiography
initially authored—and later dictated—by Pema Lingpa. Also in Harding’s text are two
useful appendices; one authored by Harding providing a list of Pema Lingpa’s terma,
drawn from the autobiography, and a second compiled by John Ardussi that gives the
lists of successive incarnations of Pema Lingpa.33 The book’s introduction, authored by

32 Eighth Peling Sungtrul Kunzang Tenpa’i Nyima, *pad gling ’khrungs rabs kyi rtogs brjod nyung
gsal dad pa’i me tog* in *Pad gling gter chos*, vol. 14: 511-600.
33 *The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa*, 137-141.
Holly Gayley, provides an excellent synopsis of Pema Lingpa’s life, major teachings, his impact in the region and his later legacy.\textsuperscript{34}

Gayley also authored the particularly useful “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination of Padma Gling pa’s [Pema Lingpa’s] Treasures,” originally presented during the 2003 International Association of Tibetan Studies conference held at Oxford.\textsuperscript{35} In it, Gayley employs Pema Lingpa’s autobiography to explore its relationship to 15\textsuperscript{th}-16\textsuperscript{th} century society and history, with special attention to the ways in which the terton was able to cultivate and parlay his local renown into regional notoriety. She points out that as Pema Lingpa was spreading his legacy outward from his hometown ‘base’ of Bumthang by revealing treasures that were successively farther from home, he was concurrently undertaking a “centripetal process of consolidation” during these large-scale gatherings.\textsuperscript{36}

Specifically, Gayley notes, this process “involved the consolidation of treasures retrieved from far-ranging places at a single site, [Tamzhing], the temple constructed by [Pema Lingpa] in the [Chokhor] Valley.”\textsuperscript{37} Though this will be elaborated upon in Chapters Two and Four, the concept of Tamzhing as a place of consolidation is claimed by Pema Lingpa as one of the motivating factors for its construction.\textsuperscript{38} Thus, as will be examined further in Chapter Four, the paintings that Pema Lingpa chose for the building’s interior,

\textsuperscript{35} In \textit{Bhutan: Traditions and Changes}, 97-120.
\textsuperscript{36} “Patterns,” 98.
\textsuperscript{37} “Patterns,” 98.
\textsuperscript{38} Phuntsho, \textit{gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar}, 221.
as well as the sculpted forms within the main shrine, provide clear evidence of the image Pema Lingpa intentionally and deliberately sought to present.

Gayley’s article also emphasizes the roles that gift-giving, spectacle and patronage played in Pema Lingpa’s upward career trajectory, and how for an extended period of Pema Lingpa’s life, each subsequent treasure discoveries expanded his “sphere of influence or domain of conversion (gdul zhing), moving steadily from peripheral points to more central ones within the cultural and political landscape of his day.” ³⁹ While “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination” focuses upon the spread of the Pema Lingpa tradition during the latter half of the tertön’s life, this dissertation instead concentrates on the role of Tamzhing in the life of Pema Lingpa, and how he made deliberate artistic choices in presenting himself as a legitimate Buddhist master and how he sought to articulate his heritage and his legacy. Further, this work will draw upon Gayley’s model of early expansion and later consolidation, and reveal how the same themes can be discerned in the artistic program of Tamzhing. Special attention will be paid to the depiction of his terma-based practices. When the original texts are taken into consideration, Tamzhing in fact is presenting the key events of Pema Lingpa’s life in its mural program, with only one depiction of the master himself in the entire assembly hall. This study posits that if an informed viewer approaches the space of Tamzhing, the most salient aspects of the life

³⁹ “Patterns,” 99-100. Gayley points out (fn.8) that the years in question for her work are 1475-1483, contemporaneous with Aris’ note in *Hidden Treasures* that “the greater bulk of [Pema Lingpa’s] discoveries took place in the ten years from 1475 to 1484. These were followed by a few scattered finds in the later years” (42).
and legacy of Pema Lingpa are fortified and reified within its walls, and for the most part, just as the master himself had intended.

_Art Historical Sources_

The art history of Bhutan is at present less studied than that of the rest of Himalayan style art. The contributions of China, India and Nepal to Himalayan art are comparatively well documented; however, the exchange of techniques, tools and traditions between Bhutan and its cultural neighbors remain fairly obscured. While works that postdate Bhutan’s mid-17\(^{th}\) century ‘unification’ period share much with contemporary moments in Ladakh, Sikkim, and southeastern Tibet, the few works that survive that predate this epoch exhibit markedly different styles and sources.

The murals in the assembly hall at Tamzhing have often been attributed to the temple’s founding in the early 16\(^{th}\) century.\(^{40}\) Coupled with the surviving documentation of their creation, if true, this would make Tamzhing one of the most significant extant sites in Bhutan. While the murals exhibit a number of artistic traits that were in vogue circa their 1503 completion, this study will show that these “early” murals have in fact been repainted in the recent past, and will present a possible identity for the artist, as well as a rationale for the overpainting.\(^{41}\)

\(^{40}\) For example, see Lauf, “Vorläufiger,” 79, and Pommaret and Imaeda, “Le monastère,” 19.

\(^{41}\) Given that the paintings have been largely reworked and in many cases overpainted, this study will focus on the content of the murals, the autobiographical account of their creation, and an
This iconographic study of Tamzhing will provide an understanding of the role that art and architecture played in building and legitimizing the legacy of Pema Lingpa. In terms of stylistic analysis, few works have been completed to date. In 2001, the Department of Culture published *The Living Religious and Cultural Traditions of Bhutan*, a catalog that accompanied an exhibit of Bhutanese art in Delhi. *The Dragon’s Gift: Sacred Arts of Bhutan*, published in 2008, provides the most substantive and systematic study to date of the arts of Bhutan. Over the course of three years, one hundred objects were assembled for a traveling exhibition. The final catalog includes a series of essays, many of which sought to offer definitions of Bhutanese art and identify its salient characteristics. Of these, “The Art of Bhutan” by Terese Tse Bartholomew provides a clear and useful foundation from which further scholarship can build. Her essay, drawn from her extensive experience in both Bhutan and in her career at the Asian Art Museum, provides a quick summary of the thirteen traditional arts (bzo rig bcu gsum) before delving into an exploration of some of the notable artists, patrons and works from the analysis of their meaning, rather than an in-depth stylistic analysis. In 2006-07, the Courtauld Institute undertook a conservation study of Tamzhing that also suggests that the murals are overpainted. At present, the Courtauld plans to restore and conserve the murals, which would include removing the later layers of paint to reveal the underlying, ostensibly original, compositions.

42 The exhibit, organized in 2008 by the Honolulu Academy of Art, traveled to the Asian Art Museum (San Francisco), the Rubin Museum of Art (New York), Musée Guimet (Paris), and Museum of East Asian Art (Cologne), Museum Reitburg (Zürich).

Bartholomew’s work names many key artists of the 17th century, including Trulku Dzing, Druk Chophel and the Newar artist Panchen Deva, all of whom were sculptors. These are amongst the earliest documented artisans who worked in Bhutan; however, as Chapter Three of this study addresses, the artists who executed the murals at Tamzhing were recorded almost a full century earlier in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography.

Bartholomew provides a few hints for dating Bhutanese art, including the distinctive characteristics of an often-encountered 17th century Bhutanese-style lotus, found frequently supporting seated and standing deities. These lotuses are highly crenulated rather than pointed, and, Bartholomew suggests, there is a particular alternation of three-lobed and five-lobed petals that comprise the special support for Guru Rinpoche, the 8th century Indian master credited with importing Tantric Buddhism into the Himalayan region. She also suggests that in the headdresses of earlier images, the stylized, fluttering ribbon ends stand close to the deity’s ears, whereas later images tend to show the ribbons nearer to the shoulders.

Bartholomew draws upon her interest in botanical plants to analyze the landscape elements of Bhutanese paintings, noting they reveal a prevalence of a particular rhododendron common to Bhutan’s middle elevations (Rhododendron arboreum) and a

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45 Bartholomew, “Art of Bhutan,” in The Dragon’s Gift, 46.
47 Bartholomew, “Art of Bhutan,” 47.
type of fruiting dogwood (*Cornus capitata*). Bartholomew further posits that the highly varied and individualized facial hair of human subjects, the bright pink pastel cloud motifs and the ways in which a figure’s clothing reveals their comparative rank are also indicators of a Bhutanese provenance.

The guidelines presented by Bartholomew provide one of the clearest delineations to date of Bhutanese artistic qualities; however, it stands to note that almost all of the images employed in the article are from the 17th century ‘post-unification’ era. Given the paucity of extant pre-17th century works, it is difficult to determine to what degree these characteristics can be extended back into the past. Along with the murals of Tamzhing’s assembly hall, which are at present largely over painted with modern pigment, only the site of Chang Gangkha (lcang sgang kha) in Thimphu contains extant murals from an early date that have been published.

48 Bartholomew, “Art of Bhutan,” 55.
49 At present, these paintings remain unstudied although Aris reproduced three of them in *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, 177-178 (Plate 15). Bartholomew also mentions Aris’ images, which she likens through stylistic similarities to Tibetan painting of the 11th-14th centuries; specifically, through their “triangular ornamentation and protruding eyes” (“Art of Bhutan,” 53). Aris describes the paintings as follows: “They depict a host of subterranean, terrestrial and astral deities in a cosmological arrangement that stems no doubt from a particular ritual cycle in use at that time. The figures (particularly those of the nine planets and the twenty-eight lunar asterisms) combine what appear to be certain features of Central Asian dress with ancient Indian motifs. The paintings may well be the oldest in the country and seem to have been preserves because the temple in which they are found is classified as a *mgon-khang* dedicated to guardian spirits. These are not so often subjected to that continuous process of refurbishment which has effaced the ancient art of the country” (177). The Chang Gangkha *gonkhang*, as are all others in Bhutan, have restricted entry for females, and only males can make offerings within.
Few other sources have taken on Bhutanese art history. Among the earliest is E. Gene Smith’s introduction to Jamgön Kongtrul’s Encyclopedia, originally published in 1970.\(^5\)

In it, Smith gives a brief account of the styles of Tibetan painting, including that of Bhutan. Smith states, “Painting as an educational discipline was introduced in Bhutan probably during the seventeenth century by [Trulku Mipham Chophel],\(^5\) who followed a fusion of the classical [painting styles, Menri and Khyenri].” He continues, speculating that these two styles likely served as the impetus for the Bhutanese mode of depiction, which was continually updating itself due to extensive religious and economic ties between it and its neighbors Ladakh, Lahul, Spiti and Nepal, in addition to contact with Tibet.\(^5\)

A modern sculptural display forms the basis of an article by Gabrielle Yablonsky that is based on her presentation at the International Association for Tibetan Studies.\(^5\) Entitled “Sculpture in Bhutan: The Tshogs zhing in the Paro Museum,” the focus is a large-scale display of masters, meditative deities (yi dam) and protective deities for four of the major traditions of Buddhism.\(^5\) The work was commissioned by the National Museum in 1972.

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\(^5\) A number of introductions authored by E. Gene Smith over the course of his long career were compiled into Among Tibetan Texts: History and Literature of the Tibetan Plateau, including “‘Jam mgon Kong sprul and the Nonsectarian Movement,” 235-272, which discusses the contents of the Shes bya kun khyab.\(^5\)

\(^5\) Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 256.

\(^5\) Among Tibetan Texts, 256-7.

\(^5\) In Impressions of Bhutan and Tibetan Art, 49-68. Khenpo Phuntshok Tashi, Director of the National Museum, published a Dzongkha language study of the Tshogzhing in 1999, entitled “Tshogs zhing gi bshad pa,” in The Second Colloquium on History and Culture of Bhutan, 72-87.

\(^5\) This piece, approximately fifteen feet in height and twenty feet in circumference, is in the shape of a flowering tree, with each side of the tree populated by the key figures of a school of Buddhism. The assembly was completed by two local Paro sculptors from the village of Neyphug.
Yablonsky provides a detailed description of the display, and also presents pictures of the sculptures, many of which dated to circa 1970 and were in an unfinished state.\(^{55}\) While the research is one of few art-historical articles focusing on Bhutan, its subject lies outside the focus of this study.

Noted Tibetan art historian David Jackson has published two articles on Bhutanese painting, “‘Brug pa Bka’ brgyud and Bhutanese Painting: A Preliminary Investigation,” and “Portrayals of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (Zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal) in Bhutanese Painting.”\(^{56}\) In the both works, Jackson is focusing upon art associated with the Drukpa Kagyu tradition of Buddhism, which originated in Tibet in the late 12\(^{th}\) century and since the mid-17\(^{th}\) century has been upheld as the primary tradition of Bhutan’s centralized government. His discussion of the history of Bhutanese painting essentially draws upon E. Gene Smith’s 1970 introduction and adds information supplied to him by renowned Tibetan scholar Tashi Tsering, which lists the following names as the most influential artists of the country circa the 17\(^{th}\) century: Dungkar Lopen Druk Samdrub and Khaling Lopen Tenzin, both students of Trulku Druk Tenzin, as well as

\(^{55}\) “Sculpture in Bhutan,” Plates 6-9

\(^{56}\) “‘Brug pa Bka’ brgyud and Bhutanese Painting: A Preliminary Investigation,” in *Written Treasures of Bhutan: Mirror of the Past and Bridge to the Future*, 205-232, and “Portrayals of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (Zhabs drung ngag dbang rnam rgyal) in Bhutanese Painting” in *The Dragon’s Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan*, 78-87. As the latter article is dedicated almost exclusively to Drukpa Kagyu iconography that focuses on the figure of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651), it will not be discussed here in detail. In 2011, I published an article building upon Jackson’s work for the *Dragon’s Gift* in the *Journal of Bhutan Studies* entitled “A Zhabdrung Phunsum Tshogpa (zhabs drung phun sum tshogs pa) Thangka from the National Museum Collection,” Vol. 25 (1), 1-49.
Adro Norbu Döndrup. Jackson goes on to note, “In addition to painting masters who learned their skills from skilled teachers, there were also religious masters active in Bhutan who produced images by more wonderful, seemingly miraculous means. These included [Terton Pema Lingpa] and [Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye].” Jackson’s article then continues to summarize Khenpo Phuntsho Tashi’s work on the thirteen traditional arts of Bhutan before shifting emphasis to Drukpa Kagyu-associated works.

In “Portrayals of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal,” Jackson presented a definition of the figures that constitute a particular composition known as the Zhabdrung Phunsum Tshogpa, or ‘submitting [oneself] to the one with perfect qualities.’ Jackson stated additional iterations of this type of composition should be studied further, and, as a result, undertook research on one Zhabdrung Phunsum Tshogpa thangka from the National Museum of Bhutan. The composition converges around the 17th century religious and political master, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, and the article sought to illustrate how iconographic study reveals the motivations behind a particular work of art, and in turn increases our understanding of the time, place and context that gave rise to it. The painting, like so much of Bhutanese art, functions in both the religious and philosophical realms, and, through the circumstances of its creation, carries with it strong political overtones as well. Beyond attesting to a lineage, this work illustrates not only how

57 “‘Brug pa bKa’ brgyud,” 208 and n. 8.
58 “‘Brug pa bKa’ brgyud,” 209.
particular individuals saw themselves, but also how they wanted to be perceived by viewers. In the article, through iconographic study, I offered an analysis of how the Zhabdrung sought to portray his sources of authority through religious lineage and, even more strongly, through his hereditary links to the Gya (rgya) clan of Tibet. Further, the article showed how human masters were conflated with the figures of bodhisattvas in order to clearly reveal and proclaim their superhuman qualities. In short, the painting proclaims and reinforces multiple sources of authority employed and promulgated by the Zhabdrung during the often-tumultuous years of the mid-17th century. These choices present the Zhabdrung as the only right and logical choice to lead, given the complex lineal and spiritual relationships illustrated in the image, an aim congruent with the early years of the Zhabdrung’s empire in Bhutan.

The same methodology employed in the article is in this study: using iconography to uncover the political and religious meanings behind a Bhutanese work of art. In the case of Tamzhing, we have the benefit of an intact and trustworthy autobiography of the site’s creator, in addition to the scholarship that has come before. Ideally, this dissertation will provide a full picture of the monument of Tamzhing temple, and provide additional material for the study of Bhutanese art history. It is only through additional research and publication that we can begin to approach the Bhutanese tradition on its own terms.

60 A bodhisattva is a being who strives for the enlightenment of all sentient beings; they can be found in both human and non-human forms. Human bodhisattvas become such once they elect to take the ‘bodhisattva vow,’ which specifies that their own enlightenment will not take place until all sentient beings experience an opportunity to become enlightened themselves.
In the hopes of increasing awareness of Bhutanese art, in 2009 I published a short article entitled “In the Dragon’s Wake: Bhutanese Art in the RMA Collection.” As part of an issue dedicated to the Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) collection in New York City, the article presented just a few of the more than two dozen Bhutanese works owned by the Rubin Museum, and offered a stylistic and iconographic analysis of their contents.

Frequently, the historical figure behind a work, or set of works, need not be shown in corporeal form in order to make his or her presence known. Rather, the depiction of their preferred ritual initiates and practices as displayed in the art obliquely invokes their particular tradition. Yet in other works, masters celebrate the contributions of their own teachers by illustrating their favored practices. The “Dragon’s Wake” article aimed to increase awareness of Bhutanese art as a unique component of the Himalayan cultural milieu, and to encourage others to take up investigation of its salient aspects.

As this survey reveals, while there is a substantial body of unstudied material in Bhutan, few studies have been completed to date. It is one of the aims of this dissertation to use the arts of Tamzhing—and the stated aims of its builder—to provide a point of contact for textual, historical and religious scholars to better engage the visual arts of Bhutan.

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62 For example, the Ninth Je Khenpo Shakya Rinchen was considered the incarnation of Tibetan master Sakya Chogden. The Ninth Je then undertook the editing of Sakya Chogden’s Ocean of Methods of Accomplishment. This seems to be the source text for a set of thangkas, four of which are owned by the Rubin Museum of Art (see Himalayan Art Resources, http://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=1116).
Scholarship Specific to Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling

The murals of Tamzhing have been, and frequently continue to be, presented as some of the oldest in Bhutan. As a result, a number of scholars have paid the site some attention, including some of those who have enjoyed the earliest and most prolonged access in the country. The earliest Western language description of Tamzhing comes from Detlef Lauf, whose 1975 article “Vorläufiger Bericht über die Geschichte und Kunst einiger lamaistischer Tempel und Klöster in Bhutan III,” documented his visits to temples throughout the west and central regions of the country at a time when few foreigners had access to the country. Lauf describes Tamzhing as definitively from the 15th century, however it seems he may have overlooked the temple’s inclusion in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography, as he states that “although Tamzhing is called a seat of Peling Gonpa, it is not mentioned under this name in the Peling Kabum,” or Collected Works of Pema Lingpa. In fact, The Collected Works of Pema Lingpa do refer to the temple multiple times by the name Tamzhing or its full name, Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling. By the time Lauf visited Tamzhing in the 1970s, the temple had been converted to a monastery, and it housed monks who had fled the Chinese invasion of their previous monastery of Lhalung in Lhodruk, just over the Tibetan border to the north. Lauf gives a list of the various

63 Lauf, “Vorläufiger Bericht über die Geschichte und Kunst einiger lamaistischer Tempel und Klöster in Bhutan III,” in Ethnologische Zeitschrift Zurich, 55-104. The section on Tamzhing can be found on 79-82.
64 Lauf reads: “Wenn auch gTam-zyng als ein Stammkloster oder Sitz des gTer-ston Padma gling-pa bezeichnet wird, so ist es unter diesem Namen jedoch nicht im Pad-gling bka’-’bum erwähnt.” (79)
65 For example, gtam zing lhun grub chos gling phyag btab pa’i skor, the section of the autobiography that details the foundation and construction of Tamzhing. (Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 209)
deities found within the temple of Tamzhing, both in painted and sculpted forms. However, he mistakenly assigns a 16th century date to the main image of the upper shrine, which is a sculpture of Tsepagme (tshe dpag med; Amitāyus), the Buddha of Long Life.66 As will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three, the upper floor, originally a treasury, was not converted into a shrine until the late 19th century, when the temple was expanded to include a second floor ambulatory and gallery, and when the original courtyard was covered by a roof. Thus, it is rather unlikely that the Tsepagme sculpture is 16th century. Though the image could have been brought from elsewhere and installed in the shrine, no records of such activities have yet been found, and stylistically, the image reveals stylistic characteristics of the late 18th-early 19th centuries. Lauf continues, describing the courtyard murals and images in the main shrine as “primitive and unadulterated” since their 16th century creation.67 The remainder of his article is dedicated to a one-by-one enumeration of the courtyard paintings, along with tentative identifications of each.68 While Lauf’s description provides a succinct overview of Tamzhing, there are a few clarifications that can be made to his identifications of various deities and masters. For example, Lauf states that one figure is a monk (“ein mönch”) when in fact it is Śrī Siṃha, one of the earliest masters in the Dzogchen, or Great

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67 “An der Stirnseite des Lha-khang im Osten befindet sich vor einem reichhaltigen Nimbus eine Grossplastik des Guru Padmasambhava, welche wie auch die gesamte Einrichtung dieses Raumes etwa im frühen 16.Jahrhundert erstellt worden ist.” (80)
68 These identifications will be explored in depth in Chapter Four.
Completion, transmission lineage.\textsuperscript{69} Interestingly, Lauf does not note inscriptions beneath most of the figures in the assembly hall murals, where at present almost all of the compositions are accompanied by an abbreviated inscription beneath the main figure. There are two types of inscriptions present, however, one modern and one of an older date. The first are those mentioned by Pommaret and Imaeda in their 1987 article, which notes the presence of some inscriptions in paint. In comparing images from their visit with those taken in the course of this study, it can be seen that additional, abbreviated inscriptions have been added underneath the figures in what appears to be black permanent marker (Figures 4 and 5).\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{69} Lauf, “Tempel und Klöster in Bhutan III,”81.

\textsuperscript{70} Many of the inscriptions include the full names of the deities and conclude with the common phrase \textit{la na mo}, meaning “homage to [the aforementioned figure].” For example, “Homage to the ḍākīṅi Yeshe Tshogyal (mkha’ ‘gro ye shes mtsho rgyal la na mo)” while other inscriptions present only an abbreviated form of the particular name, such as “Tamdrin (rta mgrin).”
Figure 4: Yakṣa (gnod sbyin), north wall, assembly hall, Tamzhing (ca. 1985). Photo courtesy of Françoise Pommaret.
The next scholar to document a visit to Tamzhing was Blanche Olschak, who mentions the temple briefly in her 1979 book *Ancient Bhutan: A Study on Early Buddhism in the Himalayas*. The chapter “The Hidden Treasures of Bumthang,” as noted above, is
dedicated to Pema Lingpa, and includes a short section on Tamzhing, which she translates as “The Temple of the Good News.”71 Most of the content is filled with site description and relaying oral traditions associated with the temple proper.72 Although as noted above, Olschak includes a number of images from within the guardian deity shrine, she does not include any substantive discussion of the Tamzhing murals or their content.

In 1987, Françoise Pommaret and Yoshiro Imaeda co-authored the first article dedicated solely to Tamzhing, entitled “Le monastère de gTam zhing (Tamshing) au Bhoutan Central.”73 Like Lauf, in the article, Pommaret and Imaeda provide an image-by-image identification of the assembly hall murals, albeit with a different numbering system. Pommaret and Imaeda provide a brief account of Pema Lingpa’s life and lineage, and state that the assembly hall murals are original to the 16th century, remarking that they have miraculously escaped the restorations that are so frequently undertaken by the faithful seeking to perform a pious act.74 The authors briefly describe the significance of Pema Lingpa’s family clan, the Nyö (smyos), in Bhutanese history before delineating the role of Tamzhing for the later incarnations and descendants of Pema Lingpa. The efforts of Lauf, Pommaret and Imaeda were certainly useful for their presentation of the mural content; however, in both articles clarifications are necessary for some of the deities’ identities. For example, the main entrance is flanked by two niches each of which houses

\footnote{71 \textit{Ancient Bhutan}, 106-108.}  
\footnote{72 For example, “The name of the temple has its own legend…” and that “local tradition” held that Pema Lingpa was small of stature. (107-108)}  
\footnote{73 \textit{Ars Asiaticques}, Vol. 42 (1987), 19-30.}  
\footnote{74 Pommaret and Imaeda, 19.
a guardian figure sculpted from clay. Pommaret and Imaeda report that the figure of Pehar is on the left and that of Dorje Legpa is on the right, yet in fact, both an iconographical study and the autobiographical text prove the arrangement is the other way around.\(^75\) The authors do provide significant amounts of useful historical information, and identify the later paintings of the upper and lower antechambers. Pommaret and Imaeda undertook a stylistic analysis to suggest comparative sites from the Tibetan region, most notably the extant 15\(^{th}\) century murals at Gyantse, among others.\(^76\) Whereas Lauf’s mural list was limited to the assembly hall, Pommaret and Imaeda detail the works in the upper and lower circumambulation paths and antechambers, at times correlating the images to works discovered or promulgated by Pema Lingpa and his lineage.\(^77\) They also suggest that it was under the direction of Ashi Phuntsho Chodron, wife of the second king of Bhutan, that the antechamber murals were “restored (restaurées).”\(^78\)

\(^75\) Pommaret and Imaeda, 21. In the article, the authors have marked Pehar (pe har) as ‘a’ and provided a schematic indicating its placement to the east of the entry, and Dorje Legpa (rdo rje legs pa) as ‘b’ on the opposite—or west—side of the doorway. The figure on the east is shown atop a snow lion and that on the right is atop an elephant. Dorje Legpa has a variety of manifestations, yet they are always on top of a snow lion or a goat. Pehar, on the other hand, can be on an elephant, horse or snow lion, depending on his form. Given that the right hand figure is on an elephant, it is extremely unlikely that it would in fact be Dorje Legpa as Pommaret and Imaeda suggest. Rather, it seems that they have reversed the deities. Further, as will be explored in more depth in Chapter Four, the autobiography of Pema Lingpa clearly states that the deities are opposite the configuration suggested by Pommaret and Imaeda. (Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa ’i rnam thar, 221)

\(^76\) Pommaret and Imaeda, 25.

\(^77\) For example, Pommaret and Imaeda reveal that the large murals of the ground floor antechamber draw their imagery from the Precious Jewel Ocean (nor bu rgya mtsho), 25.

\(^78\) Pommaret and Imaeda, 27.
The next year, Michael Aris published his own short article on Tamzhing, for which he culled information from Pema Lingpa’s autobiographical account of the temple’s construction and adornment, a source that Pommaret and Imaeda had not employed in their investigation.\(^79\) His work presents the translation of a series of Tamzhing-related events, and juxtaposes it with a strongly skeptical reading of Pema Lingpa and his (presumed) intentions. This article, published in the same year as his *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives*, displays a similar perspective on the terton and his activities. When describing Pema Lingpa’s training in the trades of woodworking and blacksmithery, Aris’ assessment presents that background as ‘proof’ of the terton’s inherently deceptive nature: “It can be assumed that some of the skills he employed in the manufacture of his ‘treasure’ were also used to produce his magical footprints on transportable stones…He was a fabricator, in all senses of that word, not only by reason of his early training but also because of the secret conventions of the cult to which he belonged.”\(^80\) Aris points out that Pema Lingpa left the Tamzhing building site at a crucial point in its construction, when the terton was summoned to Tibet to have an audience with the then head of the Karma Kagyu tradition.\(^81\) To Aris, this seems to be an indication of a lack of commitment

\(^79\) Although in the article text Aris points out that the source offered substantial additional information on the site (33), he states in the end notes that after presenting the article to Pommaret and Imaeda for their review circa 1987-88, “It is quite clear that Yoshiro Imaeda and Françoise Pommaret were unaware of the evidence on gTam-zhing contained in Padma-gling-pa’s autobiography at the time they wrote their contribution. Had they known of this source, there is no question but that they would have made full use of it. I am quite wrong therefore in suggesting any conscious oversight on their part.” (38 n.1)

\(^80\) “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35. Aris also suggests that Pema Lingpa is “on a Napoleonic quest” (35) and as part of that endeavor, had caused local residents of Bumthang to be “closely involved in the carefully stage-managed ‘discovery’ of his ‘treasures’” (33).

\(^81\) “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35
to Tamzhing; however, I suggest that Pema Lingpa’s prioritization reflects the only possible response to the invitation. Given that a ‘senior’ Buddhist master extended it, Pema Lingpa could not refuse; further, while traveling on the way to and from the meeting, he would be able to attend to the needs of patrons and devotees. Pema Lingpa records in his autobiography that the Karma Kagyu leader was so omniscient, that he included specific reference to Tamzhing in his invitation, stating, “As the paintings on the left of the courtyard are nearing completion, please come [to see me] now,” and in addition, sent along a gift of pigments to Pema Lingpa. 82

However useful Aris’ article may be, his apparent misunderstanding of iconography and Buddhist ritual space results in some errors. For example, regarding the clay guardian deities flanking the entrance, Aris says, “The identification of the two clay statues [Dorje Legpa] and [Pehar] are both reversed in Imaeda/Pommaret and Lauf. I suspect they are right and Padma-gling-pa is wrong.” 83 As noted above, the iconography of the sculptures conforms to the deities as described by Pema Lingpa, and the later authors seem to have held the inaccurate view.

Unfortunately, the author’s perspective on Pema Lingpa often distract the reader from the many useful contributions put forth in Aris’ article, including a translation of the paintings themselves and the artists who created them. Through Aris’ translation and analysis of the autobiography, he presents a convincing case for the artists being of

82 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma ’i gling pa ’i rnam thar, 216.
83 “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 39, n. 18.
Tibetan origin and that most, if not all, of the precious mineral pigments were donated by Pema Lingpa’s Tibetan patrons. Of particular interest is the description of the payments received by the artists for almost two years of work on the site, spanning cookware to horses. Overall, this article provides significant information on the murals and sculptures of Tamzhing, the artists who made them, and their consecration. In spite of the author’s apparent distaste for Pema Lingpa, this article stands as a useful contribution to the current study. In fact, it was his article that first suggested the topic of the present study, when Aris notes that further studies on the monument should investigate the degree to which Pema Lingpa’s deities iconographically diverge from other forms. He also notes, “Any full attempt to ‘deconstruct’ the meaning of these paintings will eventually have to account for the choice and location of each figure and group represented.”

In Aris’ *Hidden Treasures*, Tamzhing plays a very limited role, referred to almost exclusively as a setting for events in Pema Lingpa’s life, such as the visit of the tertön Lethrolingpa, and Pema Lingpa’s death. The last sources to date that mention Tamzhing in any substantive way are in a similar vein: while Tamzhing is mentioned, it is as a backdrop, and there is no substantive account of the site that was of use for this project. As mentioned above, in Gayley’s “Patterns of Dissemination,” she notes how Tamzhing

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84 “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 37-38.
85 “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 36.
86 “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 37.
87 “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 37.
88 *Hidden Treasures*, 82-85 and 93, respectively.
served to consolidate and house Pema Lingpa’s treasures he had collected to date, and that Tamzhing later served as the resting place for the terton’s relics.89

Expected Contributions

Through a detailed iconographic analysis of Tamzhing, this dissertation seeks to reveal how Pema Lingpa employed art to communicate with a variety of audiences. His choice of murals and sculptures sent clear and concise messages regarding his legitimacy, his lineage, the unique characteristics of the teachings he revealed, his place in the larger Buddhist tradition, and the main deities of his practices. This study intends to show how Pema Lingpa deliberately chose murals and sculptures that would communicate the most salient aspects of his practice and his personality to those who entered Tamzhing. In addition, this work will present an iconographic analysis of the ritual space generated by these images, and how they contribute to a practitioner’s experience of the space, and by extension, their understanding and appreciation of Pema Lingpa as a Buddhist master. The mechanisms by which Pema Lingpa imbued the space with his distinct style of practice, and provided the power behind the images by consecrating them in a highly uncommon manner will also be explored.

As this work will demonstrate, Pema Lingpa is careful to place himself within the larger Nyingma school of Buddhist practice, and to specifically situate himself within the Dzogchen practices that constitute its highest teachings. While through a variety of

89 Gayley, “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination,” 98 and 115, respectively.
means, such as the paintings of his unique visions and the consecration of sculptures with sacred relics revealed through prophecy, Pema Lingpa has imbued himself and his tradition into the temple proper, he carefully presents himself within a traditional hierarchy and does not attempt to function outside it, although he does clearly assert his place within it. This dissertation will analyze the ways in which Pema Lingpa uses various visual devices to communicate with viewers. Further, the temple will be analyzed according to its common and uncommon features, and explore how its artistic program, often complemented by textual accounts, also furnish clear evidence of cross-fertilization between different Buddhist traditions taking place in the late 15th-early 16th century, a pattern which eventually culminates in the non-sectarian (ris med) impulses of the 19th century.

In addition to providing a thorough study of the visual program at Tamzhing, this dissertation will examine how the temple communicates the importance and influence of Pema Lingpa. This shift, from the era of Pema Lingpa in which he is seeking validation of his legitimacy is from individuals and institutions outside the immediate area of Bumthang, to later, when Pema Lingpa’s ‘Bhutanese-ness’ provides the authenticity of the tradition, has its transition phase marked on the physical landscape in the form of Tamzhing. This work intends to reveal how it was during the construction and consecration of Tamzhing that Pema Lingpa transitioned from seeking legitimacy to asserting greater authority and building his legacy. Along with the building of his temple, this phase was marked by a significant decrease in the number of treasures he extracted.
The Terma Phenomenon

Before delving more deeply into Pema Lingpa’s life and activities, to better understand the significance of his treasure revelations, it is first necessary to describe the terma phenomenon and its functions in Himalayan Buddhism. Terma (the materials revealed) and tertons (those who reveal them) have been the focus of a great number of recent studies, and the religio-political functions they serve are becoming better understood by those outside the tradition. Given the vast amount of modern scholarship that focuses on terma revelation, only a brief summary of its origins and functions will be presented here.90

The terma phenomenon was initially a purview of the Nyingma, or Ancient, tradition of Buddhism, though over time, the tradition of treasures and their revelation were eventually adopted by almost all other traditions of Himalayan Buddhism.91 Beginning

90 In-depth studies of terma and tertons include Gyatso, Apparitions of the Self; Achard investigates terma in the pre-Buddhist Bon tradition in Bon Po Hidden Treasures; Jacoby highlights a female terton of the modern era in her dissertation, “Consorts and Revelation in Eastern Tibet: The Auto/biographical Writings of the Treasure Revealer Sera Khandro (1892-1940)”; Thondup provides a traditional perspective of terma revelation in Hidden Teachings of Tibet; while Doctor offers a systemic perspective of the phenomenon in Tibetan Treasure Literature: Revelation, Tradition and Accomplishment in Visionary Buddhism.

91 In the Sakya tradition, Nasgar Khyentse Wangchuk (gnas gsar mkhyen brtse’i dbang phyug, b. 1524) was an early treasure revealer; Rinchen Phuntsho (rin chen phun tshogs, 1509-1557), Konchog Rinchen (dkon mcug rin chen, 1590-1654), and Chokyi Dragpa (chos kyi grags pa, 1595-1659) revealed in the Drigung Kagyu school; in the Karma Kagyu tradition, the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (rang byung rdo rje, 1283-1339) and Karma Chagme (kar+ma chags med, 1613-1678), and in the Drukpa Kagyu, the Third Khamtrul Kunga Tenzin (kun dga’ bstan ’dzin, 1680-1728), the Fourth Drukchen Pema Karpo (pad+ma dkar po, 1527-1592) and the Fourth Zigar Dorje Drakpo (rdo rje drag po, 1740-1798), while in the Gelug tradition Palden Dorje (dpal ldan rdo rje) and the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Gyatso (ngag dbang rgya mtsho, 1617-1682) also received terma (Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 239-240).
in the eleventh century, individuals in the Nyingma tradition began to receive prophecies that led them to a particular place where they would then reveal a spiritual ‘treasure.’

Though there are a variety of categorization systems, terma can be broadly grouped into five subtypes, a systemization attributed to the 11th century Nyingma author Rongzom Chokyi Zangpo (rong zom chos kyi bzang po, 1012-1088). earth terma (sa gter), rediscovered treasures (yang gter), mind terma (dgongs gter), recollected treasures (rjes dran gter) and pure vision (dag snang). Earth terma refer to physical objects, such as sculptures or ritual implements, texts, medicinal plants or practice manuals, mandalas, architectural drawings or any other item that is useful for Buddhist practice. Generally,

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92 The terton Nyangral Nyima Özer (1136-1204) divided terma into two types: religious treasures (chos gter) and wealth treasures (nor gter), with several subcategories (namely, life force treasures [bla gter], black magic treasures [mthu gter], handicraft treasures [bzo gter], medicinal treasures [sman gyi gter] and spiritual treasures [thugs gter]); Doctor points out that this deviates from later classification systems as these are delineated according to function, not by mechanism of transmission (Tibetan Treasure Literature, 21). Later, Guru Chöwang (1212-1270) employs four categories of terma (specifically, the ordinary material treasures [thun mong rdzas kyi gter], especially purposeful treasures [khyad par yon tan gter], the supreme treasures of body, speech and mind [mchog gyur sku gsung thugs kyi gter] and the definitive treasure of suchness [de kho nan yid nges pa’i gter]) and places the entire treasure tradition as an expression of the full Buddhist corpus and a manifestation of the highest realm of existence, the dharmakāya. The scholar Longchen Rabjampa (1308-1364) provided a four category scheme (ancestral treasures [mes gter], filial treasures [sras gter], magistral treasures [dpon gter] and essential treasures [yang gter]) with extensive sub-categorizations. (Doctor, Tibetan Treasure Literature, 22-23).

93 The terton Nyangral Nyima Özer (1136-1204) divided terma into two types: religious treasures (chos gter) and wealth treasures (nor gter), with several subcategories (namely, life force treasures [bla gter], black magic treasures [mthu gter], handicraft treasures [bzo gter], medicinal treasures [sman gyi gter] and spiritual treasures [thugs gter]); Doctor points out that this deviates from later classification systems as these are delineated according to function, not by mechanism of transmission (Tibetan Treasure Literature, 21). Later, Guru Chöwang (1212-1270) employs four categories of terma (specifically, the ordinary material treasures [thun mong rdzas kyi gter], especially purposeful treasures [khyad par yon tan gter], the supreme treasures of body, speech and mind [mchog gyur sku gsung thugs kyi gter] and the definitive treasure of suchness [de kho nan yid nges pa’i gter]) and places the entire treasure tradition as an expression of the full Buddhist corpus and a manifestation of the highest realm of existence, the dharmakāya. The scholar Longchen Rabjampa (1308-1364) provided a four category scheme (ancestral treasures [mes gter], filial treasures [sras gter], magistral treasures [dpon gter] and essential treasures [yang gter]) with extensive sub-categorizations. (Doctor, Tibetan Treasure Literature, 22-23).

94 These are five of the ‘seven descents,’ to which are added the transmitted precepts (bka’ ma) and the oral lineage (snyan brgyud). (Tibetan Treasure Literature, 85.) For Nyingma followers, all forms of terma belong to a ‘short lineage’ of teachings, meaning the distance between the terma concealer (usually Guru Rinpoche and/or Yeshe Tsogyal) and the terma revealer is chronologically short, since it is through prophecy rather than genealogical descent that the teaching re-emerges in the human realm. The transmitted precepts comprise the Nyingma long lineage, and the shortest transmissions occur in the pure vision teachings, which occur spontaneously in the mind of the terton (Doctor, Tibetan Treasure Literature, 17).
terma texts consist of three parts: a certificate, which indicates to the revealer where his next discovery will take place; an inner message, rendered in legible script and often is just the title of the contained work; and a secret message, which is an encoded essence of the teaching legible only to the terton. In comparison, mind terma are generally imparted directly into the mind of the terton in the form of a prophetic vision or a dream.

Terma represent one means by which teachings can be conferred in Himalayan Buddhist practice, but given its particular means of transmission, it was, and remains, a ripe target for skeptics. For Nyingma adherents, terma revelation has provided a necessary mechanism for doctrinal growth. Terma, through its revelatory and prophecy-based transmissions, could keep Nyingma teachings relevant and responsive to relevant new strains of Buddhism. By necessity, religious masters competed for patrons and the resources and support they provide. This environment necessitated that Buddhist teachers ‘prove’ their authenticity and efficacy, which for the older and more established Nyingma tradition, was comparatively difficult. Newer schools were less constrained, and had a greater freedom to formulate their methodologies while taking into account the perceived shortcomings of the Nyingma, who already had espoused an established perspective. Through the mechanism of terma, however, the Nyingma were able to receive new doctrinal infusions via visions and other experiences that would allow the tradition to respond to the challenges posed by new schools of Buddhism, such as the Kadam (bka’

95 Other Buddhist traditions began casting doubt on terma as early as the 12th and 13th centuries, especially as they were developing their own doctrines in opposition to the Nyingma school; unlike the Nyingma, the newer (Sarma) schools could point to Indian primary sources to ‘prove’ their authenticity (Doctor, Tibetan Treasure Literature, 31). There were skeptics within the Nyingma tradition as well, though “they were never critical of the principle of continued revelation, but instead warned against the potential danger of admitting frauds into the ranks of genuinely visionary masters.” (Doctor, Tibetan Treasure Literature, 28).
gdams), Kagyu (bka’ brgyud), Sakya (sa skya), and later, the Gelug (dge lugs), collectively known as the Sarma (gsar ma), or New Traditions.

Ultimately, adherents believe terma exist largely due to the foresight of Guru Rinpoche (b. ca. 8th century). Followers frequently maintain that it was Guru Rinpoche, along with his consort Yeshe Tsogyal (ye shes mtsho rgyal, ca. 8th century, Figure 6), who originally concealed terma, particularly of the earth variety, for later discovery.\(^96\)

Through Guru Rinpoche’s ability to anticipate that the integrity of the Buddhist tradition would suffer periodic declines, he planned ahead and hid ‘pure’ teachings in various places throughout the Himalayas. Guru Rinpoche further preordained the specific individuals who would reveal these items and teachings in the form of prophecies. These prophecies often included the names of the terton’s future parents, the location of his (or occasionally her) rebirth, the place where the terma was concealed, and the time when it should be revealed. These ‘treasures’ were revealed by these preordained individuals in order to maintain the integrity of the Buddhist teaching, and to help address new challenges to the doctrine.

\(^{96}\) These attributions of Guru Rinpoche as the primary source of terma seem to have been in currency since ca. the 12th century, though, as Doctor points out, “little historical data exist to verify these claims” of Guru Rinpoche’s actual role (Tibetan Treasure Literature, 19).
Tradition maintains that together, and sometimes separately, Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal committed various teachings and prophecies to writing before concealing them in rocks, water and in the earth, to be later recovered by pre-ordained individuals (Figure 6).
Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal also appeared to preordained individuals in visions
to provide instructions and ritual empowerments. No matter the form of the concealed
treasures, be they physical scrolls, sculptures, or a vision, these objects/interactions
provided a vehicle for a direct connection with Guru Rinpoche, considered the source of
Himalayan Buddhism, contact which in turn conferred a badge of authenticity upon the
visionary. While linking the treasure revealer to Guru Rinpoche, these terma concurrently
embed Guru Rinpoche in the particular place of their discovery, thus anchoring Guru
Rinpoche and his legacy into the cultural landscape. In this way, terma connect both the
place where they are revealed and the person who reveals them with the source of
Himalayan Buddhism.

As the ultimate source of terma teachings, Guru Rinpoche provided the tertons with
authority. Tertons almost always attracted at least a few skeptics, most often from
competing teachers, local politicians, or by the populace in general. Most frequently,
the core reason behind their skepticism was a deep desire to avoid competition for scarce
resources, and to keep their devotees from drifting elsewhere. Tertons had to address the
skeptics and dispel their doubts in order to keep their patronage secure. By invoking Guru
Rinpoche, the purported source of Buddhism in the Himalayas, detractors were in a more

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97 Gayley, “Patterns,” 105-106.
98 For fuller descriptions of the ways in which Pema Lingpa dealt with skeptics, see Gayley,
“Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination of Padma Gling pa’s Treasures.”, and Chris Butters “Terma
and Its Critics” in Tshewang, The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan: Pemalingpa, the Terma
Tradition and Its Critics. Regarding the question of “proof” in the terma tradition in general, see
Doctor, Tibetan Treasure Literature, 31-51, and from a traditional Nyingma perspective, see
Thondup, Hidden Teachings of Tibet, 57-70 and 101-172.
difficult position, as their dissention would, by extension, be calling the Guru into question, an act could have negative effects for the questioners.

Figure 7: Detail of a terton (Dorje Lingpa 1346-1405) withdrawing treasure from rock, 18th century, mineral pigment on cotton, 117.5 x 78.6 cm, collection of Ogyen Choling, Bumthang, from The Dragon’s Gift, 296. Photo by Shuzo Uemoto.

The history of terma in Bhutan is prolific and long-standing, and it is Pema Lingpa’s in home region of Bumthang that has provided one most important sites for treasure
revelation. This association between Bumthang and terma extends back to at least the 13th century, when Guru Chöwang visited the region. Though later traditions of Buddhism predominate elsewhere in the country, the Bumthang area has long maintained strong ties to the Nyingma tradition stemming from Guru Rinpoche. This is often attributed the belief that Guru Rinpoche, as well as three of the Five Sovereign Tertons, spent significant time in Bumthang. To this day, the Bumthang region is home to a high concentration of temples and monasteries, the preponderance of which are dedicated to the Nyingma lineage and those masters associated with its highest contemplative practice, known as Dzogchen (rdzogs chen), or the Great Completion.

Early on in his revelatory career, Pema Lingpa’s discoveries were made within the confines of Bumthang, yet as his reputation grew, he also extracted treasures in the Lhalung and Yarlung areas of Tibet. Of the eight types of terma classified by Guru Rinpoche in his Short Biography, in his early years as a terton, Pema Lingpa’s

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99 Tertons from Tibet came to what is now Bhutan as early as the 11th century, when Seton Ringmo (se ston ring mo, 1027-1146) is said to have arrived in Paro, followed by Phurbu Gon (phur bu mgon), who was active in Paro and Bumthang, Gyaton Tsondru Sengdar (rkyas ston brtson ‘grus seng+ge dar) and Guru Yangwang (gu ru yang dbang). Five more Tibetan tertons appear in the records between the mid 12th to mid 13th centuries, and many more thereafter. The first ‘Bhutanese’ terton appeared at an early date in Paro, Sarbon Chogmey (sar ban phyogs med, b. 11th century), and withdrew a text from Tiger’s Den (stag tshang) entitled ‘jam dpal rdzogs pa chen po’i chos skor (Aris, Bhutan: Early History, 156-157).

100 One of Pema Lingpa’s previous incarnations was as Jomo Pema Drol (jo mo pad+ma grol, d.u.), the consort of Guru Chowang. Tshewang, The Treasure Revealer, 38 note 21.

discoveries were always of the earth variety; namely, those that were concrete objects; in opposition to visions or dreams transmitted directly into the mind. These discoveries were always accompanied by the ritual withdrawal and revelation of the ‘address’ (lde mig) of the next terma to be found. This address would serve as a certificate of sorts, allowing the terton to proceed and withdraw the specified treasure. Yet later in his treasure-revealing career, Pema Lingpa began to receive an increased proportion of mind terma in the forms of direct visions and dreams. This was happening as he was spending an increasing amount of time away from his homeland and cultivating patrons in other areas. Thus, while Pema Lingpa’s physical activities are moving progressively outward from their locus in Bumthang, his treasure-revealing activity became increasingly internal, and less dependent on the physical world.

Despite the renown that Pema Lingpa and other tertons gained throughout their lives and activities, this certainly does not mean they were without controversy. Ever since the 11th century, the rough, yet accepted, starting date for the earliest terma revelations, tertons and their discoveries have been challenged by rivals in the political, religious and even familial realms. From the beginning of his career as a treasure revealer, skeptics and detractors followed Pema Lingpa, consistently voicing their opposition. While some were eventually converted after witnessing a display of Pema Lingpa’s power, or after a first-hand experience of one of his terma withdrawals, others remained steadfast skeptics. Some remained hostilely so, and their suspicious objections to Pema Lingpa are included in his autobiography. Lopen Padma Tshewang recounts just one example of a skeptic:
“[The Shangpa] Lama Namkha appeared on one occasion with his followers to disrupt the teachings Pema Lingpa was giving to a large audience in the region of Zhamling. He demanded that two religious thrones be set up, so that he and Pema Lingpa could expound in turn, and that the people be ordered to listen to both lamas and judge which was the better or genuine one. However there was no listener at Lama Namkha’s teachings. Then he called Pema Lingpa a fraud and a devil. Quite reasonably, the chiefs and religious patrons of Zhamling had said to Namkha that since Pema Lingpa was a special guest, come from afar, they wished to attend his teachings, and that they could attend Lama Namkha’s at any time since he was from their district. When Namkha angrily rejected this, they went further and said that, as soon as Pema Lingpa had left, he could then immediately hold his own ceremonies and sermons and they would obey as desired in arranging all that was necessary. But the lama only grew more furious.”\textsuperscript{102}

He continues:

“Pema Lingpa’s reaction finally was to propose to the patrons that he and Namkha should undergo a kind of test of fire. He said that otherwise Lama Namkha would never believe him and would go on spreading malicious slander: so if he, Pema Lingpa, were consumed by the flames, it would rid the world of a devil and a fraud; if Lama Namkha were burned, they would have rid the world of a jealous scoundrel; and if both he and Namkha perished, then the Buddha’s doctrine would have been doubly purified of two bad lamas. On receiving this proposal, however, Lama Namkha collected his followers and fled.”\textsuperscript{103}

Skeptics are a common element in the hagiographies of tertons. By incorporating such individuals into the story, the reader (or reciter) of the autobiography is presented with a foil that acts as a skeptical voice, one that raises the practical concerns and questions that most individuals would have in the face of witnessing miraculous activity. As these questions are ‘answered’ throughout the text as the terton in question undertakes his enlightened activity, the reader can ostensibly then feel more confident in the treasure revealer’s legitimacy. This is not to say that everyone was convinced. Frequently, the

\textsuperscript{102} Tshewang, \textit{The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan: Pemalingpa, the Terma Tradition and Its Critics}, 82.

\textsuperscript{103} Tshewang, \textit{The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan: Pemalingpa, the Terma Tradition and Its Critics}, 82.
stories, such as that of Lama Namkha, include individuals who steadfastly refuse to accept the terton as legitimate, and invariably, they are stricken with a variety of ills, be it death, disease, loss of position or societal ridicule. Some modern scholars in have maintained strong opinions on the tradition as a whole, and, in at least one case, against Pema Lingpa in particular, calling him a “charlatan” and a “fraud.”\textsuperscript{104} The strength of conviction on both sides attests to the strong reactions that the terma tradition continues to evoke in the minds of practitioners and scholars even today.

While most agree that Pema Lingpa was a historical person with significant effect on the 15\textsuperscript{th}-16\textsuperscript{th} century Bhutanese and Tibetan Buddhist populace, the nature of his autobiography still leads to controversy. Just as science uses models and theorems to try to describe various phenomena, terma can be considered similar means of Buddhist revelation; however, both allow for skepticism and dissention. Many Buddhist initiates would point out that trying to distinguish whether Pema Lingpa’s terma or miracles are real or not merely illustrate a lack of differentiation between Absolute and Relative reality; that deep down it doesn’t matter whether or not Pema Lingpa found these terma, or wrote them himself, as in Buddhism everything can be considered to ultimately be constituted of the same immaterial essence; in summary, that it is only due to our own (fundamentally flawed) human cognition that defines objects as discrete and ‘different’ from one another. For Buddhists, once the ‘sameness’ of all things is recognized

\textsuperscript{104} See in particular Michael Aris’ \textit{Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives}. In response to Aris, a group of scholars led by Padma Tshewang (Lopen Pemala) compiled the volume \textit{The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan: Pemalingpa, the Terma Tradition and Its Critics}. 

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sufficiently, names for external objects and perceptions no longer required, and one is able to discern the ultimate lack of differentiation between ‘things’ as they were originally defined. Yet while this perspective is a deeply embedded concept in Buddhism, it is not as accessible to those outside the tradition. As a result, as scholars, students, and others have sought to understand the tradition on its own terms, there are often clashes over what aspects of Buddhism are ‘real,’ with the phenomenon of terma and their revelation sparking significant debates regarding their legitimacy.

This question of legitimacy drove Michael Aris, one of the most prolific Western scholars on Bhutan, to write *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives*, a rather scathing take on Pema Lingpa juxtaposed with a study of the Sixth Dalai Lama. Using phrases along the lines of ‘unquestioning embrace’ and ‘suspension of disbelief,’ Aris considers the Pema Lingpa mythology as far too dismissive of history. His point is that political instability in the Yarlung Valley as a result of a shift in power in 1481 caused great competition for Buddhists needing patronage.\(^{105}\) As a result, rather than spending enough time meditating in an enclave, many Buddhists, including Pema Lingpa, struck out on travels instead, establishing monasteries, giving teachings and initiations, and garnering the funds associated with such activities. By the beginning of the 16\(^{\text{th}}\) century, Pema Lingpa had garnered sufficient means to build a new temple, one with a location central to his Bhutanese patrons, and one that he imbued with the most salient aspects of his particular traditions of ritual and practice.

Chapter 2: The Life and Legacy of Pema Lingpa

Figure 8: Pema Lingpa (1450-1521), 17th-18th century, metal alloy with cold gold and pigment, 13.2 cm x 10.9 cm x 7.7 cm. Photo: Shuzo Uemoto, published in *The Dragon’s Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan*, 301.

Pema Lingpa was born in a time of great cultural ferment, and for the first twenty plus years of his life he was raised by his grandfather, who trained him in the traditional craft of blacksmithing (Figure 8). After a childhood described as full of portents of his future
role as a Buddhist master, after the age of about ten, Pema Lingpa’s life is related in a manner that depicts him as disinterested in things religious. Yet he was surrounded by a region that had been steeped in Buddhist tradition since the 8th century. The Bumthang area had hosted multiple masters from a variety of Buddhist traditions, beginning with the importer of Vajrayāna Buddhism himself, Guru Rinpoche. Other notable residents included the philosophical master Longchenpa (klong chen rab ‘byams pa dri med ‘od zer; 1308-1363), and the treasure revealers Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa; 1346-1405)\textsuperscript{106} and Guru Chöwang (gu ru chos dbang; 1212-1273). Unlike the west of Bhutan, which had been linked to the Drukpa Kagyu (‘brug pa bka’ brgyud) Buddhist tradition since the 12th century, Bumthang was a stronghold of the Nyingma (rnying ma), or Ancient, school. Bumthang had also hosted masters of the Drigung and Kamtshang Kagyu, the Sakya tradition and others, both Buddhist and pre-Buddhist in origin. In 1450, Pema Lingpa was born into this complicated and vibrant milieu, in which he eventually transformed into one of the most noteworthy masters in Bhutanese history.

This chapter will trace the significant life events of Pema Lingpa, drawing mainly upon his autobiography.\textsuperscript{107} Special attention will be paid to the ways in which Pema Lingpa, an artist and craftsman in his own right, freely circulated ritual items and relics associated with his activities amongst his patrons in order to help establish his authority and increase


\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che}, Vol. Pha, 7-514. Karma Phuntscho’s forthcoming \textit{gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar} provides another key source for autobiographical information.
his number of followers. In addition, the impact of Pema Lingpa on later Bhutanese culture and identity will be explored. Ideally, these explorations of the terton as an individual will help us better understand the ways that Tamzhing functioned in his life and spiritual career, and its role in perpetuating Pema Lingpa’s legacy after his demise in 1521.

There are at least five versions of the life of Pema Lingpa. The main, and most detailed, surviving source is his autobiography, one of the twenty-one volumes that comprise his collected works. As explained in Chapter One, Pema Lingpa authored the events of his life from birth in 1450 until 1482, after which he gave dictation to his trusted disciple Tashi Gyalpo until 1518. Gyalwa Döndrup, a local leader of the Tibetan region of Lhalung and longtime patron of Pema Lingpa, recorded the end of Pema Lingpa’s life, his funeral and the events after his death. In his contribution, Gyalwa Döndrup presented events using the third person perspective, having shifted away from the self-referential bdag and instead using chos rje, or “Lord of Religion,” as an epithet.

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108 Dudjom Rinpoche (Jigdrel Yeshe Dorje), *pad gling ‘khrungs rabs rtogs brjod dad pa’i me tog gi kha skong mos pa’i ze’u ‘bru in pad gling gter chos*, vol. 14: 601-629; Lopen Padma Tshawang, *pad gling lo rgyus drang gtam*; Pema Lingpa, *bum thang gter ston Padma gling pa’i rnam thar ‘od zer kun mdzes nor bu’i phreng ba in pad gling gter chos*, vol. 14: 3-510; Sonam Thinley Lhadingpa *gter ston padma gling pa dang bdud ‘dul gling pai gsung ‘bum gyi dkar chag, Eighth Peling Sungtrul Kunzang Tenpa’i Nyima, pad gling ‘khrungs rabs kyi rtogs brjod nyung gsal dad pa’i me tog in Pad gling gter chos*, vol. 14: 511-600.


110 Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 17-18.
for Pema Lingpa. Further, Gyalwa Döndrup wrote in a more literary style than the fairly simple dialect used by Pema Lingpa and Tashi Gyalpo.\(^\text{111}\)

In many ways, Pema Lingpa’s autobiography is meticulous, dutifully recording his activities in considerable detail. For example, he details a time when he gave a forbidden blessing to a group of women:

Gradually, I returned to Bumthang and stayed at Mani Gonpa. At the beginning of the tenth day of the monkey month, I was copying the yellow scrolls of the *Lama Norbu Gyatso*. It was near midnight when in a dream I saw that some women would arrive from the village of Baldrongma seeking a blessing [from the scrolls]. At that time [in the dream], I was told not to bless those women. Suddenly at that moment, I became wide-awake. After that, at *nyi dros*,\(^\text{112}\) four women came seeking the blessing, bringing with them a feast of meat, alcohol, and food [as offerings]. The women said, “We heard that you, Teacher, have written some Dharma, and we would like to have that blessing.” I replied, “Oh, I dreamt last night that it was not acceptable—this terma is extremely powerful and sensitive, and I think it is unsuitable to give the blessing to you.” The women were furious and left, enraged. Then I changed my mind, and, producing the paper, called the women back. After calling them, they returned. Then, after eating, the cloth-covered terma scroll was brought out and [I] blessed every one of them. After the women left, I thought I would sit and transcribe it [some more]. I went to my place, yet when I opened the cloth, the original scroll had disappeared without a trace. So on that day I could not write anything.\(^\text{113}\)

His lost scroll was not the only obstacle to arise; Pema Lingpa continues, telling of a near-death experience that very evening, also brought about by his disobedience:

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\(^{111}\) Aris notes in *Hidden Treasures* that “…in response to the repeated demands of the lama Tashi Gyalpo [Pema Lingpa] had recounted his memories and that lama had written these down ‘exactly as recounted by the lord in person without minimizing or exaggerating’. There is no reason to doubt this, because the style and structure of the section actually written by Pemalingpa in his own hand for the years 1450-1582 are identical to those for the years 1483-1518 which he dictated to Tashi Gyalpo. By contrast the break between the dictated account and the concluding section for the years 1518-21 composed by Gyalwa Döndrup is abrupt and immediately noticeable.” (17)

\(^{112}\) *nyi dros* is one of twelve traditional divisions of time (dus tshod), corresponding to 8-10 am.

In the evening, because I was guilty [of giving the initiation I wasn’t supposed to], I was about to die near Horse Bridge. I had a pain in my left hipbone as if a spear had struck me, and while I was having this unbearable pain, I fell and lost consciousness for a short time. The same woman [who had forbidden the initiation in the previous night’s dream] came into my dream. “What happened to you now that you’ve disobeyed me? If you go against my instructions again, it is at the risk of your life.” I said, “You are right. From now on, I will not go against your orders. I’m telling you the truth. I offer you confessional prayer and I hope to regain your confidence. Please do not cast any [more] obstacles.” As I had performed the offerings of fulfillment and confession, the obstacles had been removed. In the early morning [around 5-6 am], I was able to walk and my body had mostly recovered. However, because the scroll was gone, I was feeling sad. Yet when I reached home, I discovered the scroll was there as usual.

The candid, narrative tone of Pema Lingpa’s autobiography seems to reveal someone who is quite willing to document every part of his life for posterity, including those moments when he is perhaps not as ‘saintly’ as one would expect, such as giving forbidden initiations. Throughout the text, Pema Lingpa does not shy away from incorporating evidence of occasionally impulsive or unusual behavior, including flares of his temper, described as follows:

[Gyalwa Döndrup] begged Pema Lingpa to bring his autobiography up to date by relating the events which had not so far been recorded. Pema Lingpa explained that he himself had set down in writing everything that occurred down to the time when he had been infuriated by a hen that had been interfering with the offerings arranged for a ritual performed for one of his devotees. Pema Lingpa had thrown a stone pestle at it. The imprint of his hand appeared on the stone, and the description of the event is duly found in a passage dealing with the year 1482 when Pema Lingpa was thirty-two years old.  

Despite these definitively humanizing elements, other events described in the autobiography are certainly meant to record the life of an extraordinary being. Even in

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115 Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 17.
fits of rage, such as with the pesky hen above, his mastery of the material world is made apparent when he is able to leave an imprint in stone. He was certainly part of the world around him, yet he was an individual driven by dreams, visions and prophecies that drove him to perform unusual feats, such as pulling sculptures out of rocks, extracting texts from underwater caves, and submerging himself in a lake with a lighted lamp in hand, only to emerge with its flame still burning. Just as these deeds are meant to illustrate his status as a Buddhist master, his autobiography is intended to present an account of how he became one. In order to better understand how Pema Lingpa, *terton extraordinaire*, understood himself, an examination of his past lives is necessary.

The Previous Lives of Pema Lingpa

Buddhism posits that sentient beings endure endless numbers of lifetimes. Each subsequent rebirth is dictated by the actions and activities of the previous incarnation. It is a basic assumption that every being has undergone innumerable births, deaths and rebirths, and it is considered a mark of great achievement to at some point enjoy existence as a human, because as humans are capable of higher thought and reasoning, these skills greatly enhance their opportunity to achieve enlightenment. Thus, even Śākyamuni Buddha himself had to experience hundreds of previous lives in order to develop and perfect the compassion and wisdom necessary to attain nīrṇāṇa. Pema Lingpa is no different, and as we will see, had to suffer through incarnations as various animals and struggle in less-fortunate lives before enjoying the life of a treasure revealer.
One of the main sources an account of Pema Lingpa’s past lives comes from one of his later incarnations; the Eighth Speech Incarnation of Pema Lingpa authored the short text, *Flowers of Faith: A Short Clarification of the Story of the Incarnations of Pema Lingpa*, in the 19th century (See Appendix C).\(^\text{116}\)

*Incarnations between the 8th-13th centuries*

Like all Himalayan Buddhist masters, Pema Lingpa possessed qualities that set him apart from the average person. Although born into a noble lineage, the Nyö (smyos), Pema Lingpa spent his life in the comparatively ‘unclean’ profession of blacksmithing. When it came to the account of his previous lives, one can see that there is a similar mix of highly placed masters and low level rebirths, including two in which Pema Lingpa lived as a “white-colored female dog” and as an ewe.\(^\text{117}\) These lower-level rebirths are those during which the karmic entity who would eventually become Pema Lingpa was shedding any residual negative karma. The later, higher-level rebirths were enabling him to garner more positive karma, fueled by undertaking actions that would benefit all beings.

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\(^{116}\) *Pad gling ‘khrungs rabs kyi rtogs brjod nyung gsal dad pa'i me tog*. The Eighth Speech Incarnation (gsung sprul) was Kunzang Dechen Dorje (Kun bzang bde chen rdo rje, 1843-1891), also known as Nedon Tenpai Nyima (nges don bstan pa'i nyi ma). Sarah Harding skillfully translates the text in *The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa* (29-49). Brief accounts are also found in Aris, *Hidden Treasures* (21-31) and Tshewang et al., *The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan* (37-39).

\(^{117}\) *Khyi mo dkar mo zhiig gi skye ba blangs nas/…de ‘og lha sa ru lug mo shig gi lus blang/ in rig ’dzin pad+ma glin pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che*, Vol. Pha, 22.
It is believed that Pema Lingpa’s earliest earthly incarnation took place in the 8th century, in the form of Lhacam Pemasel (lha lcam pad+ma rtsal)\(^{118}\), daughter of Tibetan King Trisong Detsen (khri srong lde btsan, 742-796). In a bid to establish Buddhism as the religion of Tibet, King Trisong Detsen had invited two masters from India to aid in building and consecrating the first Buddhist monastery in the region, located at Samye (bsam yas).

One of the two masters, Guru Rinpoche (Figure 9), was an accomplished Tantric practitioner. According to tradition, he succeeded in subjugating the indigenous forces that had been blocking the establishment of the new doctrine. While Guru Rinpoche was in Tibet, the king’s daughter proved herself to be a keen disciple, though she was only five years old at the time. Yet in the Sheep year, at the age of eight, Lhacam Pemasel suffered from a parasitic infection and fell very ill.\(^{119}\) After contracting dysentery, her situation worsened. Near death, she asked a series of questions to the Guru, beginning with a plea:

Oh, Ogyen Rinpoche! I am a child in a girl’s body, of lowly birth and little worth, feeble of speech, vastly discursive, and forgetful of the Dharma. I have a half human body, half human slave’s body. Lord Guru, hold with compassion one such as I, who has not accumulated merit. Do not drop me in the swamp of cyclic existence. I request a method to become a Buddha in this life by practicing come Dharma myself.\(^{120}\)

\(^{118}\) Some sources, such as the Eighth Ganteng Tulku’s account of Pema Lingpa’s previous lives, provide the name as lha gcig pad+ma gsal, or Princess Lotus Light.

\(^{119}\) Harding, *The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa*, 31. The autobiography of Pema Lingpa lists the various classes of spirits and demons (klu, bdud, gnod sbyin, ma mo, sa bdag, etc.) that caused the illness in rig ‘dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Pha, 16.

\(^{120}\) Harding, *Life and Revelations*, 51.
Guru Rinpoche did not mince words, saying that even with her royal pedigree, being female was itself an impediment to spiritual accomplishment. Yet he did offer an account of her future lives, revealing that ultimately, she will have a final

121 “I, Padmasambhava, replied, ‘Princess, listen! To you, a girl, Dharma won’t come. Even more so, to a princess it won’t come. Powerlessly consigned to cyclic prison by your parents, you must track your husband’s moods. Dwelling your whole life in the state of ego-clinging, you must act as man’s servant without wages.’” Harding, Life and Revelations, 51. Translated from lha lcam pad+ma gsai gyi zhun lan gser gyi yang zhun, in the bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho, pad gling gter chos, vol. Ka.
reincarnation as a major treasure revealer in Bumthang.\footnote{Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 31. In his autobiography, Pema Lingpa provides the full list of teachings that the Guru prophesied Lhacam Pemasel would reveal in later lives (i.e., Pema Lingpa’s past lives) in \textit{rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che}, Vol. Pha, 18.} Followers of the Pema Lingpa tradition maintain that Guru Rinpoche was referring to Pema Lingpa as the major incarnation. Yet in the interim, Lhacam Pemasel would experience a series of lives, some accomplished and others deemed barely noteworthy. Guru Rinpoche told the king that his daughter would not recover from her illness, and that she would have to experience five ‘impure’ and seven ‘pure’ incarnations, during which she would respectively work off her bad karma and begin accumulating the merits necessary to evolve into a Buddhist master.\footnote{Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures}, 26. The text states: \textit{khyi mo dkar mo zhig gi skye ba blangs nas/}…\textit{de ’og lha sa ru lug mo shig gi lus blang in rig ’dzin padma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che}, Vol. Pha, 22.} The five ‘impure’ lives as recalled by Pema Lingpa in the text state that for the first three, he was a beggar woman in the Yarlung Valley, then a white female dog in Yarlung before living as a ewe in Lhasa.\footnote{Tradition maintains that part of the teachings was concealed in Dakpo Danglu, while the extensive tantras and their instructions were hidden at Lion Cliff (Sengge Drak) in Bumthang. \textit{Wellsprings of the Great Perfection}, 170.}

As Lhacam Pemasel grew increasingly unwell, Guru Rinpoche went to her bedside, and blessed her by touching various terma treasures to her head. She died shortly thereafter at Samye Chimphu, the first Buddhist establishment in the Himalayas, founded by her father and Guru Rinpoche. According to the autobiography, after the princess’ death Guru Rinpoche and his consort Yeshe Tsogyal interred the necessary terma so that the young girl could fulfill her aspirations in the coming centuries.\footnote{Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures}, 26.}
After five ‘impure’ incarnations, the first ‘pure’ incarnation was as a nun named Rigma Sangye Kyi (‘rigs ma sangs rgyas skyid, b. 12\textsuperscript{th} century).\textsuperscript{126} She was the consort of Nyangral Nyima Özer, the first of the five major treasure revealers (Figure 10).\textsuperscript{127} This life had been prophesied to the young princess as follows:

\begin{center}
Figure 10: Nyangral Nyima Özer (1136-1204), ink on paper, private collection, 20\textsuperscript{th} century (detail of Himalayan Art Resources 61235)
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{126} Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 31.
\textsuperscript{127} The Five Sovereign Tertons or Five Terton Kings (\textit{gter ston rgyal po lnga}) are: Nyangral Nyima Özer (nyang ral nyi ma ‘od zer, 1136-1204), Guru Chöwang Chökyi Wangchuk (gu ru chos dbang chos kyi dbang phyug, 1212-1270), Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa, 1346-1405), Pema Lingpa (pad+ma gling pa, 1450-1521) and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (‘jam dbyangs mkyen
At that time, Princess, your birth will be in the new town of Lower Drak in Central Tibet. You will be born in the Dog year as the daughter of the father Sangye and the mother Getsoma. Both of them will die early on and you will be known as Samten Kyi. When that very Lord Nyang Ral [Nyima Özer] is taking out the treasure trove at Samye, by the compelling force of previous prayers, you will meet him there and he will guide you and take you as his wife. Three children will be born. Listening to the condensed essence of the most profound instructions of Ogyen, myself, you will practice them and realize the nature of awareness. Then you will be known as the Wisdom Woman Sangye Kyimo. Your entourage and possessions will increase and you will become a holder of the Secret Mantra doctrine.128

This marks an interesting shift in how a female incarnation is presented. Earlier, the three ‘impure’ lives when Lhacam Pemasel was a beggar woman were considered lower than the animal incarnations. Also of note was how those incarnations moved from a more peripheral region, Yarlung, and into Lhasa in central Tibet by the time she took rebirth as a ewe. Here, her upward trajectory continued when she incarnated as a woman in central Tibet, a nun who has access to the Buddhist Dharma. Further, she becomes the consort of the earliest major terton in the history of the Nyingma tradition, placing her at a crucial historical moment. In addition, the passage above makes it clear that she herself was of some spiritual repute, having practiced the most profound instructions, realized the nature of awareness and cultivated her own “entourage.” It is these qualities—the ability to access and properly undertake Buddhist practices—that ostensibly distinguish this ‘pure’ female birth from those ‘impure’ lives as a female beggar, not to mention her selection as Nyangral Nyima Özer’s consort. Frequently, Buddhist masters select consorts based on the display of particular characteristics, anything from a display of intellectual aptitude to

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128 Harding, Life and Revelations, 68.
having unusual moles or other bodily marks. Together, these factors present Rigma Sangye Kyi as a notable woman for her time, which would not have been lost on the readers of Pema Lingpa’s autobiography.

Figure 1: Jomo Pema Dröl (1248-1283), from Dudjom Rinpoche, *Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 772

The next life was also female, as Jomo Pema Dröl (jo mo pad+ma sgrol, b.1248); Figure 11), born in the Layak region of Kyidrong. She was the daughter of a Buddhist teacher, Tsurpa Sangye Lama, and grew up along the border of modern southern Tibet and
northern Bhutan.\textsuperscript{129} As was her previous incarnation, Jomo Pema Dröl was a nun. She also became the consort of a major terton king, this time to Guru Chöwang (gu ru chos dbang, 1212-1270; Figure \ref{fig:GuruChöwang}).\textsuperscript{130}

![Figure 10: Guru Chöwang (1212-1270), Mani Dungkhor shrine, Tamzhing, 20th century](image)

Yet this meeting between terton and consort was actually a reunion of sorts, as much as Jomo Pema Dröl was the reincarnation of Sangye Kyi, Guru Chöwang was the reincarnation of Nyangral Nyima Özer; the two reunited for another lifetime as a result of

\textsuperscript{129} Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 32
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{rig 'dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che}, Vol. Pha, f.11a. Guru Chöwang is the second of the five terton kings, also known as Chökyi Wangchuk.
their strong karmic bond.\textsuperscript{131} Jomo Pema Dröl was active in spiritual endeavors, and acted as patron for a temple in Laya known as Dewachenpo, and fully furnished it with its contents, a notable contribution for a 13\textsuperscript{th} century woman.\textsuperscript{132} Jomo Pema Dröl was also considered an emanation of Yeshe Tsogyal, and revealed a terma treasure, the \textit{Gathering of All the Secrets of the Đākiṇīs} (\textit{mkha’ gro gsang ba kun ‘dus}).\textsuperscript{133} She and Guru Chöwang had two children together, named Sangye Kun Dröl (sangs rgyas kun grol, b. 13\textsuperscript{th} century) and Pema Wangchen (pad+ma dbang chen, b.13\textsuperscript{th} century).\textsuperscript{134} Later in his life, Pema Wangchen was sent as collateral for a shipment of wood his mother had ordered to build a temple dedicated to Guru Rinpoche in southern Tibet.\textsuperscript{135}

In this life as Jomo Pema Dröl, she had acted as patroness for a Buddhist temple, revealed treasure, received Buddhist teachings, and, in order to ensure sufficient building supplies, put her child up as a guarantee for payment, both remarkable acts of faith, and one could argue, piety. By furnishing a temple which would expose countless people to the benefit of Buddhist teachings—and which the Buddhist community would benefit from the financial support of the converts—Jomo Pema Dröl undertook an act of tremendous merit. Apparently, the deeds of this lifetime were enough to catapult her into her next incarnation as a male.

\textsuperscript{131} Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 69. The text reads: “While working for the benefit of beings to be tamed, he [Guru Chöwang] will recognize that you [Jomo Pema Drol] are endowed by previous karmic connections and will take you as his wife.”
\textsuperscript{132} Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 32.
\textsuperscript{133} The \textit{Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism}, 771.
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi gter chos mdzod rin po che}, Vol. Pha, 11a-11b.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi gter chos mdzod rin po che}, Vol. Pha, 11b. See also Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures}, 27. Later, Pema Lingpa would make multiple visits to Guru Lhakhang during his travels in Lhodrak.
Incarnations during the 14th century

The next pre-incarnation of Pema Lingpa was Rinchen Drakpa (rin chen grags pa, d.u.). According to the text, he was born in Yeru (g.yas ru), which was also the hometown of the famed terma master Orgyan Lingpa (o rgyan gling pa, 1323-1360). Rinchen Drakpa became a student of the master Orgyan Lingpa, and over the course of his life became an accomplished practitioner of the meditational deity Tamdrin (rta mgrin; Skt. Hayagrīva). This was in accord with Guru Rinpoche’s prophecy, which stated, “After practicing the profound instructions and doing the recitation practice of the fierce mighty Iron Hair Hayagrīva, you will meet that deity five times. Very great powers and abilities will be yours.” For a practitioner to directly encounter, or “meet,” a deity is an expression of their meditative abilities, and here provides a seed of the spiritual aptitude to come. After shifting from a begging female to animals to accomplished females active in the Dharma, the pre-incarnations of Pema Lingpa have finally attained a capable male body. And from this point, it is expected that each successive incarnation be endowed with greater abilities and earn greater renown.

136 In Aris’ *Hidden Treasures*, he states that Rinchendrak hailed “from Drongsar in the Tsang province of Tibet” (27), while Harding’s translation states the lineage was from Yoru in Trongsa (32). Harding, in note 21 (160) says “g.yo (sic) ru, an area in Central Tibet, south of Lhasa,” then later states that this incarnation “will be in the country called Tsangig Yeru, in the place called Trongsa (69). The autobiography states gtsang gi g.yas ru ’i nang/yul khrong gsar bya ba ru (f. 11b), which I read as from “the new district Yeru in Tsang (central Tibet),” parsing yul krong as ‘district’ and gsar as ‘new,’ rather than khrong gsar as ‘Trongsa.’

137 Harding, *Life and Revelations*, 32

138 Harding, *Life and Revelations*, 69
Understandably, Pema Lingpa’s text reveals substantive connections to important historical masters; namely, two of the five greatest treasure revealers in the Nyingma tradition. His gradual evolution from female to male rebirths and from there into male Dharma practitioners reflects societal biases of the times. Though there were, and continue to be, renowned female practitioners and tertons, there have been far fewer than there have been males. In every subsequent incarnation, the future Pema Lingpa is experiencing an upward trajectory of increasingly adept practitioners, each of whom amass consistently more impressive spiritual feats and accomplishments, and thus sets the expectation for Pema Lingpa to achieve an even higher level of attainment.

The fourth ‘pure’ incarnation was as Pema Ledreltsal (pad+ma las ‘brel tsal, b. 1248; Figure 13). Pema Ledreltsel was born in the Dwagpo (dvags po) region and though his life was short, he would eventually reveal one of the most important teaching cycles of the Dzogchen, or Great Completion, class of Buddhist practice. Pema Ledreltsel was also a terton, and began revealing terma quite young, being only fifteen years old when he withdrew the Innermost Heart-Essence of the Đakīṇī (mkha’ ‘gro snying thig) terma.

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139 For a study of a female terton, see Jacoby’s 2007 dissertation “Consorts and Revelation in Eastern Tibet: The Auto/biographical Writings of the Treasure Revealer Sera Khandro (1892-1940),” and Gayley’s 2009 dissertation “Agency and the Rhetoric of Destiny: Narrating the Buddhist Revival in the lives and letters of Khandro Tare Lhamo (1938-2002) and Namtrul Jigme Phuntsok (1944-- ).”

140 The Nyingma tradition divides their practice into nine vehicles (theg pa dgu), or spiritual approaches, which are grouped into three groups of three. The first group is called the three sutra vehicles and is considered the most elementary. It consists of the Śrāvakā, Pratyekabuddha and Bodhisattva. The second group, known as the outer tantras, is for those of more advanced capabilities and is comprised of Kriya, Upa and Yoga. The third trio, the inner tantras, is made up of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga, or Dzogchen. Dzogchen is considered the highest and most advanced of the nine vehicles. See The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, 153-372.
from a juniper tree at Danglung Thramodrak (ldang lung khra mo brag).\textsuperscript{141} The prophecy of this lifetime was quite promising, but also foreboding: “You will lead all those connected with you to the place of Great Bliss. Since everybody will come under the power of evil, this success will last only a short while, and before you reach the age of fifty obstacles will set in.”\textsuperscript{142} Aris presents an even darker tale, noting, “He is said to have been the product of an incestuous union of a tantric priest and his sister…[he] was born quite destitute, despised by all.”\textsuperscript{143} One day a monk slipped the boy a scroll, saying if he mastered its contents magic powers would result. The text contained the locations of the terma he was destined to reveal, and shortly thereafter the young Ledreltsel began wandering, carrying the scroll with him.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{141} Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 32. The role of the Innermost Essence of the Ḍākinī (\textit{mkha’gro snying thig}) in the legacy of Pema Lingpa is explored in more detail in Appendix E.
\textsuperscript{142} Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 69.
\textsuperscript{143} Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures}, 27.
\textsuperscript{144} Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures}, 27. A very similar event would happen to Pema Lingpa, when a monk in tattered robes (later identified as Guru Rinpoche in disguise) offered up the directions to his first terma in the form of a scroll.
At Samye Chimphu, the same place where Lhacam Pemasel had died approximately five centuries earlier, Ledreltsel went to a cave to meditate. While there, a goddess appeared to him in a vision and urged him to visit Lhasa. When he did, he met the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (rang ‘byung rdo rje; 1284-1339), head of the Karma Kagyu tradition of Buddhism. The Third Karmapa asked for initiation into Ledreltsel’s teachings, and
received the *Khandro Nyingthig* cycle before they parted ways.\textsuperscript{145} Ledreltsel went on to discover more than a dozen more teachings, and began traveling throughout the area giving initiations and securing patrons. But death was just around the corner for the young Ledreltsel:

[He] met a lady in the lower region of the Nyel district and for the duration of a month ‘he took care to have body-contact with her in conditions of secrecy’. He is twenty-five and it is an inauspicious year for him. That autumn, he departs for a seasonal round of begging and in upper Nyel he dreams that the lady with whom he had practiced the rites of sexual yoga was in fact a demoness. He is directed again to where she is staying, and, realizing that she is indeed a demoness, he is covered with shame. The lady then tricks her husband and brothers into believing that the saint and his followers have stolen some of their belongings. They are pursued, one of the followers is killed and the saint is wounded. He persuades his attackers that he will bring about his own death. They leave. Some days later he explains to his remaining three disciples how they will meet in a future life to complete the work of promulgating his “treasure-texts”. Then he departs to the heavenly realms.\textsuperscript{146}

Just before dying, he had told his closest disciples where to find his next rebirth: he would be born in central Tibet to parents named Tenpa and Sonam Kyi.\textsuperscript{147} At first glance, this would seem to be perhaps an incarnational ‘step backward,’ as Ledreltsel’s unfortunate parentage, social stigmatization and choice in consorts are quite unfortunate. However, it is the contact with the Third Karmapa which is of particular importance, as in both the next life and as Pema Lingpa, there will be close contacts with the different

\textsuperscript{145} Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 28. As Aris points out, this meeting between the Third Karmapa and the pre-incarnation of Pema Lingpa would provide ‘proof’ of sorts of the karmic connection between the Karmapa lineage and Pema Lingpa’s successive incarnations, thus providing a justification for the later meeting between Pema Lingpa and the Seventh Karmapa (28). See also Ricard, *Life of Shabkar*, for the Third Karmapa’s place in the *Khandro Nyingthig* lineage. The Third Karmapa is described as a “major lineage holder” in the Dzogchen tradition in Dorje, “Guhyagarbhatantra,” Vol. 1, 133 note 15.

\textsuperscript{146} Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 28.

\textsuperscript{147} Harding, *Life and Revelations*, 33
Karmapa incarnations. For Pema Lingpa, these interactions will prove deeply meaningful, and he will draw upon his exchange with the Karmapa as a source for his own legitimacy. In fact, Pema Lingpa incorporated the Karmapa into the mural program at Tamzhing. Thus, this connection between their respective prior incarnations is an indication of a deep karmic connection that will continue through their subsequent lineages. Also, as pointed out by Aris, Pema Lingpa would share similar accusations of fraud and experience his own dalliances with demonesses at the threat of losing his life.

As he had foretold on his deathbed, Pema Ledreltsel reincarnated in central Tibet, just five years after his passing. Known as Longchen Rabjam Drime Özer (klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer, 1308-1364; Figure 14), he would become a treasure revealer and one of the greatest scholars of the Nyingma tradition. Longchen was born at Drayphu Tongrong (gra'i phu stong grong) in the Tibetan area of Yuru (g.yu ru). On his mother’s side, he was a descendant of the esteemed Drom (‘brom) lineage that descended from one of Atisa’s foremost disciples, Dromtön Gyalwai Jungney (‘brom ston rgyal ba’i ‘byung gnas, 1005-1064).

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148 Aris, Hidden Treasures, 28.
149 Aris, Hidden Treasures, 28.
150 Gos Lo-tsa-ba Gzon-nu-dpal and Roerich, The Blue Annals, 201. Dudjom Rinpoche provides Longchenpa’s date of birth as the tenth day of the second month of the earth monkey year of the fifth rabjung (Dudjom Jikdrel Yeshe Dorje, The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, 575. The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, 575).
151 Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 33.
Figure 12: Longchen Rabjampa (1308-1364), upper shrine antechamber, Tamzhing
In his lifetime, Longchenpa, whose name means the ‘All-encompassing Vast Expanse of Knowledge,’ developed, compiled and systematized incredible amounts of Buddhist philosophical and practical teachings. E. Gene Smith describes Longchenpa’s significance as follows:

The figure of [Longchenpa] was for the [Dzogchen] school what St. Thomas Aquinas was for Christian scholastic philosophy. In a number of magnificently original treatises like the [Dzod dun, Longchen] ordered the philosophical and psychological truths and corollaries of [Dzogchen] into a cohesive system. For stylistic lucidity and structural organisation [Longchen] has seldom been equalled in Tibetan literature. Nyingmapa philosophy is [Longchen Rabjampa].

Yet Longchen did not limit himself to any one tradition, and combined studies of the Nyingma, Kadam and Sakya schools of Buddhism. As we will explore below, this openness to multiple spiritual approaches was particularly useful when he was later exiled to Bhutan.

Longchenpa had contact with the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (rang ‘byung rdo rje, 1284–1339) just as he had in his previous life as Pema Ledreltsel. However, during his life as Longchenpa, he and the Third Karmapa enjoyed far deeper and more sustained interactions. The profound bond between Longchenpa and the Karmapa, as would also the prior interaction between Ledreltsel and the Karmapa, later served as evidence for the

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152 Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 16.
153 In The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, Dudjom Rinpoche lists the doctrines studied with Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje as follows: “[T]he Six-Limbed Yoga and Its Means to Remove Obstacles (sbyor drug gedics sel dang bcas pa), The Six Doctrines of Nāropa, the Introduction to the Three Bodies (sku gsum ngo sprod), Jinasāgara (rgyal ba rgya mtsho), Avalokiteśvara according to the Tradition of the King (spyan ras gzigs rgyal po lugs), Guhyasamāja, the Samputa Tantra, the Mahāmāya, and the forms of Red and Black Yamārī” (578).
bond between Pema Lingpa and the Seventh Karmapa, presented in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography as a reconnection stemming their contacts in past lives. Longchenpa was the student of other important masters, including the Nyingma adept Samdrup Rinchen (bsam grub rin chen, b. 13th century), Kunga Odzer (kun dga’ od zer, b. 13th century), Tashi Rinchen (bkra shis rin chen, b. 13th century), Zalungpa (za lung pa, d.u.), Ten Gonpa (bstan gon pa, d.u.), the academician Labrangpa Chopel Gyaltsen (bla rang pa chos dpal rgyal mtshan, d.u.), Pang Lotsāwa Lodrō Tenpa (dpang lo tsA ba blo gros brtan pa, 1276-1342), Zhonnu Dōndrub (gzhon nu don grub, d.u.), Sangye Dragōd (sangs rgyas grags ‘od, d.u.), Zhonnu Dorje (gzhon nu rdo rje, d.u.), and the Sakya master Lama Dampa Sonam Gyaltsen (bla la dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan, 1312-1379), all in addition to his root guru Zhonnu Gyalpo (gzhon nu rgyal po, 1266-1343), better known as Rigidzin Kumārarāja (rig ‘dzin ku mA rA dza). It was Kumārarāja who first initiated Longchenpa into the teachings of Dzogchen, or Great Completion, when Longchenpa was about thirty years old, a tradition for which Longchenpa would later provide his own terma revelations (Figure 15).

Given this wide variety of teachers, it is no surprise that Longchenpa received a myriad of teachings, assembled from masters of the Nyingma, Karma Kagyu and Sakya traditions, and spanning topics such as maṇḍalas, sūtras, logic, philosophy, medicine,

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astrology, and other academic and Buddhist practical topics, thus providing Longchenpa one of the most extensive and varied educational pedigrees of the 14th century.155

As noted above, Pema Ledreltsel, the immediately previous incarnation of Longchenpa, had revealed the teachings of the Innermost Heart-Essence of the Dākīṇīs, or Khandro Nyingthig, a compilation of Dzogchen teachings transmitted from Guru Rinpoche and his consort Yeshe Tsogyal. In his rebirth as Longchenpa, he wrote an extensive commentary

155 Along with Tsong Khapa (1357-1419), retroactively considered the founder of the Gelugpa tradition and the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682), Longchenpa has been cited as one of the figures that reflected the cross-fertilization between traditions that later formed the core of the so-called Rime (ris med) movement, which gained popularity in the 19th century. See Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 241.
on the *Khandro Nyingthig* cycle, and expanded and combined the teachings to form the

Superior Heart Drop Teachings (*snying thig gong ma*), one of the key cycles of the

highest levels of Nyingma practice.\(^{156}\) He also provided crucial introductory material to

those who undertake a particular type of Dzogchen practice with his text *The Self-

Liberation Trilogy* (*rang grol skor gsum*).\(^{157}\) With all of Longchenpa’s writings, the full

scale and significance of his contributions is summed up as follows:

>[I]t was Longchenpa (1308-1363) who systematically refined the terminology

used by the tradition with a series of subtle yet clear distinctions; brilliantly

revealed its relationships with mainstream exoteric Buddhist thought; clarified its

internal structure; created from it masterpieces of poetic philosophy remarkable

for their aesthetic beauty, philosophical rigor, and overall clarity; and overall

pinpointed the inner quintessence of the tradition with writings that not only

systematized every major topic, but also creatively explained each to render

crystal clear the unprecedented revolution in the content, form, and structure of

“philosophical” thought in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism that the Great Perfection

teachings entail.\(^{158}\)

Longchenpa’s significance went beyond texts; he was also an accomplished practitioner.

Just as Ledreltsel had, Longchenpa was undertaking solitary practice at Samye Chimphu

(Figure 16) when he experienced a vision of the goddess Dorje Phagmo (*rdo rje phag mo;*

Skt., *Vajravarāhī*). She prophesied he would reveal a great many treasures in

Bumthang.\(^{159}\) She went on to say, “Your emanation will take birth in Bumthang and will

serve others. He, moreover, will journey to the western land of Oḍḍīyāna and reveal the

\(^{156}\) Aris, *Bhutan*, 155. As he notes, the other major tradition of Dzogchen is the *snying thig ’og ma*

of ’jigs med gling pa (1730-98).

\(^{157}\) Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 34.

\(^{158}\) Germano, “Poetic Thought,” 3.

\(^{159}\) Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 582. See also Part 4, p. 51, note 668.
attainment of buddhahood.”\textsuperscript{160} To followers of Pema Lingpa, this prophecy, along with the similar prediction provided to Lhacam Pemasel in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century, is considered clear indication of Longchenpa’s next rebirth to take place in Bumthang in the form of Pema Lingpa.

![Figure 14: Overview of Samye, Tibet (June 2007). Photo courtesy of Brid Arthur.](image)

After additional years of practice and contemplation, Longchenpa was in Lhasa near Kangpori when he experienced a vision foretelling him of serious conflict to come

\textsuperscript{160} Dorje, \textit{The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism}, 582.
between the ruling hegemony and the rapidly ascending Phagmo Drupa.\(^\text{161}\) According to Pema Lingpa’s autobiography, Longchenpa left for Bumthang of his own free will, where he began to found monasteries to propagate the Nyingma doctrine. Despite this incredible knowledge and training, Nyingma sources relate the reason Longchen spent time wandering was because he was “endowed with boundless sorrow and disillusionment at the condition of the world, [and] resolved to live in solitude” due to the “actions of Khampa scholars.”\(^\text{162}\) However, this traditional perspective lacks a bit of historical context, and deserves further clarification.

As Longchen’s reputation as a Buddhist master grew, he was invited to nearby regions to give teachings. During these trips, Longchen taught some of the foremost Buddhist leaders of his time, regardless of their individual traditions, including the head of the Sakya tradition and Khön lineage holder Lama Dampa Sonam Gyaltsen (bla ma dam pa bsod nams rgyal mtshan, 1312-1375). He also taught Tragzang (grags bzang) of Neyphug (gnas phug) and Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltsen (byang chub rgyal mtshan, 1302-1364), the founder of the Phagmo Drupa ruling family and who would later exile Longchen to Bhutan.\(^\text{163}\) Tai Situ Jangchub Gyaltsen was leader of the Sakya tradition, and as the Mongol-led Yuan era was closing, in central Tibet there was a struggle for control in the resultant power vacuum. Tai Situ was slowly consolidating power yet was facing significant resistance from Kunga Rinchen (kun dga’ rin chen) of the Drigung Kagyu

\(^{161}\) Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 590.  
\(^{162}\) Dorje, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 578.  
Because of this acrimony between the Sakya and Drigung traditions, when the Tai Situ and the Sakya eventually prevailed, Longchenpa was perceived to be a Drigung loyalist, as he had previously taught the Drigung leaders. Soon thereafter, despite having been a teacher to Tai Situ and other Sakyas as well, Longchen was exiled to the “land of the south,” Bhutan.  

Though Longchenpa would eventually be allowed to return to Tibet, he remained active while in Bhutan. Local tradition maintains that while in Bumthang Longchenpa fathered a child by a nun who was living at his monastery of Tharpaling (thar pa gling); a son by the name of Dawa Drakpa (zla ba grags pa, ca. 14th century). Dawa Dragpa would later become the source for the Dzogchen Thugse (thugs sras) incarnation lineage. In fact, according to the Blue Annals, Longchenpa had “several sons born of different mothers” and until “the present day, the line of disciples (sons) of the teacher of [Nyingthig] did not become extinct. Most of them, through their special excellence, became wonderful teachers of multitudes.” He was equally fruitful in establishing monasteries and retreats, credited with founding eight institutions known collectively as the Eight Lings. Longchen continued his prolific streak by penning a compilation of his works

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164 Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 33-34.
165 Aris states that it was a “quarrel” with byang chub rgyal mtshan that led to an exile “lasting ten years”, though does not specify his source (Bhutan, 155). See also Masters of the Nyingma Lineage, 167, and Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 34.
166 Aris, Bhutan, 155.
168 Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 34. The Eight Lings are enumerated as Tharpaling (bab ron thar pa gling) in Chume (chu smad), Shingkhar Dechenling (shing mkhar bde chen gling) in Ura (ura), Ogyenling (o rgyan gling) in Tang (stang), Kunzangling (kun bzang gling) in Kurtoe (skur stod), Drechagling ('bras bcags gling) in Nganlung (sngan lung), Pemaling (pad+ma gling) in
until that date, although many more were to come. \(^{169}\) It was in Bhutan that Longchen systematized the *Khandro Nyingthig*, originally revealed in his previous life as Ledreltsel. \(^{170}\) Longchen systematized much of Dzogchen practice, considered the penultimate and most esoteric of all Nyingma Tantric classifications, and which their tradition believes provides the most direct path to enlightenment. Dzogchen postulates that when each individual experiences rebirth, he or she is emerging from a primordial state of consciousness that was and is indistinguishable from enlightenment. From this perspective, our entire lives are a struggle to re-identify with that inherent state that was lost at the instant we gained consciousness. Longchen’s compilation and exposition on Dzogchen practice not only systematized the single-lifetime process through which one can achieve enlightenment, but his attractive packaging of this Nyingma tradition methodology became entrenched in central and eastern Bhutan, and was not supplanted even with the consolidation of power under the Drukpa Kagyu sect in the 17\(^{th}\) century.

This detailed discussion of the life and significance of Longchenpa is necessary in order to have a better understanding of the rich, scholarly legacy that Pema Lingpa was claiming as his own. His affiliation with one of the most learned Nyingma masters of Buddhist history is even more remarkable given that prior to his terma revelations, Pema Lingpa was an unschooled blacksmith who had not been a monk or in any way part of the

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Khotang (mkho thang), Kunzangling (kun bzang gling) in Menlo (men log) and Samtenling (bsam gtan gling) in Paro (spa gro) in Aris, *Bhutan*, 315. See also rgyal ba klong chen pa’i rnam thar. As noted by Aris, not all these institutions remained affiliated with Longchenpa’s lineages and some became affiliated with competing methodologies in the intervening centuries. 

\(^{169}\) Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 280 (note 93).

formalized Buddhist establishment. On one hand, Longchen’s esteemed legacy offered Pema Lingpa a form of legitimacy upon which to draw. Yet this affiliation presumably presented a formidable challenge to Pema Lingpa, as he would be expected to understand and expound upon, to some degree, some of the vast contributions offered to Buddhist philosophy by his esteemed forerunner, Longchenpa. Taken together, as is the case with so many Buddhist masters, each of Pema Lingpa’s former lives provided the necessary opportunities for him to perfect various qualities so that he could finally take rebirth as Pema Lingpa, and fulfill the prophecy of Guru Rinpoche made seven centuries earlier.

Pema Lingpa’s Early Years

In 1450, the year of the Iron Horse, Pema Lingpa was born into the Nyö family on the fifteenth day of the eleventh month. The famous Tibetan lineage of Nyö, while originally embedded in the Tsang (gtsang) region of Tibet, made inroads into Bhutan in the eleventh century when Yonten Dragpa (yon tan grags pa, d.u.) travelled south to India with Marpa Chokyi Lodrö (mar pa lo tsA ba chos kyi blo gros, 1012-1097). Since these earliest generations, the Nyö family has maintained a high status in Bhutanese society, one that continues into the present day. In Bumthang, Nyö family member Lama

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171 Alt. gnyos or smyos, meaning ‘insane.’ Aris summarizes two versions of the origin of the name: In the first, a king’s widow witnesses her three sons being swept away by a river and goes mad. Her grief is lessened by the arrival of a divine son, who is the first member of the Nyö clan. The other account tells of a son of the gods who descends to earth, where the impurities of humans drive him insane (Aris, “New Light on an Old Clan of Bhutan: The sMyos-rabs of Bla-ma gSang-sngags,” 18–19). Later in the 17th century, holders of the Nyö lineage would found the Mindroling monastery of central Tibet, which would maintain strong connections with the Pema Lingpa lineages and perpetuate the practices of the Pema Lingpa tradition (See Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 18).
Demchog (1179-1265) built the temple of Sumdrang ca. 1230 CE. History records that many men in this branch of the Nyö intermarried with a nearby clan that claimed the 13th century terton Guru Chöwang as their ancestor. Within five generations, the Nyö had divided into two lines: the Sumdrang lineage descendant through Jamyang Drakpa Özer (‘jam dbyangs grags pa ‘od zer, 1382-1442) and that of his twin brother Tenpa’i Nyima (bstan pa’i nyi ma, b. 1382), who founded the Langdrang (glang ‘brang) temple just near Sumdrang. Jamyang Drakpa Özer maintained control over Sumdrang and married not a descendant of Guru Chöwang, but rather a bride from the Dung (gdung) family, another line of Bhutanese nobility. These marital alliances between the Dung and the Nyö, compounded by the connections to Guru Chöwang and other important early Buddhist masters comprised the early stages of what would essentially become Nyö hegemony over the eastern regions of Bhutan. A series of political and religious hierarchs would be emerge from the Nyö and take on prestigious positions on the regional and national stage. This included Tenpa’i Nyima, Jamyang Drakpa Özer’s twin brother, who would leave

173 Ardussi, John A., “A 17th Century Stone Inscription from Ura Village,” 1. Ardussi , citing Lam Sangngak (‘brug gi smyos rabs gsal me long, 106-107), notes that the site was originally connected to the Lhapa Kagyu, a subsect of the Drigung tradition, however, Aris maintaíns that this lineage was part of the Nyingma branch of the Nyö family and provides Lama Demchok’s full name as Nyoton Trulshik Choeje, 1179-1265 (Hidden Treasures, 21). Pommaret and Imaeda provide the following: “Le fils de lHa(s) gnang pa, ‘Khrul zhig chos rje alias bDe mchog (1179-1265) se rendit également au Bhoutan et établit dans la vallée d’U ra à Bum thang le monastère de Sum grang bSam grub chos rdzong qui deviendra le siege principal de la branche bhoutanaise du clan sMyos.” (“Le monastère,” 20.)
174 Aris, Hidden Treasures, 21. As noted in the last section, in one of his previous incarnations, Pema Lingpa was the consort of Guru Chöwang and mother of his children.
176 Aris, “New Light,” 19. See also Aris, Bhutan: Early History; Karmay, The Treasury of Good Sayings, 115-139; and Ardussi, “The Gdung Lineages of Central and Eastern Bhutan: A Reappraisal of Their Origin, Based on Literary Sources.”
Sumdrang and later begin a family, which would later include his grandson, Pema Lingpa.

In his late twenties, Tenpa’i Nyima left his brother on the throne at Sumdrang and went on a journey to Tibet, where he sought out and received teachings from some of the most important Buddhist practitioners of the time, including the First Dalai Lama Gendun Drup (dge ‘dun grub, 1371-1474), the Fifth Karmapa Deshin Shegpa (de bzhin gshegs pa, 1384-1415), Go Zhonnupel (‘gos lo tsA ba gzhon nu dpal, 1392-1481) and Thangtong Gyalpo (thang stong rgyal po, 1385-1464). Tenpa’i Nyima had at least three children, one of whom was Döndrup Zangpo (don grub bzang po, d.u.), who later fathered Pema Lingpa. Döndrup Zangpo lost both his parents in a fire that also destroyed his family temple of Langdrang. He and his two siblings returned to Sumdrang, where in time his sister would become the consort of Thangtong Gyalpo. During the mid-fifteenth century, Döndrup Zangpo and his wife Pema Dronma (pad+ma sgron ma, d.u.) were settled in the Chel region of the Tang Valley, located in the Bumthang district of central Bhutan. According to Pema Lingpa’s autobiography, Pema Dronma began having intense dreams, of the sun and moon dissolving into a vase, which was carried by a turquoise-colored woman who then descended into the crown of her head. Meanwhile, her husband dreamt of himself as a maṇḍala, or cosmological diagram, that extended throughout the universe. These dreams were considered a sign of auspicious events to come. In 1450, a

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177 Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 22.
son named Peljor was born to them, who would be followed by eight more siblings. It would not be until much later that Peljor would receive his more famous moniker, Pema Lingpa (Figure 17). As is so frequently encountered in descriptions of a Buddhist master’s birth, the autobiography states that Pema Lingpa’s arrival was accompanied by rainbows lasting three days, auspicious omens of bountiful harvests and paired birds, as well as an assortment of other lucky portents.\(^{181}\)

\(^{180}\) The name Pema Lingpa would not be conferred upon him until he was in his thirties, when he had a dream encounter with Guru Rinpoche. 

\(^{181}\) Tshewang, *Treasure Revealer*, 41.
This account of the conception and birth of Pema Lingpa is quite standard. While the infant has not yet achieved his prophesied spiritual status, biographers commonly attributed supernatural and unusual happenings to every life event of their subjects in order to augment the claim to legitimacy held within. While these assertions may seem
unbelievable to a modern, non-initiated audience, to the intended audience, these events seem more possible, if not feasible.

Also as frequently revealed in these types of biographies, as a child, Pema Lingpa exhibited unusual characteristics; he continually acted as if he were a lama and spent time making Buddhist ritual items instead of toys, and other decidedly unchildlike behavior:

Even playing around in his youth, he would sit on a throne and act as if he were giving empowerments and instructions, sing incantations, perform sacred dances, gather together a following, enter into meditative absorption, and generally engage in activities beyond the scope of most children. At those times, his hands and feet would leave many imprints in hard stone as if it were mud.\textsuperscript{182}

Yet he also had an assertive nature that garnered him quite a reputation among the local residents. One account describes the young Pema Lingpa as follows:

It is said that he seldom listened to others, but had very much a mind of his own, and a mind full of fancies at that. Not even his parents did he listen to. [...] His rough and wayward behaviour shows how a different, convention-free impulse guided him. But unruly he certainly was: both naughty, and with a huge appetite. His father soon gave him the nickname ‘Protruding Navel’, his mother called him ‘Spent Merit’, while local people in general jokingly called him Dondrupgyal—which means, literally, ‘Lord of What He Wants’.\textsuperscript{183}

Over time, though, his youthful activities related to things spiritual would become more varied and more elaborate, with a seeming desire to bring happiness to other children around him:

Pema Lingpa enjoyed entertaining other children by making small models of chortens, thrones and temples for them, and also by imitating sermons, religious rites, erecting prayer flags, writing texts on leaves, and going through the movements of the sacred dance for them. All of these natural propensities are to

\textsuperscript{182} Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 40.
\textsuperscript{183} Tshewang, \textit{Treasure Revealer}, 41-42.
be seen as coming from his karmic background. On the other hand, he disliked both ordinary songs and the sport of archery.\textsuperscript{184}

This early behavior of preferring Buddhist activities is a common theme in the biographies of spiritual masters, as is the stated aversion to average, everyday activities. Archery, a sport used to kill animals, was anti-Buddhist because it took a life for no justifiable purpose. To Pema Lingpa’s skeptics, this portrait of the young terton--obstinate yet seeking to teach while refusing to listen to authority--could be considered an early indication of patterns that would predominate in Pema Lingpa’s later life.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure16.png}
\caption{Pema Lingpa, 16\textsuperscript{th} century, copper, Kunzangdrak, Bumthang. From Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives}, 107.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{184} Tshewang, \textit{Treasure Revealer}, 43.
When Pema Lingpa’s younger brother was born, the house was too crowded, and it was decided that Pema Lingpa would go to his maternal grandparent’s house for the remainder of his childhood. Pema Lingpa was raised by his grandfather, a blacksmith named Yonten Jangchub (yon tan byang chub), and his grandmother, a lay nun named Ani Døndrup Zangmo. Yonten Jangchub trained his grandson in the hereditary craft of blacksmithing, at which the boy seemed to excel. The text states, “From the age of nine years, he [Pema Lingpa] naturally understood without effort the various crafts such as ironwork, carpentry, masonry and tailoring.” Later, these skills would provide skeptics with ammunition when they charged Pema Lingpa with manufacturing the very treasure items he claimed to reveal. Yet at this point in his life, Pema Lingpa had no idea of the path that awaited him.

A Terton’s Career Begins

At the age of twenty-five years, Pema Lingpa, who had been making his living in the smithy making swords and iron pans, began having strange dreams in the night, dreams in which people were urging him to hand over works he could not produce. Although he had been invited to spend time as the student of the Buddhist teacher Chogdenpa (mchog Idan pa, d.u.), Pema Lingpa had opted to stay with his grandfather. Then, on the tenth day of the first month of the Fire Monkey Year (1476), Pema Lingpa wandered into the

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185 Harding, Life, 40. See also Sangngak, ‘brug gi smyos rabs yang gsal me long, 202.
186 Given as Wednesday, July 31, 1476 by Dudjom Rinpoche (Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, 796).
woods to find mushrooms. He stopped to rest and was awakened from his doze by a monk wearing ragged robes, who handed him a yellow scroll of paper. The monk then disappeared, but the scroll entreated Pema Lingpa to go to Naring Drak (sna ring brag), or Long-Nosed Cliff, on a particular date. After returning home and recounting this dream, his father scoffed; however, his mother and a visiting nun told Pema Lingpa that he ought to go, as a similar situation had happened to the famous tertön Ratna Lingpa (rat+na gling pa, 1403-1479) before he revealed his first treasure.

Figure 17: Naring Drak (Long-Nosed Cliff) at Mebartsho (Burning Lake), Tang valley, Bumthang.

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188 Alternately described as Pema Lingpa’s maternal aunt.
189 *Lingpa* is a frequent component in the names of treasure revealers, meaning ‘sanctuary [for living beings].’
On the ordained night, five friends\(^{190}\) tried to convince a disinterested Pema Lingpa to go to Naring Drak (Figure 19). It was only through an elaborate ruse on their part that they were able to bring the unwilling blacksmith to the edge of a frigid pool bathed in moonlight. According to the autobiography, Pema Lingpa suddenly went blank as if in a trance, jumped into the water, and disappeared from view. Unknown to his panicked friends above, Pema Lingpa discovered a long cave underwater, in which was a large golden Buddha image. Standing next to the statue was a one-eyed woman named wearing red robes. She shoved a small chest encased in rhinoceros skin into Pema Lingpa’s hands and then shouted at him to leave.\(^{191}\) Pema Lingpa emerged from the water and came back to his senses on the shore, holding the box before his astonished friends.

This first dive into Lake Mebartsho and his retrieval of the rhino-skin case marks the point at which Pema Lingpa’s autobiography shifts more toward hagiography. The acclaim lavished upon him for this discovery opens the door for him to manifest his destiny as prophesied by Guru Rinpoche, yet simultaneously opened him up to scrutiny and incredulity. Inside the case was a terma text, which beyond its significance for

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\(^{190}\) Some versions attest Pema Lingpa went to the cliff with his five brothers.

\(^{191}\) Pema Tshewang states the woman is the deity Ralchigma (The Treasure Revealer, 46, n.32), while Harding “a woman with one eye, wearing maroon clothes” (Life and Revelations, 41), and Aris states “a girl with a single eye in her forehead” (Hidden Treasures, 38). Ralchigma (ral gcig ma) is Ekajati, one of the primary protective figures of the Nyingma tradition.
Buddhist practice, was a de facto indication that Pema Lingpa was a predestined terton and thus of immense spiritual importance.\textsuperscript{192}

After Pema Lingpa’s recovery from the lake, the local community met him with equal parts honor and skepticism. The text contained within the casket was difficult for Pema Lingpa to read until a dream revealed the necessary ‘key’ that would enable transliteration of the text from its cryptic letters into their legible (ostensibly Tibetan language) counterparts.

But before achieving fame and glory, Pema Lingpa had to convert followers and maintain their patronage in order to continue his activities and revelations. Without any proof of his visionary experiences, or even perhaps any realization of his own, of his identity as a great treasure revealer, Pema Lingpa was little more than a soaking wet blacksmith holding a rhinoceros-skin box. In the sources, there seems to be some disagreement about whether or not Pema Lingpa was able to even read the scroll inside the casket. According to Chakravarti, Pema Lingpa was illiterate, as noted in this translation of the scene just after his encounter with the unkempt monk, prior to his first plunge into the lake:

\[\text{[Pema Lingpa]} \text{ suddenly remembered that the hermit had given him a small roll of paper. He took it out and tried to read but he did not know the Bhutanese alphabet even, not to speak of Sanskrit (deva bhāṣa) in which the paper roll was said to have been written. But still he concentrated his mind on the scroll and could}\]

\textsuperscript{192} Chapter One provides an overview of the terma ‘treasure revealing’ tradition.
intuitively grasp that the script bore a message for him to go to the Burning Lake and find out the Hidden Treasure.\textsuperscript{193}

However, as discussed above, Chakravarti’s text is less reliable, and offers no source for this assertion.\textsuperscript{194} The Bhutanese scholar Padma Tshewang describes the same scene, and indicates a scribe had to be found in order to transcribe this first treasure text, yet like Chakravarti does not indicate his source. Padma Tshewang begins with Pema Lingpa’s attempt to discern the yellow scrolls given to him by the ragged monk:\textsuperscript{195}

Returning to Mani Gonpa, Pemalingpa concentrated deeply, and again examined the Yellow Pages with great care. On this, the Scroll of Prophecy, he found the Tibetan alphabet with its subjoined and superscribed letters and vowels, and immediately below were written the corresponding letters in the Terma script. With difficulty he was then able to read the title as Longsel Sangwa Nyingchu, the ‘Quintessence of Secrets’. He then read further in the scroll that he should transcribe the text and give teachings for the public three months later, in the Pig Month.\textsuperscript{196}

Padma Tshewang then relates how Pema Lingpa located an appropriate scribe:

[Pema Lingpa’s] next task was to find the scribe who was destined to do the transcription. He had no idea how to go about this, but then in a dream five girls appeared before him, saying, “Your scribe is to be found in Ura; he has a limp in his left leg, and wears a red robe with blue cuffs: call him”. The girls then disappeared. According to the dream, the scribe was found and called to Mani Gonpa in order to transcribe the text. Here too some strange things happened. When the work was half done, the scribe’s ink ran out and, thinking he would wait until the next morning to prepare more, he opened the inkpot and found it had been filled. So he could carry on immediately. Now, Tibetan ink shines, due to maize-based gum which is added to it. Later on, when the light was failing, the

\textsuperscript{193} Chakravarti, \textit{A Cultural History of Bhutan, Volume 2}, 28.
\textsuperscript{194} In Chakravarti’s brief treatment of Pema Lingpa in \textit{A Cultural History of Bhutan, Volume 2}, 27–30; however, there are no citations offered.
\textsuperscript{195} Naring Drak would not be known as Mebartsho (me ‘bar mtsho), or Burning Lake, until Pema Lingpa’s second, far more public treasure withdrawal took place the following year.
\textsuperscript{196} Tshewang, \textit{The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan: Pemalingpa, the Terma Tradition and Its Critics}, 46.
scribe thought to add some gum in order to see his writing better. But with the addition of the gum, the ink in the pot immediately disappeared.  

These accounts related by Padma Tshewang seem to suggest that Pema Lingpa, at least at the start of his revelatory career, was less than adept with the scripts revealed. Unfortunately, like Chakravarti, Padma Tshewang does not reference the specific source for this account.

Additional questions over Pema Lingpa’s literacy—or perhaps lack of it—can be raised through conflicting accounts of Pema Lingpa’s activities. Harding translates the same post-revelation period described above, just after Pema Lingpa revealed the terma *Quintessence of the Mysteries of the Luminous Space of Samantabhadrī* (*klong gsal gsang ba snying bcud*), the scene is markedly different:

Back at Mani Gonpa, when it was time to transcribe the yellow scroll, the ink ran out. Immediately a dakini appeared and offered a self-filling pot of ink and made a prophecy about the scribe and other things. At the village of Dangkhabi, when he opened the door or the empowerment and instruction of this sacred teaching for the first time, myriad good signs appeared, such as a rain of flowers and a canopy of rainbows. Every night he experienced the Great Orgyen and Tsogyal explaining the exact details of how to confer the empowerment and give the instructions, how to perform the dances, the musical notation for the ritual

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198 *rig 'dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mzdod rin po che*. Presumably the biography referred to is one of the three texts found in volume 14 (Pha), namely, *bum thang gter ston padma gling pa'i rnam thar 'od zer kun mdzes nor bu'i phreng ba, pad gling 'khrungs rabs kyi rtogs brjod nyung gsal dad pa'i me tog, or pad gling 'khrung rabs rtogs brjod dad pa'i me tog gyi kha skong mos pa'i ze'u 'bru*; however, despite efforts, the specific text was not found.  
199 As pointed out by Chris Butters in *The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan* (129 n.21), tertons and literacy need not go hand in hand, and he cites Keith Dowman (*Sky Dancer*, 292) and Samten Karmay (*The Treasury of Good Sayings*, xxxvi) as noting similar phenomena.
activity, and so on, and he would precisely implement these instructions on the following day.\(^{200}\)

The source used by Harding is a text written by the Eighth Pema Lingpa Sungtrul Kunzang Dechen Dorje (kun bzang bde chen rdo rje, 1843-1891). It is a comparatively modern work, and offers up a translator not a simple scribe from Ura, but rather the ultimate sources of the terma doctrines themselves: Guru Rinpoche and his consort Yeshe Tsogyal, who appeared before Pema Lingpa to describe the exact meanings of the treasure. It could be gleaned that without the assistance of these visions of Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal, Pema Lingpa would have had considerably more difficulty in transcribing the scroll he withdrew from Mebartsho. Further, by directly incorporating the Guru and his consort as the immediate interlocutors for the instructions, this later account offers Pema Lingpa additional legitimacy in this, his first revelation.

Given the work translated by Harding postdates Pema Lingpa’s autobiography by about three hundred years, it reflects an interesting transition from the earlier version presented by Padma Tshewang. In the later text, indications of Pema Lingpa’s early inexperience and possible lack of literacy were supplanted with direct visionary encounters with Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal, the sources of the terma tradition. By shifting the agency of translation from an unknown, poorly dressed scribe in Ura Valley to Guru Rinpoche himself greatly augments Pema Lingpa’s spiritual status. Only the most accomplished meditators are able to directly encounter Buddhist masters and deities, so when in the

\(^{200}\) Harding, *Life and Revelations*, 41.
later text Pema Lingpa meets Guru Rinpoche in person in the course of his first revelation, this is making a strong statement of the importance of Pema Lingpa. This transformation of the story, which took place over more than three centuries, reveals a cumulative process during which Pema Lingpa’s activities become increasingly superlative and spectacular.

Pema Lingpa’s Mid-life

Pema Lingpa’s discoveries continued, and in 1481 at the age of 31, he had a dream in which he was summoned to Guru Rinpoche’s Copper Mountain Paradise realm, where the Guru conferred upon him the name Orgyan Pema Lingpa (o rgyan pad+ma gling pa). In addition, Guru Rinpoche stated that Pema Lingpa would reveal a total of 108 terma in his lifetime, all for the benefit of sentient beings. While he never revealed the full number, he did recover almost forty of them before the end of his life in 1521 CE. For the first three years, Pema Lingpa is withdrawing terma all around the Tang (stang) Valley, and does not even leave his home valley until a terma retrieval at Kurje (sku rjes), located in the next valley over. As time went on, Pema Lingpa’s activities spread farther afield of Bumthang, expanding into Lhodrak in southern Tibet in 1483, and eventually culminating in a revelation in 1487 at the central Tibetan site of Samye, the

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201 Gayley, “Patterns,” 100. Pema Lingpa withdrew the Dzogchen teaching The Gathering of Samantabhadra’s Knowledge (kun bzang dgongs pa kun ’dus) from a stūpa (mchod rten) at Samye in 1487. Gayley points out that shortly after this revelation, made late at night, Pema Lingpa left immediately the next morning and that the treasure was not transmitted near Samye; unlike the other terma Pema Lingpa revealed, he did not stay near the place of discovery to cultivate a new body of patrons (“Patterns,” 111). Later in 1513, Pema Lingpa did perform initiations into his treasures at Samye (“Patterns,” 114).
reputed source of the terma tradition. Pema Lingpa traveled extensively from 1476 until the end of his life almost forty years later. He went to Tibet twenty-one times, revealing terma, offering initiations, performing miracles, and fulfilling the requests of his many patrons (Figure 20). It was in the Tibetan region of Lhodrak that Pema Lingpa one of his most important terma—the *Lama Jewel Ocean* (*bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho*), extracted from a rock marked with a vermillion swastika. These terma discoveries, often done in public and before an assembled crowd, provided Pema Lingpa with new patrons and followers, as well as the material support they offered him. Further, the materials brought forth were considered by his supporters to be holy objects, and were frequently given as gifts in the case of sculptures, or Pema Lingpa offered his patrons private initiations into the texts he revealed.

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202 Gayley, “Patterns,” 104.
203 Later, in 1503, the imagery from the practices in this text would provide a significant portion of Tamzhing’s iconographic program.
Yet despite his busy travel schedule Pema Lingpa oversaw a number of projects. A trained woodcarver, he crafted blocks for text printing. He is also credited with the renovation and partial restoration of the wall murals at Jampey Lhakhang (byams pa’i lha khang), the 7th century temple located near the sacred site of Kurje (sku rje) in Bumthang. He also spent time in retreat at two of his monasteries, Kunzangdrak (kun bzang brag) and Peling (pad gling) to cultivate his meditative skills.

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When needed, miracle working was also part of Pema Lingpa’s repertoire. In addition to silencing critics, these miracles both communicated lessons to the assembled audience and provided a display of power. For example, when invited to give initiations at Samye Chimphu in Tibet, his patron insisted that Pema Lingpa consecrate a stone pestle that would be used to make medicinal powders.\footnote{Tshewang, \textit{The Treasure Revealer}, 53.} The autobiography relates that Pema Lingpa froze in a moment of uncertainty:

Pemalingpa felt uneasy, knowing that if he did not respond to this, people would lose faith in him. As he stood, wondering what to do, holding the pestle, a trance came over him, and it was found that the stone pestle had been imprinted with the mark of his hand. Faith in him was thereby strengthened, and the people present there became his disciples too.\footnote{Tshewang, \textit{The Treasure Revealer}, 53. The text continues: “He left imprints in stone on several occasions. One was during his childhood at Chel Baridrang, when he is said to have stamped angrily on a rock upon being teased, leaving several small footprints. The best known is the footprint he made on a stone which is kept at the monastery of Kunzangdrak.” In \textit{Hidden Treasures}, Aris describes that on a journey into southeast Tibet, Pema Lingpa left a footprint in stone, “which his female porters actually licked in their extreme devotion,” and then notes “By [Pema Lingpa’s] own admission these feats were not involuntary: on another occasion he produced a footprint specifically ‘in order to counter the abuse and malevolence of the locals’”. (73)}

Leaving marks in stone is common in the Himalayan tradition in general, as well as in this autobiography, where an angry Pema Lingpa imprinted his foot in stone, and even his horse left a similar display during a quick departure. Throughout Bhutan, these stones and other sacred relics are displayed on the shrines of Pema Lingpa-related sites so that visitors can receive blessings from them. Other tales note that when grain was offered to Pema Lingpa, it sprouted and was ready to eat in the course of an afternoon. These feats, as well as others, offered devotees proof of Pema Lingpa’s spiritual power, while concurrently offering his skeptics a rich arsenal of material which to them, cast
significant doubt on the terton’s authenticity. As the autobiography notes, these displays of miracles could yield significant rewards in the form of new patrons. For example, when the Nangso (prefect) of Lhalung hosted Pema Lingpa, he insisted that the terton withdraw a terma from Gado (gad mdo), a site that was prophesied to hold terma by both Guru Chöwang and Dorje Lingpa. The Nangso made Pema Lingpa change clothes with another person to ensure that he did not have any materials hidden in his robes. After Pema Lingpa successfully withdrew the treasure, he “immediately placed a hat of the paṇḍits upon the head of the Nangso and arranged the auspices to make him” Pema Lingpa’s patron. 208 When Pema Lingpa then went to the Nangso’s residence, he was welcomed with significant pomp and circumstance and then given public confirmation of his status as a bona fide terton, which marks Pema Lingpa’s transition from the prior, Bumthang-based revealing activities to a wider, regional presence. 209 Pema Lingpa was also able to gather a significant number of new supporters as he straightaway traveled around the Nangso’s territory, giving initiations at a number of sites and giving private initiations to highly-placed potential patrons. 210

Yet even if these accounts were not completely accurate, as the stories themselves would spread, people would seek to receive teachings from Pema Lingpa, or after his demise,

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210 Pema Lingpa offered public initiations at Trongsa (grong gsar), Tsugna (btsug rna) and in other areas of Manthang (sman thang) before giving Sonam Lhundrup (bsod nams lhun grub) and his students private initiation into the cycle of Red Hayagrīva (rta mgrin dmar po) at Zalung Gonpa (rdza lung dgon pa). Gayley, “Patterns,” 109.
visit sites associated with his life and activities, ensuring material support for the tradition years in the future.

Occasionally, highly placed patrons would seek out Pema Lingpa to request that the terton use his powers to aid them in more secular matters. As the Phagmo Drupa and Rinpungpa hegemonies fought for control of Tibet, the leader of Lhalung, a longtime patron of Pema Lingpa, was feeling nervous about the Rinpungpa, who seemed on the verge of taking over his territory:

Pemalingpa reassured him with one of his prophecies, which held that there was nothing to fear from the Rinpungpa. As events proved, all the districts except that of Lhalung were defeated. Twenty years later, in 1503, a later incumbent to the position [in Lhalung] again complained to Pemalingpa about the Rinpungpa threat, saying he needed Pemalingpa’s “advice on means, auspices and counsels”. This time Pemalingpa performed a tantric ritual to repulse the enemy forces (**dmag-zlog**)—with complete success.\(^{211}\)

The autobiography chronicles many of these efficacious results, but it also reveals Pema Lingpa’s practical side, as when Pema Lingpa is summoned to the Seventh Karmapa and a man named Donyo Dorje (don yod rdo rje, 1463-1512), both of whom had strong connections to the Rinpungpa.\(^{212}\) The latter meeting failed to materialize, but it is probably safe to assume that the leader of Lhalung, Pema Lingpa’s erstwhile patron, might have felt a bit uneasy had he known Pema Lingpa was cultivating ties with his adversary.

\(^{211}\) Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 70-71.
\(^{212}\) Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 71.
By the time the 16th century arrived, Pema Lingpa’s renown—and his patron base—had grown enough so that he did not need to travel as often, and his number of terma revelations concurrently decreased. His supporters were coming from farther afield and as he received many invitations to travel, he gradually extended his reach far beyond his native Bumthang. In 1503, he was invited to Rinchenpung (rin chen spungs) to have an audience with the Seventh Karmapa, who requested full initiation into Pema Lingpa’s terma practices. For followers of the Pema Lingpa tradition, this interaction, in which Pema Lingpa conferred initiations and empowerments to the Seventh Karmapa, is an indication that the Karmapa accepted Pema Lingpa as legitimate. It could be extrapolated that the Karmapa considered Pema Lingpa’s terma as useful, and that the possessed some ritual efficacy and utility.

The number of texts and treasure items revealed by Pema Lingpa is recorded differently in different sources. In Masters of the Nyingma Lineage, it states, “At age twenty-seven, he obtained a list of locations of one hundred and eight [terma] from [Guru Rinpoche], and thereafter discovered over fifty texts and ritual objects.” While it is clear Pema Lingpa did not recover all 108 treasures originally prophesied, as Aris points out, leaders of other Buddhist traditions seemed to have misunderstood the number, time and place of Pema Lingpa’s revelations:

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213 For a detailed analysis of the gradual spread of Pema Lingpa’s activities, influence and teachings, see Gayley, “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination of Padma Gling pa’s Treasures,” 97–121.
214 See Aris, Hidden Treasures, 77-79 for an account of this meeting.
215 Masters of the Nyingma Lineage, 204. This source also notes that twenty-three of Pema Lingpa’s texts were included in the rin chen gter mdzod, and credits 737 texts (4,266 pages) to Pema Lingpa throughout his lifetime.
The [Fifth] Dalai Lama is clearly wrong in his statement that the thirty-two ‘treasure-hoards’ attributed to Pemalingpa were all discovered in the six years between the time he was aged twenty-seven (when he recovered the [Longsel] at Naring Drak) and thirty-two (when he go the [Mangagikhor] at Samye): he was in fact twenty-five (or twenty-six by Tibetan reckoning) when he discovered the former in 1475 and sixty-three (or sixty-four) when he found the latter in 1513.\textsuperscript{216}

Aris continues: “There seems, however, to have been just a single find in all the years from 1489 to 1513.”\textsuperscript{217} A study offered by Aris in Appendix One of \textit{Hidden Treasures, Secret Lives}, reveals a marked shift in activity beginning between 1490 and 1493. At an unspecified time between those years, Pema Lingpa founded the monastery of Dekyiling (bde skyid gling) in Bumthang before embarking on a multi-year expedition throughout Bhutan during which he made two additional visits to Tibet. One of the trips, noted as his tenth, was explicitly described as a “begging tour to Yarong, Kharchung, Chakharzung, etc.”\textsuperscript{218} Whereas on his previous seven visits to Tibet, Pema Lingpa performed extractions of terma, between his eighth and sixteenth visits to the area, he did not reveal any treasures whatsoever. Instead, he was attending funerals and consecrations, and offering teachings. In fact, trips to Tibet that had formerly taken only twenty days were taking more than a month as Pema Lingpa stopped multiple times along the way to his ultimate destination in order to give instructions.\textsuperscript{219} And Pema Lingpa gave them freely, willing to impart teachings “to nobles and nomads alike, to important lamas and also the many nuns in charge of small temples, to large crowds of ordinary folk to small groups of

\textsuperscript{216} Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives}, 215.
\textsuperscript{217} Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives}, 215.
\textsuperscript{218} Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives}, 215.
\textsuperscript{219} Gayley, “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination of Padma Gling pa’s Treasures,” 109.
By the time he broke ground on Tamzhing temple in 1501 (Year of the Iron Bird), it is possible that as the revelations tapered off—or, one might say the impetus for their extraction became less acute—Pema Lingpa was able to focus himself on building a home monastery and placing himself in the center of his own sacred landscape. After the height of Pema Lingpa’s treasure activities (circa 1486-89), he was able to shift from withdrawing treasures from the earth and toward leaving his mark on the landscape by constructing temples and other important institutions. For Pema Lingpa to have the resources to support himself, his community and still travel at the will of his patrons, both local and regional, he had to have in place a well-established series of institutions where he could focus his income-generating activities.

In 1513, on his eighteenth visit to Tibet, Pema Lingpa was attending the consecration of a new temple at Samye when he extracted two terma at the site; these would be his last revelations before his death in 1521. As Samye Chimphu was a major meditation, teaching and revelation site of Guru Rinpoche, it eventually became *de rigueur* for tertons of note to travel there if at all possible, and ideally make a revelation onsite. This action would thereby claim, at the penultimate geophysical source of the terma tradition, that the terton is legitimate and have rightfully inherited the legacy of that place. The withdrawal itself becomes the culmination of legitimating activities, especially having taken place at the site of Samye, which was the first Buddhist institution established in the Himalayan realm. Samye had also been a place of significance for many of Pema

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221 Aris, *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives*, 220.
Lingpa’s previous incarnations, beginning with princess Lhacam Pemasel receiving her prophecy there, and for later incarnations such as Ledreltsel and Longchenpa to pass months and years in meditations at the site, thus increasing Pema Lingpa’s connection to Samye and placing even greater weight to the treasures he himself would reveal there. Pema Lingpa’s revelation at Samye in 1487 was unusual in many ways, as he uncovered the treasures under the cover of night, in secret, without the crowds that had begun to follow his every movement. 222 Also atypical was Pema Lingpa’s choice to leave Samye before disseminating the treasure; instead, he went immediately to Lhodrak before holding any public initiations. 223

Last Years of Pema Lingpa

After revealing his treasure at Samye Chimphu, Pema Lingpa takes it on a tour, giving initiations throughout Lhodrak and Bhutan. This is the most important terma Pema Lingpa has brought forth to date, and as described by Gayley, “takes on newfound importance in the dissemination process, harvesting the meaning of a site through a kind of charisma of place. As such, it retains potent associations to a discovery site even as it is disseminated even farther afield.” 224 The Samye treasure, and the cache it provided, also furnished the mechanism by which Pema Lingpa could begin to consolidate his

222 Gayley, “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination of Padma Gling pa’s Treasures,” 111. Gayley also notes that Pema Lingpa was told in a dream exactly when to go to the revelation site, and that it was the protector deity Pekar (Pehar) who appeared before him. In Tamzhing, Pehar is one of the two main guardian statues flanking the entry threshold.
223 Gayley, “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination of Padma Gling pa’s Treasures,” 111.
224 Gayley, “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination of Padma Gling pa’s Treasures,” 112.
activities, focusing more on building his legacy and less upon terma withdrawal. While he would still make his seasonal begging tours, as the sixteenth century dawned, he concentrated on his new project, the construction of Tamzhing temple.

Figure 19: Sculpture of Pema Lingpa, inner shrine, Tamzhing. From Sangngag, ‘brug gi smyos rabs yang gsal me long, 198.
This temple would provide a structure housing Pema Lingpa’s accumulated treasures to date. Its murals would reveal important aspects of his practices, while the walls and sculptures would be imbued with a variety of terma functioning as consecratory materials. Other terma would remain in Tamzhing so that visitors would have the chance to receive their blessings, making the temple a key destination for pilgrims. Even after he consecrated Tamzhing in 1505, Pema Lingpa continued to make trips to Tibet at the request of his followers, traveling there fifteen more times before his death. Some of the gatherings, organized in conjunction with local leaders and regional dignitaries, drew hundreds or even thousands of attendees, and were oriented toward contact with Pema Lingpa and physical contact with his treasures (Figure 21). These events and the close contact they propagated with Pema Lingpa served only to increase his number of supporters and his renown throughout the region, a legacy which could then extend to important people in the tradition. By now, he had produced a large family, having six sons by three different women between 1499 and 1509. These sons would carry on his lineage and cultivate patrons throughout the region. Yet Pema Lingpa was in such demand that it caused him many problems, including spending a lot of time away from his family. When one of his key patrons, the leader of Lhalung, could not be mollified and was requesting Pema Lingpa to return to Tibet every few months, Pema Lingpa lost his patience and said that because of his absence from home, he had not been able to take proper care of his brother or son, both of whom died while he was away. Pema Lingpa

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226 Aris, Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives, 79.
continued, saying, “Throw all these gifts in the river. Tomorrow I’ll leave with just two or three attendants for Umataktse and then I’ll go off to the east to whatever place I reach…If I die, there won’t be suffering: I can reside in the line of the *vidyādhara* [in heaven]. If you lot were to die you’d have to wander around in *saṃsāra*.”Little did he know that death was imminent. He became ill just as he was preparing for yet another trip, this time an intended trip to the west of Bhutan. Like his former incarnations, Pema Lingpa’s death is said to have come about due to congress with a demoness in disguise:

[Pema Lingpa] was attacked by a demoness in the form of one of his lady friends, a close relative of his consort Budren. She had ‘rendered him service’ but then had refused to continue doing so. It was alleged that the same demoness, who was herself the incarnation of the wicked queen of King Trisong Detsen of Tibet, had brought about the deaths of Pemalingpa’s earlier incarnations when he had lived as Pema Lendreltsel and Longchenpa.

Given that it was perhaps the same demoness, it could lead one to question whether this serial pattern of death by demoness is an indication of negative karma still clinging to the incarnations, yet this is not raised by any of the sources. It seems that this continual cycle was seen as a logical outgrowth, given that it had been endured by many of Pema Lingpa’s previous incarnations. When death did come to Pema Lingpa at Tamzhing, it is recorded in the autobiography as a quiet family affair:

Then on the morning of the third day of the first month in the year of the Snake [1521], just as the day was getting warm, [Pema Lingpa] sat up straight, placed his feet into the lotus posture and put his right hand into the mudrā of counting his rosary. His son Dawa thought he meant to indicate he wanted to say his prayers, so he put a skull-cup and ritual dagger into his hands. But he returned these to Dawa’s lap. Lama Dawa said: “Father, where are you going after you’ve abandoned us? For the sake of sentient beings, please stay.” Weeping he made this entreaty. Till this point Pemalingpa had been unable to speak, but now he

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uttered many sounds of “A, A”. With his eyes on Drakpa Gyalpo he took up is right hand and placed it into the hand of his son Dawa. Dawa said: “For the sake of sentient beings, please stay on and don’t pass into nīrвесa.” He replied: “Eh, eh”, nodding his head three times. And then his mind was absorbed into the dharmakāya of Samantabhadra.230

Comparatively, a later account from the Eighth Sungtrul’s biography relates Pema Lingpa’s death occurred in a much more fantastic manner:

[He] placed his hands on the heads of his two heart sons Dawa and Drakgyel, and said “ah ah ah.” With this sound of the unborn, the magical illusion of emanation passed into inner space, the great state of primordial extinction. At that time, the whole area of Chökor was filled with an extremely sweet, continuous sound of horns and cymbals, and the fragrance of saffron pervaded everywhere. The sky became a canopy of rainbow light of five colors, a rain of flowers fell, there was a great rumbling sound, and the earth moved again and again. These and other auspicious sights occurred for two or three months after the body passed away. After it passed, for many days continuously, the awareness-holder displayed the unmistakable apparitions of escalating to higher and higher levels. In particular, as in the prophecy, the relic of his heart, a turquoise girl, melted into his heart son Dawa.231

Again, the differing tone between the autobiography and the Eighth Sungtrul’s text demonstrate how Pema Lingpa was understood when each volume was composed. The elaborate post death miracles in the latter text reflect the renown with which Pema Lingpa had come to be held. After all, by the time of its composition, Pema Lingpa was the source of not one but three different incarnation lineages, each of which enjoyed great prestige and power in the region.

231 Harding, Life and Revelations, 49.
The funeral ceremonies that followed were so costly that when Pema Lingpa’s former patron, the prefect of Lhalung, attended, “he gave orders that taxes in Bumthang should be reduced that year to compensate for the great burden which the ceremonies had imposed on the public.”\footnote{Aris, Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives, 70. See also rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Pha, 244b} In addition to relics that survived the cremation pyre, Pema Lingpa left behind a number of material objects, now spread throughout the country.

Figure 20: Iron cape attributed to Pema Lingpa, circumambulation path, Tamzhing

At Tamzhing is a chainmail coat said to be made by Pema Lingpa (Figure 22), and additional evidence of his skills in blacksmithing are seen in the National Museum of Bhutan collection, where a frying pan (Figure 23), a ritual dagger (phur bu) and a sword

\footnote{Aris, Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives, 70. See also rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Pha, 244b}
(ral gri) are credited to his hand. He is also credited with a sculpted self-portrait, executed in clay and currently housed in the Ura Valley (Figure 24).

![Figure 21: Frying pan attributed to Pema Lingpa, 15th century, Iron, National Museum of Bhutan collection](image)

The National Museum also holds wooden reliquaries (mchod rten) said to be by Pema Lingpa. Near Pema Lingpa’s birthplace in the Tang valley of Bumthang, the temple of Kunzangdrak has held a set of wooden printing blocks that contain the master’s autobiography. A ritual dance mask carved by Pema Lingpa hangs in the upper shrine of Tamzhing, and is used annually in the autumnal Tamzhing Phala Choedpa festival.

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233 In 2010-11, the set of blocks were moved from Kunzangdrak to the National Library and Archives of Bhutan in Thimphu, where they are being fumigated for woodworm infestation and 115
Figure 22: Self-portrait of Pema Lingpa, 16th century, clay and pigment.

Later Incarnations of Pema Lingpa

conserved. Blocks beyond repair are being replaced with new carvings. After treatment, the blocks will be returned to the temple.

Appendix F provides an overview of this festival.
As noted earlier, Pema Lingpa had been born into the Nyö clan, a lineage that carried with it a long history in both Tibet and Bhutan. In Bumthang, the Nyö had connections to the temple of Sumdrang and links with the descendants of Guru Chöwang. Now there was also the legacy of Pema Lingpa from which to draw, and almost immediately, three Pema Lingpa incarnation lineages were established. Notable incarnations were frequently discovered in prominent families, including the Nyö and the Dung amongst others, thereby further increasing their rank and importance.

In the early years following Pema Lingpa’s death, these inter- and intra-family connections were fortified through the activities of his siblings and his children. Pema Lingpa’s side of the Nyö family had descended from his grandfather Tenpa’i Nyima, and those of a collateral branch originated from his great-uncle Jamyang Drakpa Özer of the Sumdrang Chöje (gsum ‘phrang chos rje) lineage. Pema Lingpa’s youngest brother, Orgyan Zangpo (o rgyan bzang po, b. 15th century) continued the Sumdrang Chöje line, into which the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Gyatso (gtsang dbang rgya mtsho, 1683-1706) was born seven generations later.

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235 Ardussi, “A 17th Century Stone Inscription,” 1. Ardussi , citing Lam Sangngak (‘brug gi smyos rabs yang gsal me long, 106-107), notes that the site was originally connected to the Lhapa Kagyu, a subsect of the Drigung tradition, however, Aris maintains that this lineage was part of the Nyingma branch of the Nyö family and provides Lama Demchok’s full name as Nyoton Trulshik Choeje, 1179-1265 (Hidden Treasures, 21). Pommaret and Imaeda provide the following: “Le fils de lHa(s) gnang pa, ‘Khrul zhig chos rje alias bDe mchog (1179-1265) se rendit également au Bhoutan et établit dans la vallée d’U ra à Bum thang le monastère de Sum phrang bSam grub chos rdzong qui deviendra le siege principal de la branche bhoutanaise du clan sMyos.” (Le monastère,” 20.)

236 Aris, Hidden Treasures, 116. A full discussion of Tsangyang Gyatso’s ancestry can be found on pages 111-122.
The equally profligate and remarkable Nyö clan has provided a remarkable number of notable historical figures. Five out of six Pema Lingpa speech incarnations originated from the Nyö clan since 1819, and the current monarchy also traces itself to the Nyö lineage.\(^{237}\) Part of this prevalence, which exponentially increased in the 17\(^{th}\) century, came as the country was being consolidated under the Drukpa Kagyu leadership of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651). In response, the Nyö were absorbing weaker local ruling families through matrimonial alliances, which would in return give the smaller family lines protection under the Nyö. To accomplish this, regardless of whether the father or mother of a child was Nyö, any male offspring would assume the Nyö parentage, and all non-Nyö fathers by definition would renounce their parentage (and thus their own family line) to become fully subsumed into the Nyö clan.\(^{238}\) Further, the wide-ranging religious affiliations maintained by the Nyö, who were more often than not hereditary priests, enabled them to present themselves as spiritual authorities who would provide efficacious rituals to the local population.\(^{239}\) These connections, along with matrimonial alliances and the religious reputation of historical masters such as Pema Lingpa, could convincingly present the Nyö as the most powerful and effective practitioners available. As the west of Bhutan was consolidated under the Drukpa Kagyu hegemony beginning in the mid-17\(^{th}\) century, in the east many of the Nyö were able to


\(^{238}\) Aris, “New Light,” 20. Aris points out that the non- Nyö husbands brought in to marry Nyö women and carry on the family line were referred to as *gdung ’jin*, or “maintainer of the patriline” (19).

\(^{239}\) Aris, “New Light,” 21. He notes that in addition to the Nyö-specific practices and those associated with each branch of the family, history records that the Nyö received teachings from masters in the Nyingma, Kagyu and Sakya traditions.
leverage for themselves high positions in the central government and thus maintain an elite status.\textsuperscript{240}

Reincarnations were frequently discovered within these families, each of which brought with them additional prestige. For masters of great significance--such as with Pema Lingpa--a trio of incarnations would arise, each of which encapsulated a particular essence of the departed master. These are known as the Body, Speech and Mind Incarnations, respectively the Gyalse (rgyal sras), Sungtrul (gsung sprul) and Thugse (thugs sras).\textsuperscript{241} The relationships between the three incarnation lineages of Pema Lingpa are often complicated, combining at times hereditary succession through a son or nephew and at others, the discovery of a reincarnation outside the direct family line. As will be explored below, there are also conflicting accounts regarding the lineages’ origins, and the proliferation of student-teacher relationships between various incarnations themselves frequently further obfuscate the situation.\textsuperscript{242}

\textsuperscript{240} Aris, “New Light,” 21-22.
\textsuperscript{241} The three incarnation lineages are presented in Appendix D.
\textsuperscript{242} Sources do not agree on the relationship between the initial incarnations of these lines. According to the sixty-ninth Je Khenpo, Gendun Rinchen (brug rje mkhan po 69 dge 'dun rin chen, 1926-1997), the First Peling Thugse, Pema Lingpa's son Dawa Gyaltsen, was the father of the First Peling Gyalse, Pema Thinley (pad gling rgyal sras pad+ma 'phrin las, 1564-1642). The Second Peling Sungtrul, Pema Lingpa's immediate reincarnation, was Yenpa Lode (pad gling gsung sprul 02 yan pa blo bde, 1536-1597), also known as Tenzin Chokyi Drakpa (bstan 'dzin chos kyi grags pa). He was a teacher of the First Peling Gyalse. Other sources have alternate relationships between the three: Yenpa Lode, the Second Peling Sungtrul, was a disciple of Dawa Gyaltsen (the First Peling Tukse), and the father of Pema Trinley, the First Gyalse. As given in Holly Gayley's Introduction to Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, the current Gangteng Tulku, Rigdzin Kunzang Pema Namgyel (sgang steng 09 rig 'dzin kun bzang pad+ma rnam gyal, b. 1955), solves the historical discrepancy by explaining that Dawa Gyaltsen passed away while his wife was pregnant with the First Gangteng Tulku, Pema Trinley. He entrusted his wife to his disciple, Tendzin Drakpa, who then raised the child as his own. Because the boy was believed
The Peling Sungtrul, or Speech Incarnation, is considered the incarnation of Pema Lingpa himself.\textsuperscript{243} This tradition considers all Pema Lingpa’s previous lifetimes from the time of Princess Lhacam Pemasel in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century to be part of the institution. The Sungtrul traditionally held Tamzhing as his seat of residence, and, beginning with the Second Sungtrul, maintained a second seat at Guru Lhakhang in Lhodrak, Tibet.\textsuperscript{244} The first Peling Sungtrul, Tenzin Dragpa (bstan ‘dzin grags pa, 1536-1597) was born in the Phojibkha valley in the modern Wangdue Phodrang district. He was discovered to be the immediate incarnation of Pema Lingpa and was looked after and taught by none other than Dawa Gyaltsen, Pema Lingpa’s own son.\textsuperscript{245}

\textsuperscript{243} Ardussi gives the list of Pema Lingpa, or Peling, Sungtrul incarnations as follows: 1. Pema Lingpa; 2. bstan tzin chos grags dpal bzang (aka bstan ‘dzin grags pa, 1536-1597); 3. kun mkhyen tshul khrims rdo rje (1598-1669); 4. rdo rje mi bskyod rtsal (aka ngag dbang kun bzang rol pa’i rdo rje, 1680-1723); 5. kun bzang tshe dbang (aka bstan ‘dzin grub mchog rdo rje, 1725-1762); 6. kun bzang bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan (1763-1817); 7. pad+ma bstan ‘dzin (aka kun bzang ngag dbang chos kyi blo gros, 1819-1842); 8. kun bzang bde chen dro rje (aka nges don bstan pa’i nyi ma, 1843-1891); 9. bstan ‘dzin chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1894-1925); 10. pad+ma ‘od gsal ‘gyur med rdo rje (aka thub bstan chos kyi rdo rje, 1930-1955); and (11) the current Sungtrul, kun bzang pad+ma rin chen rnam rgyal, b. 1968 (alt. b. 1965) in Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 138.

\textsuperscript{244} It may be recalled that Guru Lhakhang was built in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century by Guru Chöwang’s consort, a previous incarnation of Pema Lingpa named Jomo Pema Drolma. She had put one of their sons up as collateral for the timber needed to build the temple. Later, Pema Lingpa would travel to Guru Lhakhang numerous times, including a prolonged stay in 1518. John Ardussi relates that through an appointment of the Fourth King of Bhutan, in addition to the seat at Tamzhing, the Sungtrul Rinpoche lineage maintains residence at Dramitse Thegchog Namdrol Orgyan Choling (sgra med rtse theg mchog rnam ’grol o rgyan chos gling) in Tashigang, Eastern Bhutan. (Appendix A in Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 137)

\textsuperscript{245} Tshewang, \textit{The Treasure Revealer}, 90-91.
Dawa Gyaltsen became the source of his own reincarnation lineage, that of the Thugse or Mind Incarnations of Pema Lingpa. \(^{246}\) Like the Sungtrul incarnations, the Thugse maintained a seat at Tamzhing. \(^{247}\) Until the Chinese incursions in southern Tibet, the Thugse also maintained a seat in Lhodrak at the Meto Lhanang monastery. \(^{248}\) There are disparate histories for the Thugse line during the 18th and early 19th century, as those maintained by authorities in Lhasa (which oversaw the Lhodrak-based institutions) differed from sources kept in Bhutan. \(^{249}\) Ardussi points out that the lists compiled in Lhasa were those registered with the Chinese high officials, but as they were not submitted to the emperor, the lists must have been maintained for local use only. \(^{250}\) This does not entirely explain the differences, though Ardussi provides a likely suggestion for the cloudy nature of contemporary Nyingma Buddhist documentation: that the Dzungar invasion in Tibet had caused significant disruption to Nyingma establishments. \(^{251}\)

\(^{246}\) Also referred to as the Lhalung Thugse (lha lung thugs sras). Ardussi provides their incarnations as follows: 1. zla ba rgyal mtshan (son of Pema Lingpa, b. 1499); 2. ngyi zla rgyal mtshan; 3. ngyi zla klong yangs (fl. 17th century); 4. bstan ‘dzin ‘gyur med rdo rje (1641-ca. 1702); 5. ‘gyur med mchog grub dpal ‘bar bzang po (ca. 1708-1750); 6. bstan ‘dzin chos kyi ngyi ma (ca. 1752-1775); 7a. kun bzang ‘gyur med rdo rje lung cigs chos kyi go cha (ca. 1780-ca. 1825) enthroned at Lhalung concurrently with (7b.) bstan ‘dzin ngag dbang ‘phrin las enthroned at Dorjedrak; then continuing with the rebirth of the Lhalung-based Thugse in the person of 8. kun bzang zil gnon bzhad pa’ rtsal, d.u.; 9. thub bstan dpal ‘bar (1906-1939); and 10. theg mchog bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan (1951-2010). (See Ardussi, Appendix A in Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 138)

\(^{247}\) As mentioned in Chapter Three, their dual holding presence at Tamzhing is reflected in the presence of two thrones in the assembly hall, placed at equal height to indicate their equal status. \(^{248}\) \textit{Life and Revelations}, 138. Ardussi notes that Meto Lhanang (the full name of which is me tog lha nang theg mchog rab rgyas gling) was formerly a Karmapa monastery that had been given to the Peling Sungtrul and Thugse incarnations by the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1672.

\(^{249}\) The first through fourth Thugses are the same in both lists, and, as compiled by Ardussi, the fifth through seventh Thugses appear as follows: 5. blo bzang ‘jigs med (d.u., lived for fifty-two years); 6. blo bzang phun tshogs rgya mtsho (d.u., lived for fifty years); and 7. ngag dbang ‘jigs med (d.u., had been alive for 37 years at the time of the text’s composition) in Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 173-4.

\(^{250}\) \textit{Life and Revelations}, 174.

\(^{251}\) \textit{Life and Revelations}, 174.
The third of the incarnation lineages, the Gyalse or Body Incarnation, is no less complicated as sources do not definitively agree on its origin. The Gyalse line, also known as the Gangteng Trulku (sgang steng sprul sku) after the incarnations’ traditional seat at Gangteng, was the last of the three to emerge. While it is agreed that the Gyalse incarnations began with the figure of Pema Thinley (pad+ma ‘phrin las, 1564-ca.1642), there is less accord over his parentage. According to the 69th Je Khenpo Gedun Rinchen (dge ‘dun rin chen, 1926-1997), Pema Thinley was the son of Dawa Gyaltsen and thus grandson of Pema Lingpa. Thus, to recap, in this tradition Pema Lingpa was the source of the Sungtrul line, his son Dawa Gyaltsen originated the Thugse lineage, and Dawa Gyaltsen’s son Pema Thinley was the first Gyalse incarnation. However, other sources maintain that the second Sungtrul, Tenzin Drakpa, Yenpa Lode (yan pa blo bde, 1536-1597), himself a disciple of Dawa Gyaltsen, fathered Pema Thinley. So from this perspective, the second Sungtrul, who was a disciple of Thugse Dawa Gyaltsen, was the father of Pema Thinley. The current Gangteng Trulku, Rigdzin Kunzang Pema Namgyal (rig ’dzin kun bzang pad+ma rnam rgyal, b. 1955), sought to solve the historical discrepancy and explained that Dawa Gyaltsen, son of Pema Lingpa, had died while his

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252 Ardussi chronicles the Gyalse lineage as follows: 1. pad+ma ‘phrin las (1564-1642?); 2. bstan ‘dzin legs pa’i don grub (1645-1726); 3. ‘phrin las rnam rgyal (aka kun bzang pad+ma rnam rgyal, d. ca. 1750); 4. bstan ‘dzin srid zhi rnam rgyal (1761?-ca.1796); 5. o rgyan dge legs rnam rgyal (d. 1842?); 6. o rgyan bstan pa’i nyi ma (ca. 1873-1900?); 7. o rgyan bstan pa’i nyin byed, 1862-1904); o rgyan ‘phrin las rdo rje (d.u.); 9. Rig ’dzin kun bzang pad+ma rnam rgyal (b. 1955).

253 The Je Khenpo (rje mkhan po) holds a status equal to the king and is the highest religious authority in Bhutan.

254 This is also the tradition reported by Aris in Bhutan: Early History, 164, and Hidden Treasures, 105.
wife was pregnant with Pema Thinley. Before dying, Dawa Gyaltsen had entrusted his wife to his disciple, the second Sungtrul Tenzin Drakpa, to raise the child as his own.

In spite of the questions surrounding Pema Thinley’s parentage, the Gyalse line would be the catalyst for one of the most significant achievements of the Pema Lingpa lineage. The second Gyalse, Tenzin Legpa'i Döndrub (bstan ‘dzin legs pa’i don grub, 1645-1726) was on good terms with the Drukpa Kagyu, who were by this time largely in control of western Bhutan and beginning to consolidate parts of central and eastern Bhutan.

Through the Second Gyalse’s efforts, the entire corpus of Pema Lingpa rituals, practices and dances were formally accepted by the central government and incorporated into the official doctrines.\(^\text{255}\) This meant that the practices developed and perpetuated by Pema Lingpa were now part of the state monastic curriculum, and that Pema Lingpa, who was part of the Nyingma tradition, was declared by the Drukpa Kagyu leadership to be of significance. There were political considerations in this move as well; first, Pema Lingpa was born in Bumthang, which by the late 17\(^{th}\)-early 18\(^{th}\) century was a part of the newly-established nation of Bhutan. By incorporating him at the state level, the Drukpa leaders were laying claim to him as a distinctly ‘Bhutanese’ master, even though Bhutan as such had not existed during Pema Lingpa’s time.\(^\text{256}\) Second, as most of the eastern areas of Bhutan belonged to the Nyingma tradition, and many of the local leaders themselves were somehow related to Pema Lingpa through the Nyö, Dung or incarnation lineages, presenting Pema Lingpa as a key part of Bhutanese Buddhist practice would draw the

\(^{255}\) Aris, *Bhutan: Early History*, 164.
\(^{256}\) Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 105
sympathy and support of strategically significant people in the east, thereby increasing
the power and control of the Drukpa Kagyu. The architect of the 17th century
consolidation efforts, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, was fully aware of the importance
of Pema Lingpa and sought out a number of avenues to incorporate the master’s legacy
into his rapidly increasing empire.

The Role of Pema Lingpa in Bhutanese History

The remnants of Pema Lingpa, both from his physical body and his teachings, provided
the nascent nation of Bhutan with a cultural touchstone during the consolidation efforts of
the 17th century. The western portion of the country had been allied with the Drukpa
Kagyu tradition since the 12th century, yet the east had long been under the domain of
Nyingma practitioners. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (Figure 25), a Tibetan from the
Drukpa Kagyu Buddhist tradition, arrived in Bhutan in 1616 after fleeing his native Tibet
in fear of his life. The Zhabdrung was a contested incarnation, and at the time, highly-
placed enemies in Lhasa were doing everything possible to ensuring their candidate took
the Zhabdrung’s place. After experiencing a vision of the deity Gonpo (mgon po, Skt.
Mahākāla) that urged him southward, the Zhabdrung arrived in what is now western
Bhutan, where a pre-existing network of Drukpa Kagyu patrons and monasteries awaited
him. The Zhabdrung quickly realized that unification was necessary if he was going to

257 The founder of the Drukpa Kagyu, Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje (1161-1211), had sent
numerous ‘ambassadors’ of the tradition to the land of the south, hoping to gain converts and the
stand a chance against the centralized government of Tibet, then under the control of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Yet in order to incorporate the central and eastern portions of the country, he had to find a means by which he could establish his authority there. With almost two centuries of history in Bumthang and its environs, the Pema Lingpa lineage provided the ideal avenue through which he could accomplish his goal of strengthening ties between the Drukpa Kagyu west and the largely Nyingma-dominated east.

As the Zhabdrung sought to unify the heretofore disparate regions, while he already could reasonably lay claim to and consolidate the west due to their Drukpa Kagyu allegiance, the center and east of the country were not partial to Drukpa methodology, and as described above, had long sheltered a rich variety of religious traditions. By the time that Zhabdrung arrived in 1616, Pema Lingpa’s various incarnation lineages were the most powerful network in Bumthang and its environs. If Zhabdrung were thus able to present himself as an integrated, initiated part of the Pema Lingpa tradition, it might encourage the local population to be more inclined to acquiesce to his advances.

associated material support. At the same time, members of the Baraba, Sakya, Drigung, etc. were also attempting to establish themselves in the area. It was not until the time of the Zhabdrung that the Drukpa Kagyu hegemony was established after a series of engagements, a time during which armies from Tibet, often in conjunction with the Mongols, were also invading. These tensions, both internal and external to the territory, created a great impetus for the Zhabdrung to unify the peoples in the area, and to do so effectively, Nyingma support was necessary in the center of the country.
In the early 17th century, though the Zhabdrung actively sought out the Pema Lingpa teachings from any of the three incarnation lineages, he had no success. Zhabdrung met the first Gangteng Trulku Pema Thinley, who agreed to confer the full initiations of Pema...
Lingpa upon the Zhabdrung; however, Pema Thinley died before he could confer the teachings.\(^{258}\) The Gyalse, Kunkhyen Tshultrim Dorje (kun mkhyen tshul khrims rdo rje, 1598-1669), was not available. The interlude between the death of the third Thugse and the discovery of the fourth was so long that by the time Tenzin Gyurme Dorje (bstan ‘dzin ‘gyur med rdo rje, 1641-ca.1702) was discovered, the Zhabdrung was close to death. Yet the Zhabdrung was not to be deterred from his goal, and he eventually received his initiation into the Pema Lingpa tradition from Lama Choeje Gyalwang (bla ma chos rje rgyal dbangs, d.u.).\(^{259}\)

Ultimately, the Zhabdrung did consolidate the central region, though the east would not come fall under the Drukpa Kagyu until after his death. Yet in a clear statement of the desired unity between Drukpa Kagyu and Nyingma practice in Bhutan, respectively embodied, as it were, in the mortal remains of the Zhabdrung and Pema Lingpa, Pema Lingpa was disinterred from Tamzhing and his remains brought to Punakha,\(^{260}\) then the capital of the nascent Bhutanese nation, to be re-interred next to the remains of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, which carried with it great symbolic significance:

The best symbol of [Drukpa] support for the order of [Pema Lingpa] is provided by the fate of [Pema Lingpa’s] earthly remains; the stūpa containing them was removed from the temple of [Tamzhing] by the [Drukpa] campaign which subjugated this area of the country in the middle years of the 17\(^{th}\) century. Far from being despoiled, the sacred reliquary was taken to the capital at [Punakha] where it was eventually placed alongside the mortal remains of [Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal] the founder of the [Drukpa] theocracy. The ashes of [Pema

\(^{258}\) Tshewang, *The Treasure Revealer*, 91.

\(^{259}\) Tshewang, *The Treasure Revealer*, 92.

\(^{260}\) Other accounts maintain that Pema Lingpa’s remains were brought to Yungdrung Choling (g.yung drung chos gling) in Trongsa district.
Lingpa] and the corpse of the 1st [Zhabdrung] were together removed to safety during each of the successive fires which reduced the capital fortress to a smouldering ruin.  

By moving the physical remains of Pema Lingpa from his home monastery of Tamzhing, located in the Nyingma stronghold of Bumthang, and bring them to the newly established capital at Punakha in the newly-defined ‘nation’ of Bhutan, is a huge statement of power and consolidation on the part of the Zhabdrung. Further, Pema Lingpa’s interment next to the Zhabdrung in a monument of equal size—advertisises the ‘equality’ between Drukpa Kagyu and Nyingma traditions. It reflects the necessary unification between the two largest religious groups at the time. Besides the King and Je Khenpo, only the attendant who offers daily food and drink to the remains of both religious masters, are ever allowed to enter the shrine.

For the Zhabdrung, statements of this type were necessary in order to keep the Tibetan Nyingmapas over the newly-defined border from seeking to claim the area, or somehow convincing the ‘Bhutanese’ to support the wealthy Tibetans as leaders. Thus, though Zhabdrung had been busy repelling at least eight military invasions directed by the Fifth Dalai Lama and his regent Desi Sangye Gyaltsö, the Zhabdrung was pouring financial resources into Bumthang, building administrative complexes and providing support to the populace in his bid to win their allegiance. Matrimonial and other family ties also

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261 Aris, Bhutan, 163–164.
262 During enthronement ceremonies, this shrine plays an important role, where it serves as the penultimate source of the authority to rule, and a private ceremony takes place within its walls. 128
provided useful means of integrating the various elite families into the centralized government.

As mentioned earlier, Pema Lingpa’s descendants also gave rise to the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso.\(^{263}\) Other descendants of Pema Lingpa established other significant family lines, including the Dungkar Choeje (dung dkar chos rje) line. The Dungkar Choeje was able to ally itself with the central government in the 18\(^\text{th}\) century, when it produced the third incarnation of the Zhabdrung’s son Jampel Dorje (‘jam dpal rdo rje, 1631?-1681), Gyalse Drukdra Namgyal (rgyal sras ‘brug sgra rnam rgyal, 1735-1762).\(^ {264}\) As the combination of the Pema Lingpa lineage and an embodiment of the Zhabdrung, this incarnation reveals that each figure remained an important focal point for nascent Bhutanese culture. At the time, Bhutan was seeking to define itself in the political vacuum that had resulted after the Zhabdrung’s death, which had occurred at a particularly inopportune and tenuous time for the young country. Militarily, there had been many successes in repelling the many Tibetan and Tibeto-Mongol invasions of the 17\(^\text{th}\) century, largely due to the leadership of Third Desi Migyur Tenpa (sde srid mi ‘gyur brtan pa, r.1667-1680). As many of these invasions were taking place, it was said that the Zhabdrung was ‘in retreat’ meditation, yet in fact he had died in 1651. In order to try and effectively consolidate the region, the Drukpa Kagyu leadership had to continuously to

\(^{263}\) Aris, \textit{Bhutan}, 162.

\(^{264}\) Aris, \textit{Bhutan: Early History}, 163. It is noted in this work as well as a number of sources that although Jampel Dorje was the Zhabdrung’s biological son, he was unable to assume his father’s role, due to some sort of incapacity whereby he was ruled ‘incompetent’ and ‘invalid’ (252). This made the search for a viable successor to the Zhabdrung all the more urgent in the face of threats from both within and outside Bhutan.

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fend off attacks from Tibetan-Mongol armies and also deter potential usurpers from within Bhutan, thus the Zhabdrung’s death was kept secret. However, with growing suspicion at home and abroad, there was a strong impetus to find and install a suitable strong successor.

During Gyalse Drukdra Namgyal’s life, the impressive Fourth Desi Tenzin Rabgye (sde srid bstan ‘dzin rab rgyas, r. 1680-1695), responsible for the consolidation of power and entrenchment of Drukpa methodology throughout the region, had retired and passed away, further stressing the young nation. The Ninth Je Khenpo, Shakya Rinchen (rje mkhan po shAkya rin chen, r. 1730-38) was at the time in control of the spiritual direction of the country. The incarnation appeared shortly thereafter in the form of Zhabdrung Thugtrul (zhabs drung thugs sprul) Jigme Drakpa (‘jigs med grags pa, 1724-1761). While he proved to be fairly competent, the Zhabdrung Gyalse line descended from the Zhabdrung’s biological son, Jampel Dorje, was by all accounts completely incompetent and unable to rule. Thus, in conjunction with the contemporaneous—almost concurrent—births of the Zhabdrung Sungtrul (zhabs drung gsung sprul) Shakya Tenzin (shAkya bstan ‘dzin, 1736-1780), the Peling-descendant lineage of Drukdra Namgyal came into play to legitimate the rule of the Zhabdrung, and form a combination of the two prestigious lineages at a time when the entire incarnation line was in jeopardy. In

265 See Ardussi, “Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1696), Artist Ruler of 17th Century Bhutan,” “Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye and the Founding of Taktsang Lhakhang,” “Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye and the Celebration of Tsechu in Bhutan,” and “Formation of the State of Bhutan (Brug gzhung) in the 17th century and Its Tibetan Antecedents.”

266 Aris, Bhutan, 270.
this way, the lineage of Pema Lingpa, and its combination with that of the Zhabdrung, provided a touchstone around which the government was able to unite itself and promote a cohesive narrative.

In the modern era, the legacy of Pema Lingpa played a major legitimating role in the pedigree of the first king of Bhutan, who assumed control of the country in 1907. After years of struggle amongst internal factions, as well as external skirmishes including the Duar war with British India, the then-governor of the Trongsa region known as the Trongsa Penlop (kron gsar dpon slob) prevailed. The family traces their lineage through a son of Pema Lingpa named Khedrup Kinga Wangpo (mkhas grub kun dga’ dbang po), who settled in the Kurtoe (skur stod) region, and who was the founder of the esteemed Kouchung Choeje (mkho’u chung chos rje) family line. This line also gave rise to the Dungkar Choeje (dung dkar chos rje) line via Tenpa’i Gyaltsen (bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan). This latter Dungkar Choeje line eventually gave rise to the first hereditary king of Bhutan. It was a number of generations after Tenpa’i Gyaltsen that a boy named Gonpo Wangyal (mgon po dbang rgyal) was born into the lineage, who in turn fathered Jigme Namgyal (’jigs med rnam rgyal), the eventual governor of Trongsa. Jigme Namgyal later appointed his own son, Ugyen Wangchuck (o rgyan dbang phyug, r.1907-1926; Figure 26) to the post, and who would become the first king of Bhutan.

267 Dorji, “Religious Life and History of the Emanated Heart-son Thukse Dawa Gyeltshen,” 76.
268 Aris, Bhutan, 163.
In summary, Pema Lingpa is one of the most popular and integral historic figures in contemporary Himalayan Buddhism, with deep spiritual and cultural significance in the nation of Bhutan. The terma he discovered lead to the advent of new systems of Buddhist practice and ritual, new methodologies, and a myriad of followers to experience full enlightenment. The person of Pema Lingpa is almost subsumed by his karmic
accumulation and spiritual ancestry; however, it is in this manifestation that an ordinary person became the vehicle of profound revelation.

Given the environment in the late 15th-early 16th century, Pema Lingpa’s evolution from a possibly illiterate grandson of a blacksmith to one of the five most important treasure revealers of the entire Nyingma tradition, a founding father (by proxy) to the nation of Bhutan and an ancestor to the royal family is quite remarkable. Born in Bumthang, Pema Lingpa represents to the Bhutanese people one of the most important figures of their history, having given rise to the modern monarchy and while providing a link to the sacred past in the form of Guru Rinpoche and his enlightened activities. Pema Lingpa’s lineage produced a reincarnation of the Zhabdrung, thus uniting the lineages; an outgrowth of the Zhabdrung’s fervent seeking of the Pema Lingpa tradition, thereby unifying the country. This important differentiation separated the Bumthang-region Nyingmas of Pema Lingpa from the ‘Tibetan’ Nyingmas, in effect claiming Pema Lingpa as belonging to ‘Bhutan’, an act redoubled in intensity when the Zhabdrung had Pema Lingpa disinterred from Tamzhing and brought to the newly constructed center of his empire, Punakha Dzong. To this day, key rituals that were introduced by and the spiritual innovations of Pema Lingpa are prevalent in festivals from the local to national scale, and are performed in order to maintain and safeguard the integrity of Bhutan and its populace.

Yet though the Zhabdrung sought to present Pema Lingpa as exclusively Bhutanese, in fact, the terton left a deep and meaningful legacy in Tibet as well. He was responsible for
the establishment of monasteries, renovations of important sites, and offered initiations to highly regarded masters of his time. Later, the Fifth Dalai Lama, one of the most inclusive and scholarly of the Dalai Lamas, requested initiations into Pema Lingpa’s practices, and soon after, his resultant visions were painted in the private Lukhang temple in Lhasa. The next Dalai Lama was then born into the Pema Lingpa lineage, which was also an attempt by the Lhasa government to claim control over parts of Bhutan, where the Sixth Dalai Lama was born.

It is important to note that the many political considerations that surround(ed) Pema Lingpa and his incarnations are not the sole driving factor behind the terton’s significance in Bhutanese and Himalayan Buddhist history. Later incarnations of the master would provide immense spiritual benefits for the population on the local and national scales, and their accomplishments in the religious realm would, and continue to be, remarkable. The various Pema Lingpa ritual dances (‘cham) performed at hundreds of festivals annually provide the populace with a better understanding of Buddhist teachings, and are also executed to purge negative influences from the community. These and other efficacious rituals and practices originally introduced and transmitted through the Pema Lingpa lineage have had a lasting impact on Bhutanese religion and culture. Given the

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269 Blanche Olschak describes Pema Lingpa as the founder of “three monasteries in Bum-thang: Künzangda (Kun-bzang-brag dGon-pa) in Tang in the north of Bumthang, the Tamzhing Lhakhang (gTam-zhing lHa-khang) with the Konchogsun Lhakhang (dKon-mchog-gsum lHa-khang), and the Pädtshälling Gömpa (Pad-tshal-gling dGon-pa). Furthermore, he is mentioned as the founder of the Lhalung Lhakhang in Lhodak (lHa-lung lHo-brag) situated in southern Tibet, bordering Bhutan, which can be reached from Kurtö (sKur-stod) over the Mönla (Mön[sic]-la) or over the Pöla (Bod-la).”

134
importance of Pema Lingpa in both Bhutanese and Nyingma history, it is useful to study
investigate his home monastery, which was built under his personal supervision and
involvement, and to investigate the iconographic themes represented in the wall
paintings, how these teachings revealed Pema Lingpa’s main practices, teachers and
disciples, his legitimacy, and how later renovations emphasized particular teaching cycles
and masters from the tradition as a whole.
Introduction

Through the late fifteenth century, Pema Lingpa traveled frequently throughout what is modern central Bhutan and southern Tibet, promulgating his teachings, revealing terma, and giving initiations into his practices. Though he maintained a network of small temples and hermitages throughout Bumthang and southern Lhodrak and was able to secure adequate lodging during his trips, he did not have a primary temple seat of his
own, which would befit his growing prestige. As his notoriety increased, so did pressure from his hometown, where the locals were urging him to build a temple near his hometown that would serve as Pema Lingpa’s main seat. In addition to the prestige that a resident Buddhist master would bring to the community, pilgrims and devotees would certainly visit the site bringing with them gifts, supplies and other resources that would then enrich the entire community. The local headman approached Pema Lingpa and requested that the master allow the villagers to build him a home temple, likely with the knowledge that by extension, the locals would tangentially share in the significant potential material and religious benefits brought about by such an institution.

This temple, Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling, would be the seat of Pema Lingpa’s activities and would reveal the core of his legacy, through its display of sacred items he withdrew from the earth, the performance of rituals he received in divine visions, mural paintings of powerful deities specific to his practices, and sculptures consecrated with sacred substances provided by the master himself. In addition to particular deities, Pema Lingpa instructed the mural painters to include important lineage masters in the program, thus openly illustrating how he envisioned himself in the Buddhist tradition. Within

270 For a map of Lhodrak, see Appendix B. Pema Lingpa founded the monastery of Pemaling (pad+ma gling) circa 1476, established a temple at Ugyenling (o rgyan gling) in Kurto (kur stod) circa 1480, and founded the monastery of Dekyiling (bde skyid gling) circa 1490 (Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 216-218). These establishments indicate that Pema Lingpa had sufficient followers and access to enough material wealth to build temples and support resident monastic communities.

271 Some workers seem to have come from Tibet, yet their specific roles are not detailed in the biography. (Pommaret, “Historical and religious relations between Lhodrak (southern Tibet) and Bumthang (Bhutan) from the 18th to the earliest 20th century: Preliminary data,” 94).

272 Tamzhing is located at 27°35'15.53"N, 90°44'15.66"E.
Tamzhing’s walls, Pema Lingpa consolidated the treasures and teachings he had revealed to date, offering them as a source of blessings for adherents and pilgrims.

In many ways, Tamzhing follows the familiar format of a Himalayan temple, with a main shrine surrounded by a walled off circumambulation path, both of which are adjacent to a large space used for assembly, rituals or teachings. Guardian figures flank the main entrance, declaring the space within the temple walls to be sacred, and deterring negative forces from approaching the inner, purified area. This architectural layout would be familiar to any Himalayan Buddhist, as this core arrangement survives in Buddhist temples in the region from as early as the 7th century.  

Tamzhing in its present state allows for visitors to engage with the paintings and sculptures, and explore the space as it is at present, however, without a contemporary account of the temple’s creation, there is little information to be gleaned about its earliest history. Fortunately, the autobiography of Pema Lingpa provides an in-depth, first person account of the foundation, construction and consecration of Tamzhing temple, a process that took place between 1501 and 1505. The building process was informed by concerns both the mundane and the lofty aspects of Pema Lingpa’s life and he experienced a series of challenges in bringing it to completion. The text addresses the

273 Surviving edifices dating to the 7th century include the core shrines of the Jokhang and Ramoche temples in Lhasa, as well as in the Kyichu temple of Paro and Jampey temple in Bumthang. For Tibetan architectural history, see Alexander, *The Temples of Lhasa: Tibetan Buddhist Architecture from the 7th to the 21st Centuries* (2005). The earliest temples consist of a shrine surrounded by a circumambulation path, all of which tended to be built from comparatively thick walls.

practical demands being made on Pema Lingpa with remarkable openness and plain language. He had to balance his patrons’ desires to receive teachings and deal with urgent entreaties to travel and give initiations; further, he had to tend to everyday family matters. For example, the Seventh Karmapa Chodrak Gyatso (chos grags rgya mtsho, 1454-1506) wrote to Pema Lingpa during Tamzhing’s construction process to request the terton come to visit him, saying that although he was aware that Pema Lingpa was in the midst of working on the temple paintings, he must complete them quickly and hastily come to Rinpung.275 Given that the Seventh Karmapa held a status by far superior to that of Pema Lingpa, Pema Lingpa had little choice but to agree to leave the construction site and attend the Karmapa immediately. In 1502, just as the roof of Tamzhing was about to be erected, Pema Lingpa was requested to come urgently to Tibet in order to perform magical rites to protect his patrons in Lhalung from invading Rinpungpa forces276 who

275 Phuntsho, *gter ston pad+ma gling pa'i rnam thar*, 216. *da lta lha khang gi g.yon ngos ri mo dbu btsugs yod pas/myur bar 'grub par mdzad nas/yar cis kyang phebs dgos shing/nga dang skye ba gsum gyi 'brel ba yod pas/lha sa tsam du cis kyang mjal ba byed gsungs pa'i bka' shog nan chen phebs pa la brtien na sa/

276 During the late 15th century, the Phagmodrupa ruling family, which had been in control of much of Ü district, had lost much of their power. They were faced with increasing aggression from the Rinpung clan, who were at the time based in Shigatse and in control of large parts of Tsang district. The Rinpung launched an unsuccessful attack on Lhasa in 1481, and in 1485 were also defeated in an attack on Gyantse. However, in 1491 the Rinpung attacked again and took control of Lhasa until being driven out in 1517 (Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*, 73-90). In the earliest years of the sixteenth century, the Rinpung were seeking to consolidate as much territory as possible, including Lhodrak in southern Tibet, where many of Pema Lingpa’s patrons were based. In the summer of 1502, Pema Lingpa was requested to come to Lhodrak to protect his Lhalung-based sponsors, which he did successfully through magical spells (Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35.) Despite performing these magical rites of aversion, both the Rinpungpa and the Nedong (associated with the Phagmodru hegemony) acted as patrons to Pema Lingpa during his later life (see Aris, *Bhutan: Early History*, 118-119). For example, Pema Lingpa provided initiations to the Rinpung-embedded Seventh Karmapa in 1503, and provided gifts to the Rinpung ruler, Donyo Dorje (don yod rdo rje, 1463-1512); then in 1511, Pema Lingpa went to Phagmodru-controlled Gyantse and in 1513, while
were seeking to overtake Lhalung in its push for control over the centralized government. While these interruptions did help Pema Lingpa maintain close connections with his benefactors and, in the case of the Seventh Karmapa, with major Buddhist masters of the time, his absences seem to have disrupted the building process, and frequently, Pema Lingpa would buckle under the stress. Unlike many hagiographies, in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography, rather than presenting himself as a ‘perfect’ Buddhist master, Pema Lingpa includes what could be described as flashes of anger, frustration and struggles with conflicts of interest. Though the environs of Tamzhing were, and still are, bucolic and beautiful, the autobiography illustrates how the life of a Buddhist master is often tumultuous, especially when he was so intimately involved in the construction of his centerpiece temple.

As the construction and consecration of Tamzhing is so richly described in the autobiography, and the site itself represented the transition of Pema Lingpa from roving treasure revealer to a resident master, this chapter seeks to uncover a deeper understanding of the temple. This chapter uses Pema Lingpa’s own words to better understand the role he played in the construction and consecration of Tamzhing, as well as present his stated motivations behind its creation. Through an exploration of the building and consecration processes and the ceremonies associated with them, this chapter also presents how this temple formed the center of Pema Lingpa’s teaching.

_consecrating a new temple at Samye, met with the Nedong and strongly anti-Rinpung leader Tashi Dragpa (bkra shis grags pa, 1488-1564). (Aris, _Bhutan: Early History_, 119.)

277 Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35.
tradition both during and after the master’s life. Lastly, this chapter will address Tamzhing’s role in modern times, when in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it provided shelter to Tibetan monks of the Pema Lingpa lineage who were fleeing advancing Chinese armies in their home region of Lhodrak in southern Tibet.

Establishment and Construction of Tamzhing

Tamzhing Lhundrup Choling sits adjacent to a broad riverside plain in the Chamkhar (lcags mkhar) Valley of Bumthang. The late Lopen Padma Tshewang poetically described the temple’s environs as follows:

Tamzhing lies directly across the river from Jampa Lhakhang. A little way upstream from Jampa Lhakhang one finds the famous Kurje hill, shaped like a pile of skulls, where the Kurje complex stands and where the Terton also made discoveries; it was built around the rock which bears the imprint of Guru
Rinpoche’s body, below the very old cypress tree of which one branch, curling around the temple spire, is said to be the walking stick of the Guru.\textsuperscript{278}

It was at this location, near to key sites of Buddhism in the Bumthang region that was selected for the temple of Tamzhing, the key site from which Pema Lingpa would disseminate his teachings, offer initiations and empowerments, and hold large scale rituals from its completion in 1505 until his death in 1521.\textsuperscript{279} As explored in Chapter Two, Pema Lingpa had cultivated a significant number of followers, both in and around Bumthang as well as farther afield that he had gathered in over thirteen different visits to the southern areas of Tibet. Concurrent with his increasing popularity, there was growing pressure on Pema Lingpa to maintain an easily accessible, centralized location from which to teach and interact with disciples. Aris describes the significance of Tamzhing in Pema Lingpa’s larger process of consolidating resources as well as patrons:

> The consolidation process begins in earnest from 1501 onwards with the building of Gtam zhing. This is a major transition point in Padma gling pa’s life, when his own local residence is shifted from the peripheral location of Padma gling in the Stang valley to a central location in Chos ‘khor. The process from start to finish involves the whole community. It begins with a meeting of local leaders, prompted by Padma gling pa’s patron, the dpon po Kun thub, where the decision to build at Gtam zhing with the participation of local residents as volunteers in the construction process, both acting as labourers and providing food and shelter to visiting artisans from Tibet. This community decision and volunteer effort are a clear sanction of Padma gling pa as a principal figure in the religious life of Bumthang. Thereafter, Gtam zhing became a hub of activity and place of congregation with its own large-scale annual gathering.\textsuperscript{280}

\textsuperscript{278} Tshewang, \textit{The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan: Pemalingpa, the Terma Tradition and Its Critics}, 86.
\textsuperscript{279} Tamzhing is across the river and roughly opposite the 7\textsuperscript{th} century Jampey Lhakhang (byams pa’i lha khang) and the 8\textsuperscript{th} century temple of Kurje (sku rjes), two of the earliest Buddhist establishments in Bhutan.
\textsuperscript{280} Gayley, “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination of Padma Gling pa’s Treasures,” 113–114.
This consolidation of resources and influence would also bring benefits to the surrounding community, as pilgrims and patrons would visit Tamzhing and infuse cash and goods into the local economy. These financial benefits would increase the standard of living for those living near Tamzhing, and in turn they would provide additional support and resources to their local temple. Thus, the local populace would benefit greatly from having a temple in their midst—not only would Pema Lingpa, an esteemed Buddhist master, be embedded in the society to tend to their spiritual needs, but his presence would also engender wealth throughout Chamkhar through his extensive base of followers and patrons. Given the possibility for significant gains in the material and religious realms, the local populace was all too happy to volunteer their labor to build Tamzhing. As is common in Buddhist hagiography, it is only through the pleas and intercession of one of Pema Lingpa’s followers that the project took place at all. Textual accounts frequently employ this trope so that the subject of the text is not presented as overly concerned with worldly things; rather, it is only through the urging of disciples that major projects or teachings take place. This allows the master to present himself as responding to the earnest request of his disciple, and then if he so chooses, undertakes the action out of compassion with the stated understanding that the activity is done to serve sentient beings and increase access to the Buddhist Dharma. This is seen in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography when the topic of a new temple is brought up: a supplicant local leader, Pönpo Kunthup by name, begs Pema Lingpa to allow the populace to build the master a temple. In the text, just after his description of a near-death experience resulting from his
giving an unauthorized initiation, Pema Lingpa relates how the decision to build a new temple came about:

I realized that [having received] so many alms, I should assemble the necessary things to make a shrine. [The local leader] Ponpo Kunthup said to me, “Since you, a Dharma lord, have such extensive activities going on, you should build a better temple; this land isn’t exalted [enough]. I think I will entreat the locals from upper and lower Chokhor [to help build it]. You [Pema Lingpa], only have to collect enough beer [for them].” So all the local headmen of Chokhor then gathered at Pemaling. Pönpo Kunthob said to them humbly, “Since I requested Precious Dharma Lord to construct one tsuglhakhang [temple], we, the common workers, have to do the work. At which place should we build it?” The populace replied, “Wherever you like, Pönpo.” He said, “Well then, Tamzhing offers a good place for the consecration. The ground in front of it is a good place for horse races.”

This shows that is was at the urging and under the organization of the local leader, Ponpo Kunthub, that the temple site was selected. Further, unlike other building projects, there seems to have been no astrological divination undertaken to determine the ideal space; rather, it seems to have been selected due to the adjacent field and its suitability for horseraces. The locals stood to benefit by having a temple in the community for the reasons outlined above, though even if they did not, they were indebted to Pönpo Kunthub to perform in-kind labor in place of paying taxes.

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281 Phuntsho, *gtam zhing lhun grub chos gling phyag btab pa’i skor in gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar*, 210. The author expresses thanks to Dr. Karma Phuntsho for advance access to his forthcoming book, which compiles and annotates the various versions of Pema Lingpa’s *rnam thar*. See also a translation offered by Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 33.

282 Such corvée labor was an important component of the pre-modern Bhutanese economy, and continued to be so until the recent past. The levying of in-kind taxes, serfdom and corvée labor were abolished under the reign of the third king, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (’jigs med rdo rje dbang phyug, 1929-1972; r. 1952-1972) as part his plan to modernize the barter-based Bhutanese economy, among many other national development initiatives.
With the site selected and the labor force procured, the traditional lunar calendar had to be consulted in order to determine an auspicious date for the temple’s foundation. As the temple was intended to be the main seat for Pema Lingpa, tradition would hold that his personal astrological chart would dictate the timing for important events; thus, events were scheduled according to those most auspicious times when his personal power was at its height.\(^{283}\) The autobiography states, “the foundation was laid in the Year of the Female Iron Bird (1501), on the Ox day, the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) day of the Rat month, when the constellation Rohini\(^{284}\) was at its height.”\(^{285}\) After the foundation stone was laid, local residents of Chokhor and the local headman (mi dpon) gathered for a large, celebratory

\(^{283}\) Since Pema Lingpa was going to take up residence in Tamzhing, as well as perform curative rites, protective rituals and offer initiations and teachings within its walls, in order for the environment to be most efficacious, Pema Lingpa’s personal birth chart had to be taken into consideration during the construction of Tamzhing. For example, if important phases were to commence or conclude on an inauspicious day, the building, and by extension all activities that would take place within it, could have poor outcomes or negative results. Thus, as the primary resident of Tamzhing, and the main teacher of the site, Pema Lingpa’s individual horoscope would dictate the timing of crucial parts of the building process (such as laying the foundation stone, raising the roof, consecrating the interior images, and holding the consecration of the temple). For Aris, who notes that the timing was “fixed by careful astrological reckoning to harmonize with [Pema Lingpa’s] own horoscope” (“gTam-zhing,” 33), this synchronization serves as further evidence of Pema Lingpa’s self-centeredness, citing how, along with other considerations, this shows that Pema Lingpa’s account of the construction process (and his life in general) “reveals very few, if any at all, of those qualities of self-effacement traditionally associated with the teachings of the Lord Buddha” (“gTam-zhing,” 38). However, this seems to demonstrating the author’s lack of familiarity of the traditional building process.

\(^{284}\) Rohini is a nakshatra, or fixed star, found in Vedic and Indic traditions. Rohini is considered the third of twenty-eight in the astrological system used by Tibetans, and corresponds to the star Aldebaran and is part of the Western zodiac constellation of Taurus.

\(^{285}\) Samten, a lecturer in astrology at the Institute of Language and Culture Studies, was able to reveal that there were two ninth lunar months in 1501. Such duplication of months within a year, or even lunar days within a month, are frequently encountered up to the present day. Through his analysis of the autobiography, Samten determined that the astrological phenomena described in the text correspond with the first of the two ninth months, and by working back through the traditional calendar, he arrived at the likely a foundation date corresponding to the Gregorian September 30, 1501.

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banquet (ston mo rgya chen mo) during which all those present enjoyed a series of dance performances to mark the occasion.

Pema Lingpa then carefully describes the measurements of the temple, and the craftspeople he employed to execute the work. It was built in the traditional style, and like other early buildings, used parts of the human body as measuring tools. Pema Lingpa states that the unit of measurement was a *dom* (‘dom). A dom is the breadth of a person’s arm span; specifically, the measurement from one fingertip, extending across the chest and ending at the opposite fingertip of outstretched hands. Though the text does not specify that Pema Lingpa used his own arm span as the measuring tool, oral tradition maintains this was the case although there is no reliable evidence for this. The proportions and layout of the temple is described as follows in the autobiography:

> The shrine hall was four *dom* square, and the sutra courtyard [assembly courtyard] was fifteen *dom* wide, and the anterior area was eight *dom*. Behind the rear field, the space was six *dom* square on each side. Guru and Dzomdar were particularly expert in the art of masonry, and properly established the foundation with twelve pillars in a square pattern, beginning in the corner [and equal] on the right and left. The carpenters were Lama Chogyam and Kunga Chogyal. While they were working, monks were made to pull out the logs on the north and south sides of the river. I was going to give counsel [instructions] to the workers.

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286 Germano, “Poetic Thought,” 855
287 Note that the temple is oriented somewhat to the northeast, and not fully aligned with the cardinal directions, as is generally encountered in Himalayan temple architecture. For the sake of simplicity, this study will refer to the temple according to the cardinal directions, with the entrance wall ‘west’ and the main shrine in the ‘east.’
Pema Lingpa refers to two parts of the building: the ‘shrine’ (gtsang khang) and the ‘sutra courtyard’ (mdo khyams). When he refers to these two sections alone, Pema Lingpa reveals that the original form of the temple was much smaller than what survives today.

The term *gtsang khang* can refer to the shrine or the ‘sanctuary,’ or inner shrine, while *khyams* can mean either ‘hall’ or ‘courtyard,’ and often an open-air courtyard. This definition of *khyams* seems to have been overlooked modern scholars, and there has been
little recognition that what is now a covered assembly hall was originally an open-aired courtyard.\textsuperscript{289} This is important, as in later site analyses given separately by Aris and Olschak, they relate local oral tradition; specifically, that the upper story of Tamzhing was also laid out according to Pema Lingpa’s personal proportions, and its comparatively short height is reflective of Pema Lingpa’s notoriously small stature.\textsuperscript{290} However, this upper story was not part of Tamzhing’s original structure. It is not mentioned in Pema Lingpa’s meticulous account of the site, and neither is an upper floor found in later descriptions of the temple authored by the Eighth Peling Sungtrul. A recent, unpublished UNESCO report by Pierre Pichard confirmed that Tamzhing originally consisted only of the ground floor main shrine, the courtyard and a small treasury above the main shrine (Figure 28). Pichard briefly describes the discernible building phases in the present state of the site as follows:

It was found during the mission that only the central shrine was built in 1501 with an upper story, in which was kept the treasure of the temple. Around the shrine, the circumambulation corridor was originally build at ground floor only, together with the wall surrounding the present prayer hall which was probably a courtyard, open to the sky and surrounded by a gallery at ground level only. Then, as an addition, a second floor was built over it, including the upper corridor and gallery. This is clearly shown by the presence of the previous kemar (a band painted red, between two string courses on the outside of the walls a little below the roof), which is now hidden under the present roof. The walls around the shrines were then heightened to separate the two tiers of roof, with a new kemar now visible between the two roofs. The third floor over the shrines was made at this occasion, just under the final roof. The upper floor was then completed by the upper gallery and covered by the present roof all over the temple. This heightening was possibly carried out at a date as late as the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{291}

\textsuperscript{289} See Pichard, UNESCO report, 6.
\textsuperscript{290} Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 33 and 35, and Olschak, Ancient Bhutan, 108.
\textsuperscript{291} Pichard, UNESCO Mission to Tamshing Monastery, Bhutan, 2-12 July 2004 (unpublished report), 6. The author wishes to thank Françoise Pommaret for furnishing a copy of this report.
While Olshack presents the Pema Lingpa-as-yardstick account as simply a part of the structure’s history, Aris’ provides a markedly different perspective when extrapolating what he believes are Pema Lingpa’s motivations, apparently not realizing that in Pema Lingpa’s time, there was no upper story. Olschak recounts her experience at the site as follows:

One thing is striking in Tamzhing: all the doors are especially low and one has to bend down when entering a room to protect one’s head. Stumbling over a threshold one can easily bump one’s forehead on the lintel. These low doorways remind one intensely of the founder, who was a very tiny man and, as it is recorded in the local tradition, designed the building according to his own size.  

Olshack’s account must be referring solely to the upper story of the building, where in fact the ceilings are quite low and the pillars accordingly short (Figure 29).

Figure 29: Upper story pillar, measuring approximately 60" from base to underside of rafter
As can be seen in Figure 30, the ceilings on the ground floor are approximately ten feet in height and none of the doorways require bending down or minding one’s head.

Figure 30: West wall of ground floor, measuring approximately 110" from floor to rafters

In his own analysis of approximately a decade later, Aris writes, “It may be that his [Pema Lingpa’s] correlation of the body as a vessel of divine forms with the symbolic
representation of those forms in a temple-palace provided unconscious inspiration for the way he chose to lay out the measurements of gTam-zhing. Since he believed his own body had realized its divine potential, it was more than appropriate to use it as the yardstick for the construction of his own temple,\textsuperscript{293} before continuing his analysis:

Though he does not say so explicitly, we can assume that Padma-gling-pa himself measured the distance with his own arms. This would align strongly with the oral tradition still current which explains how the size of the unusually low doorways of the temple were all deliberately measured to accord with the very small stature of the saint himself. One is tempted to think this short and ambitious personage was thus imposing the dimensions of his own body on the temple as a modular device in his Napoleonic quest to leave his mark on the world and subject it to his authority.\textsuperscript{294}

Aris’ language reveals his perspective regarding the scope of Pema Lingpa’s claims, yet despite his feelings about Pema Lingpa as an individual, Aris’ viewpoint on the motivating factors behind Tamzhing’s proportions is worth exploring further. For example, why would Pema Lingpa’s use of the dom, a standard mechanism of measurement throughout the region, be considered any more “Napoleonic” than in other buildings commissioned by other individuals? It would stand to reason that rather than making some larger claim to subjugating the world, instead Pema Lingpa is simply following the traditional methods of construction, one which would, no matter who the patron, end up being imbued with his ‘mark’ simply through the building process itself when he served as the ‘yardstick.’ Yet, as noted above, it is only the upper floor, a later addition dating to the late 19\textsuperscript{th}-early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, which carries evidence of these comparatively squat proportions. On the ground floor, the spans between pillars are not

\textsuperscript{293} Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives}, 219.
\textsuperscript{294} Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35.
particularly small, and the height of the ceilings certainly allows people of varying height to access the space comfortably. Further, it was through the work of the stonemasons Guru and Dzomdar that the foundation stones for the twelve pillars were laid, not Pema Lingpa. So, as Pema Lingpa does not clearly state that it was his dom that provided the template for the building, perhaps it could stand to reason that someone else’s arms provided the measurements? Through the autobiography, it is apparent that during the building process, Pema Lingpa was frequently called away to tend to the needs of his patrons, even extracting terma from Rimochen, visiting Kurelung, and undertaking two trips to Tibet (his eleventh and twelfth visits). For example, when the Nangso of Lhalung, his longstanding patron, died suddenly, Pema Lingpa had to miss a crucial part of the building process:

[After hearing of the Nangso’s death,] a tooth relic [of mine] was also sent to the Nangso’s wife and son. After that, I found out that the carpentry work had been finished at Tamzhing. I was already deeply grieving over the departure of Nangso, but on top of that I was scolded by the Rinpunpas, who said, “according to his order, you have to come [here] anyway.” So I instructed my construction workers as to how to roof the temple, and I departed. Nangso Chodzod wrote to me [about his problems with the advancing Rinpunpa]. We discussed possible outcomes and stayed together in Lhalung for three days. At that time, in order to avert the Rinpunpa army’s advances, we tried many different methods. We succeeded in preventing that war. And for that [success], I was given an offering by Nangso Chodzod of one faultless urn worth 500 [regular quality urns], and for every load

295 In the hopes of clarifying the measurements for the ground floor versus the upper floor, detailed measurements of the site were taken over the course of a series of visits during February 2011. The ground floor is approximately three feet taller than the upper floor, with average measurements of 7.67 feet and 10.56 feet respectively. Upstairs, the pillars overlooking the assembly hall were approximately 5.2 feet (roughly 158-163 cm) in height from base to where they joined the rafters.

296 The passage reads: gtsang khang gi logs la ’dom bzhi pa grub bzhi/mdo khyams kyi dkysa la ’dom bco lnga/mdun phyogs kyi zhing la ’dom brgyad/rgyab zhing la ’dom drug gru chad g.yas g.yon la ’dom re ste/ka ba bco gnyi sa yul rmang rdo bzhag nas/gu ru dang ’dzom dar gnyis kyi/rtsig bzo’i bye brag legs par byas. (Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa ’i rnam thar, 218.)

I had, they gave [assistance] to help bring it down. Since I didn’t have to fear the possibility of war I was able to benefit extensively [from the situation]. Then, there was a Depa in Nagar Tseding and we had an audience with him there. We stayed there for two nights and then returned. While staying at Gangchung, I went to relax by the southern part of the river and left a footprint in stone. I overturned the stone and left it there. Then while coming to Lhalung, the Nangso Gyalpo’s sister had a misunderstanding about me, accusing me that I hadn’t come while Nangso Gyalpo was still alive. Then the day after I went to Trojangkhar and returned to Bumthang. When I arrived there, Tamzhing’s roof was finished.

This passage reveals not only the pressures being placed upon Pema Lingpa by his patrons, but also his willingness to leave Tamzhing during construction to tend to their needs. He clearly entrusted important phases of work to his team, and it could be that various measurements were carried out by someone other than himself. This allowed him to travel and perform the rites requested of him, be they funeral or war-averting in nature, and receive the appropriate payments for his services. These items were then brought back to Tamzhing, ostensibly to become part of the treasury there.

So is it truly accurate to call Pema Lingpa “Napoleonic” in the construction of Tamzhing, or was he working within the constraints of his role as Buddhist master? Was his reportedly stout physique, as Aris asserts, used as the “divine yardstick” on which the temple proportions were based? Local tradition asserted that the height of Tamzhing’s interior pillars reflected Pema Lingpa’s small stature. In her work, Olschak reported the

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298 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 211-214.
299 Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35.
300 Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 33.
local folklore in a straightforward manner, presenting the story without commentary.\textsuperscript{301} Aris’ reading also restates the local oral tradition, stating that during a trip to the temple in 1970 he was told the same.\textsuperscript{302} Aris says in the same note that the story is “confirmed” in Olshack; however, this provides no confirmation of anything beyond that both visitors were told the same story; the tale, although engaging, provides no substantive proof as to who served as the standard for the \textit{dom}. And neither does the autobiography, a fact which Aris readily points out.\textsuperscript{303} Yet this does not deter him from inferring what Pema Lingpa’s intentions must have been with the building. Given Aris’ justifiably strong standing in the field of Himalayan studies, and especially in light of his otherwise remarkable material on Bhutan, it is worth revisiting Aris’ assertions in detail in order to provide an updated perspective, and ideally, to provide a more balanced presentation of one of Bhutan’s most important masters.

If Pema Lingpa \textit{had} used his own body as the \textit{dom} measurement, it would not be an aberration from traditional construction methods. Yet the temple in its original form bears ceilings and spans that are not remarkably small, although the northernmost portion of the upper story—a later addition to the complex—certainly is. Were Aris to have considered the autobiography more carefully, perhaps he would have recognized that the lack of a

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\textsuperscript{301} “These low doorways remind one intensely of the founder, who was a very tiny man and, as it is recorded in the local tradition, designed the building according to his own size.” Olshack, \textit{Ancient Bhutan}, 108.
\textsuperscript{302} Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 39, note 8.
\textsuperscript{303} Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35.
\end{flushleft}
mention of an upper floor was not out of sloppiness or “carelessness,” but rather that the present form of the temple was not necessarily original.  

The autobiography further suggests that Pema Lingpa was not even onsite during the measuring and erecting of the pillars. Immediately after the foundation stone was laid, Pema Lingpa tells of being summoned to Tibet to attend the funeral of his longstanding patron and prefect (nang so) of Lhalung, Nangso Sonam Gyalpo (bsod nams rgyal po, d.u.) in 1502. The details of the Nangso’s death and the circumstances that arose as a result provide evidence that the increasing demands on Pema Lingpa’s time caused him to miss significant portions of the Tamzhing building process, especially during the crucial initial building phase, when he left the site to oversee the funeral rites of Nangso Sonam Gyalpo:

When Lhodrak Nangso Sonam Gyalpo then died on the third day of the third month of the Dog Year, in the early morning of the fifth day [of the same month], I experienced a dream in which I was in Pemaling and the Nangso came riding on a white horse, with one black man leading him and another black man behind. They reached near the door of Pemaling. The Nangso dismounted from the horse and made three prostrations to me. After that, Nangso said “Precious Dharma Teacher, I want to stay in this world for a few years, but due to black magic there is an obstacle in my life [and I have to leave]. These two have trapped me in their grasp. I am here in front of you; may you please protect me between this life and the next. Those who are living there are also in danger of becoming affected by black magic; please protect them.” He prostrated and then rode [off] on the horse between the two black riders, who took him away. Then I woke up, and I thought, “Nangso is dead.” I was not comfortable; I felt anxiety and suffered from a fever through the rest of my sleep. Then my son, Kunchog Zangpo, said “Father, are you sick? What happened?” I replied that last night I had had a dream

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304 Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 37.
305 Traditionally, dreams are considered to be more accurate portents when they take place between the early morning hours of 3-6 am.
and it seems that Nangso is now dead and I am concerned. So I built a mandala of Zhirto Shenchen and opened the mandala and did the ritual for one night to set [the Nangso] on the path of liberation, and sent a letter saying [to Lhalung], along with a gurma [a religious song] containing instructions.

[The song’s lyrics are omitted here.]

A tooth relic [of mine] was also sent to the Nangso’s wife and son. After that, I found out that the carpentry work had been finished at Tamzhing. But I was already deeply grieving over the departure of Nangso, and on top of that I was being scolded by the Rinpungpas, who said, “according to his order, you have to come [here to Tibet] anyway.” So I instructed my construction workers as to how to roof the temple, and then I went [to Tibet]. The Rinpungpa asked Nangso Chodzod, who already had the problem of Nangso Gyalpo’s death, had the further problem of the Rinpungpa [making military advances]. Nangso Chodzod wrote to me [seeking help]. We stayed together in Lhalung for three days and discussed possible outcomes. At that time, in order to avert the Rinpungpa army’s advances, we tried many different methods, and we succeeded in preventing that war. And for that, I was given an offering by Nangso Chodzod of one faultless urn worth 500 [everyday urns], and for every load I had, they gave [a carrier] to help bring it down. I didn’t have to fear the possibility of war so I was able to benefit extensively [from the situation].

Then, there was a Depa in Nagar Tseding and we had an audience with him there. We stayed there for two nights and then returned. While staying at Gangchung, I went to relax by the southern part of the river and left a footprint in stone, which I overturned and left there. Then while coming to Lhalung, the Nangso Gyalpo’s sister had a misunderstanding with me, [accusing me], saying that I didn’t come while Nangso was alive [as I should have]. Then the day after I went to Trojangkhar and returned to Bumthang. When I arrived there, Tamzhing’s roof was finished. 306

In the building process, as pointed out in Aris’ article, the moment when the roof is completed carries with it great ritual and symbolic significance. 307 The roof represents

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307 The full quote reads: “In terms of ritual and symbolic significance, the characteristic sloping wooden roof of any building in Bhutan, secular or religious, is crucially important since it appears to represent the “head” or “crown”, requiring therefore the utmost care and a strict observance of custom. On this occasion Padma-gling-pa says he carefully gave “counsels on how to erect the
the point of intersection between the skies above and the earth below, enclosing—and by extension establishing—the sacred space of the temple itself. While the final elements of the roof’s completion were delayed until Pema Lingpa’s return from Tibet, his willingness to put his patrons’ needs first would suggest that he is concerned foremost with their needs, rather than being on a “Napoleonic quest to […] subject [the world] to his authority.”

Besides standard use of astrological divination and traditional measuring systems, Tamzhing is also easily-recognized as part of the larger milieu of Himalayan temples. As a site associated with the esoteric Vajrayāna (Tantric) Buddhist teachings, it exhibits an iconographic program dependent upon the Three Roots of Tantra, namely the trio of Guru (teacher), Yidam (meditational deity) and Ḍākini (enlightened female) that provide the means to spiritual accomplishment. These are the Vajrayāna counterparts of the exoteric Buddhist triad of Buddha, Dharma (teachings) and Sangha (community) found in other Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions. The guru, or teacher, is responsible for introducing a particular practitioner to the most appropriate practices for his or her level of acumen. One of these trainings may include the identification of an appropriate yidam (yi dam), or meditational deity, to be used during visualization practice to precipitate more advanced insights. The female Ḍākini is a fully enlightened female deity that is capable of conferring empowerments upon advanced practitioners. These themes predominate in

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roof” (*thog phub-pa’i kha-lta-rgnams*) and then departed for lHa-lung.” Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35.

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308 Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 35.
the imagery of Tamzhing, and their significance will be explored in depth in Chapter Four.

In short, though a very strong personality not without controversy, Pema Lingpa may not have had the strong ulterior motives suggested by modern scholars. To a degree, in order to support their livelihoods (and in some cases, families) all Buddhist teachers had to perform efficacious rites, fulfill requests, offer initiations and provide services to their patrons and devotees. This phenomenon certainly was not particular to Pema Lingpa, and his adherence to it need not necessarily be construed as evidence that he was widely perceived as a fraud, though skeptics were certainly part of the terton dynamic. As evidenced in the autobiography, if anything, Pema Lingpa was simply following the conventions of the time to the best of his ability, and if anything, missed significant phases of the work in order to fulfill his religious commitments.

And much work remained at Tamzhing, and of course additional interruptions were in store for Pema Lingpa. After the roof was completed and the necessary rituals performed, it was time to begin the interior paintings and murals, which Pema Lingpa dutifully recorded in significant detail.

Fashioning the Relics and Murals of Tamzhing

As is the case elsewhere in the Himalayas, in Bhutanese Buddhist temples the images within communicate the history, basic religious tenets and methodologies of a particular
tradition, lineage or site. While the teacher himself would be considered the living source of the tradition, the sculptures and paintings serve an equally important role in providing an understandable, accessible display of the most important aspects of Buddhist practice. In the temple environment, these visual ‘art’ elements frequently act as conduits to the same degree of the teacher himself, and are frequently objects of devotion in their own right.

In his account of the interior of Tamzhing (Figure 31), Pema Lingpa documented the murals and sculptures and carefully elucidated their specific placement within the space.

Figure 31: Overview of central panels, east wall, ground floor
Pema Lingpa revealed that Tamzhing would be a storehouse for his terma treasures revealed to date, and would serve as his home monastery until the end of his life. Accordingly, he sought to ensure that each of the elements within the temple was properly consecrated for ritual use. For his main shrine sculptures, Pema Lingpa packed them with a variety of sacred objects (Figure 32). Given the extensive list of what materials he placed inside these sculptures, Pema Lingpa seemingly wanted to imbue the images with as many precious substances as possible. These items would, from the perspective of Buddhist adherents, increase the spiritual power and efficacy of the sculpture.

Figure 32: Guru Rinpoche sculpture, main shrine of Tamzhing, ground floor. From Tshewang, *The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan* (Figure 13).
As is the case throughout the Himalayas, the consecratory materials inserted into the sculptures at Tamzhing include small texts, precious and semi-precious stones, smaller sculptures, medicinal herbs, coins, and relics from other masters. Fortunately, in his autobiography, Pema Lingpa offers the following detailed account of the creation of the main shrine sculptures:

Then in the Pig year (1503), on the 15th day of the Dragon month, Lama Chogyam finished his plastering work, including the assembly hall ceiling and shaping of the main statues: Guru Rinpoche and his retinue, from the right, successively, Tonpa Rinpoche, Marmedzod, Pema Jungney, Loden Chogsey, Nyima Odzer, Sengge Dradog; and from the left Jampa, Chenrezig, Padmasambhava, Pema Gyalpo, Shakya Sengge, Dorje Drolo. While they were fabricating the sculptures, at the same time, they also started putting the consecratory material inside them. However, inside the [main image of] Guru Rinpoche, the materials naturally entered. Pema Lingpa inserted [into Guru Rinpoche] a Dorje Sempa sculpture that he had withdrawn from Naring Drak, the terma text of Chogyur Lingpa, the Self-Liberating Awareness Tantra, the Introduction to the Pearl Necklace Tantra, the instruction manual to the Radiant Mirror, the Lama Jewel Ocean, and various yellow scrolls. Also [inserted were] a piece of Guru Rinpoche’s robe, small images of white and red bodhisattvas, a piece of [the Guru's main consort] Yeshe Tsogyal’s silk pants, a relic of Jampel Shenyen, a relic of Garab Dorje, a guide to the eight great charnel grounds of India, Pemasel’s Complete Answers, (Guru) Chöwang’s Sarvabuddha Samayoga, all remained [there inside the image] along with the five precious substances, turquoise, and so forth.

This very long list of materials provides a useful tool for understanding what Pema Lingpa deemed most significant and which lineages and legacies he was drawing upon.

The consecration materials were so carefully documented, it likely indicates that Pema Lingpa wanted this list to be known, and for readers both present and future to understand

309 dgongs pa kun 'dus
310 sangs rgyas mnyam sbyor lcags smyug ma, one of the five major explanatory tantras of the Mahāyoga and known as ‘Tantra of the Body,’ systematized as such by Longchen Rabjampa. See Longchenpa, The Practice of Dzogchen, 30.
311 Phuntsho, gtam zhing gi nang rten bzhengs tshul in gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 215-216.
exactly what treasures were within the main figure of Tamzhing temple. The terma objects and texts he lists were among those withdrawn at some of the most important sites of Himalayan Buddhism, such as the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet, Samye. Others were discoveries revealed at key moments in Pema Lingpa’s career, occasions which marked his growth and development as a treasure revealer, such as a Vajrasattva sculpture withdrawn in the earliest years of his career at Naring Drak in the Tang Valley. These serve to encapsulate his entire career as a treasure revealer, beginning with his humble, local roots in Bumthang when he dove into the lake, and culminating with a terma withdrawal at Samye, one of the most significant sites for Himalayan Buddhists. As such, these items mark the consolidation of his terma career to date within the Guru Rinpoche sculpture, the main object of worship in Tamzhing.

Further connections between Guru Rinpoche and Pema Lingpa are reinforced in his choices of consecratory material. For example, Pema Lingpa’s inclusion of pieces of robe once belonging to Guru Rinpoche, and his consort Yeshe Tsogyal, place an immediate, personal object of the two masters into the form of the Guru. These pieces of robe are relics from the life of the Guru and his consort, and are considered particularly efficacious as relics. Beyond the text withdrawn at Samye, a site which was consecrated by Guru Rinpoche, the Guru is further considered the source of all terma treasures and the conduit through which the necessary prophecies are transmitted into the earthly realm. Thus, Pema Lingpa is, in a way, returning the terma to their source by

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312 As these were objects used by a Buddha-type figure, these relics would fall into the category of pāribhogika.
including them in the physical form of Tamzhing’s Guru Rinpoche sculpture.

Concurrently, Pema Lingpa is acknowledging the Guru as the source for the terma tradition, and also the one who prophesied his personal success as a terton. After all, without receiving a prophecy from a ragged-robed monk who was thought to be a manifestation of the Guru, Pema Lingpa might never have known he was meant to be a treasure revealer, and in the Buddhist perspective, may never have performed so many activities that benefitted ordinary beings.

Pema Lingpa also draws upon other sources of Buddhist authority in his choice of consecratory materials, in particular Jampel Shenyen (Mañjuśrīmitra) and Garab Dorje (Prahevajra) of the Great Perfection (rdzogs chen) tradition, and Lhacam Pemasel, his own earlier incarnation. As will be explored in more depth in Chapter Four, both Jampel Shenyen and Garab Dorje are considered among the first human masters to have received the Great Perfection teachings from the primordial Buddha. Drawing upon the legacy of these individuals emphasizes Pema Lingpa’s role in Great Perfection teachings, considered one of the most important vehicles for practice in the Nyingma tradition. As will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Four, the assembly hall murals on the north wall are dedicated to illustrating the masters of the Great Perfection tradition, from their ultimate source in the primordial Buddha Dorje Chang (Vajradhara) down to Pema Lingpa himself. As discussed in Chapter Two, Lhacam Pemasel was the daughter of the Tibetan king Trisong Detsen and is considered as one of Pema Lingpa’s previous lives. According to tradition, Guru Rinpoche had entrusted a number of key teachings to
Lhacam Pemasel on her deathbed, including the vastly important *Nyingthig (snying thig)* cycle described in more detail in Chapter Two. When Pema Lingpa selected one of these teachings, entitled the *Complete Answers*, he was including a work that would immediately remind the initiate of Pema Lingpa’s past lives. In addition, the *Complete Answers* are part of a larger terma withdrawn by Pema Lingpa, the famed *Lama Jewel Ocean*, or *Lama Norbu Gyatso*, the significance of which were discussed in Chapter Two.  

In reading Pema Lingpa’s account, it is interesting to note the care with which he elucidates the list of texts and terma that he included in the statue, and then suddenly become abrupt with those items of material wealth, remarking simply the balance of items were “the five precious substances, turquoise, and so forth.” This is reflective of his desire to prove his authority through lineage, teaching transmissions and direct revelations, emphasizing spiritual wealth rather than material goods.

The other statues seem to have been consecrated in a more traditional way, described succinctly: “All the other statues were filled with varieties of holy [scrolls] and dhāranī mantras, etc., and while filling the statues, the consecration texts were followed.”

Interestingly, the term translated above as “statue,” *derku (ider sku)*, can refer to either a

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313 This text has been translated by Harding and constitutes Chapter Two of her work, *The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa*, 51-86.  
314 'gyu sogs rin po sna lnga  
315 dam rdze  
clay statue or an image painted on the wall. Though the context of this particular passage makes it quite clear that it is the statues that are being discussed, Pema Lingpa also took the unusual step of inserting scrolled texts into the plaster of the wall murals in order to consecrate them as well: “At the beginning of the plastering process, in the whole of the Buddha-field [compositions], a hollow bamboo tube [containing] a yellow scroll was inserted into each god’s body.” This unexpected activity—to insert consecratory material into mural plaster underlying the paintings—is infrequently encountered in Himalayan art, and could indicate a larger practice that has to date remained unexplored, or perhaps adds another mark of distinction to Tamzhing as one of few sites to be likely to contain such a feature. Pema Lingpa records that after the walls were suitably prepared with plaster and the necessary consecratory materials inserted into the plaster ground. As with all significant phases of the building process, the paintings are begun on an auspicious day that is also, like all earlier important stages, determined by Pema Lingpa’s personal astrological chart. Though at least one author takes this reconciliation between resident and dwelling to be evidence of Pema Lingpa’s self-

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317 Phuntsho, *gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar*, 220-221. See also Aris’ translation in “Gtam-zhing,” 36

318 To date, there has not been any formal analysis of these paintings with penetrating radar or other means that could indicate whether or not there are scrolls still present in the wall plaster; however, it is quite likely such a study will take place in the near future as significant conservation work gets underway at the site.

319 In this case, small scrolls of “dharanis and mantras, etc.” (*gzungs sngags sogs*) were put into (lit: “entered,” *gzhug*) into the wet plaster to vivify the images that would be painted atop its surface. (*gzhan yang gzungs sngags sogs/rab gnas kyi gzhung las ji ltar bshad pa’i rim pa rnam gzhug nas/ dpon mo che ba chu yis bzhengs su gsol* in Phuntsho, *gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar*, 215.)

320 “Then in the Pig Year on the ninth day of the Dragon month when the constellation *nab so* [the Vedic Punarvasu, known as Beta Geminorum (Pollux) in the Western reckoning] and the planet Venus were developing [in ascendency]. Aris (“gTam-zhing,” 36) states that the planet is Jupiter, however, the phrase used in the text, *gza’ pa wa sangs*, in fact refers to the planet Venus.
centeredness, astrological readings play a role in almost every building project in the Himalayan cultural sphere.\textsuperscript{321} Yet as Tamzhing was going to be Pema Lingpa’s seat and local residence, it is not at all surprising that his horoscope was the driving force when determining appropriately auspicious days.\textsuperscript{322} According to tradition, if Pema Lingpa’s personal characteristics were not taken into account during the building process, it could result in reduced efficacy of any ritual undertaken at the site, illness befalling Pema Lingpa or the community, or even disruption of agricultural cycles due to natural calamities—any of which were believed to result from an improper cosmological alignment between ‘owner’ of a given site and the natural forces that surround and occupy the space.\textsuperscript{323} Once the appropriate rituals took place, the team of artists began their work, with the compositions duly noted in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography, beginning with the southeast corner and moving clockwise.\textsuperscript{324}

The lines [for the paintings] were added to the left side of the sutra hall. Senior artist Tshering began making the arrangement of the newly arisen [images]: the

\textsuperscript{321} Aris, “The Temple of Gtam-zhing According to Its Founder,” 33, 38.
\textsuperscript{322} Even in modern Bhutan, the homeowner/patron’s personal astrological chart is taken into account when beginning the building process: “The commencement of the [construction] work should be fixed by an astrologer who, basing his calculations on the birth year of the owner of the house to be built, gives a day, date and time for an auspicious beginning,” (Wongmo, “Rituals of Bhutanese House Construction,”106).
\textsuperscript{323} Bhutanese oral tradition includes detailed information on when certain phases of building can take place, paraphrased as follows: “Measure the land on the day of the Mouse; like a mouse enters its burrow, it is auspicious. Lay the foundation on the day of the Bull; like a bull lying down, it is auspicious. Erect the main door on the day of the Tiger; like a tiger guarding the door, it is auspicious…” (Dorji, \textit{Clear Exposition of Bhutanese Architecture}, 40). A later text (baiDU r+y+ya ser po) in the Gelug tradition authored by the Desi Sangay Gyatso (de srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653-1705) provides similarly specific guidelines for the construction process: “While erecting the main wall, the day of the Tiger and an auspicious hour must be identified besides other astrological calculations. It is important to see the correct directions and ‘auspiciousness’ of the year. Besides, the person who is responsible for erecting the door should be someone whose fortunes, stars, and astrolocial readings of his birth-year (for that year) are auspicious,” (Dorji, \textit{Clear Exposition of Bhutanese Architecture}, 40).
\textsuperscript{324} The various paintings and their significance will be explored in depth in Chapter Four.
Buddhas of the Three Times, the Heaven of the Great Compassionate One, the Lamp that Dispels Darkness. Starting from there [successively are] the Highest and Most Secret Buddha of Long Life, [and] the Highest and Most Secret Horse-Headed One. After that, peaceful Samantabhadra with consort and the forty-two deities of [the maṇḍala], the landscape of the Five Blood-drinking Heruka Families, [then, further is], Highest and Most Secret Vajra-holder. Then is the Heaven of the Gentle-voiced One and his retinue, the Perfection of Wisdom and the rest of the paradises of the Buddhas of the ten directions, and the Indestructible Dagger, the Most Secret and Unsurpassed Kīla, with ten wrathful ones encircling [him].

In the midst of the painting process, Pema Lingpa received a summons from one of the leading Tibetan religious masters, requesting the terton to come at once. Two messengers arrived just after the paintings were begun, carrying with them a message from the Seventh Karmapa Chodrak Gyatso, head of the Black Hat tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

This would prove to be a major event for Pema Lingpa, who describes their arrival as follows:

While making these charcoal sketches [under drawings], two servants, Zablung Lama Trulku and his student, [arrived] from the Rinpung estates, carrying with them a decree written by the Omniscient One Black Hat Chodrak Gyatso. They delivered the decree and the color. In order to indicate his [omniscient] wisdom and that he was a superior person, [Karmapa stated in the letter], “Since you have begun the paintings towards the left side of the temple, complete them as soon as possible and come up [to Tibet]. We have been related in three [previous] generations, and we must by all means at least try to meet in Lhasa.” Due to this important letter, I had to go to Tibet immediately and in the Sheep Month, after having speedily reached upper Tibet, I stayed at Lhalung for two days and arrived at Taglung without resting.

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325 Phuntsho, gter ston pad ling pa’i rnam thar, 216. See also Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 36
326 Likely referring to paint
327 Phuntsho, gtram zhing gi nang rten bzhengs tshul dang karma pa chos grags rgya mtsho mjal ba’i skor in gter ston pad ling pa’i rnam thar, 215-217.
This meeting with the Karmapa would not only have a deep impact on Pema Lingpa but also on the iconographic program at Tamzhing. As was discussed in Chapter Two, the Karmapa had superior status to Pema Lingpa, yet the master summoned the terton in order to give the Karmapa all the initiations to the Pema Lingpa tradition. In so doing, Pema Lingpa was then able to draw upon his meeting with the Karmapa as a source of his own authority and legitimacy. Although the Seventh Karmapa would not go as far as to openly state that Pema Lingpa was an emanation of Guru Rinpoche and truly a treasure revealer (and not a fraud, as some skeptics accuse in the autobiography), the Karmapa’s keen interest in receiving the teachings indicates he found them desirable. Pema Lingpa declined the Karmapa’s invitation to travel together to Lhasa, saying he had to instead return to his temple in Mön [Bhutan] and complete its construction. Yet before Pema Lingpa took leave of the Karmapa, the Karmapa requested that the treasure revealer not divulge that initiations had taken place:

So after that, Karmapa said “Because of our sponsor’s/patron’s (gu tog po) are narrow-minded at this time, it would not be so comfortable [for anyone to know I’ve had these initiations]. I’m going to Lhasa soon, so we will go together and have detailed discussion along the way.” Then I responded, “Oh, my temple in Mon is incomplete and it’s under construction, so I have to return soon.” I indicated that I was going to go tomorrow, but was asked to stay until the day after tomorrow. I was given three ka (squares) of gechen (silk) of peacock color designed with traditional clouds. The next day’s presents were five items: a golden Maitreya statue about the size of my foot, a pair of white Chinese trousers, one set of khadar scarf, one horse, and one sword. I gave the horse back again.

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329 See Aris, *Hidden Treasures*, 78; Phuntsho, *gtam zhing gi nang rten bzhengs tshul dang karma pa chos grags rgya mtsho mjal ba`i skor in gter ston pad ling pa`i rnam thar*, 220-221; and Chapter Two of this study for more details regarding this meeting and its significance.
330 Phuntsho, *gter ston pad ling pa`i rnam thar*, 220.
Although Pema Lingpa was unable to spend additional time with the Karmapa, the terton would incorporate the Karmapa as a prominent presence in the wall mural program of Tamzhing. And, though under pressure to return to his building site, while making his way back to Bumthang, Pema Lingpa made a number of stops to tend to his other patrons; visits that helped solidify spiritual ties with his followers yet that also provided him additional material support:

At that time, Deba Dronyer Dorje was entering into retreat at the age of 65, and gave me a bulk piece of meat and 100 measures of barley, asking me to stay for a few days. Since he was a patron mentioned in Guru Rinpoche’s lung prophecy, I thought it might be auspicious to stay, but I did not. …[We] the patron and priest could not make any serious connection because our tendrel deviated. At that same time, the reincarnation of Jamyang Choeje was staying above Kharuteng. He asked me to come to his camp up there, so I went and with respect made prostrations to him. So then the Jamyang Choeje asked for the initiations into Lama Naljor [bla ma rnal 'byor], or Lama Yoga.

Due to the needs of his patrons and the ongoing construction of Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa declined to spend additional time with the Karmapa, and Pema Lingpa prioritized visits with his sponsors as he journeyed home. This allowed him to further accumulate gifts and resources for the journey and for his home treasury at Tamzhing. After returning to his temple laden with gifts from his trip to Tibet, Pema Lingpa quickly returned to the task at hand, giving a complete account of the remaining murals. These will be explored further in the iconological study in Chapter Four, yet of pertinence here is that Pema Lingpa included the Seventh Karmapa as part of his own Dzogchen lineage, and further, that Pema Lingpa placed the Seventh Karmapa ahead of him, i.e., in a spiritually superior position. By integrating the Seventh Karmapa into the mural composition at Tamzhing,
Pema Lingpa is offering visual evidence of his connection with the master, and by extension, augmenting his own spiritual standing, as one who had been summoned in order to teach such a prestigious figure. These paintings, along with the sculptures of the main shrine, combine in the temple to provide a clear testament of Pema Lingpa’s lineage and the tradition to which he belongs, that of the Dzogchen masters of the Nyingma tradition. By inserting precious substances into the sculptures at Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa sought to increase the spiritual power and efficacy of the site, while concurrently presenting his own terma treasures as the mechanisms by which blessings are conferred. Yet nowhere does Pema Lingpa claim to paint or sculpt the objects himself. Rather, throughout the Tamzhing-related sections of the autobiography, he refers to the various craftspeople by name and notes their individual contributions. His meticulous documentation of the paintings and sculptures of Tamzhing closes with an account of the payments offered to the carpenters, masons and artists that contributed to the temple:

Then for their parting fees (yon-brdzongs) the dpon Chos-[rgyam] was pleased with one horse, [a pair of ] cymbals, a set of seven offering bowls, a teapot, two iron hearths and a head decoration, also sixteen pieces of ‘mixed cotton.’ Lama rGyal-mchog [received] a set of seven offering lamps and a copper vessel capable of holding three measures of water. Kun-bkras and Tshe-ring together received four horses, a khro vessel, two lengths of silk, two iron hearths, one drum and a couple of zho measures of gold. dPon Tshe-ring came before [me and received] one offering lamp of li metal. While they resided [at gTam-zhing the artists were] properly supplied with food by all the country folk and so they were well pleased. So after sending them off [with these fees] they reached their homes without mishap.

331 span thog ma; a fine metal ornament usually worn on a woman’s head.
332 Aris, “The Temple-palace of gTam-zhing as Described by Its Founder,” 36. See also Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 223: yon rdzongs kyang/dpon chos/la lta gcig se chol/ting bdun tshar/zangs dkar lcags skhyed gnyis/spen thog ma sog/ ‘dres ma bcu drug rnams kyis myes par byas/bla ma rgyal mchog la ting bdun tshar geig/zangs chu khur gsun ‘gro bag cig kun bkras dang tshe ring gnyis la lta bzhi/khro geig dar yug gnyis/leogs skhyed gnyis/mkhar rnga geig/gser zho do/dom tshe ring sngon la yong bas li ting geig/bzhugs ring lung
The autobiography consistently records the presence of these artisans, clearly noting their name, the supplies they used, their particular skills and specialties, yet in the oral tradition, it is frequently claimed that Pema Lingpa painted the assembly hall murals himself based on his visions. The origin for this tale is ultimately unknowable, but is repeated consistently in modern times by tour guides, guide books and in the media. With the building completed, and the paintings and sculptures finished, it was time for the consecration ceremony, which was astrologically determined to take place on the fifteenth day of the Tiger month in the year of the Ox (1505).

The Consecration of Tamzhing

Tamzhing was to serve as the main seat of Pema Lingpa. As such, he consolidated the majority of the treasures that he had withdrawn to date within its walls. These items and their placement within the temple, as well as the temple’s overall iconographic program, will be described in detail in Chapter Four, yet it is important here to remember the function of Tamzhing in proclaiming the importance of Pema Lingpa, and how its consecration would place him even more prominently on the spiritual landscape of Bumthang. In her article studying the systematic growth of Pema Lingpa’s sphere of influence, Holly Gayley provides a useful analysis:

Importantly, the consecration of Gtam zhing employed relics from the breadth of Padma gling pa’ discoveries. In a sense, the variegated terrain from which Padma gling pa drew his treasures are symbolically conjoined in a single place and

\[
\text{pa dmangs kyis ja ma yang legs par sgrub cing/mnyas par byas nas/yar rdzongs ltar byas nas byes med ngu rang yul du slebs par byas/}
\]
concealed to consecrate the temple by their presence. The use of gter ma to fill the central statue of Padmasambhava is a fascinating reversal of the discovery process. In this reversal, Padma gling pa consolidates a group of treasures from near and far and reconceals them. By doing so, he anchors them to Bumthang in perpetuity. In this reconfiguration process, however, the newly concealed objects are permanently marked by their association to Padma gling pa. 333

On the occasion of the consecration of Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa was going to perform the consecratory dances himself, based on terma revelations he had discovered years before on a trip to Tibet. And in light of the occasion’s importance, the autobiography relates that Pema Lingpa was suffering from nerves the night before the consecration was to be performed for the waiting throngs of patrons and locals. Aris translates the events leading up to the 1505 consecration of the temple as follows in the first person narration of Pema Lingpa:

I had a dream in which the five tantric brother priests appeared and declared: ‘For the consecration of your temple, do a sacred dance like this’. Even after I awoke the movements of the sacred dance were still very clear in my mind and I showed them to the disciples. The movements were clearly set out in the dance code (rtsa-tshig) of the Phur-ba srog-gi spr-gri (‘Kīla, the Life-Razor’) and performed for the consecration [of the Tamzhing temple]. 334

333 Gayley, “Patterns in the Ritual Dissemination of Padma Gling pa’s Treasures,” 114.
334 Aris, Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives, 61, a translation that follows the account given in the autobiography (folio 154a). In “gTam-zhing” note 21, Aris states “The choreographic manual for this dance appears to be contained in the Phur-ba ’i ’chams-bcād stong-thun dang-bcas-pa, in RPLZT [Rig-’dzin Padma-gling-pa-yi/zab-gter chos-mdzod rin-po-che], vol. Ma (16), pp. 369-83. However that dance was supposed to be “discovered” at sMan-mdo in the lHo-brag province of Tibet and not revealed in a dream.” In the autobiography, there is no question that the origin for the dance is the above-referenced text—discovered years before in 1483—and that the vision that appeared to Pema Lingpa the night before he performed the dance in 1505 was a visual exposition of the textual version Pema Lingpa had already revealed and recorded. At that point, Pema Lingpa had not performed the dance in question, and thus this vision functioned to aid him in how the dance should ‘look’ and be performed, rather than as an initial visionary experience of an unattested practice or ritual, as Aris seems to understand the passage.
Given this diving intervention, Pema Lingpa expressed relief at receiving personalized last-minute instructions, and was able to impart them to his fellow performers, which they assumedly executed without flaw.

In the later biographical account of Pema Lingpa written by the Eighth Sungtrul Kunzang Dechen Dorje (kun bzang bde chen rdo rje, 1843-1891), it agrees that Pema Lingpa had planned in advance to perform the Dance of the Wrathful Dagger Deity (Phurpa’i Tsa Cham), which was part of his terma Lama Jewel Ocean (Lama Norbu Gyatso), but differs in the agent who provided the vision on the eve of the consecration. In this version, when Pema Lingpa confessed his feelings of nervousness the night before his impending dance display, it was not five tantric priests who came to him in a vision, but rather Yeshe Tsogyal, the consort of Guru Rinpoche, who showed him the steps, one by one. As is the case elsewhere in the Eighth Sungtrul’s text; as presented in Chapter Two, the text shifts agency from a less ‘prestigious’ actor (the five tantric brothers described in the autobiography) to one of more spiritual significance, the partner of Guru Rinpoche, the ostensible source of Himalayan Buddhism. In another example in the later text by the Eighth Sungtrul, he replaced a simple scribe from Ura with the figures of Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal. Here, in his description of the consecration vision, the Eighth Sungtrul has taken the “five tantric brothers” and supplanted them with Yeshe Tsogyal. These choices seem to indicate that in the time of the Eighth Sungtrul, the tradition had
changed and he was recoding it as he understood it, and for whatever reason diverged from the words Pema Lingpa dictated to his scribe in the autobiography.\footnote{These and other differences between the autobiography and various textual accounts will be addressed in Karma Phuntsho’s forthcoming compilation of Pema Lingpa biographies, when he reconciles the various editions and in the introductory chapter, provides an overview of their origins and development.}

No matter who conferred the vision, the consecration of Tamzhing was to mark a key point in Pema Lingpa’s career. Patrons, devotees and local leaders all gathered together on the appointed auspicious day\footnote{The autobiography states “Then in the Ox year 1505, on the New Year of the Jungtsi system, corresponding to the fifteenth day of the Tiger month, [and] on that Saturday, the constellation for that day was Gyal (rgyal)” (Phuntsho, 226). The rgyal lunar constellation or nākṣatra, corresponds to Pushya in the Indic system, and Delta Cancri (Asellus Astralis), located in the constellation Cancer in the Western reckoning.}, bringing gifts and offerings, described as follows:

From Menthang, Khenchen Tshultrim Peljor was invited and he came. On the [appointed] day of the Lhundrup Choling consecration, an elaborate rabney of the temple was taking place. Concurrently, the local public offered displays of kabsey [fried dough], and performed many songs and dances. There were other dances, besides the Wrathful Dagger Deity Dance, all presented in a very elaborate festival which was enjoyed by all who attended, both human and non-human [spectators] alike.\footnote{Phuntsho, gtam zhing rab gnas sogs kyi skor in gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 226.}

While the events were enjoyable, they also brought in a significant amount of material wealth to Pema Lingpa and his new temple, which Pema Lingpa carefully recorded:

Some of the patrons of the events gave mineral paints; Karumala received monetary offerings; [also brought were both] decorated and plain urns; woven cotton cloth; and [I] was given an abundance of tea. After, according to the instructions of Choeje Khenchen [Tshultrim Peljor, who was the chief guest] he indicated that there [I should give] a teaching. Led by the Khenchen, who was responsible for the preparation of decorations, the regional lamas and the pönlop assembled. [My] throne faced the southeast and was placed in front of and to the
right side of the [Guru] shrine room. For about twenty-five days, there were empowerments, instructions, and oral transmissions of [my] complete teachings for those assembled, including Pönpo Thundrup, guests and patrons. 338

After giving the full set of empowerments to his teachings, Pema Lingpa would go on to host an annual event at Tamzhing for the rest of his life, which, by his death in 1521, had “assumed the scale and function of a regional gathering.” 339 In the following years, these gatherings would continue, until at some unknown point its performance ceased. 340

After the celebrations had concluded, Pema Lingpa left for a long tour, visiting a variety of sites where he undertook meditative retreats, gave initiations and received even more offerings. 341 Yet from this time forward, Tamzhing would serve as a primary conduit for the Pema Lingpa tradition, and would later serve as the home monastery for two of the three Pema Lingpa incarnation lineages.

Later History of Tamzhing

Toward the end of Pema Lingpa’s life, though his trips to Tibet continued with fair frequency, most of his activities centered on Tamzhing and its environs, where he gave teachings and initiations and performed rituals for patrons and followers. Rather than having to travel far afield to meet with other Buddhist masters, as had happened before

338 Phuntsho, gtam zhing rab gnas sogs kyi skor in gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 226-227.
339 Aris, Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives, 91
340 Appendix F details the current schedule and components of the annual festival at Tamzhing, which was reinstated in the 1960’s when the temple became a monastery, filled with resident monks of the Pema Lingpa tradition who were fleeing the Chinese incursions into Lhodrak.
341 During this time, Pema Lingpa and others visited Tangrung, Bumpa, Gendungyi Phodrang at Kunzangling, Dechenling, Tharpaling in Tibet, Kurelung before finally returning to Bumthang (Phuntsho, gtam zhing rab gnas sogs kyi skor, 227-231).
for his visit with the Seventh Karmapa, spiritual adepts were seeking Pema Lingpa out in Bumthang, frequently visiting Tamzhing in order to receive the terton’s teachings. This continued until Pema Lingpa died at Tamzhing in 1521, entrusting his temple and his teachings to his son, Dawa Gyaltse (zla ba rgyal mtshan, b.1499). Dawa Gyaltsen would be the origin of the Thugse (thugs sras), or body incarnation lineage, which would maintain a seat at Tamzhing until the present day. Tamzhing is also the seat of the Peling Sungtrul (pad gling gsung sprul), considered the speech incarnation of Pema Lingpa. Their joint holding of seats at Tamzhing is reflected in the modern assembly hall, with two thrones of equal height placed directly opposite the main shrine (Figure 33).

342 As was explored in Chapter Two, important Buddhist masters frequently reincarnate in one or more lineages. One oft-encountered schema is a triple incarnation where one individual is considered the embodiment of the past master’s Body (Kutrul, sku sprul), one the incarnation of the teacher’s Speech (Sungtrul; gsung sprul) and a third the emanation of the guru’s Mind (Thugse; thugs sras). After his passing, the Pema Lingpa tradition maintained three such incarnation lineages.

343 The current Peling Sungtrul is Kunzang Pema Rinchen Namgyal (kun bzang pad+ma rin chen rnam rgyal, b. 1968), who maintains his seat at Tamzhing as well as one at Dramitse Thegchog Namdrol Ugyen Choling Monastery (sgra med rtse theg mchog rnam ‘grol o rgyanchos gling) in Tashigang. The most recent Thugtrul, Thegchog Tenpai Gyaltse (theg mchog bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan, b. 1951), passed away in April 2010; to date, his reincarnation has not been identified.
The links between the current royal family and the Pema Lingpa lineage was presented in Chapter Two; however, the role of this family at the site of Tamzhing in particular is worth explaining further. As noted earlier, the Eighth Sungtrul was the maternal uncle of the first king of Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck, and the young monarch-to-be learned reading and writing from his uncle. As well, the Ninth Thugse was the cousin of the first king, making the king a blood relative to two of the three Pema Lingpa incarnation lineages. Upon the passing of the Eighth Sungtrul in Lhalung, Ugyen Wangchuck

344 Pommaret, “Historical and Religious Relations between Lhodrak (southern Tibet) and Bumthang (Bhutan) from the 18th to the early 20th century: Preliminary data,” 95.
345 Pommaret, “Historical and Religious Relations between Lhodrak (southern Tibet) and Bumthang (Bhutan) from the 18th to the early 20th century: Preliminary data,” 95.
traveled to Tibet for the funeral, where met a lama, the Eighth Bakha Trulku Khamsum Rigdzin Yongdrol (rba kha sprul sku kham sgrum rig ‘dzin yongs grol, b. 19th century), who he invited to Bumthang for teachings. As will be explored in the next chapter, the 8th Bakha Trulku was a strong patron of the arts, and as his Bakha lineage had extensive connections with the Pema Lingpa tradition, it seems that he participated in renovations of Tamzhing that took place in the late 19th-early 20th century, based on his inclusion in the later murals found on the upper floor, and in the antechambers to the shrines on both the ground and upper floor.

As affirmed in Pierre Pichard’s UNESCO report on Tamzhing, the upper floor, its circumambulation path, shrine antechamber, wrathful deity shrine and text storeroom, along with the antechamber for the ground floor shrine, are all later additions, likely dating to the late 19th century. This agrees with Pema Lingpa’s description of the floor plan as having “twelve pillars” (ka ba bcu gnyis).

346 Pommaret, “Historical and Religious Relations between Lhodrak (southern Tibet) and Bumthang (Bhutan) from the 18th to the early 20th century: Preliminary data,” 95.
Figure 34: Present ground floor plan of Tamzhing, from Pichard (unpublished UNESCO report, 2006).

The floor plan in Figure 34 shows fourteen pillars on the ground floor; the difference between the original and the present forms is that the two pillars located in front of the main shrine are part of the antechamber are part of the later addition dating to the late 19th-early 20th century. Also, as pointed out by the autobiography, there were originally painted figures of the four guardian kings, figures which do not survive today. Aris speculates, probably rightly, that these figures originally had been painted on either side

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347 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 221.
of the doorway to the main Guru shrine; however during the later addition of the antechamber (Figure 35), these walls were removed and the images presumably lost.\textsuperscript{348}

![Diagram of Tamzhing]

Figure 35: Original layout of Tamzhing as described in Pema Lingpa's autobiography

The renovations have previously been attributed to Ashi Phuntsho Chodron (a lce phun tshog chos sgron, 1911-2003), wife of the second king of Bhutan.\textsuperscript{349} However, upon further investigation it seems that the renovations could have been undertaken by Lam

\[348 \text{“[T]o the right of the door to the principal shrine, Virūpākṣa and Vaiśravaṇa (sPyan mi bzang dang rNam-[thos]-sras)...to the left [of the door], Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Virūdhaka (Yul 'khor-srung dang ‘phags-skyes-po), these four” (Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 36).} \]

\[349 \text{Pommaret and Imaeda, “Le Monastère De gTam Zhing (Tamshing) Au Bhoutan Central,” 27.} \]
Phuntsho, who was active at Tamzhing during approximately the same time. Interviews with the present Tamzhing Drungchen Pema Kuenchab indicate that while Ashi Phuntsho Chodron was an active patron at sites throughout her native Bumthang, including Kurje, which sits just across the river from Tamzhing, there are no specific records of her sponsorship of the renovations at Tamzhing currently available.

From its founding in 1501 until the 1960’s, Tamzhing remained a temple, without a resident monastic body. This changed when it offered shelter to monks who were fleeing the Chinese army, who had advanced into the Tibetan region of Lhodrak just to the north of Bumthang. Many of the monks who fled came from Lhalung Monastery (Figure 36), which had been seat to Pema Lingpa incarnations since the 17th century. Among those who arrived at Tamzhing from Lhalung were the then eight-year-old Tenth Mind Incarnation, or Thugse, and a nine-year old monk named Tsetan.

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350 lha lung me tog lha nang theg mchog rab rgyas gling; as noted in Harding, in 1672 the Fifth Dalai Lama gave this monastery to the Peling Thugse and Sungtrul incarnation lineages (The Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa, 138).

351 Thugse Thegchog Tenpa’i Gyaltsen (thugs sras theg mchog bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan, 1951-2010).
In 1964, shortly after their arrival, the temple of Tamzhing was formally established as a monastery, and a resident body of monks was introduced for the first time. According to Tsetan, the young monk from Lhalung who eventually became head lama of Tamzhing, they carried out rituals and monastic rites as they had been performed at Lhalung, even
transplanting the Lhalung calendar as the schedule for monastic life at Tamzhing.\textsuperscript{352} This is confirmed in a variety of ways, including the seal currently used by the Tamzhing community. As seen on a sign hanging in the Maṇi Dungkhor that delineates the prescribed and prohibited behaviors of participants in the annual festival of Tamzhing, the authoritative seal shown on the document is that of the “Lhalung Community,” not of ‘Tamzhing’ (Figure 37).

![Figure 37: Sign in Maṇi Dungkhor shrine outlining rules for annual festival, signed by authority of the Lhalung community](image)

Tamzhing has served as a place of refuge from tumult since its consecration more than five centuries ago. Much as it did a generation ago for the monks of Lhalung, in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century Tamzhing offered a haven for Pema Lingpa, who was under his own pressures to perform and respond to the needs and demands of his patrons, detractors and devotees.

\textsuperscript{352} Presently, even the officiating seal on some documents and signage state that the posting authority at Tamzhing is the “Lhalung community,” signifying self-identification as a community based on Lhalung tradition, not Tamzhing.
While Pema Lingpa spent his years in peace in the military sense, he was frequently entreated to travel far away to provide initiations and teachings, and for many years, he was occasionally pressured to withdraw terma for assembled crowds. Yet with the construction and consecration of Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa was able to consolidate his legacy under one roof. This made him available to patrons and devotees, both in physical form in the early 16th century and later by proxy, with his image, his terma and his ritual practices imbued throughout the temple complex and its decoration. By establishing Tamzhing as the main site for his tradition, Pema Lingpa was able to perpetuate his teachings in absentia through the paintings and sculptures within the temple, which contained the texts, the treasures, the deities and the rituals necessary for his informed and initiated followers to experience significant spiritual advancements. The next chapter will explore the subtleties of the artistic program at Tamzhing, and will attempt to portray the meaning of the space as intended by Pema Lingpa and later patrons, as well as how it would be experienced and understood by a devotee.
Chapter 4: Iconography and Iconology of Tamzhing

Introduction

Figure 38: Overview of southwest corner, assembly hall, ground floor, Tamzhing

The murals in the assembly hall, also known as the sutra hall, of Tamzhing have been described as among the “oldest extant in Bhutan” and dated to the founding of the temple, painted between 1503 and 1505 (Figure 38). While Pema Lingpa’s autobiography

353 “[L]e vestibule qui se trouve au rez-de-chaussée est orné de peintures qui datent du tout début du XVIe siècle et qui ont miraculeusement échappé aux restaurations qui sont considérées dans le monde bouddhiste comme des actes pieux.” (Pommaret and Imaeda, “Le monastère,” 19.)

“Vergleichen wir stilistisch die Gestaltung der acht Emanationen des Guru Padmasambhava aus
provides a list of the murals that were created (and not) during the time of Tamzhing’s construction, the text does not divulge their significance. This chapter will lay out the iconography of the murals of Tamzhing before presenting an iconological study of the mural program instituted under the direction of Pema Lingpa. This latter step will examine the murals in the order they were created as described in the autobiography of Pema Lingpa. By following the text, we will better understand the temple and its role in Pema Lingpa’s life; how it served as a visual representation of his motivations, his lineage and his contributions to the Buddhist tradition. In particular, a number of otherwise unattested iconographic forms shown in Tamzhing are unique to the Pema Lingpa tradition, such as the manifestation of the wrathful deity Chana Dorje (phyag na rdo rje; Vajrapāṇi) on the assembly hall’s western wall.

By relying on the temple structure itself and drawing upon the autobiography of Pema Lingpa, this chapter seeks to reconcile some earlier oversights, and perhaps offer a fuller understanding of the murals of Tamzhing: the motivation for their creation, the messages the images communicate(d) to initiates, and the ways in which Pema Lingpa sought to imbue the essence of his teachings and his worldview into the murals themselves.  

354 Later murals that were the result of building renovations will be presented in the Appendices; specifically, the ground floor antechamber to the main shrine, the entire upper floor and an adjoining shrine off the main courtyard (the Maṇi Dungkhor).

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354 Later murals that were the result of building renovations will be presented in the Appendices; specifically, the ground floor antechamber to the main shrine, the entire upper floor and an adjoining shrine off the main courtyard (the Maṇi Dungkhor).
While most scholars present Buddhist monuments according to the traditional clockwise ritual movement through the space, in the case of the assembly hall murals the present study will address them according to the chronology of their creation, which is chronicled in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography. This approach allows for a clearer understanding of what historical and political events were transpiring concurrent with each particular phase of the mural painting process. Further, this will better account for the factors that could have influenced Pema Lingpa’s decision-making process as he determined which subjects would appear where. The discussion of the images, drawn from the autobiography, will close with an analysis of how each of the murals was intended to function not only as discrete sacred spaces but also how the murals create and perpetuate the assembly hall and circumambulation path as a whole.

The Sūtra Hall

Traditionally, the sūtra hall (mdo khyams) is a place of assembly, where devotees gather to listen to the teachings of a master or to participate in a ritual. Another key function of the sūtra hall is for monks to congregate and perform ceremonies, and receive initiations and empowerments. At the west end of the sūtra hall at Tamzhing are two thrones, oriented towards the main shrine so that the occupants, when present, are directly facing the main deity within, Guru Rinpoche.

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355 See in particular the sections gtam zhing lhun grub chos gling phyag btab pa’i skor, gtam zhing gi nang rten bzhengs tshul dang kar+ma pa chos grags rgya mtsho 'jel ba’i skor, and gtam zhing rab gnas sogs kyi skor in Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar.
The thrones belong to two different incarnation lineages that descend from Pema Lingpa; namely, the Peling Sungtrul (pad gling gsung sprul), or Speech Incarnation, and the Peling Thugse (pad gling thugs sras), or Mind Incarnation. Each of the incarnations maintains a seat at Tamzhing, and their equal status is reflected in the equal height of the thrones (Figure 39). Small tables and rugs arranged in rows along the west-east axis provide seating for the resident monastic population, the community of which was

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356 Important spiritual figures frequently serve as the origin for multiple incarnation lineages. Such is the case with Pema Lingpa, and three distinct lines arose from him after his death; specifically, the Body, Speech and Mind Incarnations. This trio of Body, Speech and Mind Incarnations is often encountered Himalayan Buddhism. They respectively represent the discrete physical, verbal and mental activities of highly realized beings reincarnated into separate bodies.
formally established at Tamzhing in 1968. Surrounding the sūtra hall are the murals
Pema Lingpa carefully described in his autobiography, and which provide an insight into
how the Buddhist master conceived of himself and his key practices.

Pema Lingpa calls Tamzhing a “palace of images” (gzugs brnyan pho brang) and the
sūtra hall murals themselves as “maps to the residences of the gods” (zhing bkod). This
nomenclature is important, as it reveals how Pema Lingpa conceives of the space and
how he intends it to function for the viewer. It is also clear from the autobiography that
Pema Lingpa asserts he is not building any edifices for himself, but rather for the benefit
of those devotees who require a temple environment in order to reach higher levels of
spiritual understanding:

Just as the organs and senses of the body
Are the nature of gods and goddesses
So the substance of one’s own body [conceived as] the palace of the peaceful
and wrathful deities
Is in reality the dexterity of the Dharmakāya,
The magical jugglery of the Unborn.
For me, Pad[ma]-gling [pa], who has gained a realization such as this
There is no need for a material palace.
However, for the sake of impure beings
A palace of images is established

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357 When the Chinese army arrived in Lhodrak in the late 1960’s, the monks of Lhalung
Monastery in Lhodrak, located just over the northern border with Tibet, fled to Tamzhing along
with the then-current Peling Thugse, Tenpai Gyaltsen (bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan, 1951-2010). In
1968, Tamzhing was formally constituted as a monastery for the first time in its history.
358 Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 33. The term gzugs brnyan (Skt. pratirūpa) is translatable as ‘image,’
though in Tibetan and Dzongkha, gzugs brnyan is defined as ‘reflection.’ (Dzongkha
Development Authority, English-Dzongkha Dictionary, 851.) The term ‘reflection’ reinforces the
idea that these images, no matter how well-executed, will always be a representation of an ideal
state of being which by definition can never be fully portrayed. Often, this concept is explained in
terms of the moon’s reflection in still water; although it is substantive in appearance, if one tries
to touch it, its inherently illusory and ungraspable nature becomes apparent.
359 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 216, 220-221, et passim.
In order to liberate them by skillful means to the level of the unsurpassed.360

In this short song, Pema Lingpa is revealing his perspective on the function of religious architecture; specifically, that those who are not yet enlightened (at “the level of the unsurpassed”) require an environment conducive to higher spiritual attainments. Although Pema Lingpa makes it clear that he himself has already surpassed the level at which such tools are necessary, he provides some hints as to how others can join him in this higher state of realization, sharing that the potential for full enlightenment is already endemic to a human incarnation. In particular, Pema Lingpa is referring to a basic Tantric Buddhist conception that if one realizes one’s own capacity to manifest as the deity, once that practitioner fully identifies him- or herself as such, they have achieved an enlightened state. In the Tantric system, such realizations can happen in one human lifetime, though it is highly advised that it take place under the guidance of a qualified master. The master provides the teachings that help initiates understand the fundamentally illusory nature of the surrounding world; that, although the senses are delivering near-constant stimulation and information into the brain for processing, in fact sensory input is incorrect. In fact, if one relies on sensory input alone, one will only be led farther away from the meaningful realizations necessary for successful Buddhist practice. So as Pema Lingpa is presenting these images for public consumption, he is making it clear that in order for them to be efficacious, the viewer must be guided through their practice by a qualified master; in particular, someone like himself, who has

360 Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 33, Translation of bum thang gter ston pad ma gling pa’i rnam thar ‘od zer kun mdzes nor bu’i phreng ba zhes by aba skal ldan spro ba skye ba’i tshul du bris pa, folio 156b.
not only transcended the need for visual supports in his practice, but is in fact the source of the practices themselves.

Artists and Craftsmen of the Sūtra Hall

At least five painters are responsible for the murals of the ground floor. One was Ponmo Tshepa Tshering, whose name means “Tshering, the Artist from Tshe (region).” It was Ponmo Tshepa Tshering who “added the [iconometric] lines on the left hand side of the sūtra hall.” Later, the autobiography states that as Ponmo Tshepa Tshering and another painter, Kuntrey (kun bkras) were finishing the left side murals, there were three artists (lha bzo ba gsum) starting the outlines of the deities on the opposite side of the courtyard. Other artisans oversaw other aspects of the building; specifically Guru and Dzomdar were the stonemasons (tsig bzo) and the carpenters (shing bzo) were Lama Chogyam and Kunga Chogyal.

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361 mdo khyams kyi g.yon phyog la thig htab cing/dpon mo che ba tshe ring pas ris mo dbu btsugs nas bzhengs pa’i bkod pa... Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 215
362 mchod khang gi lder sku rnams kyi ’dam bzo dang/logs ris g.yon phyogs kyang dpon kun bkras dang tshe ring gnyis kyi tshar la khad ’dug da nas bla ma rgyal mchog kyang khrid nas/khong lha bzo ba gsum g.yis sgo g.yas g.yon g.yi kha yar bstan dang/ Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 220.
363 gu ru dang ’dzom dar gnyis kyi/rtsig bzo ’i bye brag legs par byas/shing bzo ba bla ma chos rgyam dang kun dga chos rgyal gnyis kyi byed cing yod pa’i skabs. Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 219.
These artists were well-supplied, with many of the mural pigments presented to Pema Lingpa as gifts from his Tibetan patrons.\footnote{Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 37-38.} At least some of the pigments are noted as being provided to the temple as a gift from the Seventh Karmapa Chodrak Gyatso:\footnote{Chos grags rgya mtsho (1454-1506)}

When making these charcoal sketches [under drawing], two students [arrived] from the Rinpung estates, land of the Omniscient One, carrying a kasho written by the Black Hat Karmapa Chodrak Gyatso and delivered by Zablung Lama Trulku and his student. They delivered the kasho and the paint.\footnote{Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 216. “support for making the illustrations (mtshon gyi rten bcas),” which can be read as painting supplies.}

The Karmapa’s kasho, or decree, invited Pema Lingpa for a visit, and noted that he was aware that the team was in the midst of painting the murals. This letter, along with the gift of the paint, was considered as an example of the Karmapa’s omniscience.\footnote{The autobiography refers to the Karmapa with the common title thams cad mkhen pa, or Omniscient One (253) before noting that the omniscience of this superior personage [the Karmapa] was evidenced (mkhyen pa chen po’i bdag nyid yin pa’i rtags sa) through his prescient knowledge of exactly which paintings had already been completed at Tamzhing, and at what point Pema Lingpa should leave the site to come to Tibet (da lta lha khang gi g.yon nogs ri mo dbu btsugs yod pas/myur bar’drub par mdzad nas/) Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 216.}

However, it is also that the Karmapa learned of the project because word about it had spread. The foundation of Tamzhing had been laid in 1501, so at least two years had elapsed before Pema Lingpa received the invitation. Also, Pema Lingpa had visited southern Tibet in 1502 to oversee the funeral rites for one of his most high-ranking patrons, the nangso (nang gso; or local leader) Sonam Gyalpo. Given the high profile of Sonam Gyalpo, it is within the realm of possibility that word of Pema Lingpa and his project had reached the Karmapa’s residence at Rinpung in time for him to issue the
request in 1503. Regardless of whether the Karmapa learned of Tamzhing through prescience or word of mouth, his eventual meeting with the terton would end up being commemorated not only in the autobiography, but also prominently included in the wall mural program at Tamzhing, with a large composition dedicated to the Karmapa occupying a key place on the north wall, perhaps created with the very paints the Karmapa offered. The artists responsible for executing this homage, as well as the entire program at Tamzhing all bear Tibetan names, indicating they were not local:

[One of the team at gTam-zhing, Tshe-ring, was called Tshe-pa, “The Man of Tshe”—presumably to distinguish him from another dpon [artist] of the same name called mKhar-ba, “The Man of mKar.” Since Tshe and mKhar are not Bhutanese districts or villages, they must be places situated across the border in Tibet. On at least two occasions we are told specifically that the dpon [artists] were summoned from Tibet, in one of the cases from the lHo brag province which adjoins Bum-thang to the north.]

In his account of the consecration of Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa also clearly states Tibetan patrons (yon mchod) and local Tibetan leaders (sde pa) were the mural donors and provided the paints to create them. As has been noted, at the conclusion of the project the artists’ high levels of skill and the respect they commanded was reflected with generous payments. Pema Lingpa was apparently pleased enough with the work at

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368 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 215. phag lo ‘brug gi zla ba’i tshes beo Inga la (the 15th day of the Dragon month in the year of the Pig). This is the Water Pig year of the Eighth Rabjung, or 1503-1504 according to the Gregorian calendar.
369 Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 37.
370 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 227. “At this time, the Debs [local leaders] and patrons from Tibet requested to act as patrons and offer the paint [shing tshon; literally, ‘dye from trees’] for the Buddha-field [murals].” (de dus bod nas sde pa yon mchod rnams nas zhing khams shyin bdag zhus shing tshon rnams phul lo/) See also Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 37.
371 Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 38. He also offers the following translation of their payments: “Then for their parting fees (yon-brdzongs) the dpon Chos-[rgyam] was pleased with one horse,
Tamzhing that he employed at least one of them at a later project, Kunzangling (kun bzang gling), which also suggests the artists may have been itinerant. Taken together, the autobiography seems to prove that Pema Lingpa held artists in high esteem, and that those he employed at Tamzhing and elsewhere were offered substantial payments (in addition to lodging and food for the duration of their projects) for their services. It stands to reason that the murals they painted would reveal their Tibetan origins through particular stylistic motifs, and in fact, this chapter will explore potential sources of inspiration for these murals found elsewhere in the Himalayan cultural region.

Given that Tibetan artists were responsible for the murals, Tibetan patrons the materials for their creation, and Tibetan leaders the funds necessary to complete the construction of Tamzhing, it is fair to say that by the time Tamzhing was being built, Pema Lingpa’s sphere of influence and renown had certainly extended beyond Bumthang. Yet the temple was built through the hard labor of the local residents of Chokhor, and it was through their request and propitiation that Pema Lingpa had decided to build a temple there at all. This uniting of the locals to provide volunteer labor is yet another indication of Pema Lingpa’s importance; due to his high status, Pema Lingpa’s teachings and activities

[a pair of ] cymbals, a set of seven offering bowls, a teapot, two iron hearths and a head decoration, also sixteen pieces of ‘mixed cotton.’ Lama rGyal-mchog [received] a set of seven offering lamps and a copper vessel capable of holding three measures of water. Kun-bbras and Tshe-ring together received four horses, a khro vessel, two lengths of silk, two iron hearths, one drum and a couple of zho measures of gold. dPon Tshe-ring came before [me and received] one offering lamp of li metal. While they resided [at gTam-zhing the artists were] properly supplied with food by all the countryfold and so they were well pleased. So after sending them off [with these fees] they reached their homes without mishap.” (“gTam-zhing,” 36) See note 162 for Tibetan.

372 Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 33.
would certainly continue to draw devotees and patrons from around the region. The savvy local leaders of Chokhor recognized this and their quick mobilization of a workforce to build the temple thus ensured that Pema Lingpa’s Tibetan patrons brought their offerings to Tamzhing, and that their community would be the one to benefit.

Iconographic Overview of the Sūtra Hall Murals

The murals of the sūtra hall provide clear visual evidence of those practices, persons and deities most important to Pema Lingpa. Tamzhing provides a concrete physical space, which, when coupled with his personal textual account of its creation and consecration, offers significant insight into how Pema Lingpa invested himself into the building and its contents, and how he sought to use the art within to clearly illustrate his contributions, his lineage and his practices. This section provides a summary overview of the iconographic subjects found in the sūtra hall (mdo khyams) murals.

These murals have received the most scholarly attention to date. For the initial iconographic explanation, each mural will be briefly listed beginning with those murals encountered near the main entry and moving clockwise.³⁷³

³⁷³ Where inscriptions are present, they will be noted and Romanized transliterations, along with any Sanskrit equivalents, will be footnoted.
Entering Tamzhing, ritual movement prescribes that one should move clockwise (in this case, west). Immediately, one encounters a protruding wall containing a small niche that measures 27" on each side. The niche is covered by a small fabric curtain, indicating the esoteric nature of the deity concealed within. Inside is a sculpted clay figure of the guardian deity Dorje Legpa (rdo rje legs pa; Skt. Vajrasadhu) in his two-armed, red form, seated atop a snow lion. Progressing in the traditional clockwise pattern, one encounters the following murals in succession along the north portion of the west wall:

1. Wheel of Life (srid pa’i ’khor lo)\(^{374}\)
2. Remati (dpal ldan lha mo)\(^{375}\)
3. Dark Red Yakṣa (gnod sbyin dmar nag)\(^{376}\)
4. Black Life-Killing Demon (srog bdud nag po)\(^{377}\)
5. Life-Butcher (shan pa srog sgrub)\(^{378}\)

These figures, primarily wrathful deities, illustrate some of Pema Lingpa’s nine main practice deities.\(^{379}\) The north wall is dedicated to human masters of the Dzogchen tradition, as well as the primordial Buddha that gave rise to it. Additional figures reveal meditational forms of the purified practitioner, the primordial Buddha of the Nyingma tradition, and the five Buddha families. Moving along the north wall from west to east, the figures are:

6. Pema Lingpa (pad+ma gling pa; 1450-1521)\(^{380}\)

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\(^{374}\) Skt. Bhavachakra; inscribed srid pa’i ’khor lo. Unless otherwise noted, the inscriptions accompanying the assembly murals are later additions, written in black permanent marker. These inscriptions are not present in photographs taken at the site in the mid 1980’s provided by Françoise Pommaret.

\(^{375}\) Skt. Śrī Devī; inscribed lha mo re ti

\(^{376}\) Inscribed gnod sbyin

\(^{377}\) Inscribed srog bdud nag po

\(^{378}\) Inscribed shan pa srog sgrub

\(^{379}\) They, along with the rest of the sūtra hall murals, will be explored in depth below in the section “Iconology of the sūtra hall.”

\(^{380}\) Inscribed pad gling
The composition continues onto the north end of the east wall; however, the entire wall has been significantly damaged by water:

16. Vairocana (rnam par snang mdzad)
17. Akṣobhya (mi bskyod pa)
18. Samantabhadra with consort (kun tu bzang po yab yum)

At this point, visitors have the option of moving directly south and entering the main shrine, or turning east onto the circumambulation path. On the circumambulation path, both the inner and outer walls have mural compositions and show evidence of multiple painting phases. The compositions on the outer north, east and south walls of the circumambulation path were accounted for in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography. In the

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381 Inscribed kar+ma pa chos grags rgya mtsho
382 Inscribed ma gcig mkha’ 'gro ye shes mtsho rgyal la na mo
383 Skt. Padmasambhava; inscribed o+rgyan chen po pad 'byung gnas la na mo
384 Skt. Prahevajra (alt: Ānandavajra); inscribed drul sku dga’ rab. For the dating of Garab Dorje, see A.W. Hanson-Barber, “The Identification of dGa’ rab rdo rje,” in The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, 9/2 (1986), 55-64.
385 Skt. Vajradhāra; inscribed [...] rdo rje chang
386 Skt. Vajrasattva; inscribed rdo rje sms dpa’ la na mo
387 Crowned forms of the Five Buddhas (rgyal ba rigs lnga) begin at the east end of the north wall and extend onto the north end of the east wall.
388 Kun brkas gnyis kyis gtsang khang gi bskor lam rten gyi dgung la sangs rgyas rab bdun/g.yas na gnas bftan brgyad dang ha shang/g.yon na brgyad dang dha+rma ta la rnam bzhengs shing/dpon mo che ba rnam kyi phyag bzo rnam legs par grub nas/ (Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa ‘i rnam thar, 223.)
circumambulation path, the north and south walls comprise one large composition, dedicated to the Sixteen Arhats and their two attendants. No record survives that describes paintings on the inner walls of the circumambulation path, though at present they reveal at least two phases of painting took place.\textsuperscript{389} Along the south wall of the circumambulation path, moving from east to west, one finds the following nine figures:\textsuperscript{390}

- Attendant figure Hvashang (hwa shang)\textsuperscript{391}
- Arhat Bhadra (dpal bzang)
- Arhat Kālika (dus ldan chen po)\textsuperscript{392}
- Arhat Kanaka Bhadravajra (gser can)
- Arhat Ajita (ma pham pa)
- Arhat Abheda (mi phyed pa)
- Arhat Nāgasena (klu sde)
- Arhat Pindola Bharadvaja (bha ra dva ja so nyom len)
- Arhat Rāhula (sgra gcan ‘dzin)

According to the autobiography, the east wall of the circumambulation path is painted with murals of the Seven Universal Buddhas (sangs rgyas rab bdun); however, this wall

\textsuperscript{389} As this study focuses only upon the murals described in the autobiography, the inner walls of the circumambulation path will not be examined in depth. According to the Tamzhing Drungchen Pema Kuenchab, the inner north wall illustrates the first seven Speech Incarnations of Pema Lingpa (known as the Peling Sungtrul [pad gling gsung sprul] lineage), who are considered rebirths of Pema Lingpa. Their chronology is drawn from a compilation by John Ardussi, published in Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 138. However, examination of the figures seems to reveal that the north wall illustrates the previous incarnations of Pema Lingpa. The east and south circumambulation path murals were described by Tamzhing Drungchen Pema Kuenchab as the “Divine Lineage of Peling” (Peling lha brgyud).

\textsuperscript{390} There are no extant inscriptions on this wall. Identifications of the Sixteen Arhats and their attendants are made through their individual iconography and attributes.

\textsuperscript{391} Now overpainted; position inferred from comparative, symmetrical position of surviving attendant Dharmatala on opposite wall and traces of figure visible under overpainting.

\textsuperscript{392} This figure is badly damaged, and was identified through the process of elimination.
appears to have been repainted with an eight Buddha composition, most likely in the recent past. 393

Along the south wall of the circumambulation path is the remainder of the Sixteen Arhat composition, presented from east to west as follows:

- Arhat Chūdapanṭaka (lam phran bstan)394
- Arhat Paṇṭaka (lam chen bstan)395
- Arhat Gopaka (sbed byed)396
- Arhat Vanavāsin (nags gnas)397
- Arhat Vajriputra (rdo rje mo’i bu)
- Arhat Anjaga (yan lag ‘byung)
- Arhat Kanakavasta (gser gyi be’u)
- Arhat Bakula (ba ku la)
- Attendant figure Dharmatala (dge snyen dharma ta la)

Upon leaving the circumambulation path and re-entering the assembly hall, on the southern end of the east wall, one encounters the composition the Buddhas of the Three Times (dus gsum sangs rgyas).

393 Also known as the Seven Buddhas of the Past, the Seven Excellent Buddhas or the Seven Buddhas of This Age; specifically, they are: Śākyamuni (shAkya thub pa); Vipaśyin (sangs rgyas rnam gzigs); Śikhin (sangs rgyas gtsug tor can); Viśvabhū (sangs rgyas thams cad skyob); Krakucchanda (sangs rgyas ‘khor ba ‘jig); Kanakamuni (sangs rgyas gser thub); and Kaśyapa (sangs rgyas ‘od srung). The current eight Buddha composition does not correspond to any known system, and during interviews, Tamzhing officials continued to refer to them as the “seven” (bdun) Buddhas, despite that eight images are present. Their identification of the eighth Buddha is that he is Baiṣajyaguru (sman lha), or the Medicine Buddha. This combination of the Seven Universal Buddhas and the Medicine Buddha do not correspond with any known iconographic set. The ‘eighth Buddha’ at Tamzhing has the same appearance as Śakyāmuni, providing a tentative identification. In Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems, Nyoshul Khenpo states that tradition maintains Vajradhara gave the set of Seven Buddhas a large number of teachings in the distant past (34).

394 Inscribed in paint gnas brtan lam phran brtan la na mo
395 Inscribed in paint phags pa i gnas rtan lam brtan la na mo
396 Inscribed in paint gnas brtan bde byed pa la na mo
397 Partially damaged inscription in paint […] gnas ri chen po ti la […]
The south wall reveals many of the iconographic forms and practices that were originally revealed in Pema Lingpa’s treasures. Each of the illustrated terma was discovered in the early phases of Pema Lingpa’s revelatory career; specifically, between his first withdrawal in 1475 until the date of the paintings themselves, ca. 1503. Many of these murals make public the most esoteric practices of the Vajrayāna system, and still others present unique iconographic forms not found outside of the Pema Lingpa tradition. Along the south wall are the following deities, moving from east to west:

20. Buddha of Long Life with consort (tšo dpag med yab yum)
21. Guru Drakpo with consort (gu ru drag po yab yum)\(^{398}\)
22. Avalokiteśvara with consort (thugs rje chen po yab yum)
23. Hayagrīva with consort (rta mgrin yab yum)\(^{399}\)
24. Peaceful deities (zhi ba)\(^{400}\)
25. Wrathful deities (khro ba)
26. Manjūśrī (jam dpal byangs)
27. Chaturbhuja Avalokiteśvara (spyan ras gzigs phyab bzhis pa)\(^{401}\)
28. Vajrapāni (phyab na rdo rje)
29. Prajñāpāramitā (yum chen mo)
30. Vajrakīla (rdo rje gzhon nu)\(^{402}\)

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\(^{398}\) This form is based on the terma bla ma drag po dpa’ bo gcig pa Pema Lingpa recovered from Sengge Khyitsuk ca. 1480. In Hidden Treasures, Aris provides a chronological review of the titles, approximate dates and places where particular treasures were withdrawn (Appendix One, 215-221), and in “gTam-zhung,” Aris’ footnotes provide the location of many of the terma texts in Pema Lingpa’s twenty-two volume autobiography (39).

\(^{399}\) This form is based on Pema Lingpa’s terma revelation rta mgrin dpa’ bo gcig pa from Sengge Namzondrak in 1477.

\(^{400}\) This mural is paired with the neighboring wrathful deities of the Zhitro (zhi khro), both of which stem from the treasure kun bzang dgongs pa kun ’dus, revealed by Pema Lingpa from Samye in 1487. As discussed previously, as the first Vajrayāna Buddhist monastery in the Himalayas, Samye occupies a special place in Buddhist history of the region. Discoveries at the site, including Pema Lingpa’s, by definition link the revealer to both the sacred location of Samye and the source of the terma tradition, Guru Rinpoche, who both consecrated Samye and is traditionally considered the ultimate concealer of terma throughout the Himalayas.

\(^{401}\) This practice originates with the thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me revealed by Pema Lingpa in 1477 at Rimochen.

\(^{402}\) Though this mural is the southernmost panel of the assembly hall’s west wall, Pema Lingpa specifically includes it with the south wall composition, naming Vajrakīla immediately after Prajñāpāramitā yet before he breaks to describe his invitation to Rinpung to meet the Karmapa (yum chen mo la sogs phyogs bcu’isangs rgyas kyi zhung bkod/rdo rje gzhon nu la khro bo bcus

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The west wall is dedicated to protective deities, with the exception of the figure of Vajrakīla, which Pema Lingpa categorizes as part of the south wall composition. Upon entry, one encountered the Wheel of Life and a series of wrathful figures along the northern end of the west wall, and the final images, which are encountered immediately prior to the main door, are equally ferocious in their appearance and function:

31. Vaiśravaṇa (rnam thos sras)
32. Mahākāla (ma ning mgon po)
33. Ekajāṭī (ral gcig ma)
34. Rahula (ra hu la)

The assembly hall program concludes with another sculpted niche to the south of the main entrance, mirroring the placement of the Dorje Legpa sculpture immediately encountered upon entry. Within this curtained niche is the figure of Pehar, a protective deity shown in a two armed form sitting astride an elephant. The significance of these particular forms, as well as the mural components, will be explored in greater detail in the iconological analysis below.

Two- and Three-Dimensional Representations of “Buddha Realms”

Pema Lingpa was actively involved in the creation of the murals and ensured that they were carefully chronicled in his autobiography. Throughout, the murals are described as “map to the residence of the gods” (zhing bkod) and “Buddha realms” (zhing kham) of bskor ba/phur pa yang gsang bla med rnams kyi zhing kham rnams/ [Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 216]). Pema Lingpa is associated with a series of Vajrakīla practices (see rnam thar, Vol.16 [Ma]), though the form shown on the western wall of Tamzhing seems to be connected with the cycle phur pa yang gsang bla med revealed from Lhodrak Mendo ca. 1483.

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the divine forms that occupy them. Parallels exist between this terminology used by
Pema Lingpa and ideas found in the teachings of his previous incarnation, Longchenpa,
who sang a song that explained the reality underlying a practitioner’s body and its
physical environs:

O yogis, how joyous and happy it is!
Tonight, in the unexcelled Buddha-field,
In one’s own body, the palace of the Peaceful and Wrathful deities,
The mandala of the Buddhas, clarity and emptiness, has developed.
The Buddha does not exist externally, but within (oneself)
This is because of the kindness of the Lama
The Lama does not dwell outside but within (oneself)
Dwell in the state of clarity and emptiness, free of apprehensions… 403

The song continues, further elucidating how an accomplished meditator can visualize
residing inside him- or herself the Buddha, the teacher (lama), and the entire retinue of
the peaceful and wrathful deities. These abilities then serve as the key to making
successively more complex spiritual realizations that are necessary for enlightenment. In
his song, Longchenpa is making this process clear, equating the human form with a
“Buddha-field” precisely because all the qualities necessary for enlightenment, namely
the capacities of the Buddha and the Lama, are already present within, and when they are
perfectly realized, a capable practitioner can then “dwell in the state of clarity and
emptiness,” which is, by definition, where the full realization of enlightenment takes
place.

403 Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 152-153. This song was sung by Longchenpa as he was
giving the teachings of *Vima Nyingthig (bi ma nying thig)* at Chimphu Rimochen (mchims phu ri
mo chan).
Pema Lingpa employs similar language in his description of Tamzhing and how it, a “palace of images” (gzhugs brnyan pho brang), should be perceived. He sings his own song that describes how, through the display of the deities, the temple and its images can fuel spiritual achievements:

Just as the organs and senses of the body
Are the nature of gods and goddesses,
So the substance of one’s own body [conceived as] the palace of the peaceful and wrathful deities
Is in reality the dexterity of the Dharmakāya
The magical jugglery of the Unborn
For me, Pe[ma] Ling[pa], who has gained a realization such as this
There is no need for a material palace
However, for the sake of impure beings
A palace of images is established
In order to liberate them by skillful means to the level of the unsurpassed

Clearly, both Longchenpa and his later incarnation, Pema Lingpa, are referring to the corporeal self as the embodiment of the peaceful and wrathful deities, which is realized only through proper practice under a qualified spiritual master. Once this realization—that the qualities of enlightenment are already within ourselves—takes hold within a suitably advanced practitioner, he or she is able to fully comprehend the deities and the qualities they represent. Then, and only then, can they take further steps toward the ultimate release of enlightenment. Though Pema Lingpa makes it clear that his own spiritual acumen has made a physical space for his practice completely unnecessary, he was driven through compassion to provide a conducive environment so that less spiritually advanced “impure beings” have a place to cultivate their practice.

404 Translation by Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 33
The perspective of Tamzhing as divine heaven is further reinforced in the autobiography, when the images being painted on Tamzhing’s courtyard walls are described as zhingko (zing bkar)\(^{405}\), which can refer to a landscape, but is more specifically the “design of the residence of the gods.” Other terms employed in the text include zhingkham (zing kham)\(^{406}\), or “Buddha-field,” which refer to the pure abodes (heaven realms) of Buddhas, bodhisattvas and other deities. Yet throughout these same descriptions, Pema Lingpa is using terms such as derku (lder skye), or “painting,” and lokri (logs ris), meaning “mural.” The frequent interchange of these terms indicates that Pema Lingpa considered the murals and paintings themselves to be beyond ordinary images; rather, he imbued them with the qualities necessary to precipitate spiritual realization. Specifically, these images were meant to function just as he explained above—as tools to aid those of lower spiritual acumen to increase their understanding and orient them toward the goal of enlightened activity. Pema Lingpa imbued these images with consecratory materials, which were inserted into the wall plaster and clay sculptures during special ceremonies held throughout the building process.\(^{407}\) From a practitioner’s perspective, these materials would make the images more powerful, which would result in more efficacious practice.

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\(^{405}\) For example, *de ’og phyag rdor yang gsang bla med/de nas ’jam dbyangs gtso ’khor gyi zhing bkar/yum chen mo la sogs phyags bcu’i sangs rgyas kyi zhing bkar* (Phuntsho, 216).

\(^{406}\) For example, *phur pa yang gsang bla med rnams kyi zhing kham rin rms* (Phuntsho, 216).

\(^{407}\) The insertion of yellow scrolls into the wall plaster at Tamzhing is recounted in Phuntsho (221): *bla ma rgyal mchos gis bzhengs/dang po zha la’i skogs sa yang zhing kham rin rms re’i lha’i sku’i thad rnams su shog ser re yang smyug shubs la bsten nas bzhugs/*
Echoing the words of his previous incarnation, the famed master Longchenpa, Pema Lingpa is clearly displaying these deities as in their heaven realms. These purified heaven realms can by definition be considered the maṇḍala of each individual deity. A maṇḍala is a highly technical, precise rendering of the idealized universe of a particular deity. While maṇḍalas are frequently encountered as a highly geometric diagrams, other styles of compositions can also be considered a maṇḍala. The compositions of Tamzhing’s west wall murals are dominated by a large central figure, and are surrounded either by attendants or by subsidiary deities. In fact, this arrangement of figures correlates directly those arrangements when the figures are presented in a geometric maṇḍala. For example, the “heaven” of Dorje Zhonnu (Vajrakīla) at Tamzhing consists of three main parts. First, there is the central panel, delineated by white lines and dominated by the form of Dorje Zhonnu and his consort, standing atop a lotus (Figure 40).
Figure 40: Dorje Zhonnu (Vajrakīla) and consort, north wall, assembly hall, Tamzhing.

A small wrathful figure occupies each of the four corners of this central section, yet instead of legs, their bottom halves are daggers. Two columns flank the five central figures, in each of which are five wrathful figures with consorts and two small animal-headed guardian figures. When considered a three-dimensional maṇḍala abode, the ten subsidiary wrathful figures combine to protect the ten directions, while the four animal-headed guardians defend the four gates to the maṇḍala. Meanwhile, the central

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408 The four cardinal directions, four intermediary directions, the zenith and the nadir.
figure and his four primary attendants reside at the center of the maṇḍala, surrounded by
the rest of the retinue. Together, these figures combine to form the complete maṇḍala of
Dorje Zhonnu.

These relationships may be more clearly discerned when the deities are shown in a
primarily geometric form (Figure 43).

Figure 41: Line drawing of the Vajrakīla mandala, 20th century, ink on paper, private collection.
(Himalayan Art Resources 58232)
In this figure, Dorje Zhonnu and his consort are surrounded by the wrathful guardians of the ten directions, each shown on a stylized lotus petal. Just outside their circular enclosure, the half-dagger deities are shown in each of the four corners of the square, which is the enclosure to the deity palace. At the center of each side of the square, there is a small protrusion that is occupied by an animal-headed guardian. Though this 20th century line drawn version is more elaborate than the 16th century mural at Tamzhing, the continuity of the deities and how they are believed to relate to each other remains evident. No matter which form a particular maṇḍala takes, initiated practitioners are able to recognize its constituent parts, and, when necessary, employ the objects in their personal practice.  

In summary, Pema Lingpa is using the images in multiple ways. Their unique iconography reminds the viewers of his contribution to Buddhist doctrine and practice, while those forms attested to elsewhere connect him with the larger Himalayan terma tradition. By presenting these murals as fully realized maṇḍalas—that is, ritually complete—he is providing his followers with multiple paths so that they achieve higher levels of realization. This choice to openly display these esoteric images, which are the conduits to enlightenment, indicate Pema Lingpa’s manifestation of one of the most

409 Maṇḍalas are not limited to painted representations; they can also be seen in textiles, metal, wood, stone, arrangements of colored sand, or made of elaborate thread arrangements. For additional reading on maṇḍalas, see Brauen, Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism (2009); Huntington and Bangdel, The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art (2003); or Himalayan Art Resources’ online Mandala Resource Page: http://www.himalayanart.org/pages/mandalaresources/index.html (accessed 29 June 2012).
cherished tenets of the Buddhist doctrine—an unrelenting compassion for others. With this metastructure in mind, the specific messages of the murals can now be explored.

Iconology of the Sūtra Hall

Figure 42: Overview of south wall, ground floor, Tamzhing

At this point, it may be useful to recall that in Pema Lingpa’s description of the sūtra hall murals, “left” (g.yon) and “right” (g.yas) are understood according to the position of the main deity of the temple. This is the case throughout Bhutan and elsewhere in the Himalayan cultural region. At Tamzhing, the main image is a sculpture of Guru Rinpoche that is seated facing the temple’s main entrance. Given his location, the Guru’s left and right would be opposite those of visitors for half of their ritual circumambulation of the
space, specifically from the moment of their entry until they reach halfway through the circumambulation path (i.e., when they, too, are facing east). In his autobiography, Pema Lingpa begins his account of the murals with the composition immediately to the left (east) of the main shrine, reflective of the fact that the eastern wall of the sūtra hall was the first to be constructed. This is congruent with the Himalayan Buddhist tradition, as movement would be expected to proceed clockwise from the point of focus, which would be the main shrine.

*Entering the Buddha Fields: Murals of the Eastern Wall, Southern End*

This is the first composition Pema Lingpa mentions in his autobiography, stating that this composition on the “left side of the sūtra hall,” was the first one created by the artists:

Then in the Pig Year on the 9th day of the Dragon (first) month when the constellation nab so410 and the planet Venus were developing [in ascendancy]. The lines [for the paintings] were added to the left side of the sūtra hall. [The] senior artist Tshering began the erecting the arrangement of the newly made [images]: Buddhas of the Three Times…411

He credits the senior artist (dpon mo che ba) Tshering with laying out the iconometry of these “lines” (btsug nas), which depicted the Buddhas of the Three Times. These murals have suffered significant damage and are largely lost; however enough survives to

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410 In Vedic astrology, nab so corresponds to Punarvasu; or Pollux (Beta Geminorum) in Western reckoning.

411 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 215-216: mdo kyams kyi g.yon phyogs la this btab cing/dpon mo che ba tshe ring pas ris mo dbu btsugs nas bzhengs pa’i bkod pa yang/dus gsum sangs rgyas/...See also translation in Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 36.
recognize the subject matter. As seen in Figure 45, the composition is dominated by three large Buddhas: the Buddhas of the past, present and future.

![Figure 43: Buddhas of the Three Times, southern end, east wall, ground floor](image)

In this arrangement, each Buddha is thought to preside over a particular eon. In the far distant past, the Buddha of that epoch was Dipaṃkara, meaning that he successfully reached enlightenment and provided the Buddhist teachings that dominated in that era. In the course of his travels, Dipaṃkara encountered an earlier incarnation of the Buddha-to-be Śākyamuni and provided him with the prediction of his own future enlightenment.

After a long series of lifetimes, in approximately 500BCE, Śākyamuni fulfilled

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412 The Buddhas of the Three Times mural measures approximately 140” in length and is about 56” in height, measured from the rafters to the lowest point with a discernible intact painted surface.

413 The three Buddhas by definition also belong to a group known as the Thousand Buddhas of This Age, described in the *bskal pa bzang po’i mdo* (Skt. Bhadrakalpika Sūtra).
Dipaṃkara’s prediction, making him the Buddha of the present eon. As the Buddha of the current age, Śākyamuni is placed in the center of the composition, where he traditionally holds his hands in bhūmisparśa mudra, which recalls his moment of enlightenment. In displaying this gesture, Śākyamuni reminds the viewer of his own success at attaining enlightenment, which was the result of perfecting himself over hundreds of lifetimes. Concurrently, just as his own life provides a template for successful Buddhist practice, Śākyamuni’s gesture instructs the viewer that he or she is equally capable of achieving enlightenment through dedicated practice.

According to Buddhist thought, as the teachings of a particular Buddha reach their inevitable and inexorable decline, another Buddha will manifest in the world to regenerate the Buddhist tradition. In the Buddha of the Three Times composition, this future Buddha is Maitreya. Painted directly above these three Buddhas is a long line of twenty-one small Buddhas, with additional small Buddhas on the eastern edge next to the figure of Dipaṃkara. This multiplicity of Buddhas presents one of the core tenets of Mahāyāna Buddhism; that each human is born with the potential to realize their inherent

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414 This is the only representation of Śākyamuni explicitly included in the original program of Tamzhing. The paucity of Śākyamuni imagery reflects the Vajrayāna emphasis of the site, and the reliance not on the teachings of the historical Buddha, but rather the “close lineage” of the terma tradition, which stems ultimately from the primordial Buddha and is carried out in the world by numerous individuals, one of the most recognized of which is Guru Rinpoche, who has primacy of place at Tamzhing as the temple’s main image. (A representation of a later date in the circumambulation path may also be Śākyamuni, although this is not certain at present. The upper floor of Tamzhing reveals an abundance of Śākyamuni imagery; however, this is a later addition as well.)

415 Dipaṃkara and the other figures on the eastern end of the wall are largely obscured by later attempts to stabilize the wall, which was damaged by water. At that time, the images were largely covered with flat applications of concrete.
Buddha nature and thus become enlightened. Prior to the emergence of the Mahāyāna tradition, the average person could never aspire to Buddhahood as the highest attainable level of existence was that of an arhat (gnas brtan), or “worthy one.” Within Mahāyāna, Buddhahood became available to all, reflected in this mural in the multiplicity of Buddhas, and their enduring presence, eon after eon.

*Murals of the Southern Wall: Key Deities of the Pema Lingpa Tradition*
The southern wall murals display some of the most esoteric Vajrayāna practices connected with the Pema Lingpa tradition, as well as unique forms of deities otherwise unattested in Himalayan Buddhism (Figure 46).\textsuperscript{416} Taken together, this wall provides a

\textsuperscript{416} The compositions are, from south to north: Buddha of Long Life with consort (tshe dpag med yab yum); Guru Drakpo with consort (gu ru drag po yab yum); Avalokiteśvara with consort
clear visual document to those meditations and rituals that are critical components of the Pema Lingpa tradition. Further, by populating the program with deities first revealed in his terma, Pema Lingpa was clearly illustrating his contributions to Nyingma Buddhism. As a treasure revealer, Pema Lingpa likely considered his terma activities to be fulfilling the prophecies of Guru Rinpoche, predictions that detailed how discoveries by future tertons would keep the Buddhist tradition pure and serve as a continual source of doctrinal renewal. By painting the key meditational deities of his revelations on the walls of the temple, Pema Lingpa presented his teachings as a template for enlightenment. The diversity and number of deities displayed reflect the large number of terma Pema Lingpa had already revealed at the time of the temple’s founding in 1501. At the same time, their open display reinforced Pema Lingpa’s high spiritual standing, as he was the recipient of direct messages from Guru Rinpoche which led him to uncover, decipher and promulgate dozens of sophisticated ritual practices. For the viewer, these murals concurrently encouraged higher levels of practice, solidified the legitimacy of Pema Lingpa, and provided visual reminders of not only their own local master, but of the terma tradition as a whole and its founder, Guru Rinpoche. In other words, the southern wall murals provide a complex and nuanced picture of the life, activities and legacy of Pema Lingpa.

(thugs rje chen po yab yum); Hayagrīva with consort (rta mgrin yab yum); Peaceful deities (zhi ba); Wrathful deities (khro ba); Mañjuśrī (jam dpal byangs); Chaturbhujā Avalokiteśvara (spyan ras gzigs phyag bzhi pa); Vajrapāṇi (phyag na rdo rje); Prajñāpāramitā (yum chen mo); Vajrakīla (rdo rje gzhon nu)
The autobiography describes the murals as follows, noticeably including the Buddhas of the Three Times image on the eastern wall and the southernmost painting of the west wall dedicated to the deity Vajrakīla as part of the compositional set:

[The] senior artist Tshering began the erecting the arrangement of the newly made [images]: Buddhas of the Three Times, Mahākaruṇā Avalokiteśvara. After that, starting from [successively] Highest Most Secret Amitāyus, Highest Most Secret Hayagrīva; after that, peaceful Samantabhadra with consort with the surrounding the forty-two deities, wrathful Heruka surrounded by the fifty blood-drinking Herukas; then, Highest Most Secret Vajrapāṇi. Then, Mañjuśrī, Prajñāpāramitā and the other paradises of the Buddhas of the ten directions, [and] the pure realm of Vajrakumara with ten wrathful ones encircling [him]; the supreme, most secret Kīla.417

There are three extant murals not recorded in Pema Lingpa’s autobiographical account; specifically, Guru Drakpo with his consort, Shinje (gshin rje; Skt. Yāma) with his consort, and Chenrezig Chagzhipa. As will be shown below, these figures also originate in Pema Lingpa’s terma even though they are not specifically mentioned in the text.418

These absent figures could be accounted for with one phrase in the text, la sogs, translated above as “other.” La sogs has the sense of ‘et cetera,’ or ‘and so forth,’ where additional, presumably similar items are present but are not individually enumerated. The

417 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 215-216. dpon mo che ba tshe ring pas ris mo dbu btsugs nas bzhengs pa’i bkod pa yang/dus gsum sangs rgyas/tshe dpag med yang gsang bla med/erta mgrin yang gsang bla med/de ’og kun bhang yab yumla zhi ba bzhi bcu rtsa gnyis kyi bskor ba’i zhiing bkod/he ru ka rigs lnga la khrag ‘thung lnga bcus bskor ba’i zhiing bkod/de ’og phyag rdor yang gsang bla med/de nas ‘jam dbyangs gtsos ‘khor gyi zhiing bkod/yum chen mo la sogs phyas bcu’i sangs rgyas kyi zhiing bkod/rdo rje gzhon nu la kho bo bcus bskor ba/phur bu yang gsang bla med rnam kyi zhiing kham s rnam/skya ris byed pa’i skabs su/gzhing ka rin spungs nas/thams cad mkhyen pa zha nag pa chos grags rgya mtsho’i zhabz drung nas/…See also translation in Aris, “gTam-zhing,” 36.

418 “Prajñāpāramitā and the other paradises of the Buddhas of the ten directions, (yum chen mo la sogs phyas bcu’i sangs rgyas kyi zhiing bkod)” in Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 216.
text inclusion of la sogs in this position in the passage could be taken to mean that the three unlisted murals of the south wall are those that constitute the “others.”

The easternmost mural displays the secret form of the Buddha of Long Life, Amitāyus (tshe dpag med), shown in union with his consort (Figure 47).

![Amitāyus (Buddha of Longevity) mural, east end of south wall, ground floor, Tamzhing](image)

Figure 45: Amitāyus (Buddha of Longevity) mural, east end of south wall, ground floor, Tamzhing

Pema Lingpa revealed the text containing this practice in 1483 while on his second trip to Tibet, withdrawing it from the Lion-faced Cliff at Lhodrak Mendo. Known as the Lama Norbu Gyatso (bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho), or Lama Jewel Ocean, this text is the

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420 *lho brag sman mo’i brag seng+ge gdon di gter sgo la ‘dzul nas nor bu rgya mtsho dpe sgrom dang brag ze’i sha ril brgya tham pa’i* (gter chen pad+ma gling pas zab gter bzhes tshul skor bzhugs so [unpublished document provided by the Tamzhing monastic community, February 2011].)
source for at least six of the esoteric deities on the western and southern walls. This was Pema Lingpa’s tenth withdrawal of textual terma, and although it took place in 1483, it was not until 1501, shortly after the foundation stone of Tamzhing had been laid, that he transcribed the treasure into the full ritual cycle.

It is worth noting that Pema Lingpa finally transcribed the treasure, which he had left essentially untouched for almost two decades, just before beginning the decorative program of Tamzhing. The cycle of *Lama Norbu Gyatso* would become one of his most popular and widely-disseminated texts, yet at the time of its original discovery, it was at the apex of his treasure-revealing activities. From the time of his first revelation in 1475 until 1482, in just seven years Pema Lingpa had revealed eighteen different terma. Most of these were found in Bumthang, although in 1480 he recovered terma during his first foray into Tibet. By the time he returned three years later and revealed *Lama Norbu Gyatso*, Pema Lingpa’s popularity had grown exponentially. In addition to meeting

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421 Practices of Guru Drakpo (gu ru drag po), Hayāgrīva (rta mgrin), Vajrapāni (phyag rdor), Yāma (gshin rje), Amitāyus (tse dpag med) and Vaiśravaṇa (rnam sras) are all found in the second volume of the *Lama Jewel Ocean* (*bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho glegs bam gnyis pa*, in volume 2 [Kha] of *rig ’dzin pad+m a gling pa yi zab gterchos mdzod rin po ché*).

422 Textual terma are frequently revealed in the form of small bits of paper known as “yellowed scrolls” or “golden paper” (shrog gser). These often have little writing on them, yet when the predefined terton discovers the text, he or she is able to expound on the teachings contained within these small scrolls, sometimes expanding them to encompass multiple volumes of practices and rituals. Although *Lama Norbu Gyatso* was the tenth text Pema Lingpa withdrew, it was his nineteenth overall terma, as he had made a number of non-textual discoveries (i.e., sculptures, medicinal pills, etc.).
important teachers of his time, such as the fourth Shamar.\textsuperscript{423} Pema Lingpa also oversaw the construction of an addition to his monastery at Pemaling.\textsuperscript{424}

All these activities provided Pema Lingpa with growing numbers of followers and an increasing amount of material wealth. However, the demands of his swelling popularity was at the cost of other activities; in 1482, just before his discovery of the \textit{Lama Norbu Gyatso}, Pema Lingpa stopped recording his autobiography and began dictating his life’s events to his student Tashi Gyalpo (bkra shis rgyal po, b. 15\textsuperscript{th} century). Pema Lingpa’s flurry of treasure revealing would not subside until 1489, after which he would reveal just one major terma and his activities focused primarily on traveling throughout the region to expound his teachings.\textsuperscript{425}

These initiations, rituals and practices yielded substantial material results for Pema Lingpa, including increased numbers of patrons and followers. As explored above, the resultant resources and hometown sentiment provided the impetus for the construction of Tamzhing. From the surviving record, it can be extrapolated that Pema Lingpa’s busiest phase began after he handed over responsibility for his autobiography to his disciple and just before he withdrew the \textit{Lama Norbu Gyatso}. Pema Lingpa returned to this, his tenth revealed terma, and transcribed it immediately prior to the foundation laying of

\textsuperscript{423} Fourth Shamar Chodrak Yeshe (zhwa dmar 04 chos grags ye shes; 1453-1524), who traveled extensively in Bumthang.

\textsuperscript{424} Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures}, 216.

\textsuperscript{425} The last termas revealed by Pema Lingpa took place during his eighteenth visit to Tibet, in 1513 at Samye Chimphu (bsam yas mehims phu). (Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures}, 220.)
Tamzhing. Given the extensive compilation of deity practices contained within *Lama Norbu Gyatso*, it provided a natural source for part of the temple’s iconographic program.

Pema Lingpa’s autobiography states that the paintings are executed “exactly as described in the tantras.” This statement is important, as there has been some contention as to the degree to which Pema Lingpa was involved in the artistic processes behind Tamzhing’s compositions. For Aris, he infers that Pema Lingpa was *in absentia*, allowing the artists to rely on their previous experience for the deity images, commenting “The statement that their iconometric proportions were laid out ‘exactly as related in the tantras’ would suggest that [Pema Lingpa] left all the details to his artists, who were familiar only with the standard canonical prescriptions.” Yet in the same paragraph, Aris notes that Pema Lingpa’s list of paintings “is especially valuable for identifying the precise forms of the deities represented,” and continues, “the form of Mahākaruṇā as *Mun-sel sgron-me* must certainly derive from Padma-gling-pa’s own ‘discovery’ in 1477 of a ritual cycle of that name at Ri-mo-can, less than a day’s journey to the east of gTam-zhing. The same holds for those four deities [Tsepagme, Tamdrin, Chana Dorje and Phurba] who are qualified with the epithet *Yang-gsang-bla-med*.” If, as Aris suggests, the four figures bearing the

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426 This pattern of revelation and subsequent revisitation of a terma is common; at other times in Pema Lingpa’s life, there were long hiatuses between the terma extraction and its later transcription and exposition. For example, his second terma *Thugje Chenpo Munsel Dronme (thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me)* was withdrawn in 1477, but was not expounded upon until 1485. In the case of *Gonpa Kundue (dgongs pa kun ‘dus)*, though revealed in 1484, it wasn’t taught until 1507.

427 Phuntsho, *gter ston pad+ma gling pa'i rnam thar*, 221: *ri mo de rnams rgyud nas ji ltar gsungs pa'i thig tshad dang ldan zhing*.

428 Aris, “gTam-zing,” 37.

429 Aris, “gTam-zing,” 37.
title ‘Highest Most Secret’ (yang gsang bla med) each originate in texts revealed by Pema Lingpa, how could Pema Lingpa not be the source for their iconometrically prescripted forms? It would stand to reason that when Pema Lingpa asserts that the images are made “exactly as put forth in the tantras,” in the case of deities unique to his practice, he is referring to his own tantras which he has discovered, transcribed and promulgated to his disciples. For those deities that are not unique to his practice, for example, Yum Chenmo (Prajñāpāramitā) or Chenrezig Chagzhipa (Chaturbhuja Avalokiteśvara), it is possible (if not probable) that Pema Lingpa left the artists to follow standard conventions, but this would not necessarily mean that Pema Lingpa was unfamiliar with either their depiction or their practice.

The images particular to Pema Lingpa’s practice primarily stem from the Lama Norbu Gyatso text, in which a number of deities are described with the epithet ‘Most Secret (yang gsang).’ In the case of Amitāyus, Pema Lingpa dedicates three practices to the deity, subdivided into outer (phyi), inner (nang) and secret (gsang) versions. The mural depiction of Amitāyus matches the description of the secret version: red, two armed and having one face, having the appearance of bodily perfection with long plaited hair in a

topknot, adorned with all the ornaments of earrings, bracelets, anklets, necklaces and wearing luxurious garments (Figure 48). After detailing the various adornments and physical appearance of the deity, Pema Lingpa

Figure 46: Detail, Amitāyus mural, south wall, ground floor

His hands are folded in his lap, cradling a vase filled with the nectar of long life. After

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431 sku mdog dmar po zhal gcig phya gnyis pa/ long spyod rdzogs sku'i cha lugs can/ dbu skra ral pa'i thor cog dang ldan pa la/ rin po che'i srog zhung sol ba/phyag gdub/zhabs gdub/mgu la rgyan/snyan cha/mgu la chu/ se mo do dang dar gyis smad dkris byas pa/ (rig 'dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 215).

432 phyag mnyam gzags gi steng na rin po che'i bum pa tshe chus gang ba bsnams pa/(rig 'dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 215).
describes how to undertake the first of the two-stage meditation that comprises this practice:

“In this way, I meditatively cultivate myself into this form through contemplation of the red syllable HRI at the heart. From that [syllable], the light of great bliss spreads from the Buddha-field (zhing khams).”

Recalling that in the texts describing the building of Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa used the term zhing khams (“Buddha realms”) to describe the murals as heavens, to see the same term in the practice manual immediately reinforces Pema Lingpa’s intention to present the murals as the individual heavens of the particular Buddha. Moreover, in the practice, Pema Lingpa makes it clear that he is cultivating himself as Amitāyus and his environs as Amitāyus’ Buddha realm. Yet this can be performed by any initiate; Pema Lingpa is not describing it as a process that he alone can experience. Rather, his use of the first person singular (bdag) in the course of this meditation is meant to reflect the ‘interior monologue’ that directs the meditator’s—any meditator’s—experience.

Then the secret yab yum form is introduced, with instructions to visualize Amitāyus and his consort dwelling above, seated upon a sun and moon seat, with rainbow light emanating around them. In her hand, the female holds a water pot containing longevity nectar (tshe bcud), which is the essence of red and white bodhicitta (byang sms dkar

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433 bdag dam tsheg sms dpa' de ltar bsgom pa'i thugs kar/yi ge hrI dmar tsheg drag dang ldan pa gcig bsam/de las 'od 'phros bde ba chen po'i zhing khams nas ((rig 'dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 215-216).
434 bcom ldan 'das mgon po tshe dpag tu med yab yum spyan drangs/ ja'i od kyi klong ngyi ma dang zla ba'i gdan gyi steng na bzhugs par gsal biab/ (in rig 'dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 216).
dmar) which is cultivated through advanced meditational practice. Through the course of this meditation on the united deity, the practitioner visualizes this nectar of long life—the essence of enlightenment—to pour over the sides of the vase and spill out. The text then narrates in the first person, “I visualize this holy substance descending into the top of my head.” This absorption of what is often characterized as the ‘nectar of enlightenment’ signifies that the practitioner/initiate is then purified. This is the conclusion of the first stage of the practice, and the text elucidates that the goal of the practice is to enable the initiate to fill their entire bodies with this substance through meditative cultivation.

For the second stage, that of completion, the practitioner completely identifies him or herself with the deity, which enables them to assume the identity of the deity in order to undertake enlightened action. Pema Lingpa describes this phase as follows:

In the sky before me is the victorious Buddha Amitāyus, interchangeable with myself. As a mark of completion [of the meditation], [I] produce [myself with a] dazzling, majestically radiant body, surrounded by a field of merit; the poison of

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435 rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 216. This combined red and white essence is a reference to the two components of enlightenment in the Vajrayāna context. The male produces the white essence (semen) while the woman produces the red (blood). In Vajrayāna, these combined fluids represent the essence of enlightenment, indicating that the qualities associated with the male (skillful means; Tib. thabs; Skt. upāya) and female (wisdom; Tib. shes rab; Skt. prajñā) have been fully realized at the ultimate level, a state that precipitates enlightenment.

436 bdag dam tsheg sems dpal spyi gtsug tu babs bar bsam (in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 216.) Countless meditations involve visualization of deities or various substances descending through the crown of the head for absorption into the practitioner’s body/being. The head is considered to be a ‘cleaner’ and thus more pure, part of the body, and throughout the Himalayas, blessings are received though a touch to the head, from a teacher’s hand or blessed object.

437 lus kyi nang thams cad ’o rkyal gyis gang ba ltar bsgom/ (in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 216.)
death will never strike and the lifespan of the vidyādhāras will be acquired! But alas, blessed Amitāyus, presently we face the ultimate crisis: we are constrained by our human bodies and death is uncertain. In order to eliminate obstacles, kindly offer me the refuge of your protection. I ask you to dispel the obstacle of untimely death and grant me refuge in your field of immortality.\textsuperscript{438}

The brief supplication follows with Pema Lingpa’s conclusion, urging the initiate to be diligent in their practice, and closes with the note that he is revealing this terma from his heart.\textsuperscript{439}

Though the idea of requesting a longer life may at first seem to be an overly mundane concern, in fact, it certainly has its place within Buddhist practice. Without a long, healthy life, one would be far less capable of fulfilling one of the key tenets of Buddhism: benefitting sentient beings. Thus, remaining healthy and prolonging one’s life would ensure greater opportunities for helping others and accumulating additional merit, making this seemingly practical concern an important one for Buddhist practitioners.

The placement of the Amitāyus mural is significant. Its location, just after the Buddhas of the Three Times, transitions the viewer away from a space that is focused on a larger methodological tenet (the multiplicity of Buddhas and their enduring presence over eons)

\textsuperscript{438} mdun gyi nam mkhar bcom ldan tshe dpag med kyang/bdag dam tsheg sms dpa’ dang gnyis su med par bsam/de yang mi dmigs pa r dzogs rim gyi rgyas ’debs/ lus kyi bkrag dang mdangs dang gzi brjids dang tshe dang bsod nams dpal dang ’byor pa thams cad bskyed cing/dug min ’chi ba’i rkyen gwis mi tshugs/rgig ’dzin gyi tshe la mnga’ brnyes par ’gyur ro/ kye ma bcom ldan tshe dpag med/da lta dus ngan mtha’ ma’i m/tshel ring thung nges med pas/dus min ’chi ba’i rkyen sel phyir/bdag la skyabs mdzod thugs rjes bzung/dus min ’chi ba’i rkyen sel zhing ’chi med dngos grub stsal du gsal/ (in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 217.)

\textsuperscript{439} 'di sprul sku pad+ma gling pas bsam yas byang chub chen po’i thugs ka nas gdan drangs pa’o/ (in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 217.)
and into a deeply individualized practice meant to precipitate conditions conducive to personal spiritual advancement. Rather than the comparatively abstract notion of distant Buddhas overseeing countless generations of beings, the Amitāyus composition explicitly illustrates a personal practice meant to create circumstances now, in the present, that enable him or her to act as a Buddha in this life for the benefit of others. By placing this mural first in the series of most secret (yang gsang) deity practices, Pema Lingpa is grounding the practitioner in a very basic truth: without a long and healthy life dedicated to serious practice, in which one seeks to cause the ‘nectar of enlightenment to pour over’ and be accessible to all, the most basic goals cannot possibly be accomplished.

Interestingly, none of the three texts\(^{440}\) mentions attendant figures, although twenty-two of them are present in the mural. Keeping in mind that each mural is intended to be a representation of the deity’s heavenly abode, and in itself a discrete maṇḍala, this composition can be understood as assembly of four groups of figures, along with one portrait of a teacher. First, surrounding the head of the main figure are five smaller subsidiary yab yum deity pairs shown in multiple colors (Figure 49). The five colored deity pairs represent the five Buddha families, which is a common theme in Buddhist art. In summary, each of the five symbolizes a particular wisdom or insight that is a necessary component of enlightenment.

\(^{440}\) The inner, outer and secret sādhanas to Amitāyus of the *Lama Norbu Gyatso*. 227
As is the case at Tamzhing, they are frequently identifiable by their color.\textsuperscript{441} Their presence, surrounding the head of Amitāyus, forms the innermost circle of the deity maṇḍala. On either side of them are the figures of eight seated bodhisattvas, each of whom holds a long life vase in their left hands and an arrow in their right. Below them is a row of four standing bodhisattvas, also holding vases and arrows, and the lowest section of the mural is populated by four wrathful figures wearing tiger skins and bearing their own vases and arrows. Together, these figures all populate the maṇḍala of Amitāyus: the wrathful deities protect the four directional entrances to the sacred space, while the four

\textsuperscript{441} Other means of identification are their respective family symbol or throne element. For a brief essay on the five Buddha families, see Livingston, “Enlightenment Symbolized: The Five Jina Buddhas” in \textit{Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art}, 90-92.
standing bodhisattvas are positioned in the intermediary directions. The remaining eight seated bodhisattvas are understood to occupy the inner cardinal and intermediary directions. Nestled amidst all the deities is a small depiction of a seated Nyingma lama, identifiable as such by his distinctive hat (Figure 50).

![Figure 48: Detail of lama, Amitāyus mural](image)

He is seated on a throne with his hands displaying a gesture of teaching. While it is tempting to speculate that it is the form of Pema Lingpa, presenting himself as the source of the teachings within the panel (and by extension, those that follow), there is no clear evidence to support that, unless one reads the practice text as him chronicling this particular visualization that is painted on the wall, and that this small image is the “I” (bdag) in question. However, the figure of the teacher does not reveal any unique characteristics that would definitively identify him.

This analysis of the function and meaning of the Amitāyus panel, as well as the significance of its placement, provides the template for the remainder of the study.
Moving clockwise through the space, the next image is that of Guru Drakpo, a wrathful manifestation of Guru Rinpoche (Figure 51). Shown in a red, three-faced, six-armed, four-legged form, Guru Drakpo is shown in union with his consort and surrounded by twelve figures arranged in two columns of six.442 Like Amitāyus, this specific form of Guru Drakpo originates from the *Lama Norbu Gyatso* text.443 At the outset, Pema Lingpa explains that his motivation for writing down this treasure is to ensure that future beings might have the chance to benefit from the practice and grasp its meaning.444 The next portion is unlike the Amitāyus explanation in that he first imparts directions to create a maṇḍala “one arm span wide” (‘dom khang) and sprinkle it liberally with beer.445 Although Pema Lingpa has been inclusive about his audience for these practices, before describing the maṇḍala figures in detail, he clearly states that certain people should not undertake this practice, as they are “unsuitable recipients (snod min).”446 These include “those who have no faith in Buddhism (chos dred),” and “those who have wrong views (log lta can).”

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442 Guru Drakpo’s implements are a curved knife (kartika) in his primary right hand, a vajra in the upper right and a sword (khaḍga) in the middle right. In the left, his primary hand cradles a skull bowl (kapāla), the upper left raises an upraised khaṭvāṅga and the lower left grasps a nine-headed scorpion.

443 Entitled *drag po’i dbang chog gsang ba bla med bzhugs so*, in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 537-551.

444 *ma ‘ongs phyi rabs rnams kyi don yi ger bris nas gter du spas/* (in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 538.)

445 *dkyil ‘khor gru bzhi ‘dom gang ste/spos dang chang gis chag chag gdab/me long ngos ltar’jam pa la/cha chen dang ni cha phran dang/thig rnams ma nor rdzogs par btab/de la lha bkod rim pa ni/* (in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 539.)

446 *snod min chos dred log lta can/ignas ‘dir ma ‘khor phyir dengs shig/lan gsum bya’o/yang phyi nas zhu ba phul ba ni/* (in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 540.)
In the mural, Guru Drakpo dominates the central panel, surrounded by smoke and flame emanating from his body, and standing upon a lotus throne. The figures flanking him include, but are not limited to, retinue deities, who Pema Lingpa describes after an
exhortation that the reader pays careful attention to the practice as he explains it. He describes the deities of the maṇḍala, yet in the mural, there are only a few figures present. There are four figures who serve as protectors of the sacred space, found as the lowest two figures in each column and delineated by the lower half of their bodies, which are not anthropomorphic, but rather their torsos terminate in the form a dagger. In Vajrayāna practice, this dagger (phur bu; Skt. kīla) pins down obstructive forces (such as jealousy or anger) that are preventing a meditator from higher levels of accomplishment. The figures immobilize these obstacles, allowing the practitioner to continue his or her meditation and thereby overcome these barriers.

Also surrounding the central form of Guru Drakpo, on the left hand side are the Buddha Amitāyus, the bodhisattva of wisdom Mañjuśrī, Hayagrīva and Vajrapāṇi while on the right is a small form of Guru Rinpoche, the Buddha Vajrasattva and his consort, the ḍākini Vajravarāhī. The subsidiary figure in the lower right corner does not match any known iconography and was not found in the text; it is a white wrathful male figure with a skull crown, holding a flame in his outstretched right hand (Figure 52).

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448  steng ’og phyogs mtshams thams cad rdo rje’i rwa ba dang gur/de’i phyi rim dbyug to/gri gug ral gri/khor lo Inga’i nang gang/ (in rig ‘dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 541-2.)
At Tamzhing, as well as elsewhere, in the heruka form, Guru Drakpo appears with six arms, three faces and embracing a consort. Guru Drakpo is a secret wrathful (heruka) manifestation of Guru Rinpoche. Yet emanating as Guru Drakpo is not the purview of Guru Rinpoche alone; in fact, the scholar Longchenpa, previous incarnation of Pema Lingpa, appeared as Guru Drakpo to quell troublesome spirits who were disturbing the construction of a temple:

His primary implements are the skull cup and flaying knife, his left hands hold the khatvāṅga staff and a nine-headed scorpion, while his right hands brandish the vajra and a sword.
Longchenpa restored the damaged charms which suppress the Tamsi demons in various skulls [that were found at the site]; but when he was at the point of resealing them underground a wild stormy wind blew up, and a hail of earth and stones made the people run away. The skulls leapt up and collided with one another. Owing to the sorcery of the Tamsi demons, the largest of them jumped up into the air, but Longchenpa recalled it by the “contemplation and gaze of blazing wrath” and crushed it under foot. As a clear sign of his championship, [Longchenpa] actually appeared to others in the form of Guru [D]rakpo.450

Also, while Longchenpa was living in exile in Bumthang, he experienced visions of a series of masters, including Guru Drakpo.451 Pema Lingpa revealed a key trio of Guru Drakpo practices in Bumthang, one of which, Wrathful Fire Twister (drag po me rlung ’khyil pa), was withdrawn from near Tharpaling, a site that Longchenpa founded in the 14th century.452 Pema Lingpa withdrew this cycle in 1478, just three years after his first terma retrieval from Naring Drak. Given that the majority of terma deities shown on the Tamzhing murals stem from the early years of Pema Lingpa’s career as a terton—and to this the Guru Drakpo practices are no exception—it could be surmised that Pema Lingpa intentionally selected those works to adorn the walls to support his claims to legitimacy. Throughout his career as a terton, he had been dogged by skeptics, and in some way, the murals of Tamzhing provided him a blank canvas in which he could situate his teachings in the larger Buddhist traditions (in particular, Dzogchen and terma lineages) and thereby reveal the meaning and substance of his teachings. Thus, when deciding on what

450 Dudjom Rinpoche, The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, 589-590.
451 Dudjom Rinpoche, The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, 591.
452 This was the third of three cycles dedicated to the practice of Guru Drakpo collectively known as the drag po che ’bring chung gsum (Greater, Middling and Lesser Cycles of the Wrathful Guru). The other two are the greater cycle of bla ma drag mo dmar chen me lce phreng ba (The Great Red Wrathful Guru, Necklace of Flames), withdrawn from Kurje in Bumthang and the middling cycle of bla ma drag po ’gro ba kun ’dul (Wrathful Guru, Tamer of Beings), found in lower Bumthang. (compiled by Gayley in Harding, Life and Revelations, 142.)
compositions to show, it would be natural to draw upon the early material, which by the
time of the paintings, had presumably been circulated for approximately one decade.
Further, the connection between Guru Drakpo and Pema Lingpa’s previous incarnation
Longchenpa make Guru Drakpo an even more appealing option, as initiated viewers may
have been aware of Longchenpa’s deeds in Bumthang through local oral and textual
traditions. The highest teaching of the three Guru Drakpo terma that Pema Lingpa
revealed in Bumthang, The Great Red Wrathful Guru, Necklace of Flames (bla ma drag
mo dmar chen me lce phreng ba), provides the source for the form shown in the
Tamzhing mural.\(^{453}\)

Next to Guru Drakpo is one of the iconographically unique deities of the Pema Lingpa
practice, a form of Chenrezig (Skt. Jinasagara Avalokiteśvara) with consort (Figure 53).

\(^{453}\) zhal gsum phyag drug rdo rje'i go khrab can/me ri phreng ba rin po che yi brgyan/gsang
snangs yum chen rdo rje rnal 'byor ma/sku mdog mthing ga phag zhal g.yas su b'la/gri gug thod
khrag gtsod la slob/rin chen rgyan gyis sku la brgyan/ (bla ma drag po'i gsang sgrub shog dril
them med in bla ma drag mo dmar chen me lce phreng ba, rin chen pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter
Figure 51: Avalokiteśvara with consort, south wall, ground floor
This form emerged from the text *The Great Compassionate One Who Illuminates the Darkness (thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me)*, which was the second terma revealed by Pema Lingpa, who withdrew it in 1477 from Rimochen in Bumthang. The text describes this esoteric form of Avalokiteśvara as red, seated in the cross legged pose on a sun and moon disk in the position of great bliss with his red consort, together surrounded by rainbow light emanating from their bodies. His left hand is in the gesture of equanimity, cradling a vase of long life nectar. Endowed with all the major and minor marks of a Buddha, he is embellished with all the adornments and jewels. Avalokiteśvara holds his right hand up in the gesture of teaching with a garland of lotuses hanging from his thumb. Emerging from the space above Avalokiteśvara’s head is the form of the Buddha Amitābha.

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454 The autobiography specifically notes that the deity is part of the terma in question, naming the image as *thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me*i zhing bkod (Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa*i rnam thar, 216). The specifics of this form are found in *thugs rje chen po thams cad kyi yang snying ’dus pa ye shes rig pa mchog gi rgyud*, in *thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me*, Vol. 7, 181-221.

455 This vase is the same as Tshepagme’s, yet this is the only form of Avalokiteśvara that holds the long-life vase (tshe ‘bum) in the same manner as Tshepagme.

456 Though the lotus is strongly associated with the majority of Avalokiteśvara forms, Pema Lingpa’s is the only known tradition where he holds a garland of lotuses.

457 Pos propspar bsam. thugs rje chen po thams cad kyi yang snying ’dus pa ye shes rig pa mchog gi rgyud/ in thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me thugs rje chen po thams cad kyi yang snying ’dus pa ye shes rig pa mchog gi rgyud, in thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me Vol. Ja,187
Surrounding figures populate Avalokiteśvara’s heaven realm. Within the main panel are two standing attendants flanking Avalokiteśvara, two seated bodhisattvas in the top corners, and a small red wrathful figure at the bottom center.\(^{458}\) The text states that this bottom figure is a red form of Hayagrīva, a wrathful emanation of Avalokiteśvara, with one face, two arms, and a golden horse’s head protruding from his skull.\(^{459}\) Though the painted form for the most part matches the text, the golden horse’s head is not extant.

The rest of the composition is divided into two columns, each of which consists of a seated bodhisattva, three Buddhas bearing implements, and two wrathful deities. The terma describes each step of the visualization process, delineating which visions correspond with a particular chakra, or energy center, that is found within the meditator’s body.\(^{460}\) This step-wise activation of the body’s energy centers takes place with progressively more advanced meditations, each of which ideally precipitate a greater understanding, and thus accomplishment, of spiritual practice.

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\(^{458}\) The upper left bodhisattva is seated and yellow in color, holding a stylized triple gem and a vase; the right bodhisattva is in the same position with the same attributes, yet is white in color.

\(^{459}\) The majority of Hayagrīva representations have one or more green horseheads emerging from the deity’s crown, yet in Pema Lingpa’s text, he clearly specifies that it is a ‘golden horse head’ (rta mgo gser). (thugs kar rta mgrim dmar po ni/žhal gcig phyag gnyis dbu gtsug na/ rta mgo gser ’brug ldir ba ltar. In thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me thugs rje chen po thams cad kyi yang snying ’dus pa ye shes rig pa mchog gi rgyud, in thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me Vol. Ja,187)

\(^{460}\) For example, this portion of the text describes the visions emerging on top of the head, emanating from the heart and those emerging on the nose: shes rab mig ldan rnams kyis zungs zhes bka’ stsal to thugs rje chen po thams cad kyi yang snying ’dus pa ye shes rig pa mchog gi/ zer drug las thub pa chen po drug tu sprul thugs kyi ’od zer dpag tu med pa las thugs rje chen po spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug yab yum sras bcas ’khor sangs rgyas stong rtsa gnyis dang bcas par sprul nas ’gro ba ’dul ba’i ’khor tu bkod do/ yang spyi bo’i gtsug nas rigs mi ’gyur ba’i thugs rje chen po dpar po byung nas ’jig rten ’dren par dbang skur ro/ mgrim pa nas pad+ma ’byung gnas sprul nas pad+ma’i rigs ’dzin du dbang bskur ro/ thugs ka nas dpal rta mchog sprul nas snang srid thams cad dbang du bsdu so/ shangs rtse nas rdo rje chos sprul nas zhub por bzhang go…itu (thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me thugs rje chen po thams cad kyi yang snying ’dus pa ye shes rig pa mchog gi rgyud, in thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me Vol. Ja,183)
This form of Avalokiteśvara illustrates unusual features not seen in other manifestations of the deity. Specifically, the presence of the long-life vase in his cradled hand, while recalling the posture of Amitāyus, differs in that only one hand is holding the implement. Generally, when a deity holds this type of vase in the lap, it is held with two hands. Also, the lotus garland hanging from his right thumb is unusual iconographic feature. Red forms of Avalokiteśvara eventually became common, especially as red deities have long-standing associations with the Padma, or Lotus, Family of deities. One popular red form of Avalokiteśvara is the ‘Ocean of Conquerors' (spyan ras gzigs rgyal ba rgya mtsho; Skt. Jinasagara), whose form gained great popularity through the Mindroling teachings of the Nyingma tradition. Avalokiteśvara ‘Ocean of Conquerors' practices made their way into the Karma Kagyu lineage (Figure 5). There is documentation of Pema Lingpa initiating the Seventh Karmapa into the Great Compassionate One Who Illuminates the Darkness practice during their meeting at Rinpung in 1503, yet the Karma Kagyu tradition had already maintained a number of Jinasagara Avalokiteśvara practices since at least the time of the second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi (karma pak+Shi, 1204-1283).

461 The nirmanakāya Buddha Amitābha and sambhogakāya Buddha Amitāyus are part of the Lotus family, and Amitābha serves as the progenitor of a variety of manifestations, including forms of Avalokiteśvara.
462 Details on the initiations Pema Lingpa conferred on the Seventh Karmapa are found in Phuntscho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 217-218, which is also translated in the description of the eastern wall murals below.
463 In one Karma Kagyu form of Jinasagara, the female consort holds a skull bowl (kapāla) and drum (damaru) and the male holds a mala and red lotus. Another, four-armed manifestation of the deity stems from the Nyingma Mindroling lineage, and the main figure holds a gem with his primary hands, a vajra in his right hand and a red lotus in the left. For various forms of Jinasagara Avalokiteśvara, see http://www.himalayanart.org/search/set_cfm?setID=440 (accessed 06 July 2012). The lineage of Mindroling originates with the terton Terdak Lingpa (gter bdag gling pa,
Figure 52: Avalokiteśvara with consort, 19th century, mineral pigment on cotton, 31 x 21.5 in., Rubin Museum of Art collection (Himalayan Art Resources 682)

1646-1714), who had connections with later Pema Lingpa incarnations; Terdak Lingpa was a student of the third Pema Lingpa Sungtrul Tshultrim Dorje (tshul khrims rdo rje, 1598-1669) and both student of and teacher to the fourth Pema Lingpa Thugse Tenzin Gyurme Dorje (bstan ’dzin ’gyur med rdo rje, b.1641).

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Moving west, the next mural is dedicated to the wrathful deity Tamdrin (Figure 55).

Figure 53: Overview of Tamdrin (Hayagrīva) and Zhitro panels, south wall, ground floor

Pema Lingpa revealed a number of texts dedicated to Tamdrin throughout his career. Yet this form, like those of Guru Drakpo and Amitāyus, emerges from the Lama Norbu Gyatso; specifically the Empowerment of the Highest Most Secret Tamdrin (rta mgrim...)

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464 His earliest revelation of a Tamdrin-focused practice was his fourth textual terma, the rta mgrim dpa’ bo gcig pa, unearthed in 1477 from Sennge Namdzodrag, followed by the rta mgrim lcags ral can from Dramotrang in Lhodrak and the rta mgrim yang gsang bla med from Lhodrak Mendo, ca. 1483, and later, the combined practice of Tamdrin and Dorje Phagmo, recovered in 1489 from Lhodrak Mendo (Aris, Hidden Treasures, 217-218).
yang gsang bla med kyi dbang bshad)⁴⁶⁵ that is part of the larger terma Pema Lingpa withdrew in 1483.⁴⁶⁶ Recognizable by the three green horses’ heads emerging from his primary face, this form of Tamdrin is described as the union of three activities, having three faces, four legs and six arms, surrounded by a charnel ground and having an appearance that is savage and repulsive—so repulsive that he “has the appearance of being dead.” ⁴⁶⁷ Surrounding him are the rudras (half-god, half-demon beings), personifications of various poisons that present obstacles to successful practice, such large egos and avarice.⁴⁶⁸ There are a number of traditions for a red, six armed forms of Tamdrin, known in the Nyingma tradition as the Secret Accomplishment (gsang sgrub) manifestation of the deity, yet close study reveals characteristics unique to the particular treasure teaching that gave rise to it.

For example, in the Pema Lingpa version of the deity, his primary hands hold the flaying knife and skull cup, with his subsidiary right hands holding a vajra outstretched at knee level and raising aloft a sword while his left hand holds up a spear and the lower hand

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⁴⁶⁵ In rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 125-131. Throughout this text, Pema Lingpa uses the non-honorific in his description of Tamdrin, for example, using lag pa for ‘hand’ instead of the honorific phyag (126, line 1).
⁴⁶⁶ It is interesting to note that after the initial Tamdrin-related revelation in the environs of Bumthang, the remainder of the Tamdrin cycles were brought forth in Lhodrak, including the Lama Norbu Gyatso.
⁴⁶⁷ de gsum sbyor bas sa bon mngal du chags/pha ni mi sdug mi srun gsum gyi bu/zla ba brgyad la bu chung mgo gsum pa/lag pa drug rkang pa bzhi yod pa gshog pa can/cha byad sna tshogs mi sdug bkra mi shis skyes ma thag tu ma shi nas/rmi ltas ngan dang ltas ngan thams cad ’dus/ma ro dang ba brags dur khrod gnas su skyal/ma ro jos pas lus bong cher skyes de/rad rigs bzhi brgya bu ga dgu nas gtong/stong gsum lha ’dre/i sted dpon gcig byung ste/mgo gsum byung ba/i rnam dbe ’di ltar ro/ (rta mgrin yang gsang bla med kyi dbang bshad in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 125-126)
⁴⁶⁸ rta mgrin yang gsang bla med kyi dbang bshad in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Kha, 127
extended in a wrathful gesture of subjugation (tarjaṇī mudrā). His upper hands also hold the flayed skins of a human and an elephant, outstretched across his back like a cape, while two figures are trampled below his feet. In the Pema Lingpa tradition, the female consort is dark blue and the male has three horse heads emerging from his skull. Though other practices have the blue consort, there is only one horse’s head excrescence, and the implements are markedly different, as are the beings that are trampled underfoot. In the Kagyu tradition, the implements are vajra, khaṭvāṅga, sword, wrathful gesture, spear and a lasso made of intestines, with the three-horse-head excrescence. Other Nyingma traditions, for example the Mindroling cycle, the implements are the same as the Kagyu version, but the figure of Hayagrīva tramples eight naga (snake-human hybrids) beneath his feet. Another Nyingma permutation of Hayagrīva in the Secret Accomplishment form clutches the skull cup and a flower in his primary hands.

Again, we see that the Pema Lingpa tradition is largely employing deities that are found in the Buddhist pantheon, yet they are described in forms that are distinctive in substantive ways. Though for a non-initiate, having a deity’s implements differ by one or two objects may not seem meaningful, in fact, such a derivation creates a vastly different experience for the meditator. Each implement carries with it a specific meditational function; for example, the flaying knife in Pema Lingpa’s Secret Accomplishment Hayagrīva is used to sever one’s attachment to ego. In the Mindroling tradition, the corresponding hand holds a dorje, a symbolic representation of the coalescence of the
noumenal and phenomenal worlds. Thus, the presence of even one different element, whether it be an implement, the color of a subsidiary face, or a variant in which beings are being trampled underfoot, result in a different meditational process, oriented toward a particular goal. In this way, Pema Lingpa is drawing upon known traditions, yet he is promulgating practices that are otherwise unattested in the Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition.

The next two compositions are a conceptual pair, and illustrate the maṇḍalas of the Zhitro (zhi khro; Figure 56), consisting of forty-two peaceful deities and fifty-eight wrathful deities. These maṇḍalas stem from the *Tantra of the Secret Essence* (rgyud gsang ba'i snying po, Skt. Guhyagarbha), one of the most important texts of the Nyingma tradition. In the Zhitro practices, the Buddhist initiate is able to manifest himself as the highest deity Kuntu Zangpo (Samantabhadra) in both his peaceful and wrathful forms in order to undertake enlightened action. The subsidiary figures surrounding the central deities are a variety of attendants, preliminary forms and protective beings, which will be explored further below.

The *Tantra of the Secret Essence* is believed to have an basis in an 8th century text authored by Vimalamitra, and through the intervening centuries, numerous commentaries and traditions emerged, elaborating on particular aspects of the text. The imagery at

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470 As pointed out by Cuevas in *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the early text, *The All-Creating King* (*kun byed rgyal po*), is considered one of the key texts of the Dzogchen tradition, reputed to have been redacted by the monk Vimalamitra and Śrī Śiṃha (58). Cuevas’ study presents how *The All-Creating King* laid the basis for Dzogchen cosmology which was later developed by Longchen and other commentarians; in particular, how the Bardo
Tamzhing displays strong similarities to those practices described in a commentary authored by Longchen called *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions* (phyogs bcu mun sel). These similarities could be accounted for in that Pema Lingpa is considered a reincarnation of Longchen; however, there are a number of differences between the practices described in Longchen’s text and the Zhitro murals at Tamzhing. Instead of the images arising from Longchen’s commentary, like the other compositions of the north wall, the Zhitro paintings follow the practices detailed in one of Pema Lingpa’s terma revelations. Specifically, the compositions come from a component practice of the larger terma cycle *Dzogchen Kunzang Gongdue* (rdzogs chen kun bzang dgongs ‘dus). The *Kunzang Gongdue* was one of Pema Lingpa’s most important terma revelations. It was revealed at Samye Chimphu in 1487, and due to Samye’s significance in Himalayan Buddhist history, served as one of Pema Lingpa’s last, and most significant, treasures.

By including imagery from this terma, Pema Lingpa is concurrently reminding the viewer of not only his personal activities at the original site of Himalayan Buddhism, Samye, but also of Longchen’s accomplishments at the site. In this way, Pema Lingpa is

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(Intermediate State) texts authored by Karma Lingpa (b. 14th century) were developed and promulgated.

471 This is one of three major commentaries that Longchen authored on the *Tantra of the Secret Essence*, a trio known as the *Trilogy of Dispelling Darkness* (mun sel skor gsum). The *Dispelling of Darkness in the Ten Directions* is the most detailed of the three texts, and was translated by Gyurme Dorje in his three volume dissertation “The Guhyagarbhatantra and Its XIVth Century Commentary phyogs-bcu mun-sel” (1987).

472 The folio is *zhi khro’i gsang ’dus las byang padma’i phreng ba*, in *rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che*, Vol.4, 345-382.

473 Gayley characterizes this particular discovery as the culmination of Pema Lingpa’s early treasure revealing career, marking the most distant site of terma withdrawl and thus a boundary of sorts for Pema Lingpa’s sphere of influence (“Patterns,” 98).

474 See Chapter Two on the previous lives of Pema Lingpa for more information on Longchenpa’s activities at Samye and Samye Chimphu.
reinforcing his connections with Samye as a place in both his current and previous incarnation. Pema Lingpa had other connections with the site in his previous lives. Lhacam Pemasel had died there after receiving the prophecy of her future rebirth as Pema Lingpa; as the consorts of Nyangral Nyima Özer and Guru Chöwang, he had experienced revelations at Samye; then later, Pema Ledreltsel had undertaken prolonged periods of retreat and study at the site. As explored previously, Samye was also a key physical space where tertons engaged with the legacy of Guru Rinpoche; although by definition tertons were receiving the ‘word’ of Guru Rinpoche directly through their minds and material objects, it seems that during the career of most tertons, they would undertake a pilgrimage of sorts to Samye, where they would reveal a terma at the ‘source’ location for the entire tradition. This process of revealing at Samye seems to have augmented the stature of the various tertons. Thus it would be expected that Pema Lingpa would include the teachings from the cycle he recovered at Samye, as it would be one of the key moments of his career as a treasure revealer.
The Zhitro practices are comprised of two maṇḍalas dedicated to peaceful (zhi [ba]) and wrathful (khro [ba]) deities respectively. According to the tradition, these deities are primordially present in every sentient being, with the forty-two peaceful deities residing at the heart level and the fifty-eight wrathful deities located at the crown of the head. Yet without training to recognize these deities and their true meanings, most sentient beings are unable to understand them properly, let alone employ them in meditation for spiritual advancement. The Zhitro texts and practices are meant to provide the initiated viewer with the tools necessary to undertake these advanced meditational practices once they receive the requisite empowerments and permission from their teacher. Each individual is meant to approach these rituals according to their own ability, and, after

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sufficient training, he or she will be able to cause the deities of the maṇḍala to appear spontaneously\(^{477}\) in order to undertake action to aid sentient beings.

At Tamzhing, thirty subsidiary peaceful deities surround the central image of Samantabhadra and his consort, some in their solitary forms and others paired with a consort (Figure 57). The innermost figures are the Five Buddha Families, shown in union with their consorts, while the guardians of the four primary directions are the four wrathful figures along the bottom on either side of the lotus stem.

\[\text{Figure 55: Peaceful Deities (zhi ba), south wall, ground floor}\]

Additional Buddha and bodhisattva figures constitute the remainder of the mural section, presented in vertical lines on either side of Samantabhadra and along the topmost register. The top center figure, along with the four crowned Buddhas immediately surrounding Samantabhadra are the Five Buddha Families. In the practice of the peaceful deities, these five symbolize a number of key realizations, a complicated role that is reflected in their multi-faceted iconography, described in part as follows: “[the] thrones are endowed with solar and lunar disks (nyi-zla’i dkyil-‘khor); and (dang) to symbolize that they are untainted (gos-pa med-pa) by all defective flaws they are endowed with multicoloured lotuses (Padma). Thus (the buddhas) sit on seats (gdan-la) formed of precious gems (rin-po-che’i), in which all these desired qualities are found.”\(^{478}\) They are specifically characterized as the components of enlightenment, and embodiments of those realizations that will bring about an advanced practitioner’s own enlightenment:

In general there are five enlightened families when classified according to the result or actual awakening in reality. These are the enlightened family of the tathāgata, the enlightened family of indestructible reality, the enlightened family of precious gems, the enlightened family of the lotus, and the enlightened family of activity. Each of these is further subdivided into five (minor) enlightened families, namely those of buddha-body, speech, mind, attributes and activities; making twenty-five in all. Similarly when the five enlightened families are further subdivided according to buddha-body, speech and mind, they number hundreds, thousands, millions or even an innumerable quantity of enlightened families.\(^{479}\)

These enlightened families each represent a realization that the practitioner must accomplish before attempting subsequently more difficult levels of meditative practice.

However, as mentioned above, meditators are instructed only to work according to their capability. Thus in the source text themselves, they clearly describe how the deities have a different appearance according to the acumen of a particular adherent. Ultimately, however, all of the deities arise from the form of Samantabhadra and his consort and when practiced properly, will eventually culminate in the meditator’s enlightenment.  

The surrounding figures represent the various senses and sense organs, yet no matter any of their specific forms, they all arise from the central couple, Samantabhadra and his consort Samantabhadrī. Once the meditator visualizes this couple in their complete forms at the yogic chakra of the heart, he or she has achieved the full perfection stage meditation. In other words, they have become enlightened, as noted in the Tantra of the Secret Essence: “When the minds, sense-organs and so forth obtain conclusive result of primordial buddhahood, the goal is directly reached. There is no (final result) other than that.” And the ultimate goal of such activities is stated as the liberation of all sentient beings. This culmination is not possible without the entire assembly of deities, each of whom represents a crucial component of the meditational process.

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481 Dorje, “Guhyagarbhatantra,” Vol. 2, 645. The forty-two peaceful buddhas are enumerated as Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī, surrounded by the Five Buddha Families with their consorts, the eight bodhisattvas and their consorts, the six munis, and the four gatekeepers with their consorts.
Yet the peaceful deities do not provide these benefits alone. In addition, the meditator must train him- or herself to be equally adept at realizing the stages of the wrathful deity meditations, or Trowa (khro ba; Figure 58). If one maṇḍala is accomplished more readily than another, the practitioner must continue to train so that they arise spontaneously and with equal facility.\textsuperscript{485} Depending on the adherent’s capability, the wrathful deities can be experienced in three ways: first, they can be recognized in their natural location, on the crown of the head; second, they can be created in maṇḍalas through meditation; and third, for the most advanced practitioners, the wrathful deities will appear as a self-manifested array.\textsuperscript{486}

\textsuperscript{485} Dorje, “Guhyagarbhatantra,” Vol. 3, 1078.
\textsuperscript{486} Dorje, “Guhyagarbhatantra,” Vol. 3, 1079.
The deities appear in very complicated forms, reflected in the densely packed compositions of the mural. Amongst the wrathful deity composition are five iconographically complex figures bearing six arms, three faces and adorned with a garland severed human heads, flayed elephant skins and snake jewelry. These are the wrathful counterparts of the peaceful Five Buddha Families that populate the northeast corner of the assembly hall, which will be described below. The subsidiary figures that surround them bear humanoid bodies with animal heads—tigers, bears, snakes, lions and horses. Each of these animals is the anthropomorphization of a particular ‘poison’ or
obstacle to be overcome, such as attachment, anger or jealousy. The most dominant
figure in the composition is that of the central deity and his consort, the wrathful form of
Samantabhadra known as Chemchog (che mchog) Heruka. *The Tantra of the Secret
Essence* describes his appearance as follows:

> Then the Transcendent Lord, the Great Joyous One Samantabhadra himself
manifested and became in all respects transformed into the dark brown buddha-
body of the Blood Drinker Che-mchog, a very terrifying and most awesome guise,
emanating in a great blaze of light derived from a hundred thousand suns—the
lustrous glow of pristine cognition which causes panic. He is endowed with
hands, arms and legs, equal in number to the atomic particles of the infinite
chilocosm, holding diverse weapons in his hands, such as the vajra and the
wheel. He then turned into a form with three heads which represent the three
approaches to liberation, six arms which represent the six transcendental
perfections and four legs which represent the four supports for miraculous ability.
He became present, rejoicing in a great charnel ground, indicating that saṃsāra is
inherently pure without having to be renounced, in the spacious midst of an ocean
of blood indicating that desire is inherently pure, upon an accumulated heap and
great mountain peak of human bones to symbolize that hatred is inherently pure
without having to be abandoned…

This colorful description illustrates the detail with which each figure is visualized in the
meditational process. As the central figure is just one of more than fifty that constitutes
the composition, the necessity of proper training and practice is clear, as it is believed
that an erroneous visualization will not be efficacious, or, even worse, destructive.

Just as with the peaceful Zhiwa composition, the figures immediately surrounding the
main image in the Trowa panel are the members of the Buddha families, with the main

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488 The fifty-eight wrathful buddhas of the Trowa maṇḍala are the Five Buddha Families and their
consorts, the eight yoginis (eight aggregates of consciousness), the eight tramen goddesses (the
eight mudras of the senses), the four female gatekeepers, and the twenty-eight iśvarīs (who are
servants in the rituals). (Detailed in Dorje, “Guhyagarbhatantra,” Vol. 3, 1164-1172.)
figure constituting one of the five. Here, each is described according to their family name and with the same colorful terms the main figure of Chemchog. The Trowa deities act to subjugate and destroy negative forces that are impeding additional meditative accomplishments; they eradicate pride and eliminate the information fed to a practitioner by his or her senses. This sensory input is considered inherently faulty and leads to downfalls and failures along the Buddhist path. Once these figures, along with those of the Zhiwa composition, are fully realized, the adherent is able to manifest them equally and spontaneously, which is considered an outward indicator of their accomplishment of an enlightened state. Once this highly advanced level is achieved, the practitioner realizes that the world is inherently inseparable from the heaven realm of Akaniṣṭha, the abode of the primordial Buddha.

At Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa is providing viewers with detailed representations of what deities can be encountered in Zhitro practice—from the animal-headed, fanged, weapon-
bearing wrathful deities to the calm and peaceful visions of the Buddha Samantabhadra and his consort. By drawing on his own terma, which recalls the commentaries of Longchen, Pema Lingpa is also presenting his contributions to Zhitro practice.

Immediately following the Zhitro composition is a mural of the bodhisattva Jampelyang (‘jam dpal dbyangs; Skt. Mañjuśrī), the embodiment of wisdom. This form of Jampelyang comes from the same text as the representation of Guru Dragpo, the *Lama Dragpo Trowa Kundul (bla ma drag po ‘gro ba kun dul)*,492 which Pema Lingpa revealed in Bumthang in the early stages of his career. Described as one faced, two armed, with hair upswept atop his head and secured in a topknot,493 The text described Jampelyang sitting cross-legged on a lotus throne and sun and moon disk, his right hand holding the sword of wisdom (*shes rab ral gri*), and his left hand at the level of his heart, touching his thumb to his left index finger.494 Jampelyang, the dominant central figure of the composition, is surrounded by the remaining four members of his inner maṇḍala, two of which are located in the upper corners of the central panel and two of which occupy the lowest position on each of two flanking columns of figures. Though their varied colors reflect their position in the maṇḍala, each of the subsidiary figures holds aloft the sword of

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wisdom in their right hand and has a book atop a lotus on their left. The remaining figures in the columns are all Buddhas, eight in number, corresponding to the cardinal and intermediary directions, combining to create the sacred space that constitutes the heaven realm of Jampelyang, the bodhisattva of wisdom. The Jampelyang cycle stems from the same text as that of Guru Drakpo, which was withdrawn from Tharpaling in Bumthang.\footnote{Revealed at Sengge Drak (seng+ge brag, or Lion Cliff), this teaching is part of the drag po me rlung 'khyil ba.}

West of Jampelyang is his wrathful manifestation: the dark blue deity Shinje (gshin rje, Skt. Yāma; Figure 59), revealed in the mural with three faces, six arms and standing in union with his consort. He wears a tiger skin around his waist and is garlanded with a snake and severed human heads strung on intestines.\footnote{gshin rje yang gsang bla med kyi dbang chos, Vol. Kha, 111-124. This practice is also part of the larger Lama Norbu Gyatso (Lama Jewel Ocean) cycle.} His consort raises a skull cup to his lips, while he holds her close to his chest with a skull bowl and a club in his primary hands.\footnote{sprul gyi chun po/klu rigs bzhi yis phyag zhabs brgyan pa/zhabs gnyis brkyang skum gar stabs bzhugs pa la/bsyor ba'i yam then pe ta nag mo ni/phyag g.yas gri gug yab kyi mgul nas 'khyud pa/g.yon pa dung dmar ya ma kyi zhal du stob pa/ (gshin rje yang gsang bla med kyi dbang chos, Vol. Kha, 115)} Yāma’s remaining right hands hold a sword and staff, and his lower left a spear while his upper left makes a wrathful subduing gesture.
The text instructs the practitioner in how to make Yāma’s mandala, populating it with the four wrathful paired deities of the inner circle, the wrathful solitary deities of the ten
directions, and finally, placing four animal-headed guardians in the cardinal directions. Like so much of the overall program of the southern wall, this depiction of Yāma originates in the *Lama Jewel Ocean* (*Lama Norbu Gyatso*) terma revealed so early in Pema Lingpa’s career. This wrathful form of Mañjuśrī as Yāma, like other manifestations on the western wall, is traceable to the Pema Lingpa tradition through their unique implement arrangements.

As Jampelyang is the embodiment of wisdom with a peaceful countenance, and Yāma his wrathful counterpart, the next mural to the west is dedicated to the embodiment of compassion, a four-armed white form of Avalokiteśvara (spyan ras gzigs phyag bzhi pa; Figure 60), surrounded by rainbow light emanating from his body. The main image is flanked by his consorts Tārā (sgrol ma) and Bhṛktī (lha cig khri btsun) and displays the usual attributes; his primary hands are placed palms together, positioned as if holding a jewel, while his secondary left hand holds a lotus and the right a crystal rosary (‘phreng ba, Skt. māla). Above him are two members of the Lotus Family; in the top left is Amitābha, who is the progenitor of Avalokiteśvara, and opposite is Guru Rinpoche, also part of the Lotus Family and considered an emanation of Amitābha. Together, the three of them reflect the Three Body system of Mahāyāna Buddhism; Amitābha as the dharmakāya source, Avalokiteśvara as the sambhogakāya that can manifest as needed.

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498 *de'i thugs kar bla'i dkyil 'khor gyi steng du/yi ge huM sngon po tshig drag dang ldan pa zhig gsal btob* (gshin rje yang gsang bla med kyi dbang chos, Vol. Kha, 116-117).
499 A variety of cycles refer to Guru Rinpoche as an emanation of Buddha Amitābha; for example, *Narration of the Profound Dharma that Reveals the Effortless Vehicle* in Kunsang, *Wellsprings of the Great Perfection*, 228.
and finally, Guru Rinpoche as the nīrmaṇakāya, or form that appears in the human world to spread the Buddhist teachings.

Figure 58: Chenrezig Chagzhipa (Chaturbhuja Avalokiteśvara), south wall, ground floor

The remaining subsidiary figures are bodhisattvas and the lowest two, standing Buddhas. For the most part, none of the surrounding figures carries an attribute, except for the standing Buddha in the bottom right, who is red and holds a lotus. The image reflects a
text from the *Great Compassionate One Who Illuminates the Darkness (thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me)* cycle, the second text withdrawn by Pema Lingpa, retrieved in 1477 and the same text that is the source for the esoteric red Avalokiteśvara toward the eastern end of the wall.  

The last wrathful form on the south wall is a manifestation of Chana Dorje (Figure 61) that is specific to Pema Lingpa practice, known as the Highest, Most Secret Vajra-holder. He is described as being surrounded by figures of the ten wrathful ones, who appear in the mural as two side columns of five figures each, each of which is paired with his consort.

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500 *dbang gi mtshams sbyor rgyas par bkod pa skal ldan tshe gcig thar lam gsal bar byed pa’i sgron me in thugs rje chen po mun sel sgron me*, Vol. 19, 599-637.


502 *phyag rdor yang gsang bla med la/gter gzhung blor nges pa’i rtog ‘jug song nas/bdag mdun gyer tshig gcig gis dbyar med du/stong pa’i ngang las dur khrod thod pa skam rlon gyi rtsig pa zhes pa nas/sku’i’ rgyan cha yan dang mthun par gsal btab pa’i phyogs mtshams steng ‘od rtsi bas bcu’i gdan la kho bo bcu/ [The text then describes four gatekeepers, who are not included in the mural composition: sgo bzhir sgo ba bzhi dang bcas pa gsal bar gyur de thams cad kyi spyi bar].

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The iconographic features unique to this form of Chana Dorje are numerous; most notably, in his left hand he makes the gesture of wrathful subjugation while holding the body of a snake, the head of which is inside of his mouth. This is not the earliest snake-related form of Chana Dorje; since at least the 12th century the six-armed, three-headed Mahachakra form has two snakes, each of which have their heads in the main figure’s mouth (Figure 62), but this is the only form with only one snake, two arms and one face.
Figure 60: Mahachakra Vajrapāṇi, 13th century, mineral pigment on cotton, 22.5 x 15 in, Rubin Museum of Art (HAR 65128)

He is covered in snake ornaments, including two small red snakes wrapped around his earrings. Beneath his feet, eight figures are being trampled and pressed into four
intertwined snakes that sit between the deity and his lotus. This woven mat of snakes is not found with any other forms of Chana Dorje. In addition to the namesake dorje (vajra) he holds in his upraised right hand, Chana Dorje wears the flayed skin of a snow lion as a cape—another feature unique to this form.⁵⁰³

Surrounding Chana Dorje’s head and upper body are five garuḍas: red, green, white, yellow and black. Their presence may stem from the practice of the deity Vajra-holder of Great Wrath (phyag na rdo rje gtum chen), which, although it shares characteristics, is not an exact match with the Pema Lingpa practice. The latter text states that the surrounding garuḍas each bear an implement, whereas the Tamzhing garuḍas carry only snakes in their beaks and claws, and that the garuḍa immediately above the head of Chana Dorje is white, not black as is the garuḍa at Tamzhing.⁵⁰⁴ Garuḍas are able to transmute poison into benign substances, a function reflected in the snakes they carry in their mouths and in teachings that employ their visualization; frequently, the garuḍa is dispatched to neutralize a particular foe.⁵⁰⁵ When this takes place within the body of the practitioner during meditation, each garuḍa acts to negate a specific obstacle so the meditator can achieve higher levels of realization.

⁵⁰³ There are two snow lions in the throne beneath the deity.
⁵⁰⁴ The deity phyag na rdo rje gtum chen is described as follows: “On the crown of the head of this Vajrapāṇi resides the white ‘Khor lo’i khyung—addressed in a later passage as Buddha-garuda—who holds a wheel. From the neck of Vajrapāṇi issues the red Padma’i khyung (Padma-garuda), holding a lotus; the heart is the residence of the blue rDo rje’i khyung (Vajra-garuḍa), whose attribute is a thunderbolt. On the navel dwells the yellow Rin po che’i khyung (Ratna-garuda), holding a jewel. From the genitals comes forth the green Las kyi khyung (Karma-garuda) who carries a sword.” Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons, 257.
⁵⁰⁵ Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons, 258
The connection between Chana Dorje and the garuḍa may have another origin. By the time construction began on Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa had been to Tibet ten times and had spent significant time in Lhodrak cultivating patrons, revealing treasures and giving teachings. Approximately one century before, the Nyingma siddha and Dzogchen master Namkha Gyaltsen (nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan, 1326-1401) had been one of the pre-eminent teachers of the Lhodrak region. He experienced many visions of Guru Rinpoche and Chana Dorje, the latter so extensively that he would have dialogues with the deity. Namkha Gyaltsen instituted one of the most distinctive deities of Vajrayāna Buddhism: a combined form of Chana Dorje, Garuḍa and Hayagrīva. Upon his death, Namkha Gyaltsen’s body was embalmed and kept in a stupa at the monastery of Taphu (rta phu dgon).

506 Nyingma teacher lho brag grub chen nam mkha’ rgyal mtshan (also known as grub chen las kyi rdo rje), 1326-1401. Later, his teachings were incorporated into the Gelug tradition.

507 One of these question and answer sessions with Chana Dorje took place with Tsong Khapa (1357-1419) present, which Namkha Gyaltsen later recorded in The Supreme Medicinal Nectar of the Garland of Questions and Answers (zhu lens man mchog bdud rtsi phreng ba) Ricard, Life of Shabkar, 25, note 61.

508 The following description of Namkha Gyaltsen’s combined deity is as follows from Himalayan Art Resources: “Guhyapati Vajrapani with a body blue-black in colour, one face and two hands. The right hand holds a five pointed vajra. The left raised to the heart is pointing in a wrathful gesture; yellow hair twisting upwards amongst which is a Horse head, neighing sharply three times over-powering the Three Realms. The neighing of the Horse on the right over-powers the male lineages. The neighing of the Horse on the left over-powers the female lineages. The neighing of the middle Horse bestows attainments on the practitioner. On the crown of the head of the Horse is the King of Birds, Garuda, with a body white in colour, beating the sword-wings, having turquoise horns; adorned with a blazing jewel between the horns. Guhyapati's hair is adorned with a white spotted snake of the Kings Race, yellow spotted - Nobles Race for earrings and armlets, red spotted - Brahmans Race for necklace and belt, green spotted - Craftsmans Race for bracelets and anklets, black - Outcastes as a long necklace. Wearing a lower garment of tiger skin, [Vajrapani is] adorned with all the jewel ornaments - dwelling in the middle of a mass of pristine awareness [fire].” (Lhodrag Drubchen Lekyi Dorje, 1326-1401. sgrub thabs kun tus, vol. 3, folios 323-325. [http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm/50096.html, accessed 06 July 2012].

509 Ricard, Life of Shabkar, 25, note 61.
visited Taphu, where he could very likely have come into contact with the Dzogchen master’s teachings.\textsuperscript{510}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure61.png}
\caption{Yum Chenmo (Prajñāpāramitā), south wall, ground floor}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{510} By the time Pema Lingpa withdrew the \textit{Lama Norbu Gyatso}, he had already made two trips into Tibet, thus it is possible that he came into contact with Namkha Gyaltsen’s traditions on either or both of those journeys.
The goddess of wisdom, Yum Chenmo (yum chen mo; Skt. Prajñāpāramitā, Figure 63), or Great Mother, is the westernmost mural on the south wall. Shown in a seated, yellow, four-armed form, Yum Chenmo is surrounded by the Buddhas of the ten directions, representing the ten directions of the maṇḍala around her—the cardinal and intermediate directions, as well as the zenith and nadir. In the main panel above her are two of her female emanations: the goddesses Green Tārā (sgrol ljang; Skt. Śyamatārā) and white Tārā (sgrol dkar; Sitatārā), both of whom provide protection and rescue to their devotees. Like other four-armed manifestations of Yum Chenmo, her attributes are the book (dpe cha) and dorje, while her remaining two hands display the gesture of meditation and the absence of fear. Yum Chenmo appears in all the traditions of Vajrayāna Buddhism, and in her four-armed yellow form, there are few variations, save that some forms show her with the book on her right and others, like at Tamzhing, have the book placed on her left.

*Murals of the North Wall: The Dzogchen Lineage and the Purified Practitioner*

The compositions of the north wall focuses on the Buddha Samantabhadra, Vajrasattva, and the Five Buddha Families; in other words, the deities that embody the constituent elements and ultimate expression of enlightenment (Figure 64). As an initiate undertakes his or her practice, these deities provide symbolic representations to help guide successive realizations or understandings. The mechanisms by which these deities function in the lives of practitioners will be explored more fully below; first, it should be noted how Pema Lingpa described these particular murals of the north wall (his “right
side of the courtyard”). His continued use of the word ‘heaven’ to label the mural compositions indicates that he is presenting each deity as fully realized and thus at the height of their abilities to impart their particular knowledge to any given practitioner:

The murals on the left [of the courtyard], painted by the artists Kuntrey and Tshering, were almost finished. Then Lama Gyalchog led [me] to where three artists were making individual paintings on the right side of the door, respectively showing the heavens from the right as follows, beginning from the first [painting] like this: the heavenly fields of Samantabhadra, Vajrasattva, and the Five Families; Prahevajra [Garab Dorje]; Śrī Śimha; Orgyan [Guru Rinpoche]; Yeshe Tsogyal; Seventh Black Hat [Karmapa]; then me, Pema Lingpa, in my divine residence surrounded by my successive incarnations.\(^{511}\)

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\(^{511}\) Phuntsho, _gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar_, 220-221: _logs ris g.yon phyogs kyang dpon kun bkras dang tshe ring gnyis kyis tshar la khad ‘dug da nas bla ma rgyal mchog kyang khrid nas/khong lha bzo ba gsum gyo sgo g.yas g.yon g.ya kha yar bstan dang g.yas phyogs nas rim bzhin bzengs pa’i zhing bkod ‘di lta bu yod pa ni/g.yas kyi khu gs dang po nas rim bzhin/kun bzung rdor sams dang rigs lnga ‘i zhing bkod/de ‘og dga’ rab rdo rje/shrI sing+ha/o rgyan/yen shes mtsho rgyal/zhwa nag pa skye ba bdun pa/bdag pad+ma gling pa la skye ba na rim gyes bskor ba’i zhing bkod rnams._
Recalling that the position of the main shrine deity dictates ‘left’ and ‘right’ throughout the complex, Pema Lingpa’s “right side of the door” references the northern wall, and the “heavens from the right” are those immediately to the north of the main shrine, i.e., the northern end of the eastern wall. The excerpt translated above identifies that

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512 This portion of the wall is significantly damaged; however, there is sufficient iconographic data to support identification of the figures.
easternmost figure as Samantabhadra with his consort (kun bzang yab yum); however, it seems it was not until recently that there was any visible trace of this deity. Careful examination reveals that as the text describes, Samantabhadra is present, along with his consort Samantabhadrī (Figure 65). Though badly damaged, the male figure is clearly identifiable as blue and embracing his white consort, who is seated facing him on his lap and holding a skull bowl in her upraised left hand.

513 In Pommaret and Imaeda, they refer to it as “peinture détruite (destroyed painting),” (“Le Monastère,” 22). Aris does not include this figure in his schematic, indicating only two murals on this portion of the wall (“gTam-zhing,” 34), see also Figure 3.

514 The presence of Samantabhadra here upends Aris’ schematic of the sutra hall, as he mistakenly identifies the form of Dorje Chang (Vajradhara; #11 in his layout) as the Samantabhadra in question, and numbers successively easterward on the north wall before jumping back to his #11 and continuing westward with his #18.
For Nyingma practitioners, Samantabhadra transcends all qualities and characteristics, “a Buddha without beginning or end.” This deity pair is considered the ultimate source of the doctrine and the representation of full enlightenment. Yet achieving this level requires the progressive realization of certain qualities of knowledge and the cultivation of insight. The Vajrayāna system broadly categorizes these into five components and represents them figuratively in a group of Five Buddha Families (Figure 66). 

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Each Buddha is associated with a prescribed color, hand positions, and family symbol, and is representative of a specific type of knowledge necessary for spiritual growth and higher levels of attainment. These knowledges (ye shes; Skt. jñāna) arise in a practitioner as the ‘antidote’ to destructive ‘poisons,’ for example, anger, ego, or jealousy (See Figure 67 and Table 1). The system of the five Buddhas (ston pa lnga), or five teachers, as representative of certain knowledges appears in the *Tantra of the Union of the Sun and Moon* (*nyi zla kha sbyor*) and is later expanded in the *Tantra of the Secret Essence* (*rgyud gsang ba’i snying po*) into the maṇḍalas of peaceful and wrathful deities, which appear on the south wall.  

With the guidance of a qualified master, or guru, the practitioner is initiated into practices according to their particular level of acumen; in other words, their level of understanding and the specific obstacles that lie between them and spiritual advancement. The role of the teacher in these practices cannot be underestimated, as “the guru is ultimately a standard, a yardstick with which one can measure and test the authenticity of one’s psychological insights. The relationship of guru and disciple, of tutelary deity and practitioner, are time-hallowed methods in the practice of nonduality.” Under the guidance of the teacher, the student takes part in a ritual where he or she reveals an affiliation with one of the five Buddhas.

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517 Cuevas, *Hidden History*, 64-65.  
Figure 65: The Five Buddha Families in their crowned sambhogakāya manifestations, by John C. Huntington, from the Huntington Archive (http://huntingtonarchive.osu.edu/resources/buddhistIconography.html)

At Tamzhing, each of the representative Buddhas of the Five Buddha Families is the focus of an individual mural panel. The group is lined up successively so that as a visitor would circumambulate the temple, the Five Buddhas carry the viewer through successively more advanced realizations, culminating in the form of Samantabhadra. While Samantabhadra is the ultimate expression of enlightenment, the Five Buddhas provide illustrations of the requisite components of enlightenment; specifically, the various insights to be achieved, the mechanisms by which to accomplish them, and the obstacles that must be overcome along the path. The five Buddha compositions at Tamzhing begin with the figure of Vairocana (rnam par snang mdzad; Figure 68) on the eastern wall and extend to near the midpoint of the north wall. Each Buddha is shown in a crowned form, indicating that it is the Enjoyment Body form (longs sku; Skt. sambhogakāya). The Enjoyment Body is one of three types of Buddha manifestations...
known as the Three Bodies (sku gsum; Skt. trike), and can be distinguished from other Buddha emanations through their crowned and bejeweled appearances.\(^{519}\)

| An Emanation Body (sprul pa’i sku; Skt. nīrmanakāya) refers to the Buddha form taken in the physical world, be it the historical Buddha Śākyamuni or a highly advanced teacher. At the other end of the spectrum, the Truth Body (chos sku; Skt. dharmakāya) is by definition formless; however, the dharmaṃkāya can be encountered in artistic representations, as seen in images of Samantabhadra. The Enjoyment Body (longs sku; sambhogakāya) occupies the space in between, and constitute the manifestations of Buddhas found in their heaven realms, or provide teaching modalities to advanced practitioners.\(^{519}\)

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\(^{520}\) The placement of Vairocana and Akṣobhya is dependent upon the particular teaching. If the practice is Vairocana-centered (i.e., if Vairocana is the fifth and thus ‘highest’ of the five deities), then Vairocana is visualized at center and Akṣobhya is at the east. In Akṣobhya-centered practices, Vairocana occupies the eastern quadrant of the maṇḍala.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Family (kūla) Symbol</th>
<th>Gesture (mudrā)</th>
<th>Insight (jñāna)</th>
<th>Poison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vairocana</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Center/East</td>
<td>Wheel (Chakra)</td>
<td>Teaching (Dharmachakra mudrā)</td>
<td>Full understanding of reality (Dharmadhātu jñāna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akṣobhya</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Center/East</td>
<td>Vajra</td>
<td>Earth-touching (Bhūmisparśa mudrā)</td>
<td>Mirror-like insight (Ādarśa jñāna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratnasambhava</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Gem (Ratna)</td>
<td>Giving (Varada mudrā)</td>
<td>Equality of all things (Samatā jñāna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amitābha</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Lotus (Padma)</td>
<td>Meditation (Dhyāna mudrā)</td>
<td>Discriminating insight (Pratyaveksā jñāna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amoghasiddhi</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>Crossed vajras or Removal of fear</td>
<td>Perfected action</td>
<td>Envy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Characteristics of the Five Buddha Families

| sword | (Abhaya mudrā) | (Krityānuśṭāna jñāna) |

Figure 66: Buddha Vairocana, east wall, ground floor
Vairocana is shown in a solitary, crowned form flanked by two standing bodhisattvas and surrounded by multi-colored light that extends out from his body. Like the other four in the set, Vairocana shares the composition with two small figures at the upper corners of the panel. However, the figure at the upper right (Figure 69) is quite distinctive, shown as red, bare-chested and four-headed.

![Image of Vairocana panel](image)

Figure 67: Detail of upper right subsidiary figure of Vairocana panel

The heads bear neither the crowns of celestial Buddhas nor the cranial protuberance (gtsug tor; Skt. uṣṇīṣa) of exoteric forms of the Buddha, though he is seated upon a lotus-borne throne, indicating his revered status. His left hand is raised to the chest in a gesture
of teaching (dharmachakra mudrā) while the right is extended to his knee, palm outward, in an action of giving blessings (varāda mudrā). Opposite this unidentifiable figure is a small exoteric form of the Buddha Vairocana, whose gesture of teaching while grasping the extended index figure mirrors that of the crowned Vairocana at the center of the panel.

For the remaining four Buddhas of the set, the upper figures are all bodhisattvas, and their auras are painted with simple, flat bands of color; a marked departure from the undulating rainbow colors emerging from Vairocana. This comparatively more elaborate representation of Vairocana serves to demarcate him as the main Buddha of the five; in other words, he occupies the center of the five Buddha maṇḍala while the other four are stationed in the cardinal directions around him. In this system, the central placement of Vairocana reflects his role as representative of the fifth and final stage of the enlightenment process. As the murals are by definition limited to their two-dimensional surfaces, the more elaborate treatment of Vairocana and his ‘heaven’ serve as the visual cues of his role in the group.  

ADD VAIROCANA AS IN GGT

Next to Vairocana is Akṣobhya (Figure 70), whose representation follows standard iconography as laid out in Table 1.
Turning to the north wall, the Five Buddha Families compositions continue with the Buddha of the northern direction, Ratnasambhava (Figure 71, left). Though his iconography is standard, the standing bodhisattva attendant to his left holds an unusual and unidentifiable implement (Figure 71, right).
Next to Ratnasambhava is Buddha Amitābha (Figure 72, left), in his expected pose and flanked by two red standing bodhisattvas. Again, it is the attendant figure that illustrates an unexpected feature. On Amitābha’s left, the bodhisattva is painted in the act of playing a lute (pi wang; Skt. vīna), with his right hand in the act of strumming its strings (Figure 72, right).
This is unusual for the Five Buddha Family compositions, yet there are two possible explanations that come to mind. First, it could be that the artists were simply enjoying themselves and exercising creativity. Yet Pema Lingpa states in his autobiography that the painters were laying the images out “exactly as laid out in the tantras.”

It could be extrapolated that this lute-playing bodhisattva might be referencing the many sūtra texts dedicated to the Amitābha’s heaven, the Land of Great Bliss (bde ba can; Skt. Sukhāvatī), which describe the heaven’s environs as constantly resonating with the sound of music. However, without a source text from Pema Lingpa describing his rationale behind or

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521 ri mo de rnam gsung pa/i thig tshad dang/ in Phuntsho, rter ston pad+ma gling pa/i rnam thar, 221.
522 “In that Buddhaland there is always heavenly music, and the ground is yellow gold.” From Epstein (trans.), The Amitabha Sutra (Sukhavātīvyūha sūtra). (http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/Buddhism/amitabha.htm, accessed 04 July 2012.)
identification of this subsidiary figure, this possibility cannot be confirmed.\textsuperscript{523} This attendant also divulges information about the painting; examination of the necklace worn by the figure reveals a discoloration around the neck and chest, which indicates that there was another, likely earlier, necklace present.\textsuperscript{524}

The last of the five families is that of Amoghasiddhi (Figure 73).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure71.png}
\caption{Buddha Amoghasiddhi, north wall, ground floor}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{523} A thangka of Amitayūṣ in the Frey collection shows a seated bodhisattva playing a lute just below and to the left of the main figure: http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm/69111.html (accessed 03 July 2012).

\textsuperscript{524} This is one of many indications of repainting in the sūtra hall murals, which will be presented more substantively below.
Combined, these five Buddhas represent the necessary components of enlightenment, providing the practitioner with a visual program for spiritual attainment. Each figure stands for one of the five specific insights (ye shes lnga), that, when realized, imparts higher realizations upon the practitioner. Buddhism posits that these successive advancements will ultimately result in enlightenment. Thus, as an aggregate, this set of Five Buddha Families leads one to the ultimate transcendence, represented in the form of Samantabhadra and consort. Recall that as ritual movement in the space is clockwise, visitors would be encountering the five Buddhas (finishing with Vairocana, delineated as the central, concluding member of the group, before encountering Samantabhadra. Thus, this segment of the mural program provides a roadmap toward the final and highest realization of the Buddhist tradition.

Yet the practices dictate that it isn’t appropriate to simply begin meditating on the Five Buddha Families. Rather, the practitioner has to go through a process of sequential initiations to reach each level. And first, given that human forms are inherently impure, the meditator must assume a purified form before undertaking any practices. This is done

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525 These five have been described as “appearing according to the acumen of those to be guided, these forms are radiant and naturally manifest, like a reflection of the moon in water…Due to the force of confusion […] ordinary beings fixate on the confusing appearances in their minds and therefore perceive their individual environments and the manifold appearances of joy and sorrow. Within that sphere, individual buddhas of the five families manifest as naturally occurring emanations in realms throughout the ten directions, ensuring benefit for bodhisattvas who have attained the first to the tenth levels of realization.” (Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorjé, A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems, 32.)

526 “In Tantric Buddhism, one of the primary formulations of the _sambhogakāya_ is the five Jina (Victorious) Buddhas. Each of the five represents one aspect of Buddhahood; together, they offer an abbreviated reference to the qualities and realizations that constitute the totality of enlightenment.” (Livingston, _Circle of Bliss_, 90).
through the Vajrasattva (Dorje Sempa) meditation, in which the adherent goes through a step-wise visualization process in order to manifest as the deity Vajrasattva. Appropriately, Pema Lingpa places a mural of Vajrasattva immediately prior to those of the Five Buddha Families, thus ensuring that the cycle is ritually complete (Figure 74).

Figure 72: Buddha Vajrasattva, north wall, ground floor

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527 For an essay on the transformative processes entailed in this practice, see J. Huntington, “Transformation through Visualization: Vajrasattva Practice” in Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art, 208-211.
The Dzogchen Lineage

The remaining figures on the northern wall constitute a large composition illustrating the Dzogchen lineage of Pema Lingpa. Next to the figure of Vajrasattva, the purified practitioner, is Vajradhara (rdo rje ‘chang; Figure 75), the source of the Dzogchen tradition.

Figure 73: Buddha Vajradhara, north wall, ground floor
In this context, Vajradhara is not the primordial, or Adi,\(^\text{528}\) Buddha directly but is considered an emanation of Samantabhadra, who is able to manifest in any form according to need,\(^\text{529}\) described as follows:

\begin{quote}
Though they have well attained oceans of enlightenment,
In order to mature fully oceans of sentient beings,
They continually reveal their oceanic cultivation of enlightened mind,
And at all times teach oceans of unobscured conduct,
Such are the emanations of the sugatas.\(^\text{530}\)
\end{quote}

Tradition upholds that these emanations are then able to act in a variety of ways, yet no matter what form they take, “in reality,[…] they are no different from that magical emanation of [Samantabhadra].”\(^\text{531}\) The form of Vajradhara is a personification of Samantabhadra, yet at the same time, is considered the source of the Five Buddha Families.\(^\text{532}\) In this way, the mural program at Tamzhing involves a series of dynamic exchanges and successive meditational accomplishments: first, the practitioner performs

\(^{528}\) dang po‘i sangs rgyas

\(^{529}\) As explained by Nyoshul Khenpo (1932-1999), in Dzogchen, the three bodies of a Buddha (or trikāya) are identical in essence, and are manifestations of a single state of Buddhahood. This is, he describes, the result of the various capabilities of practitioners; those of high acumen do not require elaborate and explicitly physical forms, while those of lower ability might find those models more effective in their practices. Nyoshul Khenpo described Buddha bodies as context-based manifestations: “[B]uddhahood in the context of dharmakaya is Samantabhadra; in the context of sambhogakaya, it is Vajradhara; and in the context of nirmanakaya, it is Shakyamuni. And so we need to understand the three kayas as inseparable.” (Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems, xxviii.) Nyoshul Khenpo also notes that this understanding results in the necessary continuation and perpetuation of the Dzogchen lineage, stating, “In every case, from Samantabhadra down to our own root guru, all of these masters have transmitted this [Dzogchen lineage] to their disciples, one after another, generation after generation. Whether we think of the dimensions of form, speech, or the enlightened wisdom mind, none of them have disappeared; they are still present.” (Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems, xxx.)

\(^{530}\) Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 120.

\(^{531}\) Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, 121.

\(^{532}\) In the Dzogchen system, the ultimate essence of reality that is embodied in the form of Samantabhadra and his consort Šamantabhadrī can take whatever form is necessary to impart wisdom to an initiate.
the meditation to visualize him- or herself in the purified form of Vajrasattva; second, he or she attains the five successive wisdoms, personified in the forms of the Five Buddha Families, culminating in the realization of him- or herself as Vairocana; third, the meditator’s full identification with Vairocana and his representative qualities precipitates enlightenment, which is then a state indistinguishable with the next level, that of Samantabhadra; finally, Samantabhadra then emanates as Vajradhara to assist sentient beings, bringing the program full circle. The interconnectedness of these various forms (which advanced Dzogchen practitioners understand as being inherently indivisible) is reflected in an homage offered by the modern Dzogchen master, Nyöshul Khenpo:

Samantabhadra is uncontrived and unborn dharmakāya; the unceasing natural radiance of being [Vajrasattva] is the splendor of sambhogakāya; guiding beings in myriad ways, the Lord of Sages [Śākyamuni] is nirmaṇakāya. I bow to Vajradhara, the three kayas as teacher.

Within the state of suchness, in as many realms as there are atoms in the universe, appear countless manifestations of the five Buddha families—Vairocana and others— their forms radiant and perfect, with all the major and minor qualities. I bow to the lineage of mind-to-mind transmission, embracing the basic space of phenomena.

This short excerpt clearly elucidates the relationships and functions of the different manifestations seen in the southeast corner of the Tamzhing murals. This meditational cycle reminds initiated viewers about the various components of enlightenment and the practices that give rise to it. As shown in Nyöshul Khenpo’s verse above, Vajradhara plays a key role in these individual practices, yet in the mural program, he is also acting

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533 Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems, 26.
in another, equally important role—that of the embodied, enlightened teacher responsible for disseminating the entire Dzogchen tradition.

In the Dzogchen tradition, Samantabhadra\textsuperscript{534} manifested as Vajrasattva to first transmit its precepts into the human realm. These were initially brought into the human world when Vajrasattva transmitted them to Garab Dorje (dga’ rab rdo rje; Skt. Prahevajra, ca. 550 CE).\textsuperscript{535} This shift into the human realm marks the shift of the teaching mechanism from a transmission through symbolism (used in the higher realms where speech and writing are not necessary) to teaching through symbols (writing, images, and so forth). Accordingly, Garab Dorje is shown in the appearance of a Buddha, a standard also visible at Tamzhing, where he is seated on a dragon throne and flanked by two rows of monks (Figure 76).

\textsuperscript{534} It should be noted that Samantabhadra, as part of the highest level of existence (chos kyi sku dang; Skt. dharmakāya), in essence is neither male nor female; the name ‘Samantabhadra’ is used here as shorthand for the non-dual coalescence of the two principles of enlightenment, Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī.

\textsuperscript{535} Germano provides this master’s name ‘Vajraprahe,’ stating that this is the name given in the most ancient Indic source on the teachings entitled \textit{The Direct Consequence of Sound Tantra}. (“Poetic Thought, The Intelligent Universe, and the Mystery of Self: The Tantric Synthesis of rDzogs chen in Fourteenth Century Tibet,” 4.) Alternately, Hanson-Barber suggests his Sanskritized name was Ānandavajra and further posits that his dates were not 55 CE as has been presented, but rather ca.550 CE based on his reconstruction of the Atiyoga lineages presented in \textit{The Life and Teachings of Vairocana}. (“The Identification of dGa’ rab rdo rje,” \textit{JIABS}, 9/2 (1986), 58)
Tradition holds that Garab Dorje was born to a princess who had renounced her family and become a nun. When the nun later became pregnant after a particularly auspicious vision, her shame drove her to throw the child into a pit of ashes; yet when she returned three days later, the child was still alive, a miracle which was taken as a portent of his future importance.\textsuperscript{536} His prominence came to fruition when Vajrasattva appeared directly to Garab Dorje, gave him the Dzogchen empowerments, and gave him permission to write down the teachings and disseminate them.\textsuperscript{537} This committing of the

\textsuperscript{536} Nyoshul Khenpo, 	extit{Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems}, 37.
\textsuperscript{537} Nyoshul Khenpo, 	extit{Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems}, 37.
Dzogchen teachings to writing cemented Garab Dorje as the first human master of the tradition, and the one responsible for translating them into a more accessible form.\textsuperscript{538}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image75.jpg}
\caption{Śrī Śimha, north wall, ground floor}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{538} Garab Dorje is said to have received the revelation of the \textit{Seventeen Tantras of the Ancients} (rnying ma’i rgyud bcu bdun), an early Dzogchen Nyingthig text which contained an early model of death and the intermediate state that follows it (see Cuevas, \textit{Hidden History}, 61). As pointed out by Germano and Cuevas, the Seventeen Tantras were in fact compiled by many authors over time (Cuevas, \textit{Hidden History}, 61-62).
One of the earliest Dzogchen students and transmission holders was Śrī Śimha (Figure 77). Śrī Śimha was born in China and exhibited a scholarly bent from his early years. This abiding interest in learning brought him to a new path when he had a vision of the deity Avalokiteśvara, who urged him to go to India. When Śrī Śimha reached India, he revealed concealed Dzogchen tantras, which he then divided into cycles before re-concealing them.

Later, Śrī Śimha is said to have appeared to Guru Rinpoche in a vision, and gave Guru Rinpoche the empowerments and instructions of eighteen key tantric teachings.

Guru Rinpoche (Figure 78) is considered one of the main actors in the spread of Vajrayāna Buddhism into the Himalayas, and accordingly, over the centuries his legacy has accumulated successively more impressive and often fantastical feats.

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539 The murals at Tamzhing illustrate a significantly abbreviated lineage, bypassing the expected figure of Garab Dorje’s student Mañjuśrīmitra.
540 Nyoshul Khenpo, Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems, 39-40.
541 Nyoshul Khenpo, Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems, 40.
542 Enumerated as the Great Perfection’s Heart Essence of the Dakinis; Dra Talgyur Root Tantra (sgra thal ’gyur rtsa ba ’i rgyud), the Tantra beyond Letters (yi ge med pa gzhi ’i rgyud); Tantra of Shining Relics (sku gdung ’bar ba rtags kyi rgyud); Tantra of Self-Existing Perfection (rdzogs pa rang byung dbang gi rgyud); Tantra of Pointing-out Instructions (ngo sprod spros pa ’i brgyud); Blazing Lamp Tantra (sgron me ’bar ba ’i rgyud), Tantra of Self-Manifest Awareness (rig pa rgyud shar rgyud); Tantra of the Mind Mirror of Vajrasattva (rdo rje sems dpa snying gi me long gi rgyud), Tantra of Piled Gems (rin po che spungs pa ’i rgyud), Tantra of the Union of the Sun and Moon (nyi zla kha sbhor rgyud); Tantra of Studded Jewels (nor bu ’phra bkod kyi rgyud); Tantra of Self-Liberated Awareness (rig pa rang grol rgyud); Pearl Garland Tantra (mu tig phren ba ’i rgyud); Tantra of the Heart Mirror of Samantabhadra (kun tu bzang po thugs kyi me long gi rgyud); Tantra of Graceful Auspiciousness (bkra shis mdzes ldan rgyud); Tantra of the Perfected Lion (seng’ge rtsal rdzogs kyi rgyud); Tantra of the Six Spheres (klong drug gi rgyud); Tantra of Samantabhadri’s Sun of the Brilliant Expanse (kun tu bzang mo klong gsal nyi ma ’i rgyud) (Wellsprings of the Great Perfection, 158).
543 In his “The Early Development of the Padmasambhava Legend in Tibet: A Study of IOL Tib J 644 and Pelliot tibétain 307,” Dalton provides a remarkable analysis of early texts that mention Guru Rinpoche which were recovered from the cache of texts at Dunhuang, which provides
According to tradition, the goddess Dorje Phagmo (rdo rje phag mo; Vajrarāhī) gave Guru Rinpoche a prophecy that he would receive the teachings from Śrī Siṃha directly in evidence that the Guru Rinpoche legend had a period of popularity between 842-ca.978 CE, and that by the late tenth or eleventh century, Guru Rinpoche was firmly entrenched in the Tibetan cultural milieu. (Journal of the American Oriental Society, 124/4 (2004), 759-772.) Guru Rinpoche’s ubiquity and the multiplicity of roles he assumes throughout Himalayan Buddhism fill volumes. Thus for the purposes of this iconological study, only his position in the Dzogchen lineage will be addressed.
the charnel ground of Paruṣakavāna. After receiving the texts from Śrī Siṃha, Guru Rinpoche then undertook the practices for a period of years and synthesized some of them into the Khandro Nyingthig cycle, which he later passed to Lhacam Pemasel on her deathbed.

As described earlier, Guru Rinpoche plays a key role in the dissemination of the Khandro Nyingthig cycle, providing the young princess Lhacam Pemasel with its empowerment on her deathbed and the prophecy of her future rebirths, who would disseminate the teaching. Guru Rinpoche concealed the terma in anticipation of its future recovery. The terma tradition by definition can maintain comparatively short lineages, with few degrees of separation between the source of the teaching and the terton who reveals it. At Tamzhing, the murals of the northern wall reveal the short transmission lineage of the Dzogchen tradition, beginning with Samantabhadra. The Tantra of the Sun and Moon explains the history of its transmission as follows:

Through blessings the teacher Samantabhadra with consort
Entrusted the sovereign,
Who was Sattva, a recipient not separate from himself,
So that all dharmas were liberated by knowing one,
Beyond the confines of bondage and liberation.

Through the blessings of Vajrasattva
They arose in the mind of the self-appeared Prahevajra,
Who entrusted the tantras to Shri Singha.

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544 Nyoshul Khenpo, Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems, 46-47.
545 Kunsang, Wellsprings of the Great Perfection, 5. Traditions maintains the lineage passed through Vimalamitra (dri med bshes gnyen) and Jñānasūtra (ye shes mdo), after which Śrī Siṃha transmitted them to Guru Rinpoche in a vision.
546 nyi zla kha sbyor gvi rgyud, found in snying tig yang gsang rgyud bu chung, from rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. 6 (Cha), 539-562.
This short account, given in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography, delineates how the eighteen Dzogchen tantras were transmitted from Samantabhadra down to Guru Rinpoche, a lineage that is reflected in the wall mural program of Tamzhing’s north wall.

Above the head of Guru Rinpoche are the Five Buddha Families, shown in their solitary forms without consorts (Figure 79). Flanking the figure of the Guru are eight of his main manifestations (gu ru mtshan brgyad), along with a small figure of Tamdrin at the lower left. Through his substantial powers, Guru Rinpoche is able to manifest in a variety of forms, responding to the particular situation at hand. One of Guru Rinpoche’s key services was his many conversions of troublesome spirits who were blocking the

547 Guru Rinpoche
establishment of Buddhism. Thus, many of the Guru’s own appearances were not benign, and often took the forms of extremely wrathful beings (as seen in his Guru Drakpo manifestation on the opposite [south] wall), and in two of the subsidiary figures surrounding him in the north wall composition. The Guru is also flanked by his two main consorts, Mandarava and Yeshe Tsogyal. Given her incredible importance in the terma tradition and her own place in the Dzogchen lineage, Yeshe Tsogyal is the central image of the mural composition immediately next to Guru Rinpoche (Figure 80).
Yeshe Tsogyal is attributed a key role in concealing a variety of terma, many of which contained Dzogchen transmissions. Just as the legends of Guru Rinpoche multiplied over time, the legacy of Yeshe Tsogyal also grew exponentially, to the point that she plays a major role in not only the terma system, but in the narratives that fuel Tibetan self-conception.\textsuperscript{550} So much so, it seems, that Yeshe Tsogyal, a woman, commanded a place in the mural program of Tamzhing, while other, male, holders of the Dzogchen lineage were excluded.\textsuperscript{551} Despite the renown with which she was later held, the same questions arise regarding her historicity as they do for Guru Rinpoche. Unlike Guru Rinpoche, who is mentioned in 11\textsuperscript{th} century texts, the earliest extant mention of Yeshe Tsogyal (named as Kharchen Za Tsogyal [mkhar chen bza’ mtsho rgyal]) are in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century texts of Nyangral Nyima Özer (1136-1204), where she is listed as one of the queens of the Tibetan king Trisong Detsen that had some skill in meditative practice.\textsuperscript{552} Other early sources mention that she passed teachings to others, was able to control natural phenomena and was a master of Dagger Deity (phur bu; Vajrakīla) rituals.\textsuperscript{553} Nyangral Nyima Özer’s autobiography claims that his wife Jo ‘bum ma was an emanation of Yeshe Tsogyal,\textsuperscript{554} the very wife that was a pre-incarnation of Pema Lingpa. Longchenpa,

\textsuperscript{550} Gyatso, “A Partial Genealogy of the Lifestory of Ye shes mtsho rgyal,” 1.
\textsuperscript{551} Gyatso points out that the life of Yeshe Tsogyal, “[r]eplete with stories of her abduction by suitors, her Buddhist austerities, her eventual purchase of her own male consort, and even her mastery of her own rape, the tale serves, among other things, as a splendid tool for teaching college students about images of women in Tibetan tantric Buddhism.” (“A Partial Genealogy,” 2.)
\textsuperscript{552} Gyatso,” A Partial Genealogy,” 3. In the article, Gyatso shares research on her discovery of a full length biography of Yeshe Tsogyal that dates to the 1300s.
\textsuperscript{553} Gyatso,” A Partial Genealogy,” 4.
\textsuperscript{554} Gyatso,” A Partial Genealogy,” 5.
another pre-incarnation of Pema Lingpa, was entrusted with the terma of Yeshe Tsogyal’s biography, yet the only text he wrote on her known today is a brief account of her life in the *Khandro Nyingthig*.\(^555\)

Yeshe Tsogyal was important in the Khandro Nyingthig tradition, and was fully initiated into the Dzogchen doctrine. Longchenpa, the previous incarnation of Pema Lingpa, provided an account of how Yeshe Tsogyal requested initiation into the eighteen Dzogchen tantras that Śrī Śīṃha had given to Guru Rinpoche. Guru Rinpoche agreed, and described the efficacy of the practices:

> It is an instruction unlike any I have given in the past, the summit that transcends all the nine gradual vehicles. By seeing its vital point, conceptually created views and meditations are shattered; the paths and levels are perfected with no need for struggle; and disturbing emotions are liberated into their natural state without any need for correction or remedy. This instruction brings one to realization, the fruition of which is not produced by causes. It instantly brings forth the spontaneously present realization; liberated the material body of flesh and blood into the luminous samboghakaya within this very lifetime; and enables you to capture—within three years—the permanent abode, the precious dharmakaya realm of spontaneous presence, in the domain of Akanishtha. I possess such an instruction and I shall teach it to you!\(^556\)

Guru Rinpoche then initiated Yeshe Tsogyal into the set of eighteen practices, bringing her into the short lineage of the Dzogchen teachings.

And, Yeshe Tsogyal is of particular importance in Pema Lingpa’s life. Beyond her role in concealing termas, Yeshe Tsogyal manifested before Pema Lingpa at a number of times

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throughout his life. For example, prior to Tamzhing’s consecration ritual, one account maintains she appeared in Pema Lingpa’s dream to teach him the necessary songs and dance steps.\textsuperscript{557} This reveals just how special Pema Lingpa is—that Yeshe Tsogyal herself (and also Guru Rinpoche on occasion)—appears before the terton to offer him specialized and personalized instructions on some aspect of the treasures that he has revealed.\textsuperscript{558} As the main scribe for the terma treasures, Yeshe Tsogyal provides a crucial link to the source of the tradition, and further reinforces Pema Lingpa’s high status, as he is able to experience a direct connection with Yeshe Tsogyal and Guru Rinpoche.\textsuperscript{559}

Shown seated atop a lotus, wearing boots and layers of Tibetan-style robes, Yeshe Tsogyal is presented in a posture mimicking that of Vajrasattva (Dorje Sempa), grasping a dorje at chest level with her right hand and her left holding an upside down bell near her left hip. She is surrounded by eight figures wearing monastic robes and hats that indicate they are followers of the Nyingma tradition. At the lower right is a small figure wearing multiple lay garments (Figure 81).

\textsuperscript{557} Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 18.
\textsuperscript{558} Harding, \textit{Life and Revelations}, 18.
\textsuperscript{559} According to the Pema Lingpa biography \textit{Flowers of Faith}, authored by the Eighth Peling Sungtrul, Yeshe Tsogyal also appeared to Pema Lingpa in a dream to tell him where to reveal a statue of Hayagrīva (\textit{Life and Revelations}, 43).
Given his elaborate hat and lack of monk’s robes, this figure could be that of the Tibetan king Trisong Detsen, to whom Yeshe Tsogyal had once been a queen, yet without the presence of any of Trisong Detsen’s usual accoutrements and the simple style of the clothing, this speculation cannot be confirmed.
The figure immediately west of Yeshe Tsogyal is the Seventh Karmapa Chodrak Gyatso (Figure 82), enthroned on a lotus and displaying the gesture of discourse. Surrounding him are his six previous incarnations, each of which is bearing the distinctive black hat of the Karmapa lineage. At the bottom left is the bodhisattva of compassion, Chenrezig Chagzhipa. The lower right corner is occupied by the ġākinī Dorje Phagmo, who is the principal meditational deity (yi dam; Skt. īṣṭadevatā) of the Karma Kagyu tradition.

560 The Karmapa heads the Karma Kagyu (kar+ma bka’ brgyud) tradition of Himalayan Buddhism, and is also known as the Black Hat lineage. It was the first tradition to institute reincarnation as a means of succession, beginning with the First Karmapa Dusum Khyenpa (dus gsum mkhyen pa, 1110-1193). The Seventh Karmapa’s mudrā of discourse is likely a visual reference to the exchanges that he had during his meetings with Pema Lingpa at Rinpung in 1503. A study of the chronology of the Black Hat and accompanying stylistic analysis can be found in Jackson, Chapter Three “The Black Hats of the Karmapas,” in Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style, 38-69. For a discussion of the white hat of the Karma Kagyu tradition, see http://www.himalayanart.org/news/archives.cfm/category/hats (accessed 06 July 2012).
As was discussed in Chapters Two and Three, during the construction of Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa received a request from the Seventh Karmapa to leave Bumthang and visit him at his main seat of Rinpung. Pema Lingpa quickly agreed and left immediately for Rinpung, perhaps recognizing that a meeting with such a powerful and esteemed person could be beneficial to him. After concluding the arrival ceremonies and being formally received, Pema Lingpa found himself in a private audience with the Karmapa, at the time, among the most powerful individuals in Tibet. The following details their exchanges from Pema Lingpa’s perspective:

I made prostrations and asked for his blessing. The Karmapa touched my head with both hands and touched them together. I was seated to his right [on a seat] with three cushions and covers on top. He sat there [with me] for one tea session, and asked, “So then, what do you have for me?” I replied that I had yellow scrolls, sacramental substances, and scriptural transmissions to share with him. I said that some people like sacred prophecies, and some may not, so you should not show it to others. The Karmapa responded that some people liking and some people not liking is the nature of the world. Then I said, “Some people said to me, ‘you are a cheat,’ and some said ‘you are a demon,’ however, what I think I am is just an accomplisher of Guru Rinpoche’s activities. Since you, Rinpoche, are Omniscient like Dusum Khyenpa, what do you believe?” The Karmapa didn’t say anything. So I said, “Earlier [in previous incarnations], we had karmic connections in three generations, isn’t it?” The Karmapa said yes.

On the 11th day, Lama Trulku came to me and said that Tamche Khenpo [the Karmapa] wanted to see everything. So I delivered the Gonpa Kundue, Longsel, Munsel Dronme, Lama Dragpo, Norbu Gyato, Lungten Kunsel Melong, and poti of the Gurbum, into his hands. Then, we sat for a tea session. I also delivered the Gedun Ama Nga, seven pills of Dharma medicine, Ugyen Rinpoche’s clothes, a

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562 Pema Lingpa left Tamzhing so quickly, his autobiography notes he traveled without stopping, making it to upper Tibet via Lhalung in two days. (Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 216.)
white bodhisattva, Yeshe Tsogyal’s red bodhisattva, and [her] long-life medicine to the Karmapa and he was extremely happy.

On the 15th day of the 5th month, I was asked to come up so I went alone into the tent. Other lama trulkus were guarding outside the tent, and only we two penlops [the Karmapa and I] were in the tent. I was asked to sit on the left side [of the Karmapa] where there was a traditional cushion throne, so I did. Now Karmapa said, “You have to give me initiations of all these scriptures you have delivered to me.” I responded, saying, “Ananda would not be rushing around giving teachings to the Buddha.” The Karmapa replied, “You have to do it anyway.”

So I lifted the potis and gave them to Tamche Khyenpa, and he said, “You have to recite the empowerment and you also have to recite the account of the lineage holders up until you.” So I did as instructed. After that, the Karmapa said, “Because of the narrow-mindedness of my patrons at this time, it would not be so good [for anyone to know I’ve had these initiations]. I’m going to Lhasa soon, so we can go together and have detailed discussion along the way.” Then I responded, “My temple in Mön is incomplete and it’s under construction, so I have to return soon.” I indicated that I was going to go back the next day, but was asked to stay until the day after that. I was given three squares of peacock-colored silk designed with traditional clouds. The next day’s presents were five items: a golden Maitreya statue about the size of my foot, a white pair of Chinese trousers (?), one set of khadar scarves, one horse, and one sword. I gave the horse back again.  

Pema Lingpa very clearly gave the Seventh Karmapa large numbers of teachings, empowerments and precious items during their meeting in 1503, including the most significant termas he had revealed to date. In return, the Karmapa’s gifts, as well as his request that Pema Lingpa accompany him to Lhasa for some time, indicate that he was pleased with the exchange, yet the Karmapa was astute enough to acknowledge that their interactions should not be broadcast, given that at the time Pema Lingpa was a peripheral figure with only a small regional reach. The Karmapa, on the other hand, oversaw vast resources and a massive network of temples, monasteries and landed institutions. For

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someone so senior to receive teachings and initiations from a comparatively minor figure, thereby becoming a student of that minor figure, was not quite seemly. Little did the Karmapa know that his life would be finished by 1506, and most likely, little did he know that once Pema Lingpa returned to Tamzhing, he would order the prominent inclusion of the Seventh Karmapa in the Dzogchen lineage murals of the north wall. 

The motivations behind Pema Lingpa’s inclusion of the Seventh Karmapa in the mural program cannot be definitively ascertained, as he does not leave any hint in his surviving writings. Yet some possibilities can be explored. One could be that as Pema Lingpa provided the initiations and empowerments, in some sense, he became a teacher of the Karmapa. This act of bestowal would have carried with it greater significance for Pema Lingpa, who was at best a smaller-scale regional master, in comparison with the Karmapa, who was already part of a powerful and well-established incarnation lineage. The Karmapa’s presence on the wall would remind the initiated viewer that the Tibetan master had sought out the teachings of Pema Lingpa, and had requested full initiation into his terma tradition. This exchange could place the Karmapa, who had a greater position than Pema Lingpa, into the position of student of Pema Lingpa, and perhaps, to a degree, subservient to Pema Lingpa in terms of the terma tradition he espoused. Yet this reading would support the view that Pema Lingpa was asserting himself in a position higher than that of the Karmapa, which the composition simply does not bear out.

564 In his list of the northern wall murals, he refers to the Karmapa only as zhwa nag pa skye ba bdun pa, or the Seventh Black Hat. (Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 220.)
Pema Lingpa is clearly placing the Karmapa in a higher position, by locating him immediately next to the figure of Yeshe Tsogyal, while he himself is in the ‘lowest’ position at the extreme western end of the north wall.\footnote{In thangka paintings, the lineage of a particular figure is frequently shown along the top register or top series of registers. For more extensive lineages, the subsidiary holders of the tradition can fill up the entire composition around the main figure. However, the most important figures, generally those who are considered the ultimate source/originator of a particular teaching, tradition or lineage, will be in the topmost register. In general, the first figure in the lineage will be shown at the top left corner, and subsequent recipients of the tradition will be shown successively to the right, then if necessary, additional figures will occupy sequential rows, each arranged chronologically left to right and top to bottom. In other composition styles, the spiritual progenitor of a particular figure or deity will be shown directly above the head of the main figure. In the case of Tamzhing’s assembly hall murals on the north wall, when following tradition and moving clockwise through the space, one first encounters Pema Lingpa as the last (i.e., then currently living) master in the lineage, then moving progressively up the hierarchy, i.e., successively encountering the Seventh Karmapa, Yeshe Tsogyal, Guru Rinpoche, etc. until arriving at the source of the Dzogchen teachings, the Buddha Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī.} Even though Pema Lingpa gave the Karmapa initiations into his terma, Pema Lingpa has explicitly kept himself in a subservient position. For him to provide the Karmapa, who he had only recently met, with such a prominent position indicates that Pema Lingpa had held the meeting to be of great importance. The significance of the Karmapa’s place in the composition does not end there, however. Pema Lingpa certainly must have recognized that once the Karmapa was initiated into his terma cycle, that act would ensure the protection of Pema Lingpa’s treasure teachings. For a prestigious figure such as the Karmapa to seek out and request the transmissions from Pema Lingpa not only was a boost to Pema Lingpa’s standing, but it was a nearly unsurpassable opportunity for the terton to ensure that his teachings would be safeguarded. Such an act would almost certainly have provided Pema Lingpa with some sense of reassurance of the fate of his teachings. Early on in their meeting Pema Lingpa had defined himself to the Karmapa, saying, “What I think I am is just an
accomplisher of Guru Rinpoche’s activities.” Terma comprised a key component of Guru Rinpoche’s continued influence on later generations of Vajrayāna Buddhists, and the safeguarding of the Pema Lingpa treasure tradition within the Karmapa lineage would certainly help to perpetuate Guru Rinpoche’s activities in the world, and thus fulfill Pema Lingpa’s self-described role. From this perspective, in the Tamzhing murals Pema Lingpa is explicitly presenting himself in a humilific manner, subservient to the Karmapa while also presenting to initiates the innermost esoteric mechanisms of Dzogchen soteriology and the nuances of his particular terma practices.

For his own representation, Pema Lingpa surrounded himself with his previous incarnations, and, as with the other images, refers to the composition as his ‘divine residence’ (zhing bkod) (Figure 83).567

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566 o rgyan gyi phrin las sgrub mkhan yin bsam yod pas (Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 217.)
567 bdag pad+ma gling pa la skye ba na rim gyis bskor ba’i zhing bkod rnams (“[T]hen me, Pema Lingpa, in my divine residence surrounded by my successive incarnations”), Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 221.
Unlike the other figures on the north wall, Pema Lingpa is not shown atop a lotus but rather seated on an elaborate throne. This is a common convention in depictions of living masters, who are only shown atop a lotus after their death. Of the ten figures surrounding him, five seem to be female, and in the entire composition, only four are shown atop a lotus. The figure on the far left seems to be female, indicated by her high hairstyle and type of robes, while the figure next to her is a male, seated and wearing what appear to be the robes and headgear of a high-ranking person. Two additional females are present in the right side of the top register, and the fourth female is in the second register, left side. Pema Lingpa had at least three notable previous lives as a female: as the princess Lhacam
Pemasel, as Sangye Kyi (consort of Nyangral Nyima Özer), and as Jomo Pema Drolma, (partner of Guru Chöwang). The male incarnations present here would be the short lived Rinchen Dragpa and Thödkar, and the better known Pema Ledreltsel and Longchenpa, presumably the four male figures shown atop lotus seats. So far, this accounts for seven of the ten figures present.

The figure in the lower right corner wears monastic robes, shown without a hat (Figure 84). It could stand to reason that this is the figure of Tashi Gyalpo, the scribe who took dictation of Pema Lingpa’s autobiography after 1483.

Figure 82: Tashi Gyalpo (?), detail of Pema Lingpa panel, north wall, ground floor
This is tentative and cannot be definitively proven or disproven, yet seems to be a possibility given the amount and intensity of time that Pema Lingpa would have spent with his disciple-scribe, who at the time of Tamzhing’s painting would have been compiling Pema Lingpa’s life story for two decades. A potential and speculative identification for the two unidentified figures at the top left of the uppermost register could perhaps be Pema Lingpa’s mother and father (Figure 85). In Buddhist literature, it is very common for highly-realized masters to offer teachings to his or her parents, who brought the adept into the world and were providers and caregivers in the first formative years of his or her life. Though this identification is speculative, it would be consistent with a theme found throughout Buddhism since its early phases.

Figure 83: Detail, upper left corner, Pema Lingpa mural, north wall, ground floor

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568 This pattern of providing instructions and blessings to one’s parents may be traced back to the account of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, who, after his enlightenment, went to the heaven where his deceased mother was residing in order to provide her the teachings that would bring about her own full realization.
Seated at the center of his ‘divine abode,’ the figure of Pema Lingpa is presented differently from the other masters and deities of the north wall. Unlike the other primary figures, Pema Lingpa is not seated upon a lotus and instead is shown seated on one cushion that is placed on an elaborate throne covered in strands of gold and jewels and appears to be made from carved wood. The highly geometric sides of the throne reveal what is essentially the only attempt at depicting a three dimensional, recessive space, with the outermost elements representing the throne’s side arms. Also unlike the remainder of the compositions, whereas others are surrounded by multiple layers of full-body haloes, Pema Lingpa has only a single halo encapsulating only his head.

For visitors, the figure of Pema Lingpa would be the first encountered on the north wall. He is the source of the teachings that provided the impetus (and the material means) for Tamzhing’s construction. Yet his position places him as the then-current lineage holder of an extremely short transmission—only five steps removed from Vajradhara, the teaching emanation of the source Buddha Samantabhadra. By receiving the terma initiations, The Karmapa provided Pema Lingpa with a source of legitimacy and increased renown while also ensuring that the tertons doctrinal contributions would perpetuate into the future. Yeshe Tsogyal, who had helped to originally bury the teachings and appeared to Pema Lingpa in a number of visions, was a highly advanced Tantric adept and key Dzogchen lineage holder in her own right, as was her better-known
consort Guru Rinpoche, who was the recipient of the short transmission of Garab Dorje through the intercession of Śrī Siṃha. Shifting away from the human masters who codified, promulgated and safeguarded the teachings, the visitor then encounters the images of Vajradhara, the teaching modality of Samantabhadra, the purificatory deity Vajrasattva, the Five Buddha Families who represent perfected stages of Buddhist wisdom and meditative practice, and then the culmination of all that came before it, the figure of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī in union—the full expression of the highest level of achievement in the Nyingma tradition. This clear, stepwise progression of lineage figures and meditational deities follows the exact textual description provided by Pema Lingpa. 

The Western Wall: The Nine Deities of Pema Lingpa

\footnote{In “gTam-zhing,” Aris’ misidentification of Vajradhara as Samantabhadra resulted in a misconception of the north wall mural program, and unfortunately, contributed to his assessment of Pema Lingpa as “careless.” (37)}
The west wall of Tamzhing is primarily dedicated to the nine main deities of Pema Lingpa, known collectively as the Nine Protectors (mgon po sde dgu): Mahākāla (ma ning nag po); Yum Ekajaṭī (yum e ka dza ti); Rahula (gza’ bdud chen po); Black Life-Extinguisher (srog bdud nag po, also known as las mgon srog bdud); Black Butcher (srog
bdud nag po, also known as las mgon srog bdud); Dark Red Butcher (bshan pa dmar nag); Dark Red Yakṣa (gnod sbyin dmar nag); Vajrasadhu (dam can rdo rje legs pa); Śrī Devī (dpal ldan lha mo); and Vaiśravaṇa (nam sras). Pema Lingpa’s set of nine protectors is similar to those of the Karma Lingpa (kar+ma gling pa, b. 14th century) tradition, which, save Vajrasadhu and Vaiśravaṇa, has the same set of treasure protectors (gter srung). These protectors represent the various classes of spirits that were subjugated and converted to serve the Buddhist tradition, actions that are frequently attributed to Guru Rinpoche.

The complex entrance is in the center of the west wall, dividing it into northern and southern portions (Figure 86). The southernmost figure, Phurba (phur ba; Skt. Vajrakīla) is meant to be grouped with the eastern wall program, as reflected in the autobiography. For the most part, the west wall iconography reveals few derivations.

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570 These same nine deities, along with the Five Long Life Goddesses (tshe ring mched lnga), are painted on the walls of the wrathful deity shrine (mgon khang). (Personal communication, 06 July 2012.)

571 Karma Lingpa’s seven groups of treasure defenders are enumerated as follows by Cuevas: 1. The father class of glorious hermaphrodite protectors and masters of the treasure (gter-bdal dpal mgon-ma nin pho rgyud); 2. The mother class of female protectors of mantra, including Ekajāti and the deep purple mother goddesses of pristine wisdom (sngags srung-mo rgyud, smug-nag ye-shes ma-mo); 3. The mother goddesses of karma led by Remati (lha-mo ma-mo, las-kyi ma-mo); 4. The life-force-attaining butchers, including the four classes of murderers (srog-sgrub bshan-pa, srog-gcod sde-bzhi); 5. The eight classes of planetary demons, including Rāhula and the eight classes of planet-faced constellation envoys (gza’-bdud sde-brgyad, gza’-gdong sde-brgyad rgyug-skar pho-nya); 6. Dorje Lekpa and the bewitchening tsen demons, including the servants of the tsen and the tenma goddesses (rdor-legs btsan-’gong, btsan dang brtan ma’i g.yog); 7. The red butcher harmful demons, including the four classes of murderous butchers (bshan-dmar gnod-sbyin, bshan-pa srog-gcod tshogs sde-bzhi) (Hidden History, 112).

572 The text describes the goddess Yum Chenmo, then Dorje Phurbu before breaking from the account to describe Pema Lingpa’s meeting with the Seventh Karmapa, meaning that Dorje Phurbu is part of the western wall composition (yum chen mo la sogs phyogs bcu’i sangs rgyas
from otherwise-attested forms; almost all of them are forms traceable to pre-15th century practices, and some of which stem from the pre-Buddhist Indic traditions. This is reflected in the comparative lack of specific textual correlations for these deities amongst the writings of Pema Lingpa.\textsuperscript{573} That said, in a few of the forms, there are very small differences from the standard forms, such as a changed implement or an alternate vāhana (vehicle) underneath the deity.

Pema Lingpa begins his account of the west wall from the northern end, moving directly after describing the murals of the Dzogchen lineage. This would indicate that the western wall had already been completed, though unlike his notes on the south and north walls, he does not explicitly state when the west wall was painted:

> From the upper corner, in the direction of the angle [of the north and west walls], [the paintings are] successively: Life-Butcher [Shanpa Srogdu]; Dark Red Yakṣa [Nodchin Marnag]; Black Life-Killing Demon [Srogdud Nagpo]; Śrī Devī; Bhavachakra; [and] a sculpture of Dorje Legpa, [surrounded by] painted figures.\textsuperscript{574}

Beginning as Pema Lingpa does with the northern end of the east wall, the figure of the wrathful Life-Butcher (shan pa srog sgrub; Figure 87, right) is dark blue in color and stands, ithyphallic, upon the contorted corpse of a naked woman. He wears a flayed human skin around his shoulders, and his left hand holds a brown bag of diseases at his

\textsuperscript{573} With the exception of Maning Gonpo, who is the subject of more than ten different practice cycles.

\textsuperscript{574} Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 221. yar bstan phyogs la gru nas rim bzhin/shan pa srog sgrub/gnod sbyin dmar nag/srog bdud nag po/dpal ldan lha mo/srid pa’i ’khor lo rdor legs kyi lder sku dang ’khor la ri mo/
hip while his upraised right hand holds a human heart with the arteries dangling, freshly torn out from his enemy.  

Figure 85: Black Life Butcher (right) and Black Life Demon (left), west end, north wall, ground floor

Pema Lingpa describes the next figure as Black Life Demon (srog bdud nag po), who is a retinue figure of Tsi’u Marpo (Figure 87, left). This image closely follows a Karma

575 Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons of Tibet, 310. According to the Tamzhing community, this figure is known by two names: bshan pa dmar nag (“Dark Red Butcher”) and bshan pa nag mo (“Black Female Butcher”).

576 Listed as gnod sbyin dmar nag (Dark Red Yakṣa). See Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar (221) and pad+ma gling pa’i gter skor, Vol Pha (16), 149. In Dagyab (195) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz (Oracles, 172), it is noted that deities of this type can be recognized by their mounts: dark horses with white hooves. Interestingly, at Tamzhing, the deity in question wears a mirror on his chest (a common attribute of Tsi’u Marpo and related deities), and carries a bow and arrow, drawn and ready to fire, with a sword sheathed at his hip. This is extremely close to the description of a wrathful deity elucidated as one of Tsi’u Marpo’s btsan, which comes from the gcod tshogs rin chen phreng ba, written by the Third Karmapa Ranjung Dorje (folio 94). In
Kagyu description of Tsi’u Marpo’s retinue, written by none other than the Third Karmapa, who as noted in Chapter Two, had contact with a previous incarnation of Pema Lingpa. The figure’s mount is easily distinguishable: a black horse with white hooves, and he carries the implements of bow, arrow and sword.

the Karmapa’s text, the implements are reversed (sword is drawn and upraised while the bow and arrow are on his hip at the ready) and the skin color is “yellow-white” rather than black. It seems likely that if Pema Lingpa followed the pattern seen elsewhere in the Tamzhing courtyard paintings, he may have subtly changed small details of other practices to make them distinctive, drawing inspiration from other masters yet also leaving his own mark.
Immediately next to the Black Life Demon is a four-armed deity on a garuḍa. This is Dark Red Yakṣa (gnod sbyin dmar nag; Figure 89), the guardian of the southern direction.
around Samye Monastery. As both Dark Red Yakṣa and Black Life Demon are intimately associated with Samye, it is not unreasonable to believe this could be a continuation of deliberate importation of Samye-based imagery in Pema Lingpa’s iconographic choices.

Figure 87: Šrī Devī (dpal ldan lha mo re ma ti), west wall, ground floor
A four-armed form of the goddess Śrī Devī (dpal ldan lha mo re ma ti; Figure 89), riding side saddle on a mule and holding in her hands a skull bowl, flaying knife, a stick-handled implement, and a bag. In the Pema Lingpa tradition, one text is dedicated to the form of Śrī Devī known as Remati. The text reflects a greater Nyingma tradition in which Remati is Maning Gonpo’s consort. Pema Lingpa’s text describes the entire retinue of Remati, however, her entourage is not included in the wall murals.

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577 The topmost element of the stick is obscured by a modern cement repair. In other traditions, this implement is a sword (for Sakyapas and Kagyupas) or a vajra-tipped staff (Gelugpas).


579 gzhan na dkon pa’i bka’ srung mchog/ma ning nag po’i cha lag las/yum chen ma mo bsgrub ‘dod na/ yum re ma ti’i gsang sgrub, in mgon po ma ning, Vol. Da, 281-See also Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons, 59.

580 phyag g.yas zangs gri dmar po sa dgra’i srog rtsa gcod pa/g.yon nad kyi rkyal pa kha phye bas/dgra bo’i rnam shes dug dang nad kyis myos te ’chib/ ’khor nag mo bsam gyis mi khyab pa dam bcas pa gcig spyan drangs la phur pa la bstim zhing/phur pa lha mor bskyed do. In yum re ma ti’i gsang sgrub, from mgon po ma ning, Vol. Da, 285.
A painted Wheel of Life (srid pa’i ‘khor lo; Skt. Bhavachakra, Figure 90) is adjacent to the main entry to Tamzhing. The composition is common, with a large circular diagram superimposed on the figure of Yāma, the Lord of Death. Its function is to explain the workings of the Buddhist world, the various realms that constitute it, the

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581 For additional reading on early representations of the Bhavachakra, see Teiser, *Reinventing the Wheel: Paintings of Rebirth in Medieval Buddhist Temples*, 2006.
effects of karma and causality of rebirth. At the very center are three poisons,\(^{582}\) surrounded by the six realms of existence.\(^{583}\) Encircling the diagram are the twelve causes of dependent arising, those behaviors which will keep the individual trapped in the endless cycle of life, death and rebirth.\(^{584}\) Since the earliest strata of surviving Buddhist architecture the Bhavachakra schema has been presented near the entrance to Buddhist structures, reminding the viewer first and foremost the inescapability of death, and how the effects of their behavior in their current incarnation will dictate their next lives.

As we follow the autobiography, Pema Lingpa then moves to the opposite (southern) end of the west wall, stating succinctly:

> From the angle to the left of the door, [the paintings are] Vaiśravaṇa with a red lance; Mahākāla; Ekajaṭī; Rahula; a sculpture of Pehar surrounded by painted figures. Each of the individual images of the accomplished ones are arranged [so as to be] encircled with their full assembly [of retinue figures].\(^{585}\)

\(^{582}\) Represented in the forms of a rooster (desire), a pig (ignorance) and a snake (anger).

\(^{583}\) The six realms are human, animal, god, demi-god, preta and hell.

\(^{584}\) Twelve nidānas: birth, becoming, attachment, being, craving, contact, sensation, name and form, ignorance, impulse, consciousness, and “aging and death.”

\(^{585}\) Phuntsho, *gter ston pad+ma gling pa ’i rnam thar*, 220. *sgo’i g.yon phyogs kyi gru nas rnam sras mdung dmar can/ma ning/e ka tsa ti/gza’ bdud/pe har lder sku la ’khor rnams ri mo las grub pa rnams so so’i ’khor thams cad kyis ba skor ba’i bkod pa yod/
Vaiśravaṇa (rnam thos sras; Figure 91) is the southernmost mural of the set as described by Pema Lingpa. He is most often recognized as the protector of the northern direction in the group of Four Guardian Kings ('jig rten skyong). However, at Tamzhing, he is shown in his form as king of the yakṣas, a worldly protector form that is distinct from guardian king manifestations. The two modalities can be immediately identified as while the latter is generally shown standing, as a worldly protector, Vaiśravaṇa sits astride a snow

\[586\] This form stems from the rnam sras mdung dmar can gyi las byang bskang gso'i rim pa, in the Lama Norbu Gyatso (bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho), Vol. Kha, 887-894.
lion. At Tamzhing, Vaiśravaṇa is shown with common iconographic features: in his right hand is a long lance with red silken banners and surmounted by a jewel, while his left holds a jewel-spitting mongoose (ne’u li). He is yellow in color, and wears armor, silken garments and boots. Vaiśravaṇa is frequently petitioned as a wealth deity, a role reflected not only in his jewel-spewing and jewel-surmounted attributes, but also his own crown, which has a flaming jewel placed at its center. Surrounding him are the ten horse-riding members of his retinue, each of whom occupies one of the ten directions of his maṇḍala.  

Pema Lingpa describes that Yeshe Tsogyal transcribed these visions, and the entire maṇḍala of Vaiśravaṇa while at Samye Chimphu and he later recovered them from Mendo in Lhodrak. Yet the form shown at Tamzhing is limited to the ten guardians mentioned above, while the text goes in to great detail, including a description of sixteen female goddesses that form just a part of Vaiśravaṇa’s impressive retinue. Pema Lingpa describes Vaiśravaṇa as one of his key nine practice deities, however, the form of Vaiśravaṇa is not markedly different from those found in other traditions. This could indicate that while the majority of Pema Lingpa’s concerns emphasized his individual teachings and the Dzogchen lineage to which he belonged, he also remained aware of the practical needs of life and the financial resources that would allow him to be able to undertake religious endeavors and support his teaching activities throughout the region.

587 See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons, 69.
588 rnam sras mdung dmar can gyi las byang bskang gso’i rim pa, in the Lama Norbu Gyatso (bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho), Vol. Kha, 894.
Pema Lingpa’s Nine Deities are comprised of frequently-encountered Nyingma protector figures, some of which form smaller subgroups. This is the case with some of the next three successive panels of the south end of the west wall, encompassing the space between Vaiśravaṇa and the sculpted niche of Pehar. The trio of Maning Gonpo (Mahākāla), Ekajaṭī, and Rahula are the three protectors of the three highest divisions of Tantra in the Nyingma tradition: the Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga. Another group, the Ma Za Do Sum (mah gza’ rdor gsum; alt. ma gza’ dam gsum), is comprised of Ekajaṭī, Rahula and Dorje Legpa, serve as the three main protectors of the entire Nyingma tradition.⁵⁸⁹ These three were those guardians originally entrusted to protect the Khandro Nyingthig teachings when they were first concealed by Guru Rinpoche and Yeshe Tsogyal.⁵⁹⁰ The trio is also said to have taken dictation from Longchenpa, as well as prepare the necessary ink and paper, while Longchen was composing The Seven Treasuries of Longchenpa (klong chen mdzod bdun) in Bumthang during his period of exile.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁹ Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons, 94 and 154.
⁵⁹⁰ Wellsprings of the Great Perfection, 170.
⁵⁹¹ “While Longchen composed and dictated the texts, Drasung Za Rahula (gza’ ra hu la-the sage of the Za class), the mantra protectress Ekajāṭī (e ka dza ti, sngags srum ma) and Vajrasadhu (rdo rje legs pa) wrote the text, and repared ink and paper, all seated on that sacred rock now known as Longchen Zhugthri (bzhugs khri).” Penjore, “Oral Construction of Exile Life and Times of Künkhyen Longchen Rabjam in Bumthang,” 63.
The next protector is Maning Gonpo (ma ning mgon po, Mahākāla; Figure 92, left) in a black, two armed-form, holding in his outstretched right hand a trident adorned with black and red banners as his left grasps three human hearts and a noose. In addition to layered robes adorned with cloud scrolls, Maning Gonpo wears a garland of human hearts and heavy boots. His feet slowly crush two figures, and below his lotus throne are four retinue figures, yet are so badly abraded their identities cannot be confirmed. A later, 17th century Nyingma lineage established at Mindroling Monastery draws upon the Maning Gonpo of Guru Chöwang via Pema Lingpa, yet the Mindroling practice of Maning Gonpo also adds a sandalwood stick attached to the deity’s belt at the waist (Figure 90: Maning Gonpo (left) and Ekajaṭī (right), west wall, ground floor)
It would seem that the absence of this sandalwood stick in the Pema Lingpa tradition delineates the key iconographic difference between it and other manifestations.

Figure 91: Maning Gonpo with sandalwood stick, 19th century, mineral pigment on cotton, Collection of Tibet House New York (Himalayan Art Resources 90720)

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Pema Lingpa’s autobiography specifies the figure as Maning (ma ning),\(^{593}\) though unlike other depictions of Maning Gonpo the Tamzhing image lacks the usual black horse mount.\(^{594}\) However, another Nyingma form of Maning, the Activity Maning (‘phrin las ma ning mgon po che) in the same manner as shown in the Tamzhing murals, complete with the garland of human hearts.\(^{595}\) The terma associated with this form of Maning was revealed by Pema Lingpa at Lhodrak Mendo, from the Sky-Iron Blazing Cliff, one of ten different Maning practices within that text alone.\(^{596}\)

Next to Maning Gonpo is the wrathful female protector Ekajaṭī (e ka dza ti, also known as ral gcig ma or sngags srung ma; Figure 92, right).\(^{597}\) As Ekajaṭī appears in Indian sources dedicated to Mahākāla, the relationship between these two deities is long-standing and perhaps predates Himalayan Buddhism. Yet in the Himalayan tradition, she is most frequently encountered as one of the main protectors of the termas. Her physical

\(^{593}\) Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 221.
\(^{594}\) Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons, 59. Another form of Mahākāla, mgon po trakṣad dvags po’i lugs, is described with the same appearance as the Tamzhing Maning Mahākāla, but also describes the presence of a black horse: “A black, one-headed and two-armed form of mGon po, in the style of the Dvagpo (Dvags po) province, dressed in a garment of black silk, wearing high boots and depicted riding a black horse. The deity’s right hand brandishes a black war-banner (ru dar) while a trident leans against the side of its neck. The mGon po lifts with the left hand a torn-out heart to his mouth.” Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons, 58.
\(^{595}\) Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Tibetan Religious Dances, 17. The manifestation is also referred to by the author as mgon po trak shad ma ning ma; however, according to Oracles and Demons, that name corresponds to the Karma Kagyu form of Maning, where he rides a black horse carrying a bow, sandalwood club, tiger skin quiver and leopard-skin bow case. (Oracles and Demons, 59)
\(^{597}\) Ekajaṭī, meaning “One Braid [of hair],” is frequently shown with her hair arranged accordingly, however, at Tamzhing, she does not have her namesake one braid but rather one topknot at the crown of her head.
form is distinctive, having one eye, one breast, and one fang visible in her open mouth.\textsuperscript{598} In her left hand, she raises to her mouth a human heart, said to be freshly torn from the chest of her enemy, while her right hand raises upward a corpse impaled on a club.\textsuperscript{599} The Tamzhing Ekajaṭī wears a snake garland and a flayed human skin around her shoulders. She is dark brown in color, and unlike other descriptions in which she wears a tiger skin around her waist, at Tamzhing Ekajaṭī is wearing loose cloth garments around her waist and surrounded by a fluttering scarf. Rather than being surrounded by retinue figures, a series of black animals occupy the space below Ekajaṭī’s lotus throne, perhaps the pack of wolves that certain Nyingma forms of Ekajaṭī are known to use as messengers.\textsuperscript{600} Her particular role as a protector of Nyingma terma can be further clarified, with Ekajaṭī serving as the highest deity in the nagsrung (sngags srung) class of deities.

Adjacent to Ekajaṭī is Rahula (gza’ bdud; Figure 94), a nine-headed wrathful protector of the Nyingma tradition whose lower body has the form of a snake. Rahula is leader of the planet (gza’) class of protectors. Though Rahula is found throughout the Vajrayāna tradition, and has a strong presence in Nyingma terma traditions, unlike elsewhere, the Tamzhing Rahula has multi colored heads emerging from his dark brown body. Surrounding him are members of his retinue, ten multi-colored, half snake figures that

\textsuperscript{598} The treasure revealer and Longchen lineage holder Jigme Lingpa (1729-1798) presented a practice of Ekajaṭī with only one leg, in addition to the one braid, eye, breast and fang, which also carried into the Drigung Kagyu tradition.
\textsuperscript{599} Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons, 34.
\textsuperscript{600} Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons, 33.
protect the ten directions. At his lower right is an animal-headed attendant, and on his left, a small white nāga emerges from the water and extends an offering to the main deity.

Figure 92: Rahula (gza’ bdud), west wall, ground floor
There is only one text by Pema Lingpa dedicated to Rahula and his practice included in his Collected Works, but the form shown at Tamzhing follows the larger Nyingma tradition. Rahula joins with Ekajaṭī as two of the three terma treasure protectors; the third is Dorje Legpa (Vajrasadhu), who is one of two protectors present in sculpted form adjacent to the main entrance, to which we will now turn.

Protective Deity Sculptures of the West Wall

On either side of the ground floor entry is a small shrine dedicated to a sculpted protective deity, surrounded by painted retinue figures as described in Pema Lingpa’s autobiography (Figure 95). Inside, each main figure is oriented to face the door and is seated upon their particular vehicle (bzhon pa; Skt. vāhana). Thus when a petitioner crossed the threshold of the temple, they are unknowingly being surreptitiously surveyed by the protective deities behind the walls on their left and right. From the Buddhist perspective, these two figures are the guardians who demarcate the threshold of sacred space. Their presence is meant to maintain the integrity of the interior space so that any rituals and/or propitiations that take place are as efficacious as possible. From the

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601 gza’ rgod dug gi spr gri, Vol. Ta, 73-79. This is part of the phyag rdor dregs pa kun ‘dul revealed from Lhodrak at Traring Drak (lha brag kra ring brag). Notably, this is one of but a few teachings in Pema Lingpa’s Collected Works that begins with the phrase “In Indian language (rgya gar skad du).” This is a common feature of works that are attributed to an Indian origin, for example, the words of the Buddha, and in Pema Lingpa’s text is almost immediately followed by the phrase “In Tibetan language (bod skad du),” before giving the Tibetan version; this points directly to Rahula’s pre-Buddhist origin as a Hindu deity associated with eclipses.
602 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 221.
practitioner’s perspective, these guardian figures are powerful enough to deter any negative forces that seek to breach the temple’s boundaries.

The deity within the niche to the north of the entryway is obscured with a fabric, which conceals a red-skinned, two armed deity atop a snow lion (Figure 96). Although this deity has been identified elsewhere as Pehar, it is in fact Dorje Legpa. Depending on

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603 Paintings on the exterior of the north niche depict intestines, severed limbs and sense organs, as well as the accoutrements of cemeteries, which are common settings for Vajrayāna practice. These external elements signify that the deity behind the curtain within the niche is wrathful in nature. Based on their quality and the type of paint employed, these outer paintings are not original and are much later additions.

604 Pommaret and Imaeda, “Le Monastère,” 21: “À l’intérieur, de chaque côté de la porte, dans des niches, on trouve deux statues grossièrement sculptées de Pe har (a) à gauche et rDo rje legs pa (b) à droite.” In the article, the authors have marked Pehar (pe har) as being in the niche to the east of the entry, and Dorje Legpa (rdo rje legs pa) in the west. In his article “gTam-zhing,” Aris
his particular manifestation Dorje Legpa can appear on one of two animal mounts: either atop a goat, or, as at Tamzhing, on a snow lion.\(^6^0^5\) This manifestation is particular to his form as a protector of the terma tradition, and his presence at the temple would make sense, given Pema Lingpa’s role as a terton. Dorje Legpa is considered to be one of the first indigenous spirits of Tibet converted by Guru Rinpoche to protect the Buddhist teachings. The close connection between Dorje Legpa and Guru Rinpoche, who, it may be recalled, is often credited as the originator of the terma tradition, is reflected in Dorje Legpa’s primary role as a guardian of the Nyingma terma teachings.\(^6^0^6\)

\(^6^0^5\) Properly translates the deities as having the opposite orientation (that is, with Pehar in the west and Dorje Legpa in the east (36) but then states in a footnote, “The identification of the two clay statues (a) and (b) are both reversed in I[maeda]/P[ommaret] and L[aufl]. I suspect they are right and Padma-gling-pa is wrong.” (39 n. 18) In reality, iconographic analysis reveals that Pema Lingpa was correct in his identification of the sculptures.

\(^6^0^6\) In the Gelug tradition, Dorje Legpa carries the dorje (Skt.vajra) and rosary (‘phreng ba; Skt. māla) is shown on a goat with twisted horns; this is not to be confused with Garwa Nagpo (mgar ba’i nag po), also known as ‘The Blacksmith,’ who is the primary attendant of Dorje Legpa in the Karma Kagyu and Nyingma traditions. He also rides a goat with twisted horns, but is distinguished by the tiger skin blacksmith’s bellows he carries. ([http://himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=576](http://himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=576); accessed 02 July 2012.)

\(^6^0^6\) See [www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=415](http://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=415) for a compilation of the various forms of Dorje Legpa and some sources for their respective practices.
Figure 94: Guardian figure Dorje Legpa, south side of main entrance, ground floor, Tamzhing
His appearance at Tamzhing matches the description found in one of Pema Lingpa’s termas (Figure 97).\textsuperscript{607} Described as having a terrible (wrathful) appearance, his body red in color, wearing a broad-rimmed black hat and robes tied at the waist.\textsuperscript{608} In his right hand, he holds a tiny vajra, yet the silk banner that is described as being in his left is no longer extant, though his hand is positioned so that a handle could be inserted into his loosely closed fist.

Figure 95: Guardian figure Dorje Legpa, detail.

\textsuperscript{607} Text dam can rdo rje legs pa ’i cho ’phrul btang thabs khyi thod ma, part of the mgon po ma ning cycle (rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gterchos mdzod rin po che, vol. Da 329-332) withdrawn from Lhodrak Mendo (lho brag sman mdo).

\textsuperscript{608} de nas rang rdo rje legs pa sku mdog dmar nag shin du ’jigs pa/her nag zhwa nag gyon pa/ gser ga rin chen sked la bcings pa/in rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gterchos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Da, 330.
The text describes the mantra of Dorje Legpa, before elucidating which rituals to perform in order to drive away evil forces; specifically, by cutting apart a *torma* (*gtor ma*)\(^609\) offering made from dough. Dorje Legpa and his retinue are then ritually invited to feast upon the torma. With this exchange, the initiated practitioner is then instructed on how to spell out the specific ritual actions they are requesting, be it for protection, destruction of enemies, purging of evil influences, or other functions.\(^610\)

Similar functions apply to Pehar (*pe har*), who occupies the niche on the south side of the entrance (Figure 98).\(^611\) Like Dorje Legpa, Pehar was converted to protect the Buddhist teachings by Guru Rinpoche, and in the form depicted at Tamzhing, Pehar is one of the main protectors of the terma tradition. Shown here in a red, two-armed form, Pehar sits astride an elephant.

\(^609\) *A torma* is an offering made to either peaceful or wrathful deities. It can be sculpted from a mixture of flour and water, or from colored butter. Torma are crafted according to the specific deity and practice, often using textual sources to dictate the proper design and its ritual use.

\(^610\) *Phyin las gang bcol byed do phyis dgra byung na bsnyen pa mang po mi gdos par rbad pas chog pa yin no/gtor ma bshos bu can byas la dbul/gtor sngags ni bsnyen sngags la hA ling ta khA hi khA hi/ces pa dang/ dgra bo che ge mo'i sha khrag la khA hi khA hi/ces 'bul lo/bkra shis mthu che'o/ 'di ni bdud po zu ra ra skyes zhes kyang bya/mon pa skra 'then zhes kyang bya/shar phyogs rgyal po nor snyag ces kyang bya/co 'phrul gyi skye zhes kyang bya/sa ma ya/gya gya gya/ in rig 'dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che, Vol. Da, 331.

\(^611\) This is congruent with his description in the autobiography: *pe har lder sku la 'khor rnams ri mo nas grub pa rnams so so'i 'khor thams cad kyis ba skor ba'i bkod pa yod/ in Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa 'i rnam thar, 221.*
In his upraised right hand is a very small vajra, and although the implement is missing from the left hand, given its position, it is likely that he once grasped a skull cup to his
chest. As in this context, the usual two armed form of Pehar would be blue in color; however, the sculpture here is clearly red. Yet upon close examination of the image, blue pigment can be seen, indicating it is possible that the sculpture was at some time repainted red. For example, in Figure 99, slight blue underpainting is visible where Pehar’s left hand meets the sleeve of his garment.\footnote{A common Nyingma form of Pehar is known as the “mind” manifestation; one of five manifestations that represent different aspects of enlightenment (namely, body, speech, mind, qualities and activities). In the mind manifestation, Pehar appears in a dark blue two-armed form, brandishing a dagger in his right hand and a lasso in the left, seated atop an elephant.}
However, despite significant effort, no textual descriptions of Pehar were unearthed in Pema Lingpa’s large corpus of writing. Together with Dorje Legpa, whose placement is a mirror image across the threshold of Tamzhing, Pehar protects the sacred space of the temple. Photographs from inside the niche (Figure 100) indicate that its walls were recently renovated or perhaps later constructions. In his account of the temple, Pema Lingpa makes no mention of the sculptures being enclosed.

Figure 98: Detail of Pehar guardian niche, showing recent wall construction

Given the comparatively recent appearance of the walls that constitute the niches, and the lack of references to any niches in the text, it is speculated that these two sculptures were once openly visible to visitors. The orientation of the images, facing the door, coupled with the height at which the animal mounts are placed (essentially, eye-to-eye with a
visitor of average adult height), would lead one to deduce that these frightening images were meant to be seen by the visitors. Otherwise, how would their guardian function, so clearly communicated with their scale and orientation, be made explicit? Further, although the paintings outside the niches are much later in date, the painted retinue figures behind the sculptures have a much older appearance, and perhaps date to the temple’s founding. This is based upon comparative analysis between the style of the flames painted within the niche and those discernible in the layers of underpainting in the assembly hall proper.

In his autobiography, Pema Lingpa very clearly mentions these two guardian images as clay (lder sku), surrounded by paintings (‘khor la ri mo). This emphasizes his intention that these two figures be rendered three-dimensionally, and presumably, immediately engage the practitioner upon entry. While the remainder of Pema Lingpa’s iconographic program is painted – save the sculptures of the main shrine—it stands to reason that Pema Lingpa wanted these two protector figures to be prominent and inescapable, as wrathful guardians who proclaim the boundaries of sacred space.

*Murals of Circumambulation Path*

The circumambulation path (bskor lam), which encircles the main shrine, illustrates neither advanced Dzogchen practices nor esoteric forms of deities. Rather, its outer wall

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613 In the case of Pehar, Pema Lingpa uses the phrase *pe kar lder sku la ‘khor rnams ri mo las grub pa rnams.*
shares some of the most common figures in the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition; the arhats, or “Worthy Ones,” who were the Buddha’s first disciples, and a set of the Universal Buddhas, illustrating the Mahāyāna tenet that Buddhahood is available to everyone and a myriad of Buddhas exist. The autobiography gives only a brief treatment of the circumambulation path:

Then, master artist Tshering, together with [the artist] Kuntrey, [painted] the representations of the heavens on the circumambulation path around the shrine (gtsang khang). On the right, the fields of eight arhats and Hvashang were painted; on the left, eight arhats and Dharmatala. The great artists made and established [the images] well.

Leaving the assembly hall and proceeding along the circumambulation path (bskor lam), the outer reveals eight arhats of the set of sixteen (gnas brtan bcu drug), divided by a small window (Figure 103). The other eight are on the opposite (south) wall of the circumambulation path, while compositions of the eastern wall of the path show the set of Seven Universal Buddhas (sangs rgyas rab bdun), plus the figure of Buddha Śākyamuni.

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614 An image by image identification of these figures is presented above in the “Iconographic Overview” section of this chapter.

615 Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar, 222-223: de dus dpon tshe ring dang kun bkras gnyis kyis gtsang khang gi bskor lam rten gyi dgung la sangs rgyas rab bdun/g.yas na gnas brtan brgyad dang ha shang/g.yon na brgyad dang dha rma ta la rnams bzhengs zhing/dpon mo che ba rnams kyi phyag bzo rnams legs par grub nas/

616 Francoise Pommaret identified the circumambulation path as showing the “Sixteen Arhats separated by the Buddha of Medicine.” Bhutan, 229.
Ground Floor Summary

Together, the ground floor assembly hall murals combine to illustrate the lineage, distinctive teachings and unique iconography of Pema Lingpa practices, as well as how
Pema Lingpa fits into the larger Nyingma tradition. On the south wall, he places primacy upon those deities that emerged from the earliest termas he revealed, especially the *Lama Jewel Ocean* (*Lama Norbu Gyatso*), which brought forth otherwise unattested iconographic forms. These choices showcase Pema Lingpa’s individual and unique contributions to the terma tradition, and present the depth and variety of the practices in which he is embedded. Conversely, along the west wall, the Nine Deities of Pema Lingpa connect the terton with protective deities that predate his era, some of which even predate Buddhism, choices which bring Pema Lingpa into the long standing stream of pre-Buddhist and Nyingma practices. Pema Lingpa also embeds his practices within the Lotus Family of deities, to which Guru Rinpoche belonged, who in turn is the source of Pema Lingpa’s termas. Finally, on the north wall, Pema Lingpa places himself in the extremely short lineage of Dzogchen transmissions.

These murals enable Pema Lingpa to fulfill his self-defined role as the manifestation of Guru Rinpoche’s activities, providing terma as a reinvigorating and legitimate source of Vajrayāna practice. With the particular murals chosen for Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa is presenting to his devotees the full methodology of Buddhist praxis, beginning with the arhats and Buddhas of the Three Times, moving into individual purification practices and the successive steps required for spiritual advancement, then illustrating a variety of mechanisms by which one can purify their practice through wrathful deity imagery, how to negotiate the afterlife and ultimately, to the highest level of realization, Samantabhadra.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation has presented how the site of Tamzhing brings together art, text and Buddhist praxis, driven by the vision of its founder, the treasure revealer Pema Lingpa. Through iconological analysis of the temple’s murals and sculptures and drawing upon the founder’s autobiography, this study has revealed how he employed art to illustrate his unique position in the larger Nyingma tradition and the role he played in the perpetuation of the terma tradition. Concurrently, the imagery Pema Lingpa selected provided evidence of his motivations and intentions for the space, and how he dedicated himself to creating an efficacious home temple for himself and his devotees. In addition to unique iconography which originated in his teachings, Pema Lingpa provided familiar Nyingma compositions that articulated the various aspects of Buddhist cosmology and practice. This research sought to synthesize these two trends; the presentation of more standard deities and practices alongside the otherwise unattested forms and visualizations that are exclusive to the Pema Lingpa tradition. Through its exploration of how Pema Lingpa chose specific murals and sculptures to communicate the most salient aspects of his practice, this study also sought to provide an enhanced understanding of how Pema Lingpa’s personality was imbued throughout Tamzhing, and how he presented himself, his history and his legacy to those who entered the site.
His strong presence was a marked departure from his early years, when Pema Lingpa frequently struggled to prove his legitimacy in the face of skeptics both inside and outside of the terma tradition. Through his revelations, teaching activities, and the rituals he performed for his patrons throughout Bumthang and southern Tibet, Pema Lingpa made a deep and meaningful impact on social and religious trajectory. His terma provided the basis for unique approaches to Buddhist practice, presented new ritual dances and songs, and imparted new teachings and initiations to Buddhist practitioners. Later, Pema Lingpa’s distinctive practices would, due to their perceived effectiveness, be incorporated into official state rituals performed throughout the nation of Bhutan, bringing the Pema Lingpa tradition far beyond the regional borders that the master himself established in the late 15th century.

As well as conveying the local material benefits Pema Lingpa precipitated with the construction of Tamzhing, this study showed how Pema Lingpa functioned in the larger socio-political sphere of the time. His more than twenty trips to Tibet brought him in contact with high ranking teachers such as the Karmapa, whose initiation into the Pema Lingpa lineage would cement the perpetuation of the Pema Lingpa terma tradition, an accomplishment duly reflected in the Seventh Karmapa’s prominent inclusion in the Tamzhing mural program. Pema Lingpa’s trips to Tibet also enabled him to perform rituals on behalf of his patrons, averting war, thwarting invasions, and thus keeping his network of supporters intact. Due to their perceived efficacy, these actions would also ensure later support for his tradition and lineage holders.
Yet it was in the religious sphere that Pema Lingpa primarily operated. Tamzhing provided a display of his particular doctrine, and, during the 16th century, direct access to the master himself. In the program, Pema Lingpa asserts his legitimacy by making references to his previous lives, frequent invocations of the sacred site of Samye, and draws imagery from his earliest terma recoveries in Bumthang and nearby Lhodrak. In presenting the murals as “maps to the residence of the gods” (zhing bkod) and “Buddha realms” (zhing kham) of the illustrated divinities, Pema Lingpa offers his initiated viewers dozens of maṇḍala practices into which they can be initiated. In his characterization of Tamzhing as a “palace of images” (gzugs brnyan pho brang), Pema Lingpa reveals his conception of the space and how he intends for it to function for the viewer. This term references not only the divine, palatial abodes that constitute the Buddha’s heaven realms, but also that it is the visual imagery that is the mechanism of communication between master and devotee. It is also clear from the autobiography that Pema Lingpa, like many Buddhist masters, feels he is not building the edifice for himself, but rather to benefit those devotees who require such a temple environment to reach higher levels of spiritual understanding.

Pema Lingpa’s selected program reflects the Vajrayāna Buddhist tenet that once an adherent realizes their innate capacity to manifest as the deity, and achieves the full realization of him- or herself as such, that practitioner has achieved enlightenment. And at Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa is openly presenting these images—many of them extremely secret in nature—for public consumption, making the practices clear and also
emphasizing the need for a qualified master (such as himself) who is part of a respected lineage. Pema Lingpa used terms such as *derku* (*lder sku*), or “painting,” and *lokri* (*logs ris*), meaning “mural,” yet frequently interchanges these terms with “Buddha realm” or “heaven,” indicating that Pema Lingpa considered the murals and paintings themselves to be beyond ordinary images; most likely because he imbued them with the qualities necessary to precipitate spiritual realization.

This inquiry examined how Tamzhing communicates the importance of Pema Lingpa, and how the master is invoked as a key legitimating presence. It also sought to delineate the effects of a marked shift in his patronage; as Pema Lingpa received recognition and support from individuals and institutions outside the immediate area of Bumthang, later on the appeal of his ‘Bhutanese-ness’ provided the local Tamzhing community with a source of prestige and additional income. In revealing how the construction and consecration of Tamzhing enabled Pema Lingpa to transition from a largely itinerate treasure revealer to a figure of significant spiritual renown, this work sought to clarify how he is asserting his legacy through Tamzhing’s visual program, teaching activities, and the consolidation of his terma. Tamzhing revealed the core of his legacy through its display of these sacred items, in addition to the performance of rituals received in divine visions, mural paintings of powerful deities specific to his practices, and sculptures consecrated with sacred substances provided by the master himself.
This study sought to solidify Pema Lingpa as one of the pivotal actors in Bhutanese Buddhism, whose doctrinal innovations and spiritual revelations were codified and systematized in the painted and sculpted forms that adorn his home temple. He continually sought to provide for his Tibetan patrons, whether offering initiations or conducting rituals to avert potential invaders, and those patrons contributed greatly to the construction of Tamzhing, reflecting their appreciation of his work on their behalf. Given the prominent role of Tibetans at Tamzhing—providing materials, funds and artistic skills—it is fair to say that by the time Tamzhing was built, Pema Lingpa’s sphere of influence and renown reputation had extended beyond Bumthang. Yet it was at the insistence and agency of the local Tamzhing community that the temple was built there at all. The local community recognized that the high status and reputation of Pema Lingpa would certainly continue to draw devotees and patrons from around the region, and in their creation of Tamzhing that their community would be the one to benefit, while also providing a source of community cohesion. In addition to the prestige that a resident Buddhist master would bring to the community, pilgrims and devotees would certainly visit the site bringing with them gifts, supplies and other resources that would then enrich the entire community.

In essence, the visual program at Tamzhing provides a fuller picture of Pema Lingpa—his self-conception, his place within the Vajrayāna traditions, and his perspective on the most efficacious Buddhist praxis—than text alone could ever provide. Though his visual program, Pema Lingpa reveals his unique contributions to Buddhist doctrine and practice
through distinctive iconographic conventions, while concurrently using familiar, standard forms of other deities to place himself within the larger terma and Dzogchen traditions. By presenting these murals as fully realized maṇḍalas—that is, ritually complete—he is providing his followers with multiple paths so that they achieve higher levels of realization. This open display of esoteric imagery reflected Pema Lingpa’s manifestation of one of the most cherished tenets of the Buddhist doctrine—his unrelenting compassion for others.

In the murals of Tamzhing, Pema Lingpa presents a breadth of Buddhist praxis, and the depth of his own tradition. From conventions drawing on the earliest strata of Buddhism, presented in the images of arhats and Buddhas of the Three Times, and then transitioning into the complex individual meditative practices of the Dzogchen tradition, Pema Lingpa provides to his viewers the fullness of Buddhist practice, and the multiple ways in which one can advance one’s own practice. In short, Tamzhing provides a cohesive presentation of the dynamic and sophisticated religio-cultural milieu of the early 16th century, and the vibrant master who created it.

By drawing upon Pema Lingpa’s autobiography, this dissertation sought to present how practitioners would understand the sacred space as it was in its original form, consisting of an open courtyard, a small shrine and circumambulation path. This work presented an iconological analysis of the ritual space generated by the murals and sculpted images, and how they contributed to a practitioner’s experience of the space, and by extension, their
conceptions of Pema Lingpa as a Buddhist master, situated clearly in time and place (then modern Bumthang) but also in the long history of Vajrayāna Buddhism (stemming from Guru Rinpoche in the 8th century).

As explored above, Pema Lingpa instructed his mural painters to include important lineage masters in the program, openly illustrating how he oriented and embedded himself in the Buddhist tradition. The autobiography provided Pema Lingpa’s own words, allowing for an increased understanding of his own perspective of the temple’s intended functions and his stated motivations behind its creation. This temple formed the center of Pema Lingpa’s teaching tradition both during and after his life, and in modern times, it provided shelter to Tibetan monks of the Pema Lingpa lineage who sought refuge within its walls.

Pema Lingpa imbued himself into almost every aspect of Tamzhing, from inserting scrolls behind the main deities of the murals to placing sacred substances inside the main shrine images. These actions would, from the practitioner’s perspective, make the images more efficacious and thus Pema Lingpa’s choices helped to further foster a temple environment that would be conducive to higher levels of practice and realization. This is an example of Pema Lingpa’s desire to create an environment oriented to helping his devotees. His ready revelation of even the most esoteric deity practices reflected his goal of sharing Guru’s activities so that others could better understand the goals of practice. Rather than being a manifestation of Pema Lingpa’s personal quest for
domination, Tamzhing can be understood as the cumulative presentation of what his career had taught him so far, and his desire to exhibit that understanding in a public context so as to provide opportunities for adherents to enhance their own practices and thus chance for enlightenment. And, given the compositional choices that Pema Lingpa made, though his unique teachings comprise a significant amount of the program, he also situates himself in the Dzogchen and larger Nyingma traditions, acknowledging the importance of other masters and the tradition(s) as a whole.

This study showed how Pema Lingpa placed primacy upon those deities that emerged from his earliest terma discoveries, especially the *Lama Jewel Ocean* (*Lama Norbu Gyatso*), which brought forth otherwise unattested iconographic forms. These choices showcased Pema Lingpa’s individual and unique contributions to the terma tradition, and presented the depth and variety of the practices in which he is embedded. Conversely, an exploration of how along the north wall, the Nine Deities of Pema Lingpa connected the terton with protective deities that predate his era, some of which even predate Buddhism, choices which brought Pema Lingpa into the long standing stream of pre-Buddhist and Nyingma practices. Pema Lingpa also embedded his practices within the Lotus Family of deities, to which Guru Rinpoche belonged, who in turn is the source of Pema Lingpa’s termas. Finally, analysis of the eastern wall showed how Pema Lingpa prominently included himself in the extremely short lineage of Dzogchen transmissions, yet in a lower position to the leading Karma Kagyu hierarch of his day, the Seventh Karmapa. This study also emphasized how the compositions of the east wall, along with its companion
panels on the south wall, illustrated forms of the purified practitioner and of the necessary components for advancing along the Buddhist path. Taken together, the program of Tamzhing, as conceived by Pema Lingpa, provides not only a portrait of a man and his temple, but an expression of his ultimate goal: to fulfill his self-defined role as the manifestation of Guru Rinpoche’s activities, providing terma as a reinvigorating and legitimate source of Vajrayāna practice, which ideally would provide countless beings the opportunity to achieve their own enlightenment.
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Appendix A: Map of Bhutan

Figure 100: Map of Bhutan with location of Tamzhing. Adapted from Schicklgruber and Pommaret, eds., *Bhutan: Mountain Fortress of the Gods*, 11. (Boundaries should not be taken as authoritative.)
Appendix C: Previous Lives of Pema Lingpa

1. Lhacam Pemasel (lha gcig pad+ma gsal, b. 8th century): daughter of Tibetan King Trisong Detsen (khri srong lde btsan, 790-844)
2. Rigma Sangye Kyi (‘rigs ma sangs rgyas skyid, b. 12th century): consort of Nyingma terton Nyangral Nyima Özer (nyang ral nyi ma ‘od zer, 1124-1192)
5. Pema Ledreltsal (pad+ma las ‘brel rtsal, 1291-1319): treasure revealer
6. Longchen Rabjampa Drime Özer (klong chen pa dri med ‘od zer, 1308-1364): master scholar of the Nyingma tradition
7. Thödkar (thod dkar, b. ca. 1410): born near Tharpaling and died at the age of seven
8. Pema Lingpa (pad+ma gling pa, 1450-1521)

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Appendix D: The Pema Lingpa Incarnation Lineages

Sungtrul (gsungs sprul) lineage

1. Pema Lingpa (pad+ma gling pa, 1450-1521)
2. Tenzin Dragpa (bstan ‘dzin grags pa, 1536-1597)\(^{619}\)
3. Tshultrim Dorje (tshul khrims rdo rje, 1598-1669)
4. Ngawang Kunzang Rolpai Dorje (ngag dbang kun bzang rol pa’i rdo rje, 1680-1723)\(^{620}\)
5. Tenzin Drubchog Dorje (bstan ‘dzin grub mchog rdo rje, 1725-1762)\(^{621}\)
6. Kunzang Tenpa’i Gyaltse (kun bzang bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan, 1763-1817)
7. Pema Tenzin (pad+ma bstan ‘dzin, 1819-1842)\(^{622}\)
8. Kunzang Dechen Dorje (kun bzang bde chen rdo rje, 1843-1891)\(^{623}\)
9. Tenzin Chokyi Gyaltse (bstan ‘dzinchos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1894-1925)
10. Thubten Chokyi Dorje (thub bstanchos kyi rdo rje, 1930-1955)\(^{624}\)
11. Kunzang Padma Rinchen Namgyal (kun bzang pad+ma rin chen mam rgyal, b. 1986)

Thugse (thugs sras) lineage

1. Dawa Gyaltse (zla ba rgyal mtshan, b. 1499)
2. Nyida Gyaltse (nyi zla rgyan mtshan)
3. Nyida Longyang (nyi zla klong yangs, fl. ea. 17th century)
4. Tenzin Gyurme Dorje (bstan ‘dzin ‘gyur med rdo rje, 1641-ca. 1702)
5. Gyurme Chodrup Pelbar Zangpo (‘gyur med mchog dpal ‘bar bzang po, ca. 1708-1750)
6. Tenzin Chokyi Nyima (bstan ‘dzinchos kyi nyi ma, ca. 1752-1775)
7. (dual recognition) Kunzang Gyurme Dorje Lungrig Chokyi Gocha (kun bzang ‘gyur med rdo rje lung rigschos kyi go cha, ca. 1780-ca. 1825)-enthroned at Lhalung


\(^{619}\) Also known as bstan ‘dzin chog grags dpal bzang.

\(^{620}\) Also known as rdo rje mi bskyod rtsal.

\(^{621}\) Also known as kun bzang tshe dbang.

\(^{622}\) Also known as kun bzang ngag dbangchos kyi blo gros.

\(^{623}\) Also known as nges don bstan pa’i nyi ma, this incarnation was the maternal uncle of the first king of Bhutan, Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck (1862-1926). His presence as the last of the Sungtrul incarnation illustrated in the murals could indicate a possible repainting date of pre-1891; however, there are no records indicating at which date the circumambulation hall was repainted. It is likely based on stylistic evidence and sections of visible overpainting that there were a series of painting phases in circumambulation path.

\(^{624}\) Also known as pad+ma ‘od gsal ‘gyur med rdo rje

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7. (dual recognition) Tenzin Ngawang Thinley (bstan ‘dzin ngag dbang ‘phrin las)-enthroned at Dorje drag (rdo rje brag)
8. (Rebirth of Lhalung #7) Kunzang Zilnon Zhadpa Tsal (kun bzang zil gnon bzhad pa rtsal)
9. Thubtan Pelbar (thub-bstan dpal ‘bar, 1906-1939)
10. Thegchog Tenpa’i Gyaltsen (theg mchog bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan (1951-2010)

Gyalse (rgyal sras) lineage\textsuperscript{625}

1. Pema Thinley (pad+ma ‘phrin las, 1564-1642?)
2. Tenzin Legpa’i Döndrub (bstan ‘dzin legs pa’i don grub, 1645-1726)
3. Thinley Namgyal (‘phrin las rnam rgyal, d. ca. 1750)\textsuperscript{626}
4. Tenzin Sidzhi Namgyal (bstan ‘dzin srid zhi rnam rgyal, 1761?-ca. 1796)
5. Orgyan Gelek Namgyal (o rgyan dge legs rnam rgyal, d. 1842?)
6. Orgyan Tenpa’i Nyima (o rgyan bstan pa’i nyi ma, ca. 1873-1900?)
7. Orgyan Tenpa’i Nyinche (o rgyan bstan pa’i nyin byed, 1862-1904)
8. Orgyan Thinley Dorje (o rgyan ‘phrin las rdo rje, d.u.)
9. Kunzang Pema Namgyal (kun bzang pad+ma rnam rgyal, b. 1955)

\textsuperscript{625} Also known as Gangteng Tulku (sgang steng sprul sku). This lineage also maintains a list of previous incarnations: bodhisattva Tsunda (skul byed); ldan ma rtse mangs (aka rnam grol ye shes); lha bla ma ye shes ‘od; bstan ‘dzin yon tan; legs pa rgyal mtshan (aka dbang phyug dpal ‘bar); ‘jam dbyangs khyab brdal lhun grub (son of lho brag la yags rgyal po); dri med gling pa (from Bumthang); and tshul khrims dpal ‘byor (born in Lhodrak). (Life and Revelations, 139.)

\textsuperscript{626} Also known as kun bzang pad+ma rnam rgyal
Appendix E: The Maṇi Dungkhor Shrine

The Maṇi Dungkhor (ma Ni dung ‘khor) sits outside the main temple on the west side of the courtyard, abutting the front porch of Tamzhing. As its name suggests, it contains a large prayer wheel (ma Ni) that is filled with copies of prayers and spun by the faithful to generate merit (Figure 103). Inside, located on the eastern end of the north wall is a small shrine dedicated to Pema Lingpa.

Figure 102: Interior of Maṇi Dungkhor shrine, looking west.
While the construction date of the Maṇi Dungkhor is uncertain, the paintings inside were completed to the 1970s by Tshering Dhendup (tshe ring don grub, d.u.), the late father of Lama Tsetan, the current head of the Tamzhing community. As presented above in Chapter Four, it seems possible that Tshering Dhendup also repainted parts of the murals in the main ground floor assembly hall of Tamzhing proper.

Figure 103: Floor plan of Maṇi Dungkhor

627 Personal communication, Tamzhing Drungchen Pema Kuenchab, 21 February 2011.
Inside the space, the namesake prayer wheel is located near the midpoint of the north wall and slightly offset to the right of center (Figure 105). The south wall, nearest the courtyard, has two large eight paneled windows south of the entry door and no murals. Along the bottom of the three remaining walls approximately 20” off the ground is a running tableau of low-relief clay images of Buddhas and masters of unknown date.

*Murals of the West Wall*

Upon entering the Maṇi Dungkhor, the murals on the west wall present a program of thirteen figures. This composition is meant to be understood as connected with that of the western and central portions of the north wall, depicting four of the eight Vidyādharas (rig ’dzin ‘dus pa), three human masters and two attendant figures (Figure 106). The vidyādharas, or ‘wisdom holders,’ comprise a set of eight masters with such high degrees of spiritual accomplishment, they are considered to have near-supernatural powers. Though the set of vidyādharas can appear in multiple Himalayan Buddhist traditions, in Tamzhing’s Maṇi Dungkhor they are part of the meditational system revealed in the inner lama practice of the *Longchen Nyingthig* (*klong chen snying thig*), or *Heart Drop of the Đākiṇī cycle*. The *Longchen Nyingthig* is a terma revealed by the tertön Jigme Lingpa (*’jigs med gling pa, 1729/30-1798*); however, the set of eight vidyādharas have maintained a place in the Nyingma tradition since its attested origins with Guru Rinpoche in the 8th century.
Tradition maintains that long ago these eight Indian masters, the vidyādharas, received a series of religious instructions from the deity Vajradharma (rdo rje chos). Vajradharma conferred to each of them a set of Mahāyoga (rnal ‘byor chen po) tradition instructions via a particular type of case made from precious materials. While there are variances in the traditions regarding who was given which case, the consensus is that the vidyādharas

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628 Mahāyoga is one of two classes of Highest Yoga Tantra (Anuttarayoga) developed within Indian Tantric Buddhism that is characterized by the iconography of wrathful deities and Buddhist deities in sexual embrace, symbolizing awakened activity and the realization of non-dual awareness, and by the ritual use of forbidden substances (such as alcohol) and undertaking of transgressive activities.
mastered their respective teachings and became associated deeply with the tradition of the Kagye (sgrub pa bka’ brgyad).  

There are connections between the vidyādhara and the previous lives of Pema Lingpa. According to the Nyingma tradition, Guru Rinpoche gave the full set of the Kagye empowerments to King Trisong Detsen, and were later revealed in three parts by a trio of his successive incarnations; namely, Nyangral Nyima Özer, Guru Chöwang and Rigdzin Gödem, who revealed the Kagye Desheg Drupa (bka’ brgyad bde shegs ’dus pa), Kagye Sangwa Yongdzog (bka’ brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzongs) and Kagye Rangshar (bka’ brgyad rang shar), respectively. As pointed out in Chapter Two, in two of his previous lives, Pema Lingpa was a consort to both Nyangral Nyima Özer and Guru Chöwang. Another of Pema Lingpa’s previous incarnations, Longchen Rabjampa, frequently employed the eight vidyādharas as illustrations for his teachings on Dzogchen, or Great Perfection.

The eight vidyādhara in the Maṇi Dungkhor are to be understood as inhabiting a three-dimensional space. Each is associated with one of the four cardinal or four intermediary

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629 Enumerated as gold, silver, iron, copper, turquoise, agate, rhinoceros horn, agate and zi stone.
630 The three figures of Nyangral Nyima Özer (nyang ral nyi ma ‘od zer, 1136-1204), Guru Chöwang (gu ru chos dbang, 1212-1270) and Rigzin Gödem (rgod kyi ldem ‘phru can, 1337-1409) are known as the Three Supreme Emanations. For the textual account of Guru Rinpoche entrusting the Kagye teachings to Trisong Detsen, see Nyangral Nyima Özer, the bka’ brgyad bde gshegs ’dus pa. See also Tenzin Samphel, “Les bKa’ brgyad: Sources Canoniques et Tradition de Nyang ral Nyi ma ‘od zer” in Revue d’Etudes Tibetaines, 15 (November 2008), 251-274.
631 Pema Lingpa was known as Rigma Sangye Kyi (‘rigs ma sangs rgyas skyid, b. 12th century) consort of Nyangral Nyima Özer, and Jomo Pema Drol (jo mo pad+ma sgrol, 1248-1283), consort of Guru Chöwang.
directions, and together define sacred space in the form of a maṇḍala.633 The figures painted on the west wall are the north, northwest, west and northeast components of the vidyādhara maṇḍala. Nearest the door is Nagarjuna, has the appearance of a monk and holding a begging bowl in his lap with his left hand while his right holds the khakkhara (mkhar gsil), or monk’s begging staff. Immediately to the right of Nagarjuna is the figure of Rombhuguhya, associated with the northwest direction and dressed as a monk.

Prabahasti, the vidyādhara of the north, is on the other side of the large main figure. His left hand holds a pecha, or traditional Buddhist text, in his lap and in the right he holds a viśvavajra (sna tshogs rdo rje), or crossed vajra (rdo rje). Farthest from the entrance is the vidyādhara of the northeast, Śāntigarbha, holding a kapala and brandishing a five-pointed star.

These four figures constitute the top register of a larger composition centered on the figure of Tenzin Chokyi Gyaltsen (bstan ‘dzin chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1894-1925), inscribed as the tenth Peling Sungtrul (gsung sprul), or speech incarnation of Pema Lingpa.634 The Sungtrul lineage is considered the direct incarnation of Pema Lingpa, while the other two incarnation lineages descend from Pema Lingpa’s sons, Dawa

633 A maṇḍala (skyil ‘khor) is a diagram illustrating the idealized realm of a deity, and can take material forms as geometric paintings, murals, sand diagrams, metal or wood sculpture, or any number of other forms. Maṇḍalas, which by definition are understood to be three-dimensional, can be presented two-dimensionally through a variety of means. In the case of the Maṇi Dungkhor murals, each of the eight vidyādhāras is inscribed with his name and a direction, for example lho nub (southwest) and byang shar (northeast), so that their particular placement in the maṇḍala is clearly understood by the viewer.

634 Full inscription: pad gling bcu pa pad+ma ngag dbang chos kyi rgyal mtshan la na mo. Though some sources, such a TBRC (P739), Life and Revelations of Pema Lingpa (138) and Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems (376) name this incarnation as the 9th Peling Sungtrul, at Tamzhing and elsewhere, he is named as the 10th (bcu pa).
Gyaltsen (zla ba rgyal mtshan, b.1499) and Pema Thinley (pad+ma ʿphrin las, 1564-1642?). In his immediately prior incarnation, Tenzin Chokyi Gyaltsen had been the ninth Peling Sungtrul, Kunzang Dechen Dorje (kun bzang bde chen rdo rje, 1843-1891) the uncle to and teacher of the first king of Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck (o rgyan dbang phyug, 1862-1926, r. 1907-1926).
Figure 105: Detail of Tenth Sungtrul Tenzin Chokyi Gyaltsen (1894-1925), west wall, Maṇi Dungkhor shrine
As noted above, the Maṇi Dungkor was painted in the early 1970's by Tshering Dhendup, father of the current head lama of Tamzhing monastery. At that time, the then-current, twelfth Peling Sungtrul incarnation, Kunzang Pema Rinchen Namgyal (kun bzang pad+ma rin chen rnam rgyal, b. 1968) was barely ten years old, and the eleventh, Thubten Chokyi Dorje (thub bstanchos kyi rdo rje, 1930-1955) had died at the young age of twenty-five.

Flanking either side of the Tenth Peling Sungtrul are two important figures from the 16th century. To the left of the main figure is Pema Lingpa’s son Dawa Gyaltse (zla ba rgyal mtshan, b. 1499), who is the ultimate source of the Pema Lingpa Thugse (thugs sras) incarnation lineage. In the image from the Maṇi Dungkor, Dawa Gyaltse is shown seated and wearing monk’s robes, and his hair is shown as short and grey, without a hat. Opposite him on the other side of the Tenth Sungtrul is the figure of Chogden Gonpo (mchog ldan mgon po, 1497-1557). Chogden Gonpo is inscribed with the epithet *trulku* (sprul sku), and texts describe him as both an incarnation of Vairotsana the translator (rnam par snang mdzad, ca. 8th century) and of Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa, 1346-1405). Chogden Gonpo was, however, one of the main students of Pema Lingpa. At first, the connection between Dawa Gyaltse, son of Pema Lingpa, and Chogden Gonpo, one of Pema Lingpa’s most important disciples, is not incredibly clear. However,

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635 Also known as Padma Ōsel Gyurme Dorje (pad+ma ‘od gsal ‘gyur med rdo rje).
636 Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center record P1705 gives 1557 as the date of Chogden Gonpo’s death, while Franz-Karl Erhard offers the date 1531 in “Addressing Tibetan Rulers from the South: mChog-ldam mgon po (1497-1531) in the Hidden Valleys of Bhutan,” citing his source as dPal ldan ‘brug pa’i gdul zhiṅg lho phyogs nags mo’i ljongs kyi chos ’byung blo gsar rna ba’i rgyan published in 1972 by the 69th Je Khenpo Gendun Rinchen (dge ‘dun rin chen, 1926-1997).
recent research brings to light the important role that both of these masters played in protecting Bhutan from a 16th century Mongol invasion.

In the last years of Pema Lingpa’s life, the Mongols posed a growing threat to the region. According to the text *History of How the Mongols Were Turned Back* (*sog bzlog bgyis tshul gyi lo rgyus*) written by Sogdogpa Lodrö Gyaltser (sog bzlog pa blo gros rgyal mtshan, 1552-1624), before Pema Lingpa died in 1521, he entrusted Chogden Gonpo with the task of ensuring that the Mongols did not invade in the future, and that Chogden Gonpo was responsible for taking up the proper interpretation of prophetic texts said to foretell the exact time of a future Mongol invasion.637 However, Chogden Gonpo was not successful and instead the task shifted to Pema Lingpa’s son Dawa Gyaltser, who was able to complete nearly all the needed activities.638 Yet Chogden Gonpo’s legacy is maintained throughout Bumthang, as he was considered not only an important spiritual master in the Dzogchen tradition, but is also considered the originator of the Orgyan Choling Dungyud (o rgyan chos gling gdung brgyud) family line, which he inherited through Dorje Lingpa.639 In fact, it may have been in part the result of Pema Lingpa’s


639 Choden, “Losar Celebration in Bhutan” in *Traditions and Changes*, 28. Choden points out that it is not clear whether Chogdan Gonpo was the incarnation or the biological son of Dorje Lingpa. In his work *dPal ldan 'brug pa’i gdsal zhi ng lho phyogs nags mo’i ljongs kyi chos byung blo gsar rma ba’i rgyan*, the 69th Je Khenpo Gendun Rinchen (dge ’dun rin chen, 1926-1997) clearly refers to Chogdan Gonpo as an incarnation of Dorje Lingpa, where he is referred to as “rdor gling sprul sku mchog ldan mgon po” (149)
strong support of Chogden Gonpo that the latter was eventually recognized the re-
embodiment of Dorje Lingpa,

The author of the Mongol-repelling text, Sogdogpa, whose name means Mongol-defeater,
had been renowned for successfully performing Mado (mag dog) rituals to avert Mongol
aggression in Tibet. His inclusion of Pema Lingpa’s efforts to protect his patrons by
keeping the Mongols out of southern Tibet and Bhutan reveal that for many Buddhist
practitioners, the shared goal of rebuffing invasion could be successfully accomplished
through advanced ritual alone.

Another son of Pema Lingpa was Dragpa Gyaltsen (grags pa rgyal mtshan, b. 15th
century), and it this son who retained control over Tamzhing temple. Dragpa Gyaltsen
was responsible for beginning the ancestral lineage of the Tamzhing Choeje (chos rje), or
religious head.

_Murals of the North Wall_

Compositions on the north wall of the shrine display the remaining four of the eight
vidyādhara along with a series of historical masters and lineage holders. There is a slight
projection on the north wall that serves to separate this portion of the composition from

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640 Gentry, “Representations of Efficacy: The Ritual Expulsion of Mongol Armies in the
Consolidation and Expansion of the Tsang (Gtsang) Dynasty” in *Tibetan Ritual*, ed. Jose
Cabezon, 132

641 Tibtean Buddhist Rescource Center (P2651) gives the son’s name as Drakpa Gyalpo (grags pa
rgyal po).

642 “Religious Life and History of the Emanated Heart-Son Thukse Dawa”, Lham Dorji, *Journal
of Bhutan Studies*, Volume 13 (Winter 2005), 76.
the rest of the wall. The iconography of the figures clearly delineate that the figures painted on the projection and to the west are a shared composition with the west wall, and those beyond the wall projection comprise a distinct composition which relate to sculptures on a shrine below.

At the west end of the north wall, the four remaining vidyādharas occupy the top: Huṃkara representing the east, Dhanasamantrṭa (dhana sang skri) of the southeast, Maṇjuśrīmitra (‘jam dpal bshes gnyen) in the south and Vimalamitra (bi ma mi tra) in the southwest (Figure 108).643 Huṃkara wears a paṇḍīt hat and both lay and monastic robes, which indicate he is both in the world and part of the renunciate tradition.644 Huṃkara is shown with his standard attributes and pose: a dorje (rdo rje; Skt. vajra) in his right hand and the drilbu (dril bu; Skt. ghanṭa) in his left, with index fingers and little fingers extended, and his arms crossed over his chest in the manner of Vajradhara.

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643 Inscribed shar hum ka ra, shar lho dha na sang skri, lho ‘jam dpal bshes gnyen and lho nub bi ma mi tra, respectively.
644 In Himalayan traditions, figures wearing multiple robes in this way are frequently encountered. For example, Guru Rinpoche wears not only the lay and monastic robes, but the garb of a king as well..
In conjunction with the four vidyādhara from the west wall above, these eight provide representations of the four cardinal and intermediate directions, the totality of which is representative of the surrounding physical space. Specifically, these vidyādhāra and their associated knowledge and skills combine to essentially define the sacred space and mark it as an area in which enlightened activity can and will take place.

Maṇi Dungkhor Shrine
A small shrine occupies the east end of the north wall (Figure 107) of the Maṇi Dungkhor, dedicated to Pema Lingpa. The large central sculpture (Figure 108) of Pema Lingpa is of a modern date, recently donated (in 2009) by the Fifth King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck ('jigs med ge sar rnam rgyal dbang phyug, b. 1980, r. 2008-present). As explored in Chapter Two, the current Wangchuck dynasty (est. 1907) traces part of its ancestry to Pema Lingpa via the Dungkar Choeje (dung dkar chos rje) lineage through Tenpa’i Gyaltsen (bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan). This ancestral connection has long been the impetus behind royal patronage at Tamzhing, as seen in the extensive

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645 Aris, Bhutan: Early History, 163. See also Chapter Two of this dissertation, “The Role of Pema Lingpa in Later Bhutanese History.”
works undertaken at the site with the support of the queen of the second King of Bhutan, Ashi Phuntsho Chöden (a lce phun tshog chos sgron, 1911-2003).

Figure 108: Main image of Maṇi Dungkhor shrine, east end, north wall

The sculpture donated by the fifth King shows Pema Lingpa in his most frequently encountered pose, seated and displaying the gesture of meditation and holding a flower-sprouting tsebum (rtse ‘bum), or vase of long life, nestled in his hands. The sculptures
flanking Pema Lingpa are older. To his right is the figure of four-armed Avalokiteśvara (chen phyag bzhi pa), or Chenrezig, and on the left is the Indian master Guru Rinpoche. Both of these images have significant accumulations of gold on their faces, accretions that are the result of offerings by individuals. These offerings are considered to bring the donor significant merit, though these additional layers often complicate an attempt at dating the object as they tend to obscure facial characteristics to a degree. Based on its discernible jewelry elements and facial proportions the Chenrezig likely dates to the late-18th to early 19th century (Figure 109).
Later works also crafted from clay, such as those found at Neyphug (gnas phu) Gonpa in the Paro region, have longer, more ovoid facial proportions, whereas the Chenrezig in the Maṇi Dungkhor has a squared, shorter forehead and wider cheeks. Also, the relation of
ear to earlobe on the Chenrezig is more balanced and naturalistic, while later works tend to have disproportionately long earlobes. The Tamzhing Chenrezig also illustrates an earlier characteristic of comparatively wide open eyes and compact, centered features surrounded by a full face. While later works tended to present the five lobes of the crown as upright with a greater vertical emphasis, the components of the Tamzhing Chenrezig crown are pushed forward and slanted so that they are roughly parallel to the shoulders and more open toward the viewer. Further, earlier works can be distinguished by the hairstyle seen on the Tamzhing Chenrezig; tightly bound, oval-shaped segments of hair separated by red fabric ties, which stand in stark contrast to the later trend of successive stacks of rounded buns. Lastly, the red scarf element seen across the forehead and tied over the ears of the Tamzhing Chenrezig are shown in a manner consistent with late 18th-early 19th century works. In later sculpture, this element is generally smaller and shown in an increasingly stylized manner, whereas with the Tamzhing Chenrezig, the proportions are presented more naturally.

The figure to Pema Lingpa’s left, Guru Rinpoche, is considered responsible for the terma treasure tradition to which Pema Lingpa belonged. Guru Rinpoche then is the agent who concealed the treasures that Pema Lingpa later brought forth, who gave Pema Lingpa prophecies and instructions, and appeared to Pema Lingpa in numerous visions throughout his life. Without Guru Rinpoche’s actions in the 8th century, Pema Lingpa’s works in the late 15th and early 16th centuries would have been impossible. Yet those actions also required Pema Lingpa to feel compassion; compassion for all sentient beings that then acted as a driving force to undertake his Buddhist activities of revelation,
teaching and training others to move toward a goal of ultimate enlightenment. This compassion is represented in the shrine in the figure of Chenrezig, placed opposite to Guru Rinpoche. Thus, Pema Lingpa, presented in a larger scale, is the coalescence of these two forces—the source of the teachings that provides enlightenment to Buddhist adherents and the compassion that motivates their transmission—and by extension, is the embodiment of enlightened mind and enlightened activity, considered marks of a great Buddhist master.

Figure 110: Guru Rinpoche, Maṇi Dungkhor shrine, east end, north wall
The Guru sculpture is somewhat more diminutive than the Chenrezig, though it seems to be of the same era (Figure 110). It has the same wide eyes and squarish forehead as the Chenrezig sculpture, and the earrings worn by both show remarkable similarity in proportion and style. Just above each collarbone is a stylized cloud-like scroll, yet are mismatched; the element on the right is far more simplistic and roughly modeled than its left-hand counterpart, indicating that the latter is likely original and the right-hand piece is a later replacement or repair. The Guru’s hat reflects an early 19th century date, discernible through its low profile and the way in which the flaps are held tightly to the head. As can be seen in the modern Pema Lingpa placed next to the Guru, later hats become increasingly more vertical in their emphasis, and the side flaps develop into almost crown-like proportions. The Guru sculpture illustrates the earlier tendency of the facial proportions to be slightly larger than its accompanying headgear. In later works, the hats are equal in size or larger than the faces.

The shrine base is sparse, hewn from rough wood which supports the three clay sculptures. A modern photograph of the Fifth King sits just below the image of Pema Lingpa, flanked by silk flowers.

On the wall directly behind the three sculptures in the round are five shallow, roughly-molded reliefs. The sculpture of Pema Lingpa sits in front of a relief of Guru Rinpoche seated on a high lotus base, flanked by his consorts Yeshe Tsogyal and Mandarava. To the left of the Guru are the figures of Kuntu Zangpo (kun tu bzang po; Skt. Samantabhadra), the primordial Buddha of the Nyingma tradition, and Dorje Sempa (rdo
rje sems dpa’; Skt. Vajrasattva), a white crowned Buddha. In advanced Vajrayāna practice, Dorje Sempa is the purified form that a practitioner takes on through meditative practice. An adherent is only authorized to do this through an initiation and the permission of his or her guru. During this practice, through meditation, the initiate identifies him or herself with the purified form of Dorje Sempa and then performs ritual activity for the benefit of all beings.

The two relief figures behind Chenrezig are the Buddha Śākyamuni and a relief version of four-armed Chenrezig. Thus, in the small reliefs behind the shrine, there are duplications of Guru Rinpoche and Chenrezig, along with the figures of Kuntu Zangpo, Dorje Sempa and the historical Buddha Śākyamuni (ca. 6th century BCE). Just as in the three larger images on the shrine, the subsidiary figures in the reliefs show the different various qualities that contribute to and are fully expressed in the form of Guru Rinpoche. Guru Rinpoche, inspired and instructed by the primordial Buddha Kuntu Zangpo, combines the purified activity of Dorje Sempa with the compassionate action of Chenrezig and the exemplary life of the historical Buddha, thus coalescing the qualities of perfect action, compassion, and wisdom into a form, which, like the historical Buddha, was able to enact these qualities on earth for the benefit of the followers of Buddhism.

Guru Rinpoche is shown in larger scale, and unlike the other four relief sculptures, is shown within an elaborate roundel with painted flower ornamentation. The style and motifs in the painted program above the shrine and relief sculptures further emphasize the
relief of Guru Rinpoche and his consorts, and thus concurrently, the large sculpture of Pema Lingpa in front of it. Painted immediately above the figure of Pema Lingpa is the seated figure of Buddha Öpadme (‘od dpag med; Skt. Amitābha), or Buddha of Infinite Light, seated on a lotus supported by the gold curvilinear motif most frequently seen as part of a larger throne design. On either side of Öpadme are the historical Buddha Śākyamuni on the left, and Menlha (sman lha; Skt. Bhaiṣajyāguru), the Buddha of Medicine on the right. Below the three Buddha figures are two bodhisattvas and two goddesses. Bodhisattvas, as explored in Chapter Four in conjunction with the assembly hall murals in Tamzhing, are those who aspire to achieve full enlightenment, yet not until all sentient beings are helped toward the same goal. Bodhisattvas can be human beings around us in everyday life, such as Buddhist teachers or adherents that have taken the bodhisattva vow, or they can be shown in art as highly advanced deities. To the left of Öpadme is the white figure of the bodhisattva Chenrezig (spyan ras gzigs; Skt. Padmapaṇi Avalokiteśvara), or Lotus-Holding Lord Who Looks Down [Upon the World]. This two-armed form of Chenrezig is distinguishable from other white bodhisattvas through the presence of a small animal skin wrapped over his left shoulder, shown here underneath a pinkish drape of fabric. This figure in particular shows strong stylistic affiliation with the over painted murals of the assembly hall inside of Tamzhing, most notably in the comparatively larger hands, thin claves, rounded and prominent chin, and method of depicting the crown in a three-quarter view, with an extra flourish extending from the topmost element. Similar stylistic tendencies can be discerned in the dark blue bodhisattva Chana Dorje (phyag na rdo rje; Skt. Vajrapāṇi) opposite to
Chenrezig and who also shares the curving gold supporting element with him and the Buddha Öpadme. Like, Chenrezig, Chana Dorje is seated and peaceful in appearance, and upon the lotus at his left shoulder is his characteristic implement: a small dorje (rdo rje; Skt. vajra), which is a symbol of the meeting of the phenomenal world with the noumenal world. Much as in the Kantian sense of the words, within the noumenal world, events or objects are recognized without the use of sensory input, which stands in stark contrast to the phenomenal world with which we engage through sight, touch, sound and so on. The Buddhist Sanskrit equivalents of these concepts would be the relationship of the laukika, or elements or sensations discernible in the worldly realm, and the lokuttara, that which lies beyond this realm. One could also correlate the concepts of saṃskṛta dharma, meaning the worldly, compounded essences around us, and asaṃskṛta, meaning the state of ‘non-saṃskṛta,’ or nīrīvāṇa, full enlightenment. The dorje implement symbolizes the meeting of these two elements in a central, rounded element that joins two open-ended prongs, where the pronged ends are the two states of noumenal and phenomenal, and the center represents the full realization of the two states, which is the essence of enlightenment. For Chana Dorje to be holding this object is indicative of his mastery of these concepts, and emblematic of the power contained within that knowledge.

Below each of the bodhisattvas is a form of the goddess Drolma (sgrol ma), or Tāra. Under Chenrezig and slightly to the left is Droljang (sgrol ljang; Skt. Śyamatāra), or Green Tāra. Droljang is one of the most frequently encountered forms of Tāra, and is a fully enlightened female Buddha. Yet in this manifestation as Drolma Jigpa Gyeokyob (sgrol ma ‘jigs pa brgyad skyob), Droljang performs a saviouress function, acting as an
intercessor to Buddhist practitioners in need, and rescuing them from perilous circumstances. The most pressing concerns where Droljang could be of assistance were codified centuries ago in Indian sources as the Eight Perils (or Eight Fears), namely, rescue from drowning, fire, snakes, lions, elephants, thieves, false imprisonment and ghosts. Droljang, and her limitless capacity for benevolent assistance, were brought into Himalayan Buddhist traditions and are present in all schools or practice.646

Another form of Drolma, a white bodied manifestation known as Drolkar (sgrol dkar; Skt. Sīta Tārā or Saptalocana Tārā), is depicted opposite Droljang. Drolkar can be recognized by her seven eyes, three on her head, and one each on her palms and the soles of her feet. These compound eyes are thought to reflect Drolkar’s ability to see, and thus respond to, the needs of Buddhist practitioners. Like Droljang, Drolkar’s right hand is extended, palm up, at her right knee in varāda mudrā, the gesture of granting wishes or conferring boons.

The mural program behind the shrine illustrates the various functions of Buddhist deities, serving to remind the viewer of the different aspects and mechanisms that are available to them in their quest toward greater spiritual understanding. Specifically, the figures of Droljang and Drolkar stand at the ready, prepared to grant assistance in times of tribulation in matters both practical and spiritual, while the compassion of Chenrezig and power of Chana Dorje illustrate the two main emphases of Tantric practice. The presence of the Buddha Śākyamuni is emblematic of the potential for enlightenment, as his life

(and previous lives) offers a template of ideal behavior and acts a teaching tool. Menlha, the Medicine Buddha, provides healing and health to adherents so that their spiritual practices are more fruitful and beneficial to all beings. Finally, the Buddha Öpadme, surrounded by the trees of his heaven realm, provides practitioners with a goal for their practice. If they cannot achieve enlightenment in this lifetime, they can instead orient themselves to the paradise of Buddha Öpadme, where they will escape the cycle of future rebirths and reside there until they reach enlightenment. Thus, the murals behind the Pema Lingpa shrine clearly illustrate the variety of paths available to Buddhist initiates, and the support that underlies successful practice.

The final, easternmost section of the wall reveals a large scale painting of Pema Lingpa. He is shown in almost twice the scale of other figures, emphasizing his comparative importance through use of hierarchic scale. Inscribed “Homage to the Great Terton King and Wisdom Holder Pema Lingpa (gter chen chos kyi rgyal po rig ’dzin pad+ma gling pa la na mo),” Pema Lingpa is seated on an elaborate cushioned throne with the sense offerings arranged before him. Pema Lingpa’s representation in the mural mirrors that of the sculpted version nearby as he is presented frontally and cradling a vase of long life in his hands. His multi-layered robes show that he wears the inner robe of a layman, here pinkish with green cuffs, yet over it are the robes of a Buddhist monk and additional layers of fabrics with rich patterns befitting his high status. The layered robes indicate that, like Guru Rinpoche, in his life he acted as both lay practitioner and as a monastic.

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647 The sense offerings are fruit for taste, a traditional instrument (dranyen) for hearing, a mirror for sight, a conch shell filled with burning incense for scent, and a silk scarf for touch.
yet Pema Lingpa does not display the royal robes worn by Guru Rinpoche. However, the hat worn by Pema Lingpa is that of an advanced Nyingma practitioner, and emulates the hat worn by Guru Rinpoche. Pema Lingpa’s presence here, in its larger scale and comparatively detailed and sumptuous surroundings, is the most prominent and thus the most immediately present, figures in this portion of the mural. These visual tools, and the resultant emphasis upon him, remind the viewer that it was Pema Lingpa’s life and presence in Tamzhing that helped to make Buddhist teachings more accessible to local residents, and to practitioners throughout the nation and the region.

*Murals of the East Wall*

This composition consists of seven figures painted directly on wood. The placement is markedly different than the north and west walls, with the figures occupying the upper portion of the wall and no clay sculptural reliefs below. These seven figures reveal the key masters responsible for the formulation and dissemination of the Dzogchen, or Great Perfection, teachings. The Dzogchen system of practice follows three major streams, and generally falls into the highest classification of Nyingma Buddhist practice, called the Atiyoga.648

Two of the three figures in the upper register are deeply connected with the *Khandro Nyingthig* (*mkha’ gro snying thig*), or *Heart-Drop of the Ṣākiṇī*, practice. On the far left

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648 Chapter Four explains the methods and masters of the Dzogchen system according to the Pema Lingpa tradition, and analyzes the murals of Tamzhing that draw upon this methodology.
is Pema Ledreltsel (pad+ma las ‘brel rtsal, b. 1248), a former incarnation of Pema Lingpa who was also a terton in his own right.\textsuperscript{649} Pema Ledreltsel is shown in a Nyingma style hat, with long hair, wearing both monastic and lay robes. He holds a box, or treasure casket in which one usually finds terma, in his lap with his left hand and his right hand displays the gesture of teaching at chest level. Pema Ledreltsel was the rebirth of King Trisong Detsen’s daughter Lhacam Pemasel (lha lcam pad+ma rtsal, b. 8th century), and it was in this former life that Guru Rinpoche first entrusted the Innermost Heart-Drop of the Ṛṣākīṇī (man ngag mkha’ ‘gro’i snying thig) to her while she was dying at the age of eight at Samye Chimphu. When she was later reborn as Pema Ledreltsel, in that incarnation he then revealed the text in 1253 at Dangla Thramo Drak (ldang lha khra mo brag) in Dagpo (dwags po).\textsuperscript{650} Coincidentally, Pema Lingpa counted among his previous lives both Pemasel and Pema Ledreltsel, thus compounding the connection Pema Lingpa claimed to have with this text.

Just before his death, Pema Ledreltsel entrusted the Khandro Nyingthig teachings to the Nyingma teacher Trulku Legden (sprul sku legs ldan, 1290-1366).\textsuperscript{651} Trulku Legden then passed them along to the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (rang byung rdo rje, 1284-1339), who subsequently united the Khandro Nyingthig with the Bima Nyingthig (bi ma

\textsuperscript{649} In the biography of Pema Lingpa written by the Eighth Peling Sungtrul Kunzang Tenpai Nyima (kun bzang bstan pa’i nyi ma), he refers to Pema Ledreltsel with the alternate name of Pagangpa Rinchen Tsuldor (pa sgang pa rin chen tshul rdor) (Pad gling ’khrungs rabs kyi rogs brjod gsal dad pa’i me long, fol. 5a-6a). See also Harding, Life, 161 (note 24).

\textsuperscript{650} Ricard, Life of Shabkar, 47, note 16.

\textsuperscript{651} Also known as Sho Gyalse Legpa Palden Sherab (sho rgyal sras legs pa dpal ldan shes rab); Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center names him as Gyalse Legpa (rgyal sras legs pa) provides his dates as 1290-1365 (TBRC record P7625, http://tbrc.org/#library_person_Object-P7625, accessed April 06, 2012).
snying thig), giving rise to one work referred to as the *Karma Nyingthig (karma snying thig)*, which became one of his key works.\(^{652}\) The Third Karmapa gave Trulku Legden one of the first initiations into *Karma Nyingthig* practice, and the lineages continue to the present day.

Thus, the figure of Pema Ledreltsel is important for many reasons: first, the earliest strata of Himalayan Buddhism are referenced as Ledreltsel was the reincarnation of Lhacam Pemasel, the daughter of King Trisong Detsen and ostensible recipient of the first *Khandro Nyingthig* teachings from Guru Rinpoche. Secondly, Pema Ledreltsel’s repute as a prolific terma revealer laid the foundation for his later incarnation, Pema Lingpa. Third, when Pema Ledreltsel gave the *Nyingthig* practices to the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, this act would later serve as a connection between Pema Lingpa (as Pema Ledreltsel) with the incarnation lineage of the Karmapas, relationships that would repeat in multiple later lifetimes.

Tradition maintains that after Pema Ledreltsel died, he was reborn as the master scholar Longchen Rabjampa Drime Özer (klong chen rab 'byams pa dri med 'od zer, 1308-1363), who is also counted among Pema Lingpa’s previous lives. Longchen would play an important role in the elaboration and propagation of *Nyingthig* teachings, and a number of different accounts of his initiation into the tradition exist. One widely-held version of how Longchen was initiated into the Vimalamitra tradition of *Khandro Nyingthig* is that his master Kumārādza (ku mA rA dza [also known as gzhon nu rgyal

\(^{652}\) Achard, “The Tibetan Tradition of the Great Perfection”, 15-16
po] 1266-1343), inducted him. Longchen later expanded these teachings into a two-volume work known as the *Lama Yangtig (bla ma yang thig)*.\(^{653}\)

Another account maintains that when Longchen was in his thirties, he received the *Khandro Nyingthig* in both the direct (spoken) and visionary transmissions from his own disciple, a yogin named Özer Gocha (‘od zer go cha, d.u.).\(^{654}\) This version maintains that at the age of thirty-two Longchen was in Samye Chimphu, giving the teachings of *Bima Nyingthig (bi ma snying thig)*, when the Nyingma protector Ekajatī (ral gcig ma) suddenly possessed one of the female disciples and sang a song to Longchen about the true, inner, location of all knowledge necessary for enlightenment.\(^{655}\) Though this text had already stated that the *Khandro Nyingthig* had been conferred onto Longchen through his yogin disciple, it also maintains that Longchen received the *Khandro Nyingthig* through a direct vision of Guru Rinpoche. It was in this vision that Guru Rinpoche gave Longchen the name Drime Özer (dri med ‘od zer), or Stainless Ray of Light.\(^{656}\) This ‘double authorization,’ via the direct visionary transmission from Guru Rinpoche and the direct spoken authorization from the yogin, serve to show that Longchen was the proper recipient of the *Khandro Nyingthig*, since his receipt of the transmission happened nearly concurrently through different vehicles. The translated passage offers a condensed version of how Longchen then authored a commentary on the *Khandro Nyingthig*:

\(^{653}\) Achard, “The Tibetan Tradition of the Great Perfection”, 16

\(^{654}\) Achard, “The Tibetan Tradition of the Great Perfection”, 16. This Özer Gocha (Amsuvarman), disciple of Longchenpa, is not to be confused with the Nepalese king Amsuvarman (r. ca. 6th century), who is reputed to have given his daughter Bhṛkūti as a bride for the Tibetan king Songtsan Gompo.

\(^{655}\) Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 152

\(^{656}\) Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 153
“At Chugpotrag (Phyug-Po-Brag) near the Do’i Choten (rDo’i-mChod-rTen) of Zurkhardo (Zur-mKar-mDo), after performing a Tshog (Tshogs) offering, he opened the Khadro Nyingthig teachings. That night, he experienced the state of meditative clarity of remaining in the state of original purity, the Dharmakāya, manifesting its power, the Sambhogakāya, and projecting its clarity externally, the Nirmaṇakāya. Then he discovered and transcribed the Khadro Yangtig (mKha’-'Gro Yang-Tig) as Mind Dharma Treasure (dGongs-gTer), the esoteric supplementary texts for Khadro Nyingthig.”

Longchen then encountered visions of Guru Rinpoche, his consort Yeshe Tsogyal, and the goddess Yundronma (g.yu sgron ma), with Yeshe Tsogyal appearing before Longchen for seven days. The passage states:

Although he [Longchen] discovered the seed of this text at [Samye] Chimphu, he actually transcribed it at Gangri Thodkar (Gangs-Ri Thod-dKar), and so the colophon says that he wrote it at Kangri Thodkar. Although Longchen Rabjam was the incarnation of Pema Ledreltsal, the discoverer of Khadro Nyingthig, and he also received the transmissions from Guru Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal in his very lifetime, he received the transmission from Sho’i Gyalse Legpa (Sho’i rGyal-Sras Legs-Pa, 1290-1366/7), the direct disciple of Pema Ledreltsal, in order to set an example for future followers of the importance of receiving proper transmissions.”

Again, the receipt of the teachings from multiple sources is traditionally considered the most authentic means of transmission. When Sho’i Gyalse Legpa, himself a student of Longchen’s former incarnation Pema Ledreltsel, confers the initiation upon Longchen, he re-establishes Longchen as a valid tradition holder by acting as the conduit between Longchen’s incarnations. This multiplicity of similar transmissions is not uncommon, and it is worth noting that Longchen makes a point of saying he did so to “set an example” for disciples who were both his contemporaries and those to come in the future.

By claiming his position in the transmission lineage through multiple initiations,

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657 Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 153
658 Rabjam, *The Practice of Dzogchen*, 153
Longchen’s position in the tradition becomes more secure, while his concurrent earnestness in protecting the authenticity of the doctrine solidifies his place as a conscientious and ideal Buddhist master even further.

Armed with these teachings received from various sources, Longchen soon developed his own supplementary texts to the Khandro Nyingthig: a three-volume cycle known as the Khandro Yangthig (mkha’ ‘gro yang thig), and, at the request of Özer Gocha, Longchen compiled them as a mind terma (dgongs gter). Soon after, Longchen experienced a vision of Vimalamitra, whose own teachings spurred Longchen to write the Lama Yangthig (bla ma yang tig) to accompany the aforementioned Vima Nyingthig (bi ma snying thig). Later, when Longchenpa’s two works, the Khandro Yangthig and the Lama Yangtig were combined to constitute the work Zabmo Yangthig (zab mo yang thig), the two formerly separate traditions of Guru Rinpoche and Vimalamitra were thus combined. The Zabmo Yangthig became the most important commentary on both the Khandro Nyingthig and the Vima Nyingthig, and through this work, Longchen successfully united the two main streams of Nyingma Dzogchen practice. Longchen took these traditions and further systematized them into a practice known as the Four Heart Essences (snying thig ya bzhi), another key practice of the Dzogchen tradition.

The connections between Pema Ledreltsel, Longchen and Pema Lingpa, are each linked through the cycle of rebirth, but also through the Khandro Nyingthig and its associated

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659 Rabjam, The Practice of Dzogchen, 155
660 Rabjam, The Practice of Dzogchen, 155
661 Achard, “The Tibetan Tradition of the Great Perfection”, 16
662 Ricard, Life of Shabkar, 47 note 16.
cycles of practice. The prominent placement of these figures throughout Tamzhing and especially in the Maṇi Dungkhor underscores these interrelationships and the role that this lineage played in the history of Dzogchen practice.

The image of Pema Ledreltsel would be immediately recognizable to those familiar with the Pema Lingpa tradition and the master’s hagiography. The fact that these were painted within modern living memory forty years ago only further emphasizes the important role that this 12th century master played in the later understanding of Pema Lingpa, both in his legitimacy as a religious master and the veracity of the Dzogchen teachings he espoused. Then, when considering the figure of Pema Ledreltsel in juxtaposition with the other six figures in composition, the most significant teachings and contributions of those related to the Pema Lingpa tradition are revealed.

Next to Pema Ledreltsel is Guru Chöwang (gu ru chos dbang, 1212-1270), another major early terton of the Nyingma tradition, and the second of the Five Major Tertons. Guru Chöwang was a native of Lhodrak, and is depicted in the Maṇi Dungkhor seated upon an animal skin and wearing the robes of a layman. His hands are in the gesture of meditation in his lap and hold a skull cup, filled with flaming gems (nor bu), symbolic of the Buddhist teachings. Guru Chöwang was an early systematizer of the terma tradition who asserted that in order to best understand revealed treasures, a consort was necessary.

663 The Five Sovereign Tertons (gter ston rgyal po lnga) are: Nyangral Nyima Özer (nyang ral nyima ‘od zer, 1136-1204), Guru Chöwang Chökyi Wangchuk (gu ru chos dbangchos kyi dbang phyug, 1212-1270), Dorje Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa, 1346-1405), Pema Lingpa (pad+ma gling pa, 1450-1521) and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse'i dbang po, 1820-1892).
As pointed out by Jakob Leschly, one consort named as particularly efficacious is a familiar name:

“Chökyi Wangchuk [Guru Chöwang] was also instrumental in establishing the notion that treasure revelation requires the practice of sexual yoga. He claimed that he could not understand one of his own revelations, the Kabgye Sangwa Yongdzog (bka' brgyad gsang ba yong rdzogs) until after he had opened his yogic central channel via sexual yoga. His consort was Jomo Menmo (jo mo sman mo), an established treasure revealer herself.”

Jomo Menmo, it may be recalled, was one of the previous incarnations of Pema Lingpa. Yet the links between Guru Chöwang and Pema Lingpa prove to be even more extensive. Pema Lingpa belonged to the Ura branch of the family clan of Nyö (smyos), which had a history of intermarrying with women from the nearby region of Kurtöe (skur stod) who claimed descent from Guru Chöwang, who had spent a significant amount of time in Bumthang.

Guru Chöwang is credited with the construction of the Samdru Dewachenpo temple (bsam 'grub bde ba chen po), known also as Laya Guru Lhakhang (la yak gu ru lha

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665 According to the late scholar Lama Pema Tshewang, Pema Lingpa was the consort of Guru Chowang in his previous life, but named as Rigma Padma Drolma (‘rigs ma pad+ma sgrol ma). Treasure Revealer, 38 (note 21).
666 Aris, Hidden Treasures, 21. Pommaret in “Historical and Religious Relations between Lhodrak (southern Tibet) and Bumthang (Bhutan) from the 18th to the early 20th century: Preliminary data” notes that the family lines that claim descent from Guru Chowang are the Nyala and Lugkhyu lineages in the region of Kurtoe (skur stod), who each trace themselves to the same son born of Guru Chowang (93). Pommaret also notes (94) that Lhalung was considered a main seat of the Pema Lingpa lineage, even before it became the seat of the Peling Sungtrul and Thugse incarnations.
khang) at Lhalung Monastery (lha lung dgon pa) in his home region of Lhodrak. Later, Lhalung became the main seat of the Peling Sungtrul lineage when the Second Sungtrul Tenzin Dragpa (bstan ‘dzin grags pa) took up residence at Guru Lhakhang. Then, beginning in 1672, the Peling Thugse line also moved to Lhalung Monastery with the support of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Over Pema Lingpa’s more than twenty trips to Tibet, he taught and gave initiations at both Guru Lhakhang and Lhalung Monastery.

Though Guru Chöwang’s sites of Guru Lhakhang and Lhalung Monastery were important to Pema Lingpa during his lifetime, it was not until almost two centuries later that two of Pema Lingpa’s incarnations were installed at these temples. Yet later, between the 18th century and the 1970’s, both Guru Lhakhang and Lhalung Monastery became so deeply associated with the Pema Lingpa tradition they nearly surpassed Tamzhing in importance. Overwhelmingly, the incarnations spent the majority of their time at these ‘satellite’ sites, and generally headed south to Bumthang to escape the Lhodrak winters or to participate in the most important rituals and festivals.

During the 1970’s, when the paintings in the Maṇi Dungkor were created, the resident monastics maintained their strong sense of connection to Lhalung and the region of Lhodrak, from where they had arrived barely a decade earlier. Thus, the importance of

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668 Harding, Life and Revelations, 138
669 Biographies state that between 1488-1520, Pema Lingpa visited Lhodrak at least eight times, and made eleven specific trips to Lhalung, as well as a prolonged stay at Guru Lhakhang in 1518. See Aris, Hidden Treasures, Appendix One, 215-221.
670 According to Lam Tsetan, the present head lama of Tamzhing Gonpa, the monastery was established after their arrival from Tibet in the face of Chinese incursion to Lhodrak in the
Guru Chöwang as builder of the monastic community’s home monasteries remained incredibly significant for the Tamzhing community. Thus this sense of connection was exacerbated by the previous life of Pema Lingpa as consort of Guru Chöwang and Guru Chöwang’s important role in systematizing the terma texts may account for his prominent inclusion in this mural program, adjacent to those two masters who also supplied important religious rituals. Together, while Terdak Lingpa and Pema Ledreltsel provided the spiritual refuge and those practices that revealed the ultimate goal of Dzogchen Practice, it was Guru Chöwang’s work that provided them the shelter in which they could pursue it. Given that only two of the Five Sovereign Tertons are portrayed, namely Guru Chöwang and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (who will be discussed shortly), it is highly unlikely that Guru Chöwang’s inclusion referenced that thematic grouping, and if it were, it would be equally unlikely that the group would be left unfinished. Rather, it is more likely due to Pema Lingpa’s previous connection to Guru Chöwang, and the latter’s site-building activities that he is given such prominence in this composition.

The third of the upper figures, Terdak Lingpa Gyurme Dorje (gter bdag gling pa ‘gyur med rdo rje, 1646-1714), was the founder of Mindroling (smin grol gling) monastery, which eventually grew to become one of the most important sites of Nyingma Buddhism. Terdak Lingpa is shown as a bearded figure wearing a blue initiation hat. His hands are in

1960’s. On official correspondence and signs, one can see the seal of authority reads “Lhalung Community” rather than bearing Tamzhing-affiliated nomenclature, indicating a continued self-reported identity as a Lhalung-based community. This is described further in Appendix F, which explores the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa festival, held annually in the autumn.
dharmachakra mudra at chest level, and at his left shoulder is a lotus-borne dorje while at his right is a bell (dril bu), also on a lotus.

There were a number of connections between Terdak Lingpa and the Pema Lingpa traditions during his own era, as well as substantial links between his later descendants and incarnations with those of Pema Lingpa. Terdak Lingpa was an initiate of the Khandro Nyingthig lineage, and was responsible for authoring a significant commentary on it. Like Pema Lingpa, Terdak Lingpa was part of the Nyö (smyos) family line. This familial connection resulted in the Mindroling monastery serving as a major center for the perpetuation of the Pema Lingpa tradition. Terdak Lingpa’s father was Sangdak Thinley Lhundrup (sang bdag 'phrin las lhun grub, 1611-1662), himself the son of Dongak Tenzin (mdo sngags bstan 'dzin, 1576-1628). Dongak Tenzin, the grandfather of Terdak Lingpa, had been fully initiated into the lineage of Nyingthig (snying thig) teachings, which he in turn passed down to his son and grandson. All of the men went on to be major lineage figures for the Dzogchen traditions in general, and the Khandro Nyingthig in particular.

Terdak Lingpa was a student of and teacher to the Fifth Dalai Lama (ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617-1682), the head of the Gelugpa (dge lugs pa) tradition of Himalayan Buddhism. Terdak Lingpa was also the student of the Nyingma master and

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second Pema Lingpa Sungtrul, Tshultrim Dorje (tshul khrims rdo rje, 1598-1669), and of Tenzin Gyurme Dorje (bstan ‘dzin ‘gyur med rdo rje, 1641-ca. 1702), the Third Peling Thugse (thugs sras), or Mind Incarnation of Pema Lingpa. These two teachers thus directly connected Terdak Lingpa with the Pema Lingpa lineage, a connection that was further solidified when Terdak Lingpa himself became teacher to the Third Peling Sungtrul, Ngawang Kunzang Dorje (ngag dbang kun bzang rdo rje, 1680-1723), after the death of Tenzin Gyurme Dorje.

At this time, the monastery of Mindroling had already been built and was serving as a central dissemination point of the Nyingma tradition, with Terdak Lingpa at its head. The monastery functioned under the support of the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Gelugpa-controlled central government located in Lhasa. The full extent of the role of Pema Lingpa’s lineage in the perpetuation of Terdak Lingpa’s teachings will be explored further below.

The remaining four figures in the composition reveal even more connections between various Buddhist masters with the tradition of Pema Lingpa. The figure to the far left on the bottom row is Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye (‘jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha’ yas, 1813-1899). The inscription beneath the figure of Jamgön Kongtrul reveals his full name, including elements of his secret initiatory name, Padma Garwang Thinley Dodrul

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673 Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center lists Tsaltrim Dorje as the Third Sungtrul (P1692). The numbering as put forth by TBRC follows a different numbering system as that elsewhere.
674 This flourishing was short lived; the monastery of Mindroling (grwa phyi o rgyan smin sgrol gling) was founded in 1676, but was destroyed in the Dzungar war of 1717-1718, shortly after the murder of its founder Terdak Lingpa in 1714 (Smith, Among Tibetan Texts, 18).
Tsel (pad+ma dgar dbang phrin las ‘gro ‘dul rtsal). Born to a family who were practitioners of the pre-Buddhist Bön tradition, Jamgön Kongtrul sought teachings and initiations from a variety of religious traditions throughout his life, and his voluminous compilations and commentaries on these practices served to preserve a number of otherwise unknown streams of practice.

Jamgön Kongtrul is shown in the robes of a learned master (paṇḍita), with his hands at his chest in a teaching gesture (dharmachakra mudrā, chos kyi ‘khor lo phyag rgya). At each shoulder, a lotus blooms. On his left, the bloom supports a traditional book, or pecha (dpe cha), surmounted by a flaming sword, indicative of his mastery of Buddhist knowledge. To his right, a small vase is borne aloft along with a crossed vajra (rdo rje) and a right-turning (clockwise-turning) swastika. This swastika element may have originated through his tertön name, which contains the element yungdrung (g.yung drung), or swastika. Both the crossed vajra and the swastika are symbolic of the coalescence of phenomena. These visual elements are present to remind the initiated viewer that one of the main goals of Buddhism is to realize that all phenomena are illusory and therefore indistinguishable from nothingness. In fact, the shape of the swastika is intended to illustrate a central point from which understanding, here in the form of ‘arms’, radiate outward, representative of one’s comprehension of the world around them. Then, as the necessary realizations take hold in the practitioner’s mind,

676 The full inscription reads: ‘jam mgon kong sprul pad+ma dbang blo gros mtha’yas la na mo.
677 Jamgön Kongtrul’s tertön titles are ‘chi med bstan gnyis g.yung drung gling pa and bstan gnyis g.yung drung gling pa. The swastika is an ancient symbol found throughout the subcontinent, appearing in Chinese, Etruscan and Indus Valley civilizations and elsewhere prior to its adoption by the Nazi party in the 20th century.
those ‘arms’ retract back into the center to coalesce as one point; a point that is the pure understanding of the world as essentially illusory. In summary, for Buddhists, the swastika is a representation of the ultimate goal of Buddhism, that of understanding the true, illusory nature of the world around them.

Jamgön Kongtrul studied under more than fifty masters, and, in addition to revealing terma treasures, was a prolific author in his own right. He authored what is referred to as the Five Great Treasuries (*mdzod lnga*). One of the five treasuries from Jamgön Kongtrul was his compilation of the *Treasury of Precious Termas*, or *Rinchen Terdzö* (*rin chen gter mdzod*). This massive seventy volume collection brought together every terma that had been revealed up to and including his own era, the 19th century, with the inclusion of Chogyur Lingpa’s texts. Included in the *Rinchen Terdzö* are a number of Pema Lingpa’s treasures, which attested to the degree to which Pema Lingpa’s teachings were held with respect and deemed worthy of conservation. Together with the famed treasure revealer Chogyur Lingpa (mchog rgyur gling pa, 1829-1870), Jamgön Kongtrul was able to open pilgrimage routes and experience visions that further enabled him to discern the location of and reveal multiple terma.678

Jamgön Kongtrul worked frequently with Chogyur Lingpa, and also in conjunction with the figure painted immediately to the right of Jamgön Kongtrul, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (‘jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po, 1820-1892). These three worked together during the 1850’s to compile, systematize and categorize Buddhist literature of

678 *Nyingma School*, 864.
the time, and due to their extraordinary effort, the trio is frequently referred to as the Khyen Kong Chog Desum (mkhyen kong mchog sde gsum), meaning the three masters (Jamyang) Khyentse, (Jamgön) Kongtrul and Chogyur (Lingpa). They are also referred to as the Three Embodiments of Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom, an epithet that reflects their extensive and prolific contributions to Buddhist thought and practice.679

Historically, Jamyang Khyentse and Jamgön Kongtrul have been considered two of the main touchstones of the Rime (ris med) movement.680 However, the degree to which Rime could be considered a fully-formed tradition is quite slight; rather, current scholarship suggests that the previously held definition and scope of the Rime ‘movement’ requires revision. The current perspective on the role of Jamyang Khyentse—and an updated definition of Rime—is presented succinctly by Alexander Gardner:

It was largely on the basis of [his] impressive compendiums of teachings that Khyentse Wangpo is often referred to as a member of a so-called “Rime Movement.” It is more accurate to say that he embodied an ecumenical ideal (ris med) long cherished by Tibetan scholars, one of appreciating and exploring multiple traditions of Buddhism in Tibet. It is important to remember that Khyentse Wangpo was a Sakya lama whose primary ritual and literary activity was dedicated to that tradition, and while he worked closely with the Kagyu Jamgön Kongtrul and the Nyingma Chokgyur Lingpa, neither he nor his

680 As described by E. Gene Smith, “The great religious trend during the nineteenth century was toward tolerance, understanding, and synthesis. This nonsectarian movement represented a reaction to the religious rivalry and persecution that marred so much of Tibetan history; it sought to reorient Tibetan religious life to the higher ideals and mutual understanding that had been the rule with the greater teachers of the past.” However, this did not stop a rebellion that arose due to perceived pro-Nyingma favoritism, which resulted in a strong anti-Nyingma sentiment (Among Tibetan Texts, 24).
colleagues made any effort to merge traditions or initiate a new teaching institution.\textsuperscript{681}

Thus, though during his early years, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo underwent formal training in the Sakya tradition of Buddhism, he sought out and cultivated extensive contacts with other traditions of Buddhist teachings. These wide-ranging interests may have been partly due to a predilection toward learning more about his own roots; Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, like Pema Lingpa, was part of the Nyö clan. After his ordination at the age of twenty at Mindroling monastery, a Nyingma stronghold, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo received initiation into the Longchenpa tradition of the \textit{Khandro Nyingthig}, the \textit{Heart-Drop of the Ďākipīśś}, which would become one of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo’s primary practices.\textsuperscript{682} Of the five great tertons (gter ston rgyal po lnga) of the Nyingma tradition—of which Pema Lingpa was the fourth—Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo was determined to be the fifth and final major treasure revealer. He also advised on the organization of the massive Rinchen Terdzö, and suggested which terma teachings should be included within the corpus.\textsuperscript{683}

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo is shown in the Maṇi Dungkor as a mustached figure, wearing a paṇḍita hat and robes. His right hand is down at knee level and holding a vajra (rdo rje) while his left holds an upside-down bell (ghanța; dril bu). Over each shoulder is


a lotus; at his right, the flower supports a sword, and the left holds up a traditional
Tibetan text (dpe cha).

Immediately next to Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo is the figure of the 15th Karmapa,
Khakyab Dorje (mkha' khyab rdo rje, 1870/1-1921/2). The Karmapa is the head of the
Karma Kagyu (karma bka’ brgyud) lineage, which was founded in the 12th century and,
as explored in Chapter Two, one whose incarnations played a major role in the life,
previous lives, and later incarnations of Pema Lingpa. The 15th Karmapa was recognized
by Jamgön Kongtrul, Jamyang Khyentse and Chogyur Lingpa, as well as other masters,
but it was Jamgön Kongtrul who provided the Karmapa with the majority of his
instruction in the Kagyu tradition. In 1898, the 15th Karmapa went to Bhutan to give
teachings and offer empowerments, and during this trip visited the Bumthang region. The
15th Karmapa is shown with his characteristic black hat, and holding a vase of longevity
in his lap with his left hand. His right hand is in the gesture of teaching and a lotus bloom
near his shoulder supports a traditional Tibetan book.

The final figure of this composition is another master with strong links to Bumthang;
namely, the Eighth Bakha Trulku (rba kha sprul sku) Rigdzin Khamsum Yongdrol (rig
‘dzin khams gsum yongs grol, b. 19th century). The Eighth Bakha Trulku is a key figure
in understanding the connections between the Tibetan region of Lhodrak and Bumthang
closer to the modern era. Considered both an incarnation of Pema Lingpa and of Dorje
Lingpa (rdo rje gling pa, 1346-1405), the Eighth Bakha Trulku was a student of the
Peling Sungtrul Tenpa’i Nyima (pad gling gsung sprul bstan pa’i nyi ma, 1843-1891). In turn, Tenpa’i Nyima was the maternal uncle of the first king of Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuck (o rgyan dbang phyug, 1861-1926). Because of this family connection, Tenpa’i Nyima suggested to his student, the Eighth Bakha Trulku, that he serve as chant master (dbu mdzad) to the king. The Eighth Bakha Trulku agreed, and over the next many years, was able to use his close relationship with the king to secure patronage for a series of renovations at Bakha monastery.

The Trulku remained very active in Bumthang, acting as patron for a large statue of Guru Rinpoche at the famous Kurje Lhakhang (sku rje lha khang), as well as a series of murals and smaller sculptures at the site.

After the death of Sungtrul Tenpa’i Nyima in 1891, it was the 8th Bakha Trulku that was sent to the Lhodrak region of Tibet to assume temporary control of the throne at Lhalung. While Lhalung had traditionally been held jointly by the Sungtrul and Thugse lineages of Pema Lingpa, at the time of Sungtrul Tenpa’i Nyima’s death, the Thugse lineage was experiencing significant tumult and was not well-organized between the years of 1775, which marked the death of Thugse Tenzin Chokyi Nyima (bstan ‘dzin chos kyi nyi ma, 1752-1775), and the late 19th century, when Thugse Kunzang Zilnon Shepa Tsal (kun bzang zil gnon bzhad pa rtsal, b. 19th century) was recognized. With the combined circumstances of the death of Tenpa’i Nyima and the lack of cohesion within the Thugse

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684 Tenpa’i Nyima is also known as Kunzang Dechen Dorje (kun bzang bde chen rdo rje).
lineage, it was necessary to have a strong presence on the throne at Lhalung. The 8th Bakha Trulku provided this grounding force and thus helped to stabilize Lhalung as a key seat for the Pema Lingpa lineage. 685

Further, in Bhutan during late 19th and early 20th century, intense power struggles were threatening to destroy the already-crippled central government as strong ruling families in the west and center of the country were seeking to gain control. One of the main families involved was that of Ugyen Wangchuck, who, like Pema Lingpa, was part of the Nyö clan. It was Ugyen Wangchuck who ultimately prevailed and in 1907, became the first hereditary king of Bhutan, shifting the governance of the Himalayan nation from theocracy to monarchy.

The Bakha Trulku lineage had been connected with the Peling Sungtrul line since the end of the 18th century, well before the connection between the Eighth Bakha Trulku and Sungtrul Tenpa’i Nyima. In fact, the Sixth Bakha Trulku Pema Kunzang Rigdzin (rba kha 06 pad+ma kun bzang rig 'dzin, b. 18th c.) was the son of Peling Sungtrul Kunzang Tenpa’i Gyaltsen (kun bzang brtan pa’i rgyal mtshan, 1763-1817) and was the teacher of Sungtrul Tenpa’i Nyima. As explored earlier in Chapter Two, these complicated family relationships frequently drove patronage and determined social status in early Bhutan, and to an extent, descendants of these and other long-standing lineages continue to enjoy a certain amount of high social rank. Yet in the early days, these relationships were crucial to securing sufficient patronage, resources and access. Thus, to have

reincarnations appear within the family, or within a particularly well-connected family was not by any means uncommon, and such unification was in fact necessary to consolidate power.

Figure 111: Tenth Bakha Trulku Pema Tenzin Thinley Namgyal performing a long life ritual at Tamzhing Lhakhang in 1996. From Bhutan: Mountain Fortress of the Gods, 142 (Photo by Christian Schicklgruber).
The Tamzhing Phala Choedpa (gtam zhing phag la mchod pa) is a three-day festival held in the Chamkhar Valley of Bumthang during the 10th-12th days of the eighth lunar month; roughly October in the Gregorian calendar. The program consists almost exclusively of terma dances originally composed by Pema Lingpa, and executed according to his recorded textual expositions, including performances he initially experienced in visions.

686 This is an expanded version of an unpublished conference paper, “The Cornerstone of a Legacy: Pema Lingpa and the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa,” given on March 17, 2012 at the Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting in Toronto, Ontario, as part of the panel “Festivals and Folklore: Legacy, Locality, and Identity in Eastern Bhutan.”
and later transcribed.\textsuperscript{687} Pema Lingpa’s autobiography notes that by the end of the master’s life, the Tamzhing festival had the “scale and function of a regional gathering.”\textsuperscript{688} Yet at some unknown point between the end of Pema Lingpa’s life in 1521 and the mid-1960s, the festival ceased being performed. Only limited ritual events took place at the temple, yet even these were intermittent.

It was also in the mid-to-late 1960’s that it was decided to re-institute the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa. A Tibetan dance master by the name of Kunzang Chimi was brought from Lhalung to Tamzhing, where he taught a series of dances to the monks\textsuperscript{689} as laid out in Pema Lingpa’s texts. He saved the Phurpa’i Tsa Cham, or Dance of the Wrathful Dagger Deity (phur ba’i rtsa ‘cham) for last, which was the very dance that Pema Lingpa performed at Tamzhing’s consecration ceremony in 1505 (Figure 113).\textsuperscript{690} Unfortunately, just after completing his instruction, Kunzang Chimi passed away.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{687} The schedule for the 2011 festival can be found at the end of the appendix.
\item \textsuperscript{688} Aris, \textit{Hidden Treasures, Secret Lives}, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{689} Information kindly provided by Tamzhing Drungchen Pema Kuenchab, personal communication, 16 January 2012.
\item \textsuperscript{690} According to informants at Tamzhing the phurba’i rtsa ‘cham is no longer performed in Tibet. Tamzhing is believed to be one of the only places the dance survives; however, it is not performed during each year. Rather, the phurba’i rtsa ‘cham takes place every second or third year. Tamzhing tradition maintains the dance was originally performed by Lhalung Pelgyi Dorje as a means to distract the anti-Buddhist King Langdharma before assassinating him. Volume Ma of the \textit{rg} ‘dzin pad+ma gling pa yi zab gter chos mdzod rin po che contains the entire text of the dance along with detailed instructions for its thirty-three steps (370-380).
\end{itemize}
The dances continue today, presented as taught and according to the 16th century texts that describes almost all of them. The festival dancers are comprised of about thirty monastics and twenty laymen. In early iterations of the festival, if a performer showed up late or made another mistake, he or she had to pay a fine in alcohol, which was then shared amongst the participants. The present Sungtrul Rinpoche noted that due to the effects of the alcohol, the dance programs were frequently performed improperly. Since

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691 Kunzang Pema Rinchen Namgyal (kun bzang pad+ma rin chen mam rgyal), b. 1968
this diluted the quality—and thus the efficacy—of the rituals, alcohol was banned and the performers’ fines are now levied in cash. During the course of festival events, there are behavior rules, requiring timely attendance, respectable action, and proper mindset of the participants; for example, each time a person arrives late they are levied a Nu. 35 fine (under US$1), while intoxication results in a Nu. 100 (about US$2) penalty per occurrence.

Residents of the community surrounding Tamzhing monastery contribute greatly to the festival, providing donations of money, food, drink and other refreshments, as well as traditional dancers, labor and general assistance. However, the ultimate sponsor is the local leader known as the Tamzhing Choeje, an aristocratic family descended from Pema Lingpa (Figure 114).

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692 At Tamzhing, a sign clearly delineates the expected behaviors of both monastic and non-monastic participants in the Phala Choedpa, and the resultant fines should those behaviors not be followed exactly. Excerpts are translated as follows: “In preparation, the grounds and the lhakhang must be fully swept and kept clean for the duration of the festival. Further, dancers must avoid reckless behavior and situations that might cause obstacles to arise. Every infraction results in a Nu. 35 fine. From the onset of morning, singers and musicians should offer peasant movements and sounds as offerings to all assembled. If this is not done and [people are not present and are] wandering around, fines will be levied the same as upon the dancers above. Being drunk while wearing the five colors is not permissible and it is absolutely necessary to behave properly. When the whistle sounds, it is necessary for all performers to be inside the dance house before the atsara emerges; otherwise, there will be a Nu. 100 fine for each infraction. All the dancers must start as stated above and abide in the Dharma and [the state of] non-being. Control your mind and keep this knowledge.” The document closes with a seal marked “Lhalung Community.”
Although in the past the Tamzhing Choeje was compensated for expenses through local tax revenue, this is no longer the case, yet the family is still responsible for supporting all the monks, monk dancers, and local dancers, as well as providing food and tea. Local
officials note that due to the limited number of households in the village—and thus sponsors—the size and scale of the festival must be limited, as expanding the program would simply be too costly for the Tamzhing Choeje and the local community. Thus, given that there is a large repertoire of dances that could be performed the monastery rotates a number of them annually, changing the program from year to year.\footnote{For example, the Phurba’i Tsa Cham was performed in 2011, and thus will not appear again until 2013 or 2014.}

On the eve of the first day, locals gather in a nearby rice paddy for the Mewang\footnote{me dbang chos ka}, or Fire Empowerment. The Mewang is a key component of local festivals throughout Bumthang.\footnote{Including at the Jampey Lhakhang Drup and at Thangbi Mani, which is held immediately after Tamzhing Phala Choedpa.} Each year, the monastic astrologer determines the most auspicious direction for the particular day. Orientation is especially important as the Mewang is thought to purify the participants of their negative actions and offer them powerful blessings, blessings that would be greatly reduced if it were carried out in a ‘weak’ or inauspicious location.

Residents consider the Mewang one of the two most important days of the festival. The head lama and the chant master of Tamzhing oversee the Mewang.\footnote{If mewang doesn’t happen, it is believed negative effects will result. Recently, the “Naked Dance” of Jampey Lhakhang, which includes a Mewang, was changed so that participants performed it wearing pants. For the duration of the tsechu, hail and storms were rampant, and other ill effects took place. The next year local officials returned the dance to its natural state.} They, along with a small group of monks, chant from one of Pema Lingpa’s revealed texts, the \textit{Lama Norbu}
Gyatso, before a large bonfire is lit. Inside the fire is a 'gegs, representing the obstructive spirits to be driven away and purged. Four local people dance around the fire wearing wrathful masks borrowed from Tamzhing monastery. Ritual music accompanies them as they perform three-step dances. One pazap, or warrior, emerges and stomps heavily on the ground, while tapping the earth with a banner-topped spear in order to drive out any lingering evil spirits. For the next two hours, locals circle around and jump through the flames in completely random order, creating a hectic yet festive environment.

All local residents contribute money towards the Mewang. This communal purification is ritualized through the actions of the Tamzhing monastic officials using one of Pema Lingpa’s key texts, and provides blessings for the individuals while also generating community cohesion. Thus the Mewang, along with the blessings of the Buddha Tsepagme and the protector deity Tsi’u Marpo on the final day, comprise the most important rituals for local residents.

For the duration of the festival, each morning, the Choedpa begins with the Geypo Gorcham, in which the three atsaras dance around the perimeter to establish the sacred boundaries for that day’s events. During the dance, one atsara wields a ritual cake (gtor ma) that will soon absorb the community’s evils and obstacles. As atsaras are generally dressed in red with red masks and known for their bawdy, boundary-pushing behavior,

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697 Lama Jewel Ocean, revealed at Lhodrak Mendo during Pema Lingpa’s second trip to Tibet in 1483.
698 Provided as rged po’i ‘gor ‘cham. Possibly 'gegs (obstacle)?
this particular torma-bearing joker stands out as he is handling an object used for purification. The white clothes and white mask he wears further distinguish this joker, who is in fact a monk. During the Gyepo Gorcham, the monk atsara performs a dance with the ritual cake ('gegs gtor), but does not speak or engage in the rude behaviors typically associated with the atsara. Rather, he communicates only through hand gestures and is involved in the ritual as the only one of the three who is able to handle a sacred ritual object. The other two atsaras are not capable of doing this, and thus the monk atsara is solely responsible in ensuring the sacred space will remain intact through the course of the day.

A key dance on the second day is the Phag Cham (phag ‘cham; Figure 115), which commemorates the founding of Tamzhing Lhakhang. Local dancers enact a vision attributed to Pema Lingpa of the goddess Dorje Phagmo (Skt. Vajravarāhī; Figure 116).
The tale relates how, when Pema Lingpa was seeking a place to set the foundation of Tamzhing, Dorje Phagmo appeared to him in the form of a boar who went to a certain
spot in the field and began rooting in the ground. Tradition maintains that this was where Pema Lingpa decided to place the foundation cornerstone of his monastery. The dance includes a welcoming procession and then the boar enacts digging at four locations, marking the four corners of the temple that would become the seat of his teachings.

Figure 116: Phag Cham of Tamzhing Phala Choedpa. Photo by Karma Rigzin.
Yet this account does not appear in Pema Lingpa’s text describing the founding of Tamzhing and seems to be a later, but widespread, oral tradition. In fact, as noted above, the autobiography of Pema Lingpa relates that the choice of the site was driven by a need for sufficient room for horseraces more than anything else. There is no mention of the goddess Dorje Phagmo, and if anything, reveals only that payment in alcohol has been a long-standing tradition in the area.

Thus, though Pema Lingpa’s text offers a first-person, contemporary explanation for the selection of Tamzhing’s building site, it was the popular oral tradition of a goddess manifesting as a boar that dance master Kunzang Chimi codified for performance in the Phag Cham. Given that the story accounts for the founding of Tamzhing specifically, it is unlikely that this particular dance came from Lhalung. So why might have Dorje Phagmo played such an important role?

Although Dorje Phagmo was an important goddess in many masters’ lives, Pema Lingpa seems to have had few documented encounters with Dorje Phagmo. He revealed a terma sculpture of the goddess around 1483 and his *Lama Norbu Gyatso* included two ritual texts dedicated to her practice. Yet these were two small folios out of more than twenty volumes of texts. However, Dorje Phagmo had played a key role in two previous lives of

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699 The sculpture was recovered from Lion-faced Cliff at Lhodrak Mendo, as recounted in *gter chen pad+ma gling pas zab gter bzhes tshul skor bshugs so* (unpublished document, d.u.), furnished to the author by Tamzhing Drungchen Pema Kuenchab, 26 February 2011. The *bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho* texts found were *phag sha nag po’i phan gnod kyi tra.kra nams in pad+ma gling pa’i gter skor*, Vol. Ja (7), 433-468 and *phag mo’i dbang chog yang gsang bla med in pad+ma gling pa’i gter skor*, Vol. Cha (6), 193-226, also revealed at the Lion-faced Cliff of Lhodrak Mendo.
Pema Lingpa, one which offered ‘evidence’ of the scale of Pema Lingpa’s future activities and the authority that would be imbued in him. In addition, I hope to show how Pema Lingpa’s contact with the Seventh Karmapa during the building of Tamzhing may have led to an emphasis on Dorje Phagmo in his sacred history, which may have given rise to her prominent role in the Phala Choedpa festival.

As related in Chapter Two, in his previous life in the 13th century, Pema Lingpa had been Pema Ledreltsel, who was also a treasure revealer. While meditating at Samye Chimphu, Pema Ledreltsel had a vision of the goddess Dorje Phagmo, who urged him to go to Lhasa. Once there, he met the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje. The Third Karmapa asked for and received the initiations of Ledreltsal, including ḍākiṇī-centered practices. The Third Karmapa was securely within the Dorje Phagmo tradition. This meeting between Ledreltsal and the Third Karmapa, which occurred after Dorje Phagmo herself told Ledreltsel to visit Lhasa, would later be considered an important exchange that foretold of when in the future Pema Lingpa’s would have a personal connection to the Seventh Karmapa.

Five years after his death, Pema Ledreltsel was reborn as the master scholar Longchenpa (1308-1363). In his youth Longchenpa spent a number of years in meditation at Samye. During these practices, Longchen had visions of Dorje Phagmo, who twice told

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700 Heart-Drops of the Dakini; See Aris, Hidden Treasures, 27-28
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Longchen that he would go on to be reborn in Bumthang, where in that life [as Pema Lingpa] he would be of even greater benefit to sentient beings.  

For Dorje Phagmo to appear before one of the most prolific and learned masters in Buddhist history and tell him that he will be of even more service as Pema Lingpa is quite remarkable indeed. It is also worth noting that the visions of Dorje Phagmo experienced by Ledreltsal and Longchenpa both took place at Samye Chimphu. Not only was Samye the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet and thus a major site in Buddhist history, but it was directly connected to Guru Rinpoche, considered the source of the terma tradition to which Pema Lingpa belonged. These links seem to offer additional layers of meaning to the Phag Cham, as those deeply familiar with the tradition would immediately recall these two important previous lives and their respective activities at Samye.

Further, Pema Lingpa’s own terma revelations at Samye Chimphu in 1487 were essential to his full recognition as a major terton. As Holly Gayley points out, it was after this particular revelation that Pema Lingpa’s sphere of influence, which was initially limited to the environs of Bumthang, was solidified through most of Lhodrak and other parts of Tibet. So we can see how these multiple layers of connections intertwined with the power of religious authority, the importance of discovering terma, and the transmission of

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701 Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, 629.
702 pad+ma las ‘brel tsel, 1231-1259
703 klong chen rab ‘byams pa; 1308-1364
704 See Gayley, “Patterns of Ritual Dissemination in Padma Gling-pa’s Treasures”
Pema Lingpa’s particular type of Buddhist practice, making Dorje Phagmo perhaps a more logical choice than initially expected.

It was while Tamzhing was being constructed that Pema Lingpa was summoned to Tibet to meet the Seventh Karmapa\textsuperscript{705}. Pema Lingpa had never been part of the monastic establishment; he was outside formal learning systems and by his own descriptions, frequently dogged by naysayers and skeptics. It is possible that his meeting with the Seventh Karmapa brought him not only contact with but some validation from the authority he may have craved, but he also may have been initiated into the Seventh Karmapa’s Dorje Phagmo practices as Pema Lingpa was initiating the Seventh Karmapa into his Nyingma terma cycles. While the Karmapa didn’t offer an ‘on the record’ opinion about Pema Lingpa’s legitimacy, he did agree they had shared connections in three previous lives. The Karmapa then asked for all of Pema Lingpa’s initiations, which the terton gave in full. It is likely that this interaction, which took place in 1503, is the reason that the Seventh Karmapa and Pema Lingpa are shown together in the mural composition of the eastern wall (See Chapters Three and Four). Taken together, these events account for a possible justification for the high-profile presence of Dorje Phagmo in the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa.

\textsuperscript{705} rang ’byung rdo rje,1284–1339. This connection with the Karmapa incarnation lineage would be echoed in Pema Lingpa’s own life, when, while building Tamzhing, the Seventh Karmapa summoned the terton to Tibet to request initiations from him. Pema Lingpa then included the Seventh Karmapa and the yi dam Dorje Phagmo, frequently associated with the Karmapa lineage, in the murals at Tamzhing. (This is explored further in the author’s forthcoming doctoral dissertation.)
The third and final day of the festival consists of wrathful deity dances, offerings to the protector deities, and the Drum Dance of Sangye Lingpa. But the main events are the last four components of the program, for which local residents and visitors turn out *en masse*.

First, monastic dancers perform the Chandren Ngama, a dance that prepares a ritual space in which the protector Tsi’u Marpo can arrive and take his place on the throne prepared for him (Figure 117). Tsi’u Marpo\(^\text{706}\) is significant here because he is one of Pema Lingpa’s key guardian deities. It’s worth exploring this connection further.

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\(^{706}\) *gnod sbyin tsi’u dmar po*. Tradition maintains that Guru Rinpoche conferred the name Great Red Yakṣa (*gnod sbyin chen po rtsi dmar*) specifically at Samye (Bellezza, 291).
Based on both textual and artistic evidence, recent research suggests that Pema Lingpa’s texts may reveal the earliest surviving Nyingma text dedicated Tsi’u Marpo, the main deity of Tamzhing and of the Phala Choedpa. The most frequently encountered forms of Tsi’u Marpo are typically attributed to the tradition of Ngari Panchen⁷⁰⁷, who is often credited with the formal elucidation of the deity’s practice. However, as Pema Lingpa is describing the paintings of Tamzhing, he refers to a retinue figure of Tsi’u Marpo (Black Life Demon, or srog bdud nag po) as one of deities in the courtyard wall paintings

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⁷⁰⁷ mnga’ ris paN chen pad+ma dbang rgyal, 1487-1542. For one example of his attribution as the individual who initially formulated Tsi’u Marpo in a thorough manner, see Ariane Macdonald, “Histoire et philologie tibétaines” in which she states, “[…] le gter ston qui a fixé la liturgie de Tsi’u dmar-po, au XVe siècle, Mnga’ ris pan-chen […]” (1025)
This figure closely follows a Karma Kagyu description of Tsi’u Marpo’s retinue, written by none other than the Third Karmapa, who as we noted, had contact with a previous incarnation of Pema Lingpa.

(Figure 118). Listed in the autobiography as gnod sbyin dmar nag (Dark Red Yakṣa). See Phuntsho, gter ston pad+ma gling pa’i rnam thar (221) and pad+ma gling pa’i gter skor, Vol Pha (16), 149. In Dagyab (195) and Nebesky-Wojkowitz (Oracles, 172), it is noted that deities of this type can be recognized by their mounts: dark horses with white hooves. Interestingly, at Tamzhing, the deity in question wears a mirror on his chest (a common attribute of Tsi’u Marpo and related deities), and carries a bow and arrow, drawn and ready to fire, with a sword sheathed at his hip. This is extremely close to the description of a wrathful deity elucidated as one of Tsi’u Marpo’s btsan, which comes from the gcod tshogs rin chen phreng ba, written by the Third Karmapa Ranjung Dorje (folio 94). In the Karmapa’s text, the implements are reversed (sword is drawn and upraised while the bow and arrow are on his hip at the ready) and the skin color is “yellow-white” rather than black. It seems likely that if Pema Lingpa followed the pattern seen elsewhere in the Tamzhing courtyard paintings, he may have subtly changed small details of other practices to make them distinctive, drawing inspiration from other masters yet also leaving his own mark. (See Chapter Four.)
The figure’s mount is easily distinguishable: a black horse with white hooves, and he carries the implements of bow, arrow and sword.  

Given that Pema Lingpa’s account of the construction of Tamzhing and the descriptions of the paintings within was written around 1503, when Ngari Panchen was in his mid-teens, Pema Lingpa’s references to Tsi’u Marpo and the presence of a retinue figure on the wall arguably predates the practice as promulgated by Ngari Panchen.  

Furthermore, Pema Lingpa had already visited Samye when he withdrew his terma in 1487, so there is a strong likelihood that Pema Lingpa had already encountered Tsi’u Marpo around the time that Ngari Panchen was born. In addition, Ngari Panchen was taught the Northern Treasure terma tradition (byang gter) in his late twenties by one of Pema Lingpa’s main students, Yolmo Trulku Shakya Zangpo. So it is possible that Ngari Panchen’s initial exposure to Tsi’u Marpo practice arguably could have been originally transmitted to him from the Pema Lingpa tradition via Shakya Zangpo. I suggest that as Pema Lingpa viewed his discovery at Samye to be the culmination of his revelations and ‘proof’ of his legitimacy to be so significant, that that may have been his motivation to install Tsi’u

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709 Side note: Immediately next to the Black Life Demon is a four-armed deity on a garuda. This is gnod sbyin nag po, the guardian of the southern direction around Samye Monastery. As both these deities are intimately associated with Tsi’u Marpo and Samye, it is not unreasonable to believe this could be a continuation of deliberate importation of Samye-based imagery in Pema Lingpa’s iconographic choices.

710 Gibson (201) suggests that Pema Lingpa may have the earliest surviving text to this deity, named there as Tsi ma ra. Nebesky-Wojkowitz (Oracles and Demons, 166) notes that Tsi ma ra is a common Sakya name for Tsi’u Marpo.

711 Another ter withdrawn at Samye in 1513. (Aris Hidden Treasures, 220, but not listed as terma. Recent translation by Maki and Rigzin suggests possible misunderstanding.)

712 yol mo gter ston shAkya bzang po, b. 15th century. Dudjom Rinpoche, The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, 806.
Marpo as the guardian deity of Tamzhing, and further to paint the protector’s image on the wall. As the Third Karmapa had written an exposition on Tsi’u Marpo, there is also a distinct possibility that the Seventh Karmapa initiation Pema Lingpa into Tsi’u Marpo practice during their visit as well.

Tsi’u Marpo, moreover, has his own interesting history. From at least the second half of the 12th century, the main protective deity of Samye was Pehar,713 for whom Tsi’u Marpo played merely a supporting role (Figure 119).714 But Tsi’u Marpo was a key protector deity for the Sakya tradition, who was in control of Samye during the 15th century. Tsi’u Marpo steadily grew in importance, eventually becoming the main protective deity at Samye after the Fifth Dalai Lama ritually moved Pehar to Lhasa.715

713 Macdonald, 1025
715 This shift culminated in the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso (ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617–1682), when Pehar was invited to and ritually installed in Lhasa as the main protective deity for the Ganden Phodrang, leaving Tsi’u Marpo as the main protector of Samye.
As we will see, the centrality of Tsi’u Marpo during the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa parallels Tsi’u Marpo’s role in safeguarding the source of Buddhist teachings in Tibet, a function arguably mirrored in Bhutan with his role as the guardian deity of Tamzhing. Further, Tsi’u Marpo’s connection with Samye also reminds us of Pema Lingpa’s own terma discovery at this richly layered source of Himalayan Buddhism and concurrently emphasizes his spiritual authority, derived from his success as a tertön. Thus, though the fiery Mewang on the eve of the festival’s inauguration is thought to impart some blessings on the local residents, it is the blessings of Tsi’u Marpo, conferred during the last stages of the final day, that are the most powerful and efficacious.
These blessings are given during the second of four events, in the course of a dance where a member of the monastic community dressed in the dark red mask of Tsi’u Marpo—marked here with the red arrows—moves through the thick crowd and then takes his place on the waiting throne. Attendees line up to receive blessings from Tsi’u Marpo and then additional blessings from a sculpture of Tsepagme, the Buddha of Long Life. This Tsepagme is one of many sculptures said to be created by Pema Lingpa himself and the third major event of the day. A series of masked dancers help to clear a path amongst the pushing, surging devotees, while a monk carries the statue of Tsepagme around the courtyard, offering its blessings to everyone (Figure 120).

716 Other works attributed to Pema Lingpa include a sculpture of him with similar stylistic characteristics at Kunzangdrak, as well as a self-portrait in the gonkhang of Tamzhing. Pema Lingpa is also credited with a number of wooden sculptures, golang-s (metal frying pans), swords, and other metal works, stemming from his apprenticeship as a youth with his maternal grandfather, who was a blacksmith.

717 Upon asking, the author was told that there are no special rituals for the image either before or after its public viewing. Frequently, there will be some sort of preparatory ritual or post-promenade ‘decontamination’ of the object in order to ensure its ritual potency remains intact. However, this is not currently the case with the Tsepagme at Tamzhing.
Figure 120: Procession of Tsepagme image, Tamzhing Phala Choedpa, 2011. Photo by Riam-Sarah Knapp.
And yet one more blessing remains—the fourth and final one that requires more than a bit of strength and endurance. The Tsenmar Wang (a gloss of tsi’u dmar dbang), also known as Phagpa Wang, or the ‘leather bag blessing.’ Two individuals stand among the crowd, wearing masks of misshapen human-like beings, which identify them as members of the retinue of Tsi’u Marpo. They each wield a large leather bag, inside of which are relics of Tsi’u Marpo, wrapped in white silk scarves and surrounded by tightly packed hay. The relics come from the wrathful deity shrine (mgon khang) of Tamzhing. As devotees pass by, the masked figures swing these hard, heavy bags like baseball bats, whacking the people on the back, legs, neck or head. This ‘blessing’ confers the power of Tsi’u Marpo—sitting nearby on his throne—directly on the entire community, one person at a time.

Conclusion

The Choedpa commemorate religious history while concurrently reminding the local populace of the link between their hometown Buddhist master and the ultimate source of Buddhist practice in the Himalayas, Samye. Further, the relations of Pema Lingpa’s previous lives and their exchanges with other Buddhist masters provided a source of authority that was incorporated into the visual program of Tamzhing, both in the interior paintings and the Choedpa dances. The Choedpa reaffirms the authority that Pema Lingpa initially imbued in Tamzhing when he gathered together his teachings and terma

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718 The officiants confirm that Tsi’u Marpo is the deity of Tamzhing’s mgon khang, which was also noted in Pommaret (1987), 28.
719 To be fair, children, the elderly and women are treated more gently during the Tsenmar Wang; most of the force is directed upon the bodies of young and middle-aged men in good health.
within the temple itself—an authority that was recently re-established for the Pema Lingpa tradition four centuries after its founding when it first offered shelter to the monks of Lhalung fleeing the Chinese invasion. Once again, the festival annually revitalizes that sacred space by performing Pema Lingpa’s revealed dances in its spacious courtyard, purging any negative residue from the residents themselves, their personal practice, and from the community as a whole, so they may continue on in their daily lives with the blessings and power offered by the Tamzhing Phala Choedpa.
Table 2: Schedule of Tamzhing Phala Choedpa 2011 (Dzongkha)

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**Tamzhing Phala Choedpa Schedule of Events**
October 6-8, 2011 (Bhutanese calendar: 10th-12th days of the 8th lunar month)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schedule for the tenth day (Oct. 6th)</th>
<th>Schedule for the eleventh day (Oct. 7th)</th>
<th>Schedule for the twelfth day (Oct. 8th)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Opening dance by atsarasar</td>
<td>1. Opening dance by atsarasar</td>
<td>1. Opening dance by atsarasar</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Laymen …Dance of the Sow</td>
<td>3. Laymen …Dance of the Wrathful (Deities)</td>
<td>3. Laymen …Dance of the Lord of Death (Yama)</td>
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<td>11. Laymen…Dance of Brahma</td>
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Table 3: Schedule of Tamzhing Phala Choedpa 2011 (English)
## Appendix G: Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phoenetic</th>
<th>Tibetan</th>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
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<tr>
<td>Buddha Śākyamuni</td>
<td>shAkya thub pa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chakmāhāra</td>
<td>lcags mkhar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chana Dorje</td>
<td>phyag na rdo rje</td>
<td>Vajrapāṇi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chang Gangkha</td>
<td>leang sgang kha</td>
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<td>byang chub rgyal mtshan</td>
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<td>spyan ras gzigs phyag bzhi pa</td>
<td>Chaturbhuja Avalokiteśvara</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chodrak Yeshe (1453-1524), Fourth Shamar</td>
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<td>chos ‘khor</td>
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<td>Dance of the Wrathful Dagger Deity</td>
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<td>Ider SKU</td>
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<td>rdo rje legs pa</td>
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<td>Gyalse Drukdra Namgyal (1735-1762)</td>
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<td>History of How the Mongols Were Turned Back</td>
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<td>‘jig rten skyong caturmahārāja</td>
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<td>rba kha sprul sku khams gsum rig 'dzin yongs grol</td>
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<td>Khandro Nyingthig (Innermost Heart-Essence of the Đākini)</td>
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<td>Translation</td>
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