


Ratsag Monastery and its Vajrayoginī Nāro Khecarī Statue

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he monastery of Ratsag (ra tshag) is a popular pilgrimage site located in the Yab (yab) Valley in Tolung (stod lung), near Lhasa.¹ The date of the founding of Ratsag Monastery is unclear, but appears to have taken place in the early 11th century. According to Go Lotsawa ('gos lo tsA ba, 1392-1481), and several other Tibetan historians, the monastery was built in Yab by Nanam Dorje Wangchug (sna nam rdo rje dbang phyug, 976-1060).² Nanam Dorje Wangchug was a student of Lume Tshultrim Sherab (klu mes tshul khriims shes rab, b. 10th century), a central figure of the Buddhist revival, and specifically of the revival of the Vinaya, which took place in Tibet during this period. Based on Go Lotsawa's dating of the Gyal Lhakang (rgyal lha khang) in Phenyul ('phan yul) to 1012, and his mention that Ratsag was founded before this, Hugh Richardson suggested that the foundation of Ratsag dates to somewhere between 1000 and 1012.³ Richardson noted, however, that the Ratsag pillar inscription, which he re-translated, makes no mention of Dorje Wangchug and instead states that it was Ra Bende Yontan Gyalpo (rwa ban de yon tan rgyal po) who built a temple (*gtsug lag khang*) on this site under the patronage of the noble Segu (se 'go) family.⁴ Richardson further notes that even if Bende Yontan Gyalpo simply rebuilt or renovated Ratsag at a later date, this still does not explain the lack of mention on the pillar inscription of Dorje Wangchug, whose name one would certainly expect to appear if indeed he was the original founder.⁵

Apart from identifying Nanam Dorje Wangchug as the founder of the monastery, some contemporary Tibetan pilgrimage guides also attribute its original construction to Ra Lotsawa (rwa lo tsA ba, 1016-

¹ The name of the monastery is spelled in a variety of ways depending on the source. Spellings include "rwa tsag," "rwa tshag," and "ra tshag."

² Roerich, 75.

³ Richardson, 538.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 537-538.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 539. For an argument supporting Dorje Wangchug see Akester, 200-201.

1128(?)).⁶ According to this variant of the story, Ratsag was one of 108 monasteries that Ra Lotsawa had pledged to build in order to purify karmic defilements accrued through his often violent ritual activities, which involved killing a number of bodhisattvas.⁷ This famous translator and teacher specialized in the wrathful practices of the tantric deity Vajrabhairava, which he brought to Tibet from Nepal. According to this narrative the "ra" (rwa) of "Ratsag" refers to Ra Lotsawa's clan name and "-tsag" (*tshag*) refers to "*tsag su tsu*" (*tshags su tshud*), meaning "efficient" or "successful"- thus signifying Ra Lotsawa's successful or well-organized completion of the full set of 108 monasteries, and this one in particular, which was the last of the set.⁸

It is unclear if the Ra Bende Yontan Gyalpo mentioned in the pillar inscription has any direct relation to Ra Lotsawa, although they appear to share the same clan name. Despite the early history of the monastery being inconclusive, the site today continues to be closely associated with Ra Lotsawa by the local community. Michael Akester, however, suggests that the association of the temple with Ra Lotsawa may have been exaggerated from the 15th century onward, when the site became home to Gelug (dge lugs) Vajrabhairava practitioners.⁹

According to the resident monks of the monastery, when Ra Lotsawa first arrived and stayed at Ratsag, he engaged in retreat on the location where the current small protector chapel (*mgon khang*) is located.¹⁰ On this spot he then built a clay statue of Ekavāra-Vajrabhairava out of many small pieces of clay (*mtheb skyu*), each of which was separately blessed with the recitation of 100,000 *Yamarāja* mantras of the deity.¹¹ The new statue, together with a statue of the protector Kālarūpa, are together currently the principal objects of veneration in the protector chapel. The Vajrabhairava sculpture is a replica of the one destroyed during the Cultural Revolution but contains the remaining fragments of the original, which were placed inside the new work.

⁶ chos 'phel, 99 and bshes gnyen tshul khriims, 239.

⁷ The source for this account appears to be Desi Sangye Gyatso's (sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653-1705) *Yellow Beryl* (*bai DUrya ser po* [bshes gnyen tshul khriims, 239]).

⁸ chos 'phel, 99.

⁹ Akester, 200.

¹⁰ Also see chos 'phel, 99.

¹¹ Ibid. According to a resident monk this statue was executed in the style of Ra Lotsawa (*rwa lugs*), although there is no evidence that such a style existed. Akester does not mention the belief that the clay statue was made by Ra Lotsawa, but instead notes a claim that it was made by Tsongkhapa (tsong kha pa, 1357-1419), although there is no mention of this in Tibetan sources (Akester, 202).

During his stay at Ratsag, Ra Lotsawa is said to have interred the hair of ten million *ḍākinīs* into a *stūpa* (Image 1) for the sake of freeing sentient beings of the future from the negative karmas which cause illnesses.¹² The *stūpa*, known as the Stūpa of Karmic Illness (las nad 'bum pa), was damaged during the Cultural Revolution. It has, however, been renovated and is often repainted with whitewash. As it is said that circumambulation of this *stūpa* has the capacity to heal even very serious illnesses that cannot be cured by medicine, people continue to visit Ratsag to perform circumambulations and prostrations.

The largest statue in the monastery is a two-storey high sculpture of Maitreya, flanked by a statue of Tsongkhapa. The Maitreya statue is a reconstruction of the original statue, which was of the same height. It sits inside the main assembly hall (Image 2), which has four pillars, together with walls which still display remains of old murals. The main temple building housing the assembly hall is three storeys high, as it was previously. The first floor contains the assembly hall while on the second floor one finds the Khecarī chapel (mkha' spyod lha khang), its famous Vajrayoginī statue (Image 3), as well as an actual footprint (*zhabs rjes*) of the deity. It is this statue which is, or rather was, the principal object of veneration at Ratsag. Today the original statue, which was lost during the Cultural Revolution, has been replaced by a smaller replica. According to all written Tibetan accounts the original statue used to be the principal meditational object, or more literally "commitment support" (*thugs dam gyi rten*), of the Indian tantric yogi Nāropā (c. 11th century), although the earliest known textual mentions of the statue appear to date from the 14th century.¹³ The original metal alloy statue was apparently about one and a half feet high.¹⁴ The statue was so sacred that it was believed to possess the potential to "liberate through seeing" (*mthong grol*).¹⁵

The full traditional narrative surrounding the statue, its role as Nāropa's personal object of devotion, its invitation to Yab, and its journey and stay in Tibet, are all recounted in a brief history entitled *The History of the Statue of Venerable Nāro Khecarī at Ratsag* (*rwa tshag rje btsun nA ro mkha' spyod ma'i sku'i chos 'byung lo rgyus*), a translation of which can be found at the end of this article.¹⁶ It is unclear what works this history is based on, although we know it was compiled by one of the Tagtsang (stag tshang) incarnations,

¹² chos 'phel, 101.

¹³ Akester, 200-201.

¹⁴ bshes gnyen tshul khriims, 240.

¹⁵ gong sa skyabs mgon bcu bzhi pa chen po, 4.

¹⁶ la dwags stag tshang sprul sku, 2015(?).

whose name is simply given as "Ladakh Tagtsang Tulku" (la dwags stag tshang sprul sku, d.u.). The work was completed with the sponsorship of the Yuthogpa (g.yu thog pa) family, who were the traditional proprietors of the monastery (*dgon bdag*).

According to this work, the statue self-manifested during the lifetime of Buddha Śākyamuni from the materials used by the god Viśvakarmā to craft the statues of the two famous Jowo (jo bo) statues of Lhasa- the Jowo Rinpoche (jo bo rin po che) and Jowo Mikyo Dorje (jo bo mi bskyod rdo rje), which are housed, respectively, at the Tsuglagkhang (gtsug lag khang) and Ramoche (ra mo che) temples. Although initially venerated by gods and *nāgas*, the statue eventually became Nāropā's devotional object and after his passing, it manifested the current iconography associated with Vajrayoginī Nāro Khecarī, with one arm extended, holding a curved *kartrikā* knife, and the other holding up a skullcup.

The statue was brought to Tibet by a young Khampa named Gyaltzen Zang (rgyal mtshan bzang). He was urged to do so by *dākinīs*, despite his parents' concerns of him travelling to India for the statue. Having acquired the statue with the aid of Vajrayoginī, Gyaltzen Zang returned to Tibet, with the statue acting as a guide, giving specific instructions on where she wanted to go and a geomantic description of what the place she was heading for was like. The descriptions given in the history are still recounted to pilgrims at the site today in both pilgrimage guides and by locals. According to this history, the four mountains which encircle the monastery all carry an auspicious or geomantic significance. The mountain in front is described as being "a curtain of white silk" (*dar dkar gyi yol ba*), as it shields the monastery from the view of anyone approaching from Tolung. The mountain behind the monastery is described as "a pile of precious stones" (*rin chen spungs pa*). The mountain on the right of the monastery is believed to depict self-manifesting representations of the consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet, while the mountain on the left depicts the vowels.

The mountain on whose slopes the monastery is built is also commonly believed to be sacred to Vajrayoginī's consort, Cakrasaṃvara. Indeed the history of the statue states more specifically that the mountain is known as the Palace of Cakrasaṃvara (dpal 'khor lo sdom pa'i pho brang). According to the biography of Ling Rinpoche Thubten Lungtok Namgyal Trinle (gling rin po che thub bstan lung rtogs rnam rgyal 'phrin las, 1903-1983), who was born in the area, the palace specifically refers to a rocky outcrop at the top of the mountain that today is still regularly coloured with whitewash and ochre stripes, and bedecked with prayer flags (Image 4). Ling Rinpoche's biography notes that it is

because of the location being associated with Cakrasaṃvara that the area is known by the name of "Yab," i.e. "father" in Tibetan, referring to this male deity.¹⁷

Upon their arrival at Yab, Gyaltsen Zang and the statue were met by a welcome party of divine beings. After the establishment of the statue at Yab, Gyaltsen Zang also remained behind and helped to develop the site. We are also told of later figures who venerated this famous Vajrayoginī statue. The first of these was Tsongkhapa, who offered several ornaments to the statue.¹⁸ The other famous devotee was the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lozang Gyatso (ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617-1682), who invited the statue to Drepung, although it was soon returned as it demanded to go back to Ratsag.¹⁹ He also made offerings to the statue, and composed a prayer for it. The prayer, entitled *The Chariot for Attaining Khecara* (*mkha' spyod sgrub pa'i shing rta*), can be found in his collected works.²⁰

Later the statue was invited to the Potala for a week. During this journey the statue was apparently defiled and thus purificatory bathing rituals (*khros gsol*) had to be performed. It was decided by the caretaker of the statue that in order to prevent further defilement the statue should not be invited or touched by women, by those with damaged tantric commitments (*samaya*), or butchers.²¹ He also decreed that the statue should not be embellished with further ornaments as it had already been ornamented with the blessed offerings made by Tsongkhapa and the Fifth Dalai Lama. Finally, the history ends with a note stating that the statue has the power to protect crops from frost and hail and bring timely rain.

Apart from this brief record, summaries of the history of the site can be found in pilgrimage guidebooks, which in general appear to have used *The History of the Statue of Venerable Nāro Khecarī at Ratsag*

¹⁷ gong sa skyabs mgon bcu bzhi pa chen po, 4. Vajrayoginī, on the other hand, is the mother (*yum*).

¹⁸ Tsongkhapa is known for having made elaborate offerings to several important statues during his life, including the renovation of the Dzingji ('dzing ji) Maitreya statue in 1395 and the ornamentation of the Lhasa Jowo and other statues of the Jokhang in 1409.

¹⁹ It appears that the statue was invited to Drepung in 1648 (Akester, 202).

²⁰ See ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, "phyogs bcu'i bde gshegs byang sems slob mi slob kyi dge 'dun dang bcas pa'i bstod tshogs dngos grub rgya mtsho'i gter mdzod," 13-15.

²¹ Popular Tibetan culture even today often precludes women from touching certain sacred objects or visiting particular shrines, especially the chapels of protector deities (*mgon khang*). The touch of people who break their tantric commitments and vows is considered especially defiling. Tibetans also generally believed that butchers, along with blacksmiths and workers from several other trades, were impure and thus were treated as outcasts.

as a source for much of their information. The famed Ratsag Vajrayoginī statue is mentioned in the biographies, autobiographies and histories of a number of authors, such as the history of the Shangpa Kagyu (shangs pa bka' brgyud) tradition, compiled by Tāranātha (tA ra nA tha, 1575-1634), who notes that it had been Nāropa's personal devotional object.²² The statue is also briefly mentioned in the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama, in relation to his invitation to the Potala of the statue at the age of 32. Not much information is given, however he writes that:

"... I invited the statue of the Vajra Queen, which was the commitment support of the Venerable Nāropa, from Ratsag. I made one hundred offerings (*brgya mchod*), engaged in the recitation of the profound yogas of the generation and completion stages, recited the *Prayer to See the Beautiful Face of Khecara* (*mkha' spyod zhal bzang lta ba'i smon lam*), and composed a praise and prayer."²³

By the 17th century the monastery was subsumed under Kyormolung Monastery's (skyor mo lung dgon) Punkhang (phun khang) college, and in 1694 had a community of 30 monks.²⁴ Not much appears to be recorded regarding the history of the monastery or its sacred objects in the 18th and 19th centuries. Estimates of the population of the monastery in the early half of the twentieth century range from 40 to 80 monks.²⁵ The monastery was converted to the Gelug tradition at some point in the 15th century, and continues to belong to the sect today.²⁶ Ratsag is associated with the Gomang College (sgo mang grwa tshang) of Drepung ('bras spungs) and in general follows the Gyuto (rgyud stod) tantric tradition.

Important Gelug scholars and teachers continued to make pilgrimages to the site, well into the 20th century. Trijang Rinpoche Lozang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso (khri byang rin po che blo bzang ye shes bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, 1901-1981) notes in his autobiography that he visited the monastery in 1943. While there he spent three days performing the self-entry (*bdag 'jug*) rituals, offerings and *gaṇacakra* related to the mandala accomplishment (*dkyil 'khor sgrub*) in front of

²² tA ra nA tha, 2008, 283.

²³ ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho. "za hor gyi ban+de ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i 'di snang 'khrul pa'i rol rtsed rtogs brjod kyi tshul du bkod pa du kU la'i gos bzang las glegs bam dang po," 216.

²⁴ Akester, 202-203.

²⁵ bshes gnyen tshul khriims, 240. According to a current resident, there used to be 80 monks at the monastery.

²⁶ Akester, 200.

the famous statue of Vajrayoginī, which he notes "blazed with the splendid light of blessings."²⁷ He further made offerings to the monastic community and granted the four empowerments into Vajrayoginī's *sindhura maṇḍala* to about one hundred monks, nuns, and lay followers during which he experienced a number of auspicious dreams.²⁸

Today the monastery still uses ritual texts composed by Trijang Rinpoche's own teacher, Phabongkha Dechen Nyingpo (pha bong kha bde chen snying po, 1878-1941), undoubtedly the most influential Gelug lineage holder of the Vajrayoginī cycle in the 20th century. Phabongkha had also visited Ratsag Monastery with a following of thirteen incarnate lamas and performed self-entry and *gaṇacakra* tenth-day (*tshe bcu*) offerings in front of the statue.²⁹ Phabongkha placed particular emphasis on the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra* as a whole, as well as Vajrayoginī, whose practice is drawn from this cycle. Although not one of the main deities prescribed by Tsongkhapa, the originator of the Gelug tradition, the Vajrayoginī lineage within the Gelug tradition certainly pre-dates Phabongkha, as is attested by works on the deity by authors such as Tagphu Lozang Tenpai Gyaltzen (stag phu blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1714-1762), Tuken Lozang Chokyi Nyima (thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 1737-1802) and Ngulchu Dharmabhadra (dngul chu d+harmab+ha dra, 1772-1851).³⁰ Although a number of important monasteries in Amdo had arguably been the principal centers of Gelug Vajrayoginī practice in the 18th and 19th centuries, Phabongkha's lineage grew to become particularly popular in pockets of Central Tibet, especially in the Lhasa region, and eventually in Kham. Today, Phabongkha's lineage of Vajrayoginī is firmly established as the most widespread in the tradition as a whole. Due to the popularity of Phabongkha and his lineage, the ritual works that he composed on Vajrayoginī are still in use in many of the monastic sites practicing the deity in the wider Lhasa region as well.

The monthly tenth-day Vajrayoginī offering at Ratsag is today performed using Phabongkha's work *Festival of Great Bliss* (*bde chen dga' ston*).³¹ Currently the monastery is home to a small community

²⁷ khri byang rin po che blo bzang ye shes bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho, 226.

²⁸ Ibid., 226-227.

²⁹ ldan ma blo bzang rdo rje, 903.

³⁰ Repo, 27-28.

³¹ pha bong kha, "bde chen dga' ston," 61-131. Phabongkha's works on other deities are equally popular. For a full list of the contents of his collected works, including his works on Vajrabhairava and Kālarūpa, who are also central deities at Ratsag, see Repo, 43-62. The Kālarūpa ritual, *Accomplishment of the Four Activities* (*las bzhi'i 'phrin las myur 'grub*), noted as not having been included in Phabongkha's

of less than ten monks, of whom only one has the proper qualifications and necessary empowerments required to execute the full ritual schedule of the monastery, and thus performs many of these alone. Which texts were used at the monastery prior to Phabongkha is unknown, although these may have included the Vajrayoginī works of the other Gelug authors mentioned above.

The entire monastery was badly damaged during the Cultural Revolution. The stone pillar, which had been pulled down, remained intact and was re-erected on the left-hand side of the main entrance. Rebuilding of the monastery, its chapels and *stūpa* began in 1984, with the help of the local lay community. Although both of the main statues of Vajrabhairava and Vajrayoginī are replicas, the resident monks at the monastery believe that the original Vajrayoginī statue brought from India may not have been destroyed. The statue had been collected and saved by the Tenth Panchen Lama, Chokyi Gyaltzen (paN chen chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1938-1989) at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), along with several other important sacred objects, such as the Guhyasamāja Mañjuvajra of Reting (rwa sgreng).³² Unfortunately the Vajrayoginī, the history of which is presented directly below, was never recovered.³³

The History of the Statue of Venerable Nāro Khecarī at Ratsag

Namo Guru

Dharmakāya, Vajradhara, The Pervading Lord of all Families,
Sambhogakāya, Yoginī, Mother of the Victors,
Nirmāṇakāya, Nāropa, Son of the Victors,
 May those worthy of homage always be victorious!

Here, I will explain a little of the history of the thoroughly renowned statue of the one known as the Supreme Mother of all Victors, the

collected works (Repo, 22-23), is in fact included in the compilations in both the Delhi and Lhasa editions (pha bong kha, "las bzhi'i 'phrin las myur 'grub," 274). It is unclear if the text was included in the original edition, a set of which appears to be held in the Potala's collection. The fact that the colophons of a stand-alone edition of this work note that it was extracted from the collected works and printed as a separate text do not preclude it from having been included within the set.

³² This story was recounted by a monk from Ratsag. The Guhyasamāja, however, survived and continues to be the main object of devotion at Reting (gzim sprul bstan 'dzin ye shes, 56).

³³ A synopsis of the history of the Ratsag Yoginī can be found in Akester, 200-202.

Venerable Vajrayoginī, the source of all excellent roots and branches of benefit and happiness.

Our teacher, the incomparable ornament of the Śākyas, first gave birth to the mind of supreme enlightenment, and following that, for three countless aeons he accumulated the [two] collections. Finally in Magadha he attained the state of *nirvāṇa*, completely perfected buddhahood.

Because of a supplication made by Ānanda, the *ūrṇā* between the eyebrows of the Bhagavān radiated light rays inviting the three gods Brahmā, Rāhula, Śakra and others. Brahmā and Rāhula crafted the supports of the *dharmakāya* and *sambhogakāya*. Then, for the *nirmāṇakāya*, Śakra piled up the precious jewels of gods, men and *nāgas* before the artist Viśvakarmā and after making requests, [Viśvakarmā] crafted the two twin Jowo [statues], inseparable from the actual *nirmāṇakāya*. From the first portion of the construction materials, the statue of the Venerable Vajrayoginī self-manifestly emerged in a dancing posture, brandishing a *kartrikā* toward the sky, holding a skull cup of blood at her heart.

The lord of the gods, Śakra, washed the body with nectar, while heroes and *ḍākinīs* played *ḍāmarus*, bells and jingle bells. Flowers rained down [from the sky] and the buddhas and male and female tathāgatas said "Wonderful! Wonderful!" and bestowed initiation. The bodhisattvas spoke auspicious verses, the earth shook, a tent of rainbow light appeared, together with a variety of other amazing omens. [The statue then] became a support for the offerings of the *nāgas*.

Then [later] after being invited by the *ḍākinīs*, it became the commitment-support (*thugs dam rten* [i.e. devotional object]) of Nāropa. When Nāropa passed away to Khecara, [the Vajrayoginī] proclaimed that, "If the guru goes to Khecara, then she should go to Tibet." Furthermore [the statue] conversed with Mahāpaṇḍita Nāropa directly, yet without [actually] speaking.

When Nāropa travelled to Khecara, [the Vajrayoginī statue] lowered her *kartrikā* to her lower garment in sorrow, [in the gesture of] cutting away all afflictions of conceptualization, and raised her skull of blood to the sky [as a gesture of] offering and of being satisfied by the taste of uncontaminated nectar. Her three eyes looked up toward the guru in pure Khecara, and thus she became known as "Nāro Khecarī."

As for the history of how the statue was invited to Tibet:

This mountain of Yab, which is described as being in reality a manifestation of the maṇḍala of Cakrasaṃvara, gave birth to three *ḍākinī nirmāṇakāyas*. They searched the three regions of Tō Ngari (stod mnga' ris skor gsum), and the four districts of U-Tsang (bar dbus

gtsang ru bzhi), for someone who could [bring the statue to Tibet], but could not find anyone. In Dokham Me (mdo khams smad) the karmically destined being, the ten-year-old Gyaltsen Zangchawa (rgyal mtshan bzang bya ba) was born.

To him the three *ḍākinīs* said "Do not stay here, go to India, you must go to accomplish something of great meaning."

He replied: "How shall I accomplish this?"

[The *ḍākinīs* said,] "It is time for the Mahāpaṇḍita Nāropa's commitment-support, the Venerable Vajrayoginī, to travel to the Land of Snows for the benefit of sentient beings, and you must go invite her. We will assist you." They then disappeared.

Not being sure of what happened, he went back home and told his mother and father the story of his experience. They said to him, "You must have had a mistaken vision."

When he reached the age of fifteen, the Venerable [Vajrayoginī]'s compassion aroused him to ask the father and mother, "Can I go to India?"

The father and mother said, "Do not go to India. It is a long journey, the road has great dangers, it is treacherous, it has rivers and so forth. The journey is difficult. Moreover, you should stay and care for your parents. [But] if you will not listen, then go to India. If you don't listen to us and decide to go in any case, then take this with you." After saying that they gave him one *dre* (*bre*) of gold dust, which he took with him and journeyed to Lhasa.³⁴ He prostrated in front of the two twin Jowo statues, made offerings, made prayers to avert obstacles, and then went on to India.

The Indians came to know through dreams that someone was coming to invite the Venerable [Vajrayoginī] to Tibet. They said [to themselves] that they do indeed have an unequalled holy object, and so some yogis guarded the waters, others guarded the footpaths, and others the vicinity of the temple.

The Venerable [Vajrayoginī], however, manifested as three *ācāryas* who asked [the Indians], "What are you doing? We are here to take the Venerable [Vajrayoginī], the commitment-support of Jowo Nāropa, to Tibet."

The other *ācāryas* replied, "You, do not talk like that! Due to a bad dream, us Indians have been guarding the temple for three years. [If you wish to take the statue], what could you offer in return?" The three *ācāryas* offered and distributed all of the gold dust and then left, almost as if they had stolen the [statue of the] Venerable [Vajrayoginī].

³⁴ The *dre* is a traditional Tibetan measurement of volume.

[On the journey back], when the boy [Gyaltsen Zang] got tired [from carrying the statue] on the dangerous roads, it is said that she flew in the sky. When he came from India, between there and their destination of Yab, the statue spoke seven times and left seven footprints, the first footprint being at Palmo Thang (dpal mo thang). Up to this point in the journey [the statue] danced three times during the day and three times during the night, without touching the ground.

At La Tö Tingri Langkor (la stod ding ri glang skor), while offering a vast *gaṇacakra*, the gathering asked about the location where [the statue] would benefit sentient beings.

She replied, "There is a place near to the Rasa Trulnang (rasa 'phrul snang) where the Śākyamuni [statue] dwells. This is the land of Yab where the sky is in reality two intersecting *dharmodayas*, and the earth, an eight-petalled lotus. The mountain behind is a pile of precious stones and the mountain in front, a covering curtain of white silk. All aspects of the vegetation and forests are manifestations of male and female bodhisattvas. From east to west, a slowly moving stream possessing the eight qualities flows unobstructedly. On the right mountain are the consonants and on the left mountain, self-manifested vowels appear. All males are heroes, and all females are heroines. There, to the lap of the residing Śrī Cakrasaṃvara, is where I, the Vajra Queen, am going."

They then went to Shu Kunga Rawa (gzhu kun dga' ra ba). [Gyaltsen Zang] asked if this was the correct place, but was told it was not.

They then went to Tölung Zhorang (stod lung zho rang) and again [Gyaltsen Zang] asked if this was the correct place, but was [again] told it was not.

They then went to Tölung Deng (stod lung denges) and once again [Gyaltsen Zang] asked if this was the correct place, but was again told it was not, and that it was a place called Yab Chawa (yab bya ba).

Having exhausted their search, they finally arrived, so the place became known as Thelchin Nyak (thal phyin nyag, i.e. "The Low Pass [to which they] Arrived"). Then he asked to where should they now go, and [she] said they have to go upward into the valley. Thus this place became known as Yena (yas sna, i.e. "Upper Tip").

Then after having travelled upward [into the valley], many sons and daughters of the gods and manifestations of Cakrasaṃvara descended from Tuṣita and met them with umbrellas, victory banners, pennants, incense, garlands and so forth, together with music and inconceivable offerings. The place became known as Jelsaga (mjal sa kha, i.e. "Meeting Place"). [Vajrayoginī] appointed the

daughter of a god as the goddess of place, and she became known as Ama Yul Lhama (a ma yul lha ma). The mandala of Śrī Cakrasaṃvara, was clearly beheld and so the place became known as Selpoi Dengkha (gsal po'i gdengs kha, i.e. "Clearly Appearing Face").

The [Vajrayoginī] flew up like a lion, jumping up into the sky and onto the rock face saying, "With the mother, the Vajra Queen, resting in the lap of the father Cakrasaṃvara, method and wisdom are inseparable, there is no greater benefit for sentient beings. Henceforth I shall remain here no matter what." A vast *gaṇacakra* was offered. She spoke further and left a footprint.

Then Gyaltzen Zang, acting as the principal attendant, gradually developed the site and expanded the Sangha.

At the time when Tsongkhapa travelled from Kyormolung to Gawadong (dga' ba gdong), he invited the Venerable Khecarī, possessing all good qualities, to Yabda Lhundrub Rabten (yab mda' lhun grub rab brtan), and offered her a crown and earrings, together with aspirational prayers.³⁵

After this the Lord of Victors, the Omniscient Great Fifth [Dalai Lama] was thinking about what to designate as the main devotional object (*rten gtso*) of Drepung Kungarawa ('bras spungs kun dga' ra ba) and invited this Venerable Khecarī. After 21 days [at Drepung] the statue said that she would go to Ratsag, to the palace of Cakrasaṃvara. The Lord of Victors, the Omniscient Great Fifth, then affixed a garland of 100 pearls and corals, a nine-layered garment, and canopies made of fine cloth. Immediately that evening the statue was dispatched with its attendant and two additional caretakers acting as escorts, and arrived at Ratsag before daybreak.

After this the [statue] was invited to the great Potala Palace and it stayed for a week. At that time, on the way back, when the statue's attendant passed through Shangkhar Dzong (zhang mkhar rdzong) he gave advice saying that the statue had been defiled and that a proper bathing ritual (*khrus gsol*) had to be immediately performed for the statue. He also said that, "Henceforth women, those with damaged samaya, widows, butchers and so forth should not touch or invite the statue. Because the golden face is the gold of the Jambū River, it is inappropriate to cover it with something else. Although the crown and earrings were affixed by the Great Je Tsongkhapa and have great blessings, as the Khecarī is in the manner of displaying sorrow at Nāropa's passing to Khecara, [further] random offerings should not be affixed to the statue, and should be re-distributed. Furthermore, it was adorned with a garment of nine layers, and offered praises, supplications and prayers, the composition of *The*

³⁵ This site is located at the lower end (*mda'*) of the valley.

Chariot for Attaining Khecara, and a great fine offering scarf. At best the caretaker of this [statue] will be a *bhikṣu*, if not then a *śrāmaṇera*, and if not then it must be one holding the discipline of a renunciate (*rab byung tshul khrim can*). The statue will protect the whole of the noble [region of] Shun Lhojang (shun lho byang) from frost and hail and cause timely rain to fall."

Here ends this brief history of this indispensable support of offerings.

Thus the Venerable Vajrayoginī, the commitment support of Nārotāpa, was invited from India and established at the monastery called Ratsag in the excellent land of Yab, with wondrous geomancy; a supreme field of merit for all living beings. As drafts of manuscripts [of this history] written by previous authors had become tattered due to wear and tear over many years, and the texts were in danger of disappearing, out of a wish arising from supreme faith, in order for limitless living beings to find truly meaningful leisure and endowment, our mother-like proprietors, the Yuthogpa family, on a virtuous day of the month of the Wood-Pig year requested a newly edited edition [of this history], which was then made by the one with the name of Ladakh Tagtsang Tulku, one who is known for having previously stayed at Ratsag Hermitage.

The supreme mother of the victors, Prajñāpāramitā,
 Appearing in the form of a beautiful charming lady,
 The one renowned as Queen of Khecara,
 The commitment support of the non-dual Mahāpañḍita Nāropa.

Through the staircase of merit created from these carved wood-
 blocks,
 Containing the pure seeds of the volumes of the history of
 This actual, wondrous and brilliantly splendid Yoginī,
 May all beings climb and arrive in the realm of Khecara.

These words of prayer were composed by the one with the name of Mogchog Tulku Yeshe Gyaltsen (smog lcogs sprul sku ye shes rgyal mtshan) at the request of Ratsag Kunyer Drepung Gomangpa Rinchen Chogyal (rwa tshag 'bras sgo mang pa rin chen chos rgyal).



Appendix - Images

Image 1. The Stūpa of Karmic Illness, Ratsag (Photograph by Matt Linden, 2015).



Image 2. The entrance to Ratsag Monastery's assembly hall (Photograph by Matt Linden, 2015).



Image 3. A replica of the famous Vajrayoginī statue at Ratsag Monastery (Photograph by Matt Linden, 2015).



Image 4. Ratsag Monastery, with the Palace of Cakrasaṃvara in the background (Photograph by Matt Linden, 2015).

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