

MEMORIES OF TSHURPHU

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The death of His Holiness the Sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa brought vividly to mind the several occasions when I had the privilege of meeting him and in particular two visits to his great monastery of Tshurphu.

The first was in 1946 on a journey from Lhasa to Gyantse by way

First visit to of Tolung and Nyemo. I was met some four
Tshurphu miles from the monastery by the Chandzo who
escorted me to the Rinpoche's summer house in a
pleasant grove of willows a little way from the monastery. A very
large and comfortably carpeted tent had been pitched with, in the middle,
a massive brass bedstead standing like an island in an ocean. The
Yab Kusho, the Rinpoche's father, entertained me to lunch after which
I was received by the Rinpoche himself in his bright, gleaming room
looking out on a little flower garden in which stalked a fine peacock.
His room was full of clocks of all kinds and was hung with cages of
the birds he loved--budgerigars and canaries.

The Rinpoche was then about 23 years old, a large, calm young
man with a ready smile and sense of humour. We enjoyed a long
friendly conversation; and then, as I had to leave early on the following
day, there was time for only a short visit to the
Meeting with monastery. On the next day I found that the
Rinpoche Rinpoche's kindness had preceded me and that
tents were pitched for my party at the halting
place in Kharkha Drok, a wide upland grazing ground scattered with yaks.
To the west, not far from my camp, the Lhorong Ma—chu flowed northwards
towards the Karmapa Zhamar monastery of Yangpachen about 30 miles
distant and too far for a visit. Beyond the river on the far side of the plain,
plumes of steam rose from geysers of hot water. The region is now a source of
geothermal power for Lhasa.

The grandeur and interest of Tshurphu Gompa, of which I had
previously heard little and which had not, I think, been seen by a
foreigner before, determined me to visit it again and

Visit to Tshurphu, I was able to do so in 1950 to say farewell
1950 to His Holiness before finally leaving Tibet.

After so many years my memory, even with the help of notes made

at the time, can only sketch inadequately a few salient features of the great monastery with its stately chapels and halls, wonderful images, frescoes and thangkas, and religious treasures of all kinds. I hope that some learned monk from Tshurphu now living at Rumtek may be moved to do for his old monastery what Dzasa Jigme Taring has done for the Jokhang at Lhasa and draw a detailed ground plan locating all the temples, chapels and so on, and listing their contents.

In the meanwhile, let me attempt to describe what I can. Although I have heard no definite news of the fate of Tshurphu in the " Cultural Revolution ", I fear that the past tense must be used. The monastery stood in the shelter of a scrub-covered hill on the north side of a high, bare and narrow valley. In front, flowed a small tributary stream of the Tolung river. After passing through a narrow gate in the high wall surrounding the monastery one came to

Description of Tshurphu monastery a wide paved courtyard with building on three sides, the west side being open. In the centre stood a stone pillar dating from the reign of Ralpachan and describing the foundation of a temple at Changbu in Tolung. It is opposite a flight of steep stone steps leading to a doorway, with a chain curtain, into what was perhaps a Gonkhang. I wondered whether this was the original site of the early temple but was told later that the pillar was formerly opposite the main assembly hall, further inside the monastery. No one seemed to know about the Ralpachan's temple or the name Changbu.

The principal temple, lofty and dark, contained the famous brass image of Shakya Muni, known as the Ornament of the World, made in about 1265 on the instructions of the second Zha-Nag hierarch, Karma Pakshi.

60 feet high brass image enshrined in principal temple It is was about 60 feet high and enshrined relic of the Buddha and of several early religious teachers. I had the impression that its head was rather flat. There is a well-known story that Karma Pakshi found the image was leaning to one side and that he sat in meditation beside it and by inclining his body brought the image to follow his movement back to the perpendicular.

The roof above the head of the image is surmounted by a gilded pagoda-rooflet (rgya phibs) which is said to be part of a very large

such roof looted from India by the Mongols and abandoned by them near the China border. Karma Pakshi found it but could not bring it all; the portion he did manage to bring was adapted to cover the head of the great image, its rather dark colour was said to be

due to its many vicissitudes. In the main temple there is a small chapel of Dus-sum Khyenpa, the first hierarch and founder of the monastery which is perhaps the oldest part of the whole series of buildings.

Another gilded roof surmounts a great hall in which were many Choten tombs containing the ashes and other relics of former hierarchs and other Karmapa Lamas. Fourteen of them were tall and massive, perhaps 40 feet high. That of Dus-sum Khyenpa with a simple clay-covered dome decorated lightly with painted figures reminded me of the tomb of Atisa at Nyethang. Round its base were some ornamental vases. Karma Pakshi's tomb was even more austere

and its uncoloured clay dome was without any sort of decoration. The tombs of later hierarchs were rather more elaborate but were mostly of black-painted clay with golden ornamentation, much simpler and more impressive than the lavish golden tombs of, for example, the Drigung lamas at Yangri Gumpa or Drigung Thil. There were also tombs and reliquaries of some Red Hat Karmapas and some of the Pawo incarnations including the great historian Tsuglag Threngwa.

I was also shown many fine gilded images including one of the Ninth Zha-mar-pa (Red Hat) Lama said always to radiate noticeable warmth; also one of Lama Zhang who at one time created difficulties for the Karmapas but was reconciled to Dus-sum Khyenpa; and a very gaunt image of Milarepa said to be self-created, very different from the sturdy figure carved in rhinoceros horn by a previous incarnation and kept with other precious images in the Rinpoche's private rooms.

Wherever I went the monastery was clean and well kept and the monks had an air of quiet discipline and seriousness.

Over the entrance to the principal temple is a wooden tablet painted blue and gold, given by the Chinese emperor Yung Lo and inscribed

with his name. The Emperor had a special devotion for the fifth incarnation, De-shin shek-pa as can be seen in the remarkable painted scroll depicting the fifth incarnation described and translated in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1959. It is about 50 feet long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet in height and has panels of elegant painting illustrating the miracle performed by the Lama on each of 22 days during his visit to China in 1407; alternating panels in gold lettering describe in five languages the subject of each painting.

There are also treasures from the earlier connection of the Zha Nag Lamas with the Mongol Yuan dynasty—porcelain Vases, a carved ivory panel in the Rinpoche's room, bronze images, and a great gold seal inscribed in "llor-yig", with a dragon on the handle. This seal is, I believe, safely preserved at Rumtek and examination should discover whether it is that given by Mongke Khagan to Karma Pakshi and later taken from him by Kublai and restored to the Lama Rangchung Dorje by the Emperor Togh Timur in 1331. I was also shown letters from Chinese Emperors and many other treasures including palm-leaf manuscripts.

One lasting memory of my second visit is the graciousness of His Holiness in offering to perform the wearing the Black Hat for our party. It is now fairly wellknown in Europe and America but at that time in was something of a mystery even in Lhasa; and my staff were awed and delighted by the ceremony performed. We were all deeply impressed by the solemn ritual with its bursts of thrilling music and by the grave concentration with which the Rinpoche performed it. At the end, when he gave me a scarf of blessing, which I still have, I was greatly surprised and moved to be greeted by him with the touching of foreheads (dbu-thug). And with that in my mind I join the myur-du gsol-'debs, the prayer that his reincarnation may speedily appear for the benefit of sentient beings.