

# **Digitisation of 20 remote Bhutanese archives (EAP1494)**

## **Details of holding institutions**

Lopen Dorji Gyeltshen, Culture Specialist, Loden Foundation

### **Buli Lhundrup Wösel Chöling**

Buli Gonpa, located on a hill overlooking the villages of Gaytsa and Urug in Bumthang, was once a prominent center of the Dorling Tradition of Buddhism in Bhutan. The temple, believed to have been founded by Tertön Dorji Lingpa, thrived under the stewardship of nine successive Lamas known as the Buli Trulku.

There are no written records about the exact founding of Buli Gonpa, so its history is largely based on oral traditions passed down through generations. According to these stories, during one of Dorji Lingpa's visits to Gaytsa, he observed that the hill where Buli Lhakhang now stands resembled the shape of a scorpion and was inhabited by a dangerous naga spirit that threatened the local people. To protect the community, Dorji Lingpa decided to build a temple on the hill to subdue the malevolent spirit.

Initially, Dorji Lingpa settled near Chuchi Lhakhang, but a remarkable event soon unfolded. His ceremonial hat, the Ugyen Pezha, mysteriously flew from its resting place and landed on the scorpion-shaped hill. Seeing this as a divine sign, Dorji Lingpa went to the site, tamed the naga spirit, and transformed it into a protective force for the Dharma. He then built a one-story temple, initially known as Phurling Gonpa, to commemorate the event. Over time, the name evolved to Buli Gonpa.

It is believed that Dorji Lingpa had several sons, and the temple was handed over to his son, Choeing. According to oral accounts, Choeing expanded the temple and established the aristocratic family known as Buli Choeje. After his passing, his reincarnation continued the work, thus establishing the lineage of the Buli Trulku. For generations, the temple was cared for by the Buli Choeje and the Buli Trulku. However, following an issue during the tenure of the 9th Buli Trulku, Khachab Dorje, the monastery came under the jurisdiction of the Monastic Body of Trongsa. Although a Lama was appointed to oversee the temple, day-to-day management was often left to a caretaker who could only provide minimal offerings.

In 2017, Buli Gonpa experienced a revival with the establishment of the Monastic School for Higher Buddhist Studies of the Dorling Tradition. Since then, the temple's archive has been meticulously cared for by the monastic community, ensuring its preservation and continued reverence for future generations.

Source: Oral accounts

## Chorten Nyingpo

Chorten Nyingpo Lhakhang, located in the village of Chunbi, Zung-Ngey Chiwog under Chumig Gewog, Bumthang, is a privately owned temple whose history is intertwined with layers of mystery and revered lineage. It is believed that the temple is maintained by descendants of Thuksay Dawa Gyeltshen, a direct descendant of the famed treasure revealer Pema Lingpa. The temple's founding is surrounded by multiple oral traditions; one account attributes its origin to Tenpai Nyima, father of Zhabdrung Rinpoche, while another claims it was founded by a lama of the same name from the Pema Lingpa tradition. Esteemed historians, including the 69th Je Khenpo, Je Gedun Rinchen, have largely supported the view that Yab Tenpai Nyima, Zhabdrung Rinpoche's father, was the temple's founder.

The Lhakhang's significance is further corroborated by historical records. The 4th Je Khenpo, Damchoe Pekar, visited this site and identified it as the sacred residence of Je Tenpai Nyima. Additionally, a royal decree from Bhutan's second king granted tax exemptions to the temple's caretakers, honoring their service and solidifying its spiritual standing. Known by different names over time, including Choekhor Nyingpo and Choeki Nyingpo, the temple is now commonly called Chorten Nyingpo. This name may refer to an "Ancient Chorten" near the Lhakhang, though the true meaning of its name and the details of its founding remain subjects of ongoing research.

Sources: (1) 'Brug rgyal sras sprul sku 02 kun dga' rgyal mtshan. (1985). *Dam chos pad dkar gyi rnam thar* (Vol. 1–1). National Library Of Bhutan. <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/W8683> [BDRC bdr:W8683]; (2) 'Brug rje mkhan po 69 dge 'dun rin chen. (1976). *Lho 'brug chos 'byung* (Vol. 1–1). *Nges don zung 'jug grub pa'i dga' tshal*. <http://purl.bdrc.io/resource/MW19809> [BDRC bdr:MW19809]

## Zhuri Lhakhang

Zhuri Lhakhang, situated in Kertsho Chiwog of Chumig Gewog, Bumthang, is traditionally believed to have been founded by Loreypa, a 13th-century Tibetan Buddhist master who traveled to Bhutan. After establishing the temple, Loreypa passed it down to his son, initiating the lineage of Zhuri Lamas who cared for the temple over generations. Although the exact timeline is unclear, the Zhuri Lama lineage appears to have ended some years ago. Currently, the temple is under the custodianship of a family believed to be descendants of the Zhuri Lama, while also serving as the community temple for the village of Zhuri.

Source: Oral Account

## Chumigpang Temple

Choedepung Temple, originally known as Chumeygpang Lhakhang, located in Chumeypang under Chumig Gewog, Bumthang, was founded by Lama Yeshe in 1966, reportedly in fulfillment of a prophecy by His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche and Polu Khenpo Rinpoche. After Lama Yeshe's passing, his relatives maintained the temple, which served as a community temple. In 2012, the community and caretakers unanimously offered the temple to Tang Rinpoche, who formally established it as a

monastery and renamed it Choedeypong, changing its original name, Chumeypong Lhakhang, which referenced its location. Since then, the monastery has become Tang Rinpoche's main seat and is home to 150 monks.

Source: Oral Account

### **Thubten Shedrup Dargyé Chöling**

Nimalung Monastery, nestled in the serene Nima Valley of Chumig Gewog, Bumthang, Bhutan, was founded in 1934 through the collaboration of Doring Trulku and Chumig Drungpa Gönpö Dorje. This joint effort aimed to create a sanctuary dedicated to preserving the profound Longchen Nyingtik teachings alongside the treasured traditions of the Bhutanese tertön Pema Lingpa. The initiative began when Doring Trulku, a Tibetan lama from Kham, sought refuge in Bhutan in 1933, forging a partnership with Chumig Drungpa, a regional official and spiritual patron, to bring their vision to life.

The construction of Nimalung Monastery, officially named Thubten Shedrup Dargyé Chöling, was guided by a focus on spiritual discipline and scholastic advancement. From 1934 to 1940, Doring Trulku oversaw its establishment as a vital hub for the Longchen Nyingtik and Peling traditions. He introduced key rituals such as the Karling Shitro Drupchen, an annual practice that continues to this day, and enriched the monastery's repository with sacred texts brought from Tibet. Under his stewardship, Nimalung flourished as a center for spiritual enlightenment and academic rigor.

Following Doring Trulku's return to Tibet in 1940, leadership passed to Kathog Lama Ngawang Thinley, who continued the monastery's growth and its role in the community. Over the years, Nimalung has expanded its scope, encompassing a Central Monastic Body, an elementary school, and a higher Buddhist studies program. Today, under the guidance of Tenzin Yeshey Dorji Rinpoche, an incarnation of Chabje Dudjom Jigdrel Yeshey Dorji, the monastery remains a cornerstone of Bhutanese spirituality, blending its rich heritage with a commitment to nurturing future generations in the path of wisdom and compassion.

Source: [https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Doring\\_Tulku](https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Doring_Tulku)

### **Katsho Gonpa**

Katsho Gonpa Lhakhang is perched on a ridge, surrounded by a few traditional houses above Katsho village in Katsho Gewog, Haa. From this temple, visitors can enjoy views of the picturesque Katsho village and Haa town, known as Lhayuel, meaning "Heaven." Opposite the temple lies another sacred site, Jana Dhingka.

The temple is said to have been founded by Lama Choeing Gyatsho, a disciple of Drakpa Gyatsho (1646-1719). Drakpa Gyatsho, a prominent figure in Bhutan's art history, was among the six Gyatsho disciples of Jamyang Pelden Gyatsho (1610-1684), widely known as Tsang Khenchen. He is credited with creating the first Thongdrol mural in Bhutan.

Drakpa Gyatsho had several disciples sharing the Gyatsho surname, including Namdrol Gyatsho, Paljor Gyatsho, Thinley Gyatsho, and others. Among them, Choeing Gyatsho was the chief disciple.

He was also the main throne holder of Jaba Jangchub Choling, a temple established by Drakpa Gyatsho.

Choeing Gyatsho is also known for authoring Drakpa Gyatsho's biography, titled "The Virtuous Key to Open the Door of Devotion." However, due to the absence of Choeing Gyatsho's biography, details about his origins and lifespan remain unclear, as does the exact date of the temple's founding. Nonetheless, His Holiness Je Gedun Rinchen indicated that Choeing Gyatsho founded the temple later in his life.

Oral accounts also describe Katsho Gonpa as one of the four major temples in Haa, alongside Yangthang Gonpa, Jadue Gonpa, and Takchu Gonpa. Sadly, the original Katsho Gonpa was destroyed by fire in the 1950s, resulting in the loss of nearly all its relics, except for the Kanjur, a statue, and a few cymbals. It is said that the Kanjur was saved by people from the fire, although two volumes are missing.

Initially, the temple was maintained by the lay priest of Katsho village, locally known as Chop. Later, due to modernization, lay priests disappeared. Therefore, in 2003, the temple was offered to the Monastic Body of Haa, which established a monastic school. Today, the temple is home to 11 monks and two lopens, who, under a principal, take care of the temple and perform daily rituals.

Source: dge 'dun rin chen (1976), *dpal ldan 'brug pa'i gdul zhing lho phyogs nag mo'i ljongs kyi chos 'byung blo gsar rna ba'i rgyan*. Bhutan: nges don zung 'jug grub pa'i dga' tshal

## **Anag Gonpa**

Anag Gonpa, situated in Anakha village under Sangbay Gewog, Haa, serves as a profound spiritual landmark deeply intertwined with the history and faith of the local community. While its exact founding date and builder remain unknown, oral traditions trace its origins to the reigns of the 55th Je Khenpo, Choglay Trulku Yeshe Nodrup (r. 1915–1917), and the First Druk Gyalpo, Ugyen Wangchuk (r. 1907–1926), estimating its construction between 1915 and 1926.

The temple derives its name from a striking natural feature: the letters A (ཨ) and Na (ན) appearing in the cliff below, overlooking a river that flows into the Amochu. This phenomenon inspired both the name Anakha for the village and Anag Gonpa for the temple. According to local elders, before its construction, the three-acre site was barren and believed to be an assembly ground for malevolent spirits. With the Gonpa's establishment, the area transformed into a verdant sanctuary, symbolizing its sacredness and spiritual significance.

Initially a private temple owned by the late Ap Adak and his family, Anag Gonpa was entrusted to the Anakha community in the 1990s. It has since served as a community temple, maintained through the collective efforts of the villagers.

The Gonpa sustained severe damage during the earthquakes of 2009 and 2011, prompting extensive reconstruction efforts. Initial funding came from the government, supplemented by community contributions and later financial support from the Gewog Administration. By 2020, structural renovations were completed, and ongoing interior work, including sacred paintings, aimed to restore its original grandeur. The temple was anticipated to be fully restored and consecrated by the end of 2022.

Today, Anag Gonpa stands as a testament to the spiritual resilience and unity of the Anakha community, embodying their shared heritage and enduring faith.

Source: <https://bca.clcs.edu.bt/2023/09/ana-goenpa/>

### **Tsuntshang Gonpa**

Tsuntshang Gonpa, also known as Tsentsho Gonpa, is a community temple in Sankari village. The credit for founding the temple is attributed to a Lama named Wangchuk Gyeltshen. However, detailed information about Lama Wangchuk Gyeltshen and the circumstances of the temple's founding remain unknown.

Source: Oral account

### **Zabdon Choling Monastic School**

Perched above Yangthang village, Yangthang Gonpa, officially known as Zabdon Choling, is one of the four major temples (Goenchen Zhi) in Haa, Bhutan. Offering panoramic views of the Haa Valley, the temple is more commonly referred to as Yangthang Gonpa, named after its geographical location.

Local folklore adds a mystical dimension to Yangthang Gonpa's setting. The ridge on which the temple is situated is said to resemble an elephant's head, with two streams flowing on either side, symbolizing the elephant's eyes. The temple itself is believed to rest on the elephant's nose, further enhancing its sacred and enchanting aura. The temple's founding is attributed to Lama Thinley Gyatsho, a disciple of Choeing Gyatsho, who founded Katsho Gonpa and was himself a disciple of Drakpa Gyatsho. Although details about these figures are sparse, their spiritual legacy continues to be deeply felt within the temple.

In 2018, Yangthang Gonpa underwent extensive restoration after being damaged by an earthquake. Notably, all the statues and wall paintings were preserved in their original state, ensuring the temple's historical and artistic authenticity remained intact.

Yangthang Gonpa is further distinguished by its association with Je Yonten Pelzang, the 36th Je Khenpo. A room dedicated to him as his residence is preserved within the temple. Haa's spiritual heritage is also highlighted by its production of two Je Khenpos, the other being Je Rigzin Nyingpo, the 49th Je Khenpo. A residence believed to have belonged to Je Yonten Pelzang still stands in Yangthang village, though some accounts, including that of Je Gendun Rinchen, suggest he originated from Katsho.

Originally, Yangthang Gonpa was under the custodianship of the community of Yangthang village in Bji Gewog. Over time, the community offered the temple to the Haa Monastic Body, which established the Zabdon Choling Monastic School in 2019. Renowned as one of the four major temples in Haa, Yangthang Gonpa remains a site of immense cultural and religious importance, reflecting the region's rich spiritual heritage.

Source: dge 'dun rin chen (1976), *dpal ldan 'brug pa'i gdul zhing lho phyogs nag mo'i ljongs kyi chos 'byung blo gsar rna ba'i rgyan*. Bhutan: nges don zung 'jug grub pa'i dga' tshal

## Trashī Choling Monastic School

Jadue Gonpa, one of the four major temples in Haa, is located opposite Upper Haa and adjacent to Talung village in Bji Gewog. This temple holds deep reverence among the residents of Upper Haa and Talung village.

The temple is regarded as the most powerful and sensitive among the four major temples in Haa. Local belief dictates that once someone visits this temple, they must continue to visit it annually. Folklore recounts an incident where a relic was stolen from the temple, only for the thief to publicly confess his crime the following day.

According to oral accounts, the temple is named Jadue Gonpa because it is situated on the knotted seal of a ritual dagger (ལུ་པའི་རྒྱ་མདུད་). The ridge where the temple stands is believed to resemble a ritual dagger or phurpa. However, some believe it is called Jamten Gonpa because its main relic is Buddha Maitripa. Historical documents also refer to it as Jatak Gonpa, meaning the "temple of the Indian Tiger."

Oral traditions attribute the founding of the temple to Barawa Gyeltshen Pelzang, though his biography and those of his successors do not mention this. According to Je Gedun Rinchen, the temple was taken over by Drubthob Chowang Tashi after Barawa Lama became involved with the five groups Lamas opposing Zhabdrung Rinpoche. Unfortunately, detailed information about Chowang Tashi remains elusive.

Originally belonging to the community of Jadue Gonpa, the temple was later offered to the Monastic Body of Haa, which established a monastic school for monks within its grounds. Today the temple is home for around 15 monks led by a principal. It also houses large number of manuscripts including Kanjur printed from Narthang woodblock. Currently, the temple is undergoing construction.

Source: dge 'dun rin chen (1976), *dpal ldan 'brug pa'i gdul zhing lho phyogs nag mo'i ljongs kyi chos 'byung blo gsar rna ba'i rgyan*. Bhutan: nges don zung 'jug grub pa'i dga' tshal

## Zhongar Dzong

Zhongar Dzong, perched on a ridge overlooking Lingmethang Town and Thidangbi Village in the Mongar District of Eastern Bhutan, was constructed in the 17th century during the unification of Bhutan under the Drukpa system. According to Tenzin Dorji, Zhongar Dzong was the third of six eastern dzongs established as administrative centers under the Drukpa regime. The dzong underwent significant expansion in the 18th century.

The name "Zhongar" is believed to have derived from "Zhongkar," meaning "White Bowl." As the narrative accounts suggest, the dzong received its name from a white stone bowl located nearby. Historical documents, including the narrative account of producing Zhongkar Kanjur cited by Tenzin Dorji in his book, refer to the dzong as "Zhongkar." Additionally, the wooden boards of the Kanjur collection housed at Mongar Dzong are inscribed with the script "Zhongkar."

At its peak, Zhongar Dzong was one of the largest in the country, stretching across four acres. Unfortunately, the dzong was destroyed by fire in the mid-19th century during political conflicts. Tenzin

Dorji recounts that the governors of the six eastern dzongs revolted against the Choetse Ponlop, prompting him to send Jigme Namgyel to quell the rebellion. The Dzongpon Rüchung of Zhongar Dzong, unable to withstand Jigme Namgyel's forces, attempted to ruin the dzong. Although the surrounding structures were completely reduced to ashes, the central tower miraculously survived the flames. Today, Zhongar Dzong stands as a ruin, visible from the Mongar-Bumthang Highway stretching from Lingmethang to Thidangbi.

After the fire, the administrative center of Zhongar was relocated to its present site, where the current Mongar Dzong now stands. The artifacts and collections from Zhongar Dzong that had been spared from the fire were also transferred to Mongar Dzong for safekeeping.

Source: Tenzin Dorji (n.d), *Shar Phyogs kyi Rje Dpon Byung Rabs*. Manuscripts

### **Tencha Gonpa**

Tencha Gonpa, perched gracefully atop a hill between Kichu Lhakhang and Drangay Gonpa in Lamgong Gewog, Paro, was originally under the care of Ngaba and Shomo village communities. According to oral tradition, this sacred site was founded by Barawa Gyaltshen Pelzang, the illustrious founder of the Bara Kagyu tradition in Bhutan. His connection to the temple is steeped in legend, which recounts his encounter with one of the Tsheringma deities, a group of five sister goddesses, while traveling to Drangaykha. In honor of these deities, he built the temple and entrusted it to their care, naming it Tenchoe (“entrusted”), which later evolved into Tencha Gonpa.

Another narrative adds depth to its history, suggesting that the temple was initially called Tingchu (“offering bowl”) because the ridge on which it stands resembles such a vessel. This duality of oral accounts underscores the temple's significance, both as a spiritual landmark and a site imbued with mythic origins. The sacred Tsheringma deities remain central to its identity, symbolizing its role as a protectorate temple.

In 2007, Tencha Gonpa embarked on a new chapter as a monastic learning center, when the Monastic Body of Paro established a school for monks within its grounds. This purpose further evolved in 2019 with the relocation of the Kila Gonpa nunnery to the site. Renamed Tenchen Gatshel Choling, it now serves as a prestigious higher Buddhist college for nuns under the Drukpa Kagyu tradition, continuing its legacy as a beacon of Bhutanese spirituality and education.

Source: Oral Accounts

### **Yongla Tengay Riwo Pelbar Dargeychoeling Gonpa**

Yongla Riwo Tengayling Gonpa, commonly known as Yongla Gonpa, is one of the most revered monasteries in Pemagatshel Dzongkhag, eastern Bhutan. Perched atop a mountain, the monastery commands a striking presence, visible from the national highway connecting Samdrup Jongkhar and Trashigang, near the junction leading to Pemagatshel. From this junction, it is just a 30-minute drive to the monastery.

Yongla Gonpa was established as a retreat center by Khedrup Jigme Kuendel, inspired by visionary instructions from his master, Rigzin Jigme Lingpa (1729–1798), the renowned tertön (treasure revealer)

and Nyingma master. Following Khedrup Jigme Kuendel's passing, the second Yongla Lama, Dorji Jamtsho, expanded the temple as part of his teacher's funeral rites.

Khedrup Jigme Kuendel, a native of Darlungkha in Wang, Thimphu, was guided by Jigme Lingpa to find a site resembling a ritual dagger (phurpa), symbolizing Tsari in Tibet, a place of great spiritual significance. His search brought him from Tibet through Bumthang, where he had a vision of the Dakini Blissful Queen. She directed him to the present-day Yongla site. Guided by this divine revelation, he established a meditation center there. Over time, his teachings and blessings attracted a growing spiritual community, and a nearby nunnery was later established under his guidance.

The monastery is renowned for its annual Vajrakila Drupchen, a sacred ritual believed to have been initiated by Khedrup Jigme Kuendel. According to local lore, during a frontier conflict between Bhutan and Assam, Dungsam Jadrung, a local chieftain, sought Jigme Kuendel's spiritual intervention. He conducted the Vajrakila Drupchen for a week, after which Bhutan emerged victorious. This event earned Jigme Kuendel the honorary title of Great Master from the central government.

Yongla Gonpa has undergone multiple renovations, the most significant being after the 6.1-magnitude earthquake in 2009, which caused extensive damage. The restoration, completed in 2019, expanded the original single-story structure into a grand two-story temple. Today, the monastery also serves as the summer residence of the Central Monk Body of Pemagatshel.

Throughout its history, 16 successive lamas have served as abbots of Yongla Gonpa. Many Buddhist masters and luminaries have blessed this sacred site, ensuring its legacy as a spiritual beacon. Yongla Gonpa continues to uphold Pemagatshel's spiritual heritage, serving as a center for the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse practice, cultural preservation, and community gatherings.

Source: Dozang (2018), *gdung bsam yongs la dgon pa'i chags rabs dpyod ldan mkhas pa'i mgul rgyan*. Bhutan: Yongla Gonpa

## **Tshelingkhor Lhakhang**

Tshelingkhor Lhakhang is located in Tshelingkhor village, within Zobel Gewog, Pemagatshel. The temple is believed to have been founded by a Lama named Rinchen Dorji, also known as Ratnavajra among the locals. He was a contemporary and colleague of Jigme Kundrol, the founder of Yongla Gonpa.

According to local tradition, the original Lhakhang was a two-story mud-walled structure facing Yongla Gonpa, known as Nagtshang. It is said that the temple faced Yongla because its founder was a close associate of Jigme Kundrol. However, over time, the Lhakhang was reduced to a single story, and its orientation was changed. In 2009, an earthquake caused significant damage to the structure, leading to the construction of a new temple in 2014.

Although the name of the Lhakhang suggests it was founded by a lay practitioner, as Nagtshang refers to the house of a noble family, it is believed that Ratnavajra did not have any descendants. After his passing, the care of the Lhakhang was entrusted to the line of Yongla Lams. During the tenure of the 10th Yongla Lam, Nado (popularly known as Lam Phucha), the Lhakhang was given to Tandin, also known as Meymey Umze, due to his role as the chanting master of Yongla Gonpa. Later, Tandin passed the Lhakhang to the Tshelingkhor community when the government requested the construction of a community temple. Since then, the Lhakhang has been operated as a community temple. While the

Tshelingkhor community is the current owner, the descendants of Meymey Umze have continued to care for the temple over the years.

Tshelingkhor Lhakhang is known for its annual ritual of reciting the Seven Great Treasures, a practice unique to this temple and not performed elsewhere in Bhutan. Another important feature was the Longchen Nyingthig ritual, performed in the Drukpa Kagyu tradition, though this ritual has been discontinued following the passing of Meymey Umze. Despite these changes, Tshelingkhor Lhakhang remains an important cultural and historical site for the Tshelingkhor community and its neighboring villages. The current temple still houses the collection of texts created by Ratnavajra centuries ago.

Source: Oral narratives

### **Pemachöling**

Woongchilo Lhakhang, officially known as Pemachöling, is situated in the heart of Woongchilo village in Nanong Gewog, Pemagatshel. Steeped in history and tradition, the lhakhang serves as a vital community temple for the residents of Woongchilo and neighboring villages. According to oral accounts and manuscripts preserved in its collection, the temple was founded by Lama Dawa Norbu, who is believed to be a descendant of Pema Lingpa, the renowned Bhutanese treasure revealer of the 15th and 16th centuries.

Oral tradition recounts that after constructing the temple and naming it Pemachöling, Lama Dawa Norbu sought a distinctive name for the surrounding area. While writing a text in the temple, he was visited by a woman named Ogyen Dema. When he asked for her suggestion, she proposed the name “Woongchilo,” meaning “vast plain.” Since then, the village has been called Woongchilo, and the temple gradually became popularly known as Woongchilo Lhakhang. Although the authenticity of this story is uncertain, manuscripts in the temple’s collection confirm that the area was previously called Tehphu and that the temple was once referred to as Tehphu Lhakhang, an alternative name for Pemachöling. Notably, a place named Tehphu still exists near Woongchilo today.

Historically, the region was home to several temples, including Regi Gonpa and Thongpgu Gonpa, which have since disappeared. Woongchilo Lhakhang is the only temple that has survived, continuing to serve as a spiritual and cultural hub for the community. It is believed that artifacts from the lost temples were brought to Woongchilo for preservation.

At one time, the lhakhang is thought to have been owned by an aristocratic family, though little is known about their stewardship or their eventual separation from the temple. Over time, Woongchilo Lhakhang transitioned into a community temple, maintained and supported by the villagers. Tragically, the original structure was destroyed in the 2008 earthquake. The temple was rebuilt in 2010, ensuring its enduring role as a center of spirituality and cultural heritage for future generations.

Source: Oral accounts and manuscripts in the temple’s archive

### **Talang Tashi Drugyal Monastery**

Tashi Drugyal Monastery, commonly known as Talakha Gonpa, is located on the ridge above Semtokha Dzong, overlooking the Thimphu Valley. It is believed to have been founded by Drukchen

Ngawang Chogyal, a Drukpa Kagyüpa master who traveled to Bhutan from Druk Ralung in Tibet. Ngawang Chogyal is credited with founding several temples in Bhutan, and his influence on the region is significant.

Although the monastery is widely known as Talakha Gonpa, official documents spell it as “rta lang kha” in Dzongkha, which carries a meaningful interpretation. Oral tradition suggests that the ridge on which the temple stands resembles a standing horse, providing a symbolic connection to the name. Some written sources also mention it as “rta la kha,” aligning with the local pronunciation. This interpretation suggests the place may have been associated with horses or that the ridge itself resembled one. Another possibility is that the name could be “ltag la kha,” meaning “ridge situated up above,” which fits the temple’s location above Semtokha Dzong.

The true meaning and origin of the name remain uncertain, lacking substantial evidence. However, it is notable that the first lama appointed by Zhung Dratshang, under the Government of Bhutan, was Sherab Gyeltshen, believed to be the reincarnation of Lam Tharpa Gyaltsen, the root teacher of Azhey Nangsa. Following Sherab Gyeltshen, Ngawang Lhundup, who later became the sixth Je Khenpo, succeeded him. It was Ngawang Lhundup who officially named the Gonpa Tashi Drukgyal, a name that has been used ever since.

Throughout its history, many Je Khenpo have served as the Talakha Lama before ascending to the throne of Je Khenpo. As a result, there is a widely held belief that serving as the Talakha Lama guarantees one will eventually become Je Khenpo. While it is unclear how many lamas have been appointed from Bhutan’s central monastic community, it is believed that there was once a surrounding community that paid taxes to the temple, though this community has long since disappeared. Today, the temple operates a monastic school, led by a Lama or Principal.

Source: Oral accounts

### **Lhadzong Tashigang Gonpa**

Lhadzong Tashigang Gonpa, gracefully perched atop a ridge amidst a dense forest and surrounded by traditional Bhutanese houses, offers a commanding view of the vibrant Hongtsho settlement below. Situated near the renowned Dochula Pass and a short distance from Thimphu, Bhutan’s capital, the temple holds significant historical and spiritual importance. Founded in 1769 by the 12th Je Khenpo, Kunga Gyatsho, then chief abbot of Bhutan’s Central Monastic Body, the temple initially served as his private residence. It was later expanded into a four-pillar structure, reflecting his aspiration to establish a center for learning. Although his vision of a full-fledged monastic school was only partially realized, students visited the temple during his tenure to study grammar and literature.

After Kunga Gyatsho’s passing, the temple was entrusted to the 13th Je Khenpo, Yonten Thaye, at the request of his disciples. Over time, it came under the care of successive Je Khenpos, including the 14th Je Khenpo, Tenzin Namgyel—a close disciple of Kunga Gyatsho—the 15th Je Khenpo, Kunzang Gyeltshen, and Yeshe Dorji, the reincarnation of Jamgon Ngawang Gyeltshen. Throughout these custodianships, Lhadzong Tashigang Gonpa remained a vital center for spiritual study and meditation.

According to oral tradition, Kunga Gyatsho’s nephew, Ngawang Chogyel, later assumed responsibility for the temple and played a key role in transforming it into a three-story structure. Eventually, the

temple transitioned into the community temple of Toeb Phendekha, a shift believed to have occurred after Ngawang Chogyel's passing, given his ties to the Toebisa region.

In 1993, the temple was returned to the Monastic Body of Bhutan, which established a monastic school on the site. Today, Lhadzong Tashigang Gonpa thrives as both a sacred temple and a hub of education, housing approximately 50 monks under the guidance of a principal and two teachers.

Source: Yonten Thaye and Ngawang Chogyel (2023), *Biography of Kunga Gyatsho*. Tshewang Rigzin (Ed.), Thimphu: Dorden Buddhist University

## **Sangzab Dzong**

Sangzab Dzong, perched on a hilltop overlooking Thimphu Valley, is the first dzong built by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel in Bhutan. Constructed in 1629 amidst conflict with the Five Lamaist factions, it was completed in 1631 and consecrated by Zhabdrung's teacher, Lhawang Lodrö. Zhabdrung established his dual system of governance here, and his son, Jampel Dorji, was born in the dzong.

Originally named Sa-Nga Zab Don Phodrang, meaning "Palace of the Profound Meaning of the Secret Teachings," it later became known as Sangzab Dzong. Locally, it is often referred to as Semtokha Dzong, named after its location.

In 1634, the dzong was captured by Tibetan invaders and accidentally burned, killing most of the invaders. It was reconstructed in 1671 by the 3rd Desi, Migyur Tenpa (1613-1680), and consecrated by Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1698). Over the years, it served as a residence for Zhabdrung's reincarnations and Desis, including Desi Jigme Namgyel, who passed away there. In the 1960s, the Institute of Language and Culture Studies was established at the dzong, later replaced by a monastic school. Today, it houses around 30 monks and serves as a monastic school. Sangzab Dzong remains a historic landmark, reflecting Bhutan's cultural and spiritual heritage.

Source: Phuntsho, K. (2013), *The History Of Bhutan*. UP: Random House

## **Samdruptsemo or Trashichoeling**

Khaling Gonpa, also known as Samdruptsemo Gonpa, overlooks the picturesque Khaling valley and is a prominent and vibrant temple in the region. This three-storied structure, built in the traditional Lhakhang style, houses numerous sacred relics, including possessions of Gyelsey Trulku Kuenga Gyeltshen, also known as Ghanapati. Notably, Khaling Gonpa is the only monumental structure in Bhutan associated with Gyelsey Trulku.

Local tradition credits the temple's construction to Gyelsey Trulku Kuenga Gyeltshen (1689–1713), the reincarnation of Jampel Dorji (1631–1681), the son of Zhabdrung Rinpoche (1594–1651). However, the catalog and narrative account of the Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines, a sacred collection housed in the temple, suggests that it was built by Gyelsey Trulku's father, Onpo Dorji.

The catalog, authored by Ngawang Pekar—a resident lama of Khaling Gonpa and a disciple of Gyelsey Trulku—documents that the Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines was created in the Iron Male Sheep Year, equivalent to 1751. It also notes that the temple received blessings from

Drukdra Jamtsho, a descendant of the Drukpa hierarch. While the catalog does not provide explicit details about the temple's construction, oral accounts from former caretakers recall that the temple was once known as Trashichoeling. This earlier name, supported by a manuscript catalog preserved in the temple, may have led some historians to mistakenly identify the site as the birthplace of Gyelsey Trulku. However, the biography of Gyelsey Trulku clarifies that the actual Trashichoeling, his birthplace, is located in or near Merak Sagteng.

Based on historical and oral sources, it is likely that Khaling Gonpa was established between 1701 and 1704. Initially referred to as Samdruptsemo Gonpa, the temple was later renamed Trashichoeling, possibly in honor of Gyelsey Trulku's birthplace. In the 20th century, it came to be known as Gonpung Lhakhang, a name likely inspired by its location. Today, locals commonly refer to it as Gonpa. Lopen Kunzang was the last resident lama of Khaling Gonpa. Following his demise, the temple was cared for by the local community. In recent years, it was formally offered to the Trashigang Monastic Body, which established a monastic school led by a principal. Currently, Khaling Gonpa serves as a center for spiritual learning and practice and is home to over 10 monks, continuing its rich legacy.

Source: The Biography of Gyelsey Kunga Gyeltshen and the Narrative Account of the Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines.

### **Khaling Nagtshang**

The Khaling Nagtshang, commonly known as Bokha Dzong among local residents, is a historic architectural gem nestled amidst verdant paddy fields near Dhangre village in Kholdung-Gomchu Chiwog. Located approximately two kilometers from Khaling town, the site is easily accessible via a well-maintained farm road and is surrounded by the villages of Dangre, Kholdung, Khochiphay, and Bremang.

Local tradition and historical accounts suggest that this lhakhang once served as the residence of the Khaling Jadrung. The title Jadrung referred to a local chieftain, specifically a Drungpa appointed by the central government to oversee administrative duties, including tax collection from Indian territories. Historical records mention several Jadrung posts across Bhutan, with two in the eastern regions—one in Dungsam and another in Khaling. However, detailed information about the Khaling Jadrung lineage and the timeline of their appointments remains sparse.

Manuscripts preserved in the Khaling Nagtshang and Khaling Gonpa collections offer glimpses into the history of these chieftains. Among them, a Jadrung named Japon Tshelha is prominently mentioned in the catalog and narrative accounts of the Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines collection. Japon Tshelha is noted to have served as the Khaling Jadrung during the production of this collection. The title Japon, denoting an official responsible for serving tea to the Desi or Je Khenpo, suggests that Tshelha's appointment as Jadrung was made directly by the central government. This indicates that the tradition of appointing Khaling Jadrung likely began after Khaling came under Drukpa governance.

Elders from Dangre village recall that the lhakhang was historically referred to as Nagtshang. The transition to the name Jadrung Lhakhang appears to be a relatively recent development, supported by written sources such as the biographies of the 13th Desi Sherab Wangchuk and manuscripts housed within the temple. These records consistently refer to the site as Khaling Nagtshang. Nonetheless,

many locals continue to affectionately call it Bokha Dzong, a name derived from Bong-ung Khar, meaning “castle of the wheat field.” This name aligns with oral traditions and historical evidence indicating that the area was once a significant wheat farm and the lhakhang served as the residence of the Jadrung.

Unfortunately, no comprehensive records exist detailing the number of Jadrung who served or the period when their appointments ceased. For many years, the temple was cared for by the local community, who maintained its association with the Jadrung. This enduring connection ultimately led to the temple’s current name, Jadrung Lhakhang. Today, the temple is under the custodianship of the Monastic School of Khaling Gonpa, ensuring its continued preservation and reverence.

Source: Oral Accounts and Manuscripts from the Archive of Khaling Nagtshang

### **Yonphu Ogyen Chöling**

Nestled in Kanglung Gewog of Trashigang Dzongkhag, Yonphu Lhakhang, officially known as Ogyen Chöling Lhakhang, stands as a remarkable symbol of Bhutan’s rich spiritual and cultural legacy. Located just below the road in Khangma along the Trashigang-Samdrupjongkhar highway, this historically significant temple was once the ancestral home of the aristocratic Yonphu Chöje family. Complementing the more renowned Yonphula Lhakhang, which is the residence of Yonphula Lam, Yonphu Lhakhang offers a deeper insight into the region’s religious traditions and its unique history.

Local tradition attributes the founding of Yonphu Lhakhang to Sangda, a son of the great treasure revealer Pema Lingpa. According to oral accounts, Sangda traveled to the area in search of a place to establish his lineage. After blessing the local community, the land was offered to him as a token of gratitude. This act of generosity gave rise to the name Yonphuel, meaning “gift offering,” which later evolved into Yonphu and eventually Yonphula. Today, Yonphula refers to the site of Yonphula Lhakhang, while Yonphu designates the area surrounding Yonphu Lhakhang.

However, historical evidence suggests that the temple was more likely founded by Drakpa Gyelpo or one of his descendants. Drakpa Gyelpo, another son of Pema Lingpa, is revered as an emanation of the deity Vajrapani, also known as Sanda. The oral tradition may have confused him with Sangda, the youngest son of Pema Lingpa. Additional sources indicate that the founder of Yonphu Lhakhang married into a local aristocratic family that claimed descent from Ratna Lingpa, a renowned Tibetan treasure revealer of the 14th and 15th centuries. This union established the Yonphu Chöje lineage, whose members served as the temple’s early custodians. Over time, Yonphu Lhakhang transitioned to community stewardship, managed by caretakers under the guidance of local lamas. In recent years, it was formally offered to Yonphula Rinpoche, ushering in a new chapter of spiritual leadership.

Yonphu Lhakhang is perhaps best known for its annual Tshechu, which holds a distinctive place among Bhutanese festivals. According to legend, the temple’s founder choreographed the festival’s mask dances during the temple’s early years. Among neighboring communities, the Tshechu is uniquely called Kholong Tshechu, or the “Festival of Fighting,” a name derived from the belief that disputes would often break out among attendees. This intriguing tradition has brought fame to the festival, drawing visitors from across the region to experience its vibrant and colorful celebrations.

Today, Yonphu Lhakhang remains a vital spiritual and cultural hub under the leadership of Yonphula Lam. The temple houses a priceless collection of ancient manuscripts, safeguarding Bhutan's literary heritage and ensuring the continuity of its cultural traditions. Following a major renovation in 2022, Yonphu Lhakhang continues to serve as a beacon of spirituality, connecting the community to its rich religious history while preserving its legacy for future generations.

Source: Oral accounts

## **Trashigang Dzong**

Trashigang Dzong, perched majestically on a rugged ridge, serves as both the residence for the monastic community and the administrative center of Trashigang District, one of the six districts of Eastern Bhutan. Its origins date back to the 17th century, a pivotal time when Zhabdrung Rinpoche established Bhutan's dual system of Pelden Drukpa. Constructed in 1659, the dzong emerged following the successful conquest of local chieftains in eastern Bhutan by Drukpa forces, led by Kudrung Pekar Chophe, also known as Pekar Gyeltshen, and Umze Damcho Rabgay. The dzong was founded by Umze Damcho Rabgay, who is believed to have followed Kudrung Pekar Chophe's guidance during its construction. Kudrung Pekar Chophe became the first Dzongpon (fortress governor) of Trashigang.

In the centuries that followed, several dzongs were built in the surrounding region. Among them, Kiling Dzong in the east remains the only survivor, while others, such as Thongsa Tadzong in the south, Gosung Phupo Dzong in the west, and Dzongmae Tara Dzong in the north, vanished without a trace, believed to have been destroyed by Tibetan invaders during the reign of the 8th Desi, Druk Rabgay.

Despite the fate of neighboring dzongs, Trashigang Dzong's central tower has withstood the test of time. Though renovations and repairs have been carried out due to occasional fire incidents, the central tower has remained largely unscathed since its inception.

Initially serving as the administrative center and residence of the regional governor, the Trashigang Dzongpon, the dzong gained additional importance in 1774 when the Trashigang Dratshang, the monastic center of the region, was established under the leadership of the revered Lam Neten. Since then, it has served as both an administrative and monastic hub.

Trashigang Dzong holds immense significance as one of Bhutan's most sacred and vital monumental structures, particularly in the eastern region. It is the sole survivor of the six dzongs constructed in the 17th century in Eastern Bhutan. Beyond its architectural importance, the dzong houses invaluable historical documents, making it a treasure trove for the people of the eastern region and a resilient symbol of Bhutanese heritage.

Source: bstan 'dzin rdo rje (n.d), *shar phyogs kyi rje dpon byung rabs blo gsar rna ba'i rgyan*. Manuscript

## **Kupijigsa Lhakhang**

Perched atop a hill in Dargayling Kharthung Chiwog, Yangnyer Gewog, Trashigang, Dechenchöling Lhakhang is a temple deeply woven into Bhutan's history and local legend. Known locally as

Kupijigtsam Lhakhang, it holds close ties to the legacy of Pema Lingpa, the 15th-century treasure revealer, and the spiritual narratives surrounding his son, Drakpa Gyelpo.

Oral tradition and some Bhutanese historians attribute the temple's founding to Sangda, the youngest son of Pema Lingpa. According to legend, Sangda's visit to the site was marked by an extraordinary and auspicious event—a cuckoo singing out of season, a rare and significant omen in Bhutanese culture. A rock near the temple, bearing what are believed to be the cuckoo's footprints, stands as a lasting reminder of this mystical moment. Inspired by the cuckoo's divine song, Sangda is said to have established the temple, interpreting it as a heavenly blessing.

However, the Diamond Cutter Sutra, produced from woodblocks carved at the temple, offers an alternative narrative. Its colophon attributes the temple's founding to Drakpa Gyelpo, a descendant of Pema Lingpa. It reads: "The woodblock is carved at Dechencholing temple to ensure the flourishing of Pema Lingpa's teachings and the longevity of Drogon Yabsey, the descendant of Drakpa Gyelpo, who was in turn an incarnation of Sangda." In this context, the reference to "Sangda" likely alludes to Vajrapāni, the deity embodying the Power of Buddha, rather than Pema Lingpa's son. This distinction enriches the temple's spiritual and historical narrative.

The temple is called Kupijigtsam, commonly translated as "the cuckoo sings" or "the temple sings cuckoo." However, historical evidence suggests that its original name may have been "Kupijigsa," meaning "the place where the cuckoo sings." This subtle difference ties the temple even more closely to its legendary origins.

Though the original temple was modest, the current structure was built in 2009 after the original was damaged in an earthquake. Despite this, Dechenchöling Lhakhang remains the spiritual heart of Yangnyer village. Since its founding, the temple has been cared for by a dedicated community of lay practitioners known as the gomde. The tsholop, or community lama, leads the gomde in spiritual matters and appoints a caretaker, the kon-nyer, who preserves the temple's artifacts and ensures the continuity of religious practices.

The lineage of caretakers plays a crucial role in maintaining not only the physical structure of the temple but also the intangible cultural and spiritual heritage of Yangnyer. Through their devotion, Dechenchöling Lhakhang continues to thrive as a vibrant center of faith, safeguarding its legacy for future generations.

Source: Oral accounts and '*Brug gi smyos rabs gsal ba'i me long* (the history of the smyos clan and Padma gling pa's lineages) by Lama Sa-nga