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Religious, Ecological, and Historical Politics in Inner
Asia, followed by Varia

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A preliminary note on the successive renovations of Samye Monastery

Note préliminaire sur les rénovations successives du monastère de Samye

Lobsang Tenpa

How Samye became an important monument

- 1 Samye (bSam yas), the first Buddhist monastery established in Tibet, is one of the most important sacred sites in the Tibetan cultural world besides the Jokhang Temple (Jo khang) in Lhasa¹. It is located in the Chimbu (mChims phu)/ Dakmar (Brag dmar) valley, south of the capital city, Lhasa. In Tibetan, it is simply referred to as Samye Tsuklakhang (an abbreviation of bSam yas mi 'gyur lhun gyi grub pa'i gTsug lag khang, Inconceivable Unchanging Spontaneously Established Monastery). According to the "Testament of Ba" (*Ba bzhad*)², an important early Tibetan history, it was built during the time of emperor (*tsempo*; *btsan po*) Trisong Detsen (Khri srong lde btsan, r. 755-797/804) sometime between 763 or 775 (Hare Year) as the initial year, and 779 (Sheep Year) as the year the main shrine was consecrated. Other construction dates, from 787 to 799 through to 787 to 791 have been given by later Tibetan historians³.
- 2 Almost all Tibetan historiographies mention that Samye was modeled after Odantapuri Monastery, though Ne'u Paṇḍita stated that it is visioned after the ancient Nālanda monastery⁴. The central shrine with four surrounding branch temples itself represented the Buddhist universe, in the form of the Mount Meru and its surrounding continents. The layout is modeled after the three-dimensional mandala, which is dedicated to Buddha Vairocana. Interestingly, the central shrine consists of three stories, and all three represent the traditional architectural style in a layer of India, China, and Tibet. This signifies the cross-cultural relationships that influenced the development of Tibetan imperial power. The foundation of the monastery was initiated by Śāntarakṣita (725-788), the abbot of the Indian Buddhist learning center of

Vikramaśīlā. Padmasambhava (ca. 8th century) undertook further tantric rituals to subdue hostile spirits ensure the successful completion of construction. This led to the beginning of the first monastic institution in Tibet. Due to the influence of these two teachers, Buddhism in Tibet “represent[ed] two rather different forms of Buddhist practice, the one conventionally academic and monastic, and the other mystical and ritual”⁵. The three figures known as *khenlob chosum* (*mkhan slob chos gsum*) – Emperor Trisong Detsen, Śāntarakṣita, and Padmasambhava – played decisive roles in the foundation of Samye. They represent secular authority, the intellectual doctrinal view, and tantric supremacy respectively. These three themes have continued to have an influential role in Tibetan Buddhism and society, especially until the significant changes that took place in the 1950s.

- 3 However, while the tale of these three figures is well known, the foundations of Samye and Buddhism in Tibet were by no means straightforward. There was an intense rivalry between Indian and Chinese Buddhist missionaries for influence in Tibet, which led to debates between different propagator under the patronage of the emperor to be conducted at Samye. For a period of circa five years (793-797), the “Council of Lhasa” or “the Samye Debate” between (ca. 740-795, a disciple of Śāntarakṣita) and the Chinese monk of reportedly took place⁶. Besides the “Samye Debate”, Samye has been famously known for “Samye Stone Inscription and Samye Bell Inscription”⁷. Additionally, even the infamous Lhalung Pelkyi Dorje (lHa lung dpal gyi rdo rje, 9th century), who brought down the imperial house of Tibet by assassinating the last emperor Tri Udumtsen (Khri u’i dum btsan), better known as Langdarma (Glang dar ma, r. 841-842), took his monk’s vows at Samye⁸.
- 4 In the post-imperial period, Samye retained its significance and played a major role in reviving Buddhism in U-Tsang in the late-10th century under the guidance of Lume Sherab Tsultrim (Klu mes shes rab tshul khrims, d. 1017) and the group of Ba-rak (sBa rag tsho), and so forth⁹. Since Samye was Tibet’s first monastic institution, and other sectarian-based monastic institutes were not founded until late-11th century, Samye functioned as the main seat for many ordination ceremonies. The biographies of significant Tibetan masters suggest that ordination took place there until at least the mid-15th century, including for well-known teachers and scholars such Longchen Rabjampa Dreme Ozer (Klong chen rab ’byams pa Dri med ’od zer, 1308-1364), who was ordained there in ca. 1323-1324, and Thrimkhang Lotsawa Sonam Gyatso (Khrims khang lo tsā ba bSod nams rgya mtsho, 1424-1482) who was ordained in ca. 1433¹⁰.
- 5 Moreover, the library of Samye (bSam yas Pad dkar gling) was well known for its archive of Sanskrit texts. These texts were reportedly brought to Samye by Thumi Sambhota (Thu mi sam bhu ta), Vimalamitra, Padmasambhava, and other significant figures during the time of the Tibetan empire¹¹. Atiśa Dīpankara Śrījñāna (982-1054) discussed his experience encountering the library, stating, “as I open the archive (*dkor mdzod*) of the Samye Library, and look at those Sanskrit texts, there are many texts of *sūtra* and *tantra* which I had never seen before”. Similarly, in “The Blue Annals” (*Deb ther sngon po*), the author Goe Lotsawa (’Gos lo tsā ba gZhon nu dpal, 1392-1481) records that Atiśa said, “it seems that the doctrine had first spread in Tibet, even more than in India”¹². Similarly, the last abbot of Nālandā monastery, Kashmiri Paṇḍita Śākyaśrībhadra (1127-1225) got access to those texts when he visited Samye in ca. 1206-1207 (*Deb ther sngon po* 1984, p. 137)¹³.

- 6 Besides the historical significance of the library, Samye also gained its mythical prominence as the source of “Treasure texts” (*gter ma*). The discoveries of the texts such as “The four tantras” (*rgyud bzhi*), the Tibetan medical text in 1038 by Drapa Ngonshe (Grwa pa mngon shes, 1012-1090)¹⁴, two imperial Tibet-related texts *bKa’ mchems ka khol ma* and *Mani bka’ ’bum*, both ascribed to Songtsen Gampo (Srong btsan sgam po, r 617-649)¹⁵, and the “Ancient myths and history of Early Tibet” (*bKa’ thang sde lnga* 1997) by Ogyen Lingpa (O rgyan gling pa, b. 1323), are associated with Samye. Yet a successive abbacy list and its account have yet to surface. The significance of Samye in post imperial Tibet can be ascertained from successive renovations in the following centuries.

Pre-17th century renovations of Samye Monastery (late-10th-16th century)

- 7 After the fall of imperial Tibet, Samye gradually regained its importance and it was probably around the year of Water-Female-Ox (953) that different Tibetan patrons began to renovate parts of the Samye complex. Drumbarwa Jangchub (Grum ’bar ba byang chub) worked with the support of Lume Sherab Tsultrim and others to arrange for the restoration of Kachu (Ka chu) temple of Samye¹⁶. A few years later, in 957 (Fire-Female-Snake year)¹⁷, they built a new monastery called Solthak/nak Thangchen (Sol thag/nag Thang chen) in the lower Chongpo (’Phyong po) valley¹⁸, where Lume was appointed the first throne-holder, and Dring Yeshe Yonten was made the chief of Samye monastery. However, when continuous factionalist conflicts between members of the Lume and Ba-rak group (sBa rag tsho) lineages led to mismanagement and damage¹⁹, other monks started to claim Samye for their lineage. This conflict led to the greatest damage to the original Samye complex by fire in the year of the Fire-Male-Dog, i.e. 986 or 1046²⁰.
- 8 However, it seems that the damage to Samye was actually minor, because in 1046, Atiśa recorded how impressed he was with the collection of texts in the Library. In the mid-11th century, Jangchub Oe (Byang chub ’od, r 1037-1057) was the first person to initiate the major full restoration of Samye in 1047 after the visit of Atiśa. This restoration was carried out under the guidance of Zanskar lotsawa Phakpa Sherab (Zangs dkar lo tswa ba Phags pa shes rab, ca. 11th century)²¹. Yet as the conflict within the Lume and Barak lineages could not be settled and since many of them belonged to the ruling clans’ families, and potentially due to concerns about their objections, the damaged Samye complex and its surroundings were abandoned for many years. Only in the 1140s did Ra Lotsawa Dorje Drakpa (Rwa lo tsā ba rDo rje grags pa, 1016-1128) begin the rebuilding and renovation of Samye. His biography states that he reached Samye with around 2000 of his disciples, and it took about five years to complete the full renovation of Samye²². Goe Lotsawa in *Deb ther sngon po* (1984, p. 459) too recorded that:
- He [Ra Lotsawa], with the help of his miraculous powers carried juniper timber up the stream, and five hundred workmen, including brick-layers [*gyang btang*], carpenters, goldsmiths, blacksmiths and image-makers [*painters*], and so on, worked on it for three years. The scholar Rin chen rdo rje supervised the work. In general, about 100 000 loads of building materials were used. With the remaining supply of colors he [Ra Lotsawa] restored the courtyard of the main temple and the dbu rtse (chief temple of Samye). The work took two years to complete. The building materials comprised 10 000 loads²³.

- 9 This wide scale renovation of Samye by Ra Lotsawa lasted for many years, and was followed up only by several smaller restorations. Such restorations could have been due to the deterioration of wood, or wear on the buildings. One such restoration took place in the early 13th century (ca. 1200-1203). It was undertaken by Drikung Choeje Jikten Gonpo ('Bri khung chos rje 'Jig rten mgon po, 1143-1217), who gathered donations for a new temple to house the reliquary of Phakmodrupa Dorje Gyelpo (Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po, 1110-70) in 1198 at Densathil (gDan sa thel, est. 1158), the monastery of Phakdru Kagyu (Phag gru bKa' rgyud), and kept part of the contributions for the rebuilding of Samye. Although he founded the temple together with Taklung Choeje Tashi Pel (sTag lung chos rje bKra shis dpal, 1142-1209), he was afraid that the temple complex was likely to be destroyed in a feud between the two chieftains of Ngamshoe (Ngams shod) of Central Tibet who were in conflict at the time²⁴.
- 10 The next major renovation occurred only after 150 years. In the interim, both Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyaltsen (Sa skya paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan, 1182-1251) and Longchen Rabjampa (based at Samye), occasionally managed some minor restorations. In one of these restorations, Sakya Paṇḍita had the famous *domtson dampā* (*sdom brtson dam pa*) diagram painted on the front door of the monastery; however, there is not any record of actual building activities²⁵. It was in 1347, under the supervision of Sherab Pal (Shes rab dpal, 14th century) with further guidance from Sonam Gyaltsen (bSod nams rgyal mtshan, 1312-1375), that a restoration project was started, but it seems to be not a complete renovation. Sonam Gyaltsen resumed this project in 1356²⁶. A century later in around 1466 a large-scale renovation took place under the patronage of Thrimkhang Lotsawa²⁷. The *Deb ther sngon po* (1984, pp. 961-962) describes this renovation:
- [Thrimkhang Lotsawa] repaired the bSam yas khrims khang gling, and placed in the centre (of the altar) the images of Mahābodhi with its retinue, the images of Śāntarakṣita and rGyal ba mchog dbyangs, together with two golden *caityas* enshrining the relics of his [i.e. Thrimkhang?] father²⁸.
- 11 Afterwards, between 1533 and 1534, an additional restoration of Samye took place. This time it was led by Ngari Paṇchen Pema Wangye (mNga' ris paṇ chen Padma dbang rgyal, 1487-1542) and Rinchen Phuntsok (Rin chen phun tshogs, 1509-1557), who was the 17th abbot of Drigung Monastery. Both had conducted an extensive re-consecration ceremony after Ngari Paṇchen had discovered a Treasure text called "The condensed essence of the Vidyadhara" (*rig 'dzin yong 'dus*), in the back of an image of Vairocana in the upper hall of Samye monastery (Einhorn 2013).
- 12 However, it seems that the 1533-1534 restoration was on a minor scale, because beginning in 1551 Rinchen Phuntsok, who retired from the abbatial throne in 1534, together with Trengpo Sherab Ozer ('Phreng po shes rab 'od zer, 1518-1584), an influential monk trained in Sakya-Geluk-Kagyu disciplines, started to discover some other Treasure texts in and in the vicinity of Samye (Deroche 2011, p. 55, n. 24). As both monks were active both in Samye and the surrounding regions, and in order to legitimate their activities around the monastery and in response to the material effects of the passage of time on the monastery, another restoration of Samye took place. This led to a major restoration project in 1556, which was led by the 23rd/24th Sakya throneholder, Ngakchang Kunga Rinchen (sNgags 'chang Kun dga' rin chen, 1517-1584). He held the position for fifty years, and during those periods, he restored numerous Sakya institutions and, also rebuilt Samye. After the restoration, in 1561 he even established an institute for monastic education at Samye (bSam yas rab byung grwa tshang)²⁹.

The history of Samye from the 17th century to the mid-20th century (1600-1959)

- 13 The next renovation and rebuilding of Samye took place during the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama Lobsang Gyatso (Ta la'i bla ma Blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617-1681). This was one of the longest, as well as most comprehensive, renovations in Samye's history, and included every part of the Samye main complex and its surrounding structures. The rebuilding or renovating took around 32 years from 1645 (Wood-Bird) to 1676 (Fire-Dragon) to finish, and was supervised and sponsored by Sakyong Gadenpa Dorjee Namgyal (Sa skyong dga' ldan pa rDo rje rnam rgyal, 17th century). Sakyong Gadenpa's ancestral family has been rural aristocrats since the Tshalpa rulers of Phakdru (14th-15th century). After the Phakdru lost the civil wars against the Ganden Phodang (dGa' ldan pho brang, 1642-1959) in 1642, the 5th Dalai Lama had reinstated the family estates in 1645 with additional estates of Samye Dzong after gaining confidence in the family. Between 1645 and 1676 Dorje Namgyal himself supervised the ongoing renovation of Samye and he invited in 1662 the 5th Dalai Lama to re-consecrate Samye after the successful completion of the first stage³⁰.
- 14 Other leading spiritual leaders also sponsored and made donations towards the renovations. These figures included the 28th Sakya Throne-holder, Ngawang Kunga Sonam (Ngag dbang kun dga' bsod nams, 1597-1660) in 1659³¹, and the first Dzogchen Drubwang Pema Rigdzin (rDzogs chen grub dbang Padma rig 'dzin, 1625-1697) with his youngest disciple, Rigdzin Nyima Drakpa (Rig 'dzin nyi ma grags pa, 1647-1710). The latter two also claimed that they had contributed funds when parts of Samye were damaged by fires (Gardner 2009). The mission started by Dorje Namgyal was continued by his son, Lhagyal Rabten (lHa rgyal rab brtan, 17th-18th century), who held the regent (*sde srid*) position during the Dzungar Mongols campaign in Tibet. In 1717 he contributed to the rebuilding of some of the statues in the main shrine (Thub bstan rgyal mtshan 2008, 376-377).
- 15 A few years later, Samye needed further renovation. In 1722, a restoration project was carried out by Sonam Dargye (bSod nams dar rgyas, d. 1744), the father of the 7th Dalai Lama Kelsang Gyatso (Ta la'i bla ma bsKal bzang rgya mtsho, 1708-1757). This was initially intended to be a minor restoration, including the painting of the rooftop of the upper main temple in golden bronze. However, the scope of the work gradually extended to include a number of other areas after Samye bu tshal, referring to Samye u-tse (dBu rtse) section, which had been damaged by fires and decay³². In between those restorations, the 7th Dalai Lama visited Samye and performed a consecration; he also composed a directory (*bSam yas dkar chags* II). The third restoration in that century took place a few decades later, in 1769-70 under the guidance of the 6th Demo Rinpoche Jampel Delek Gyatso (bDe mo rin po che 'Jam dpal bde legs rgya mtsho, 1722-1757-1777). At that time Demo Rinpoche was holding a regent (*rgyal tshab/ sde srid*) position during the minority of the 8th Dalai Lama Jampel Gyatso (Ta la'i bla ma 'Jam dpal rgya mtsho, 1758-1804). The restoration was sponsored by the central Tibetan government, which took initiative to restore Samye as needed due to damage or decay³³.
- 16 Before Samye was again destroyed by fires in 1816, during the reign of the regent the 8th Tatsak Kundeling Tenpe Gonpo (rTa tshag kun bde gling bsTan pa'i mgon po, 1760,

r 1789-1810) and in the presence of the newly recognized 9th Dalai Lama Lungtok Gyatso (Ta la'i bla ma Lung rtogs rgya mtsho, 1805-1815), the walls of the main complex were renovated in the 7 months following the 1806 Lhokha earthquake³⁴. This restoration was supervised by Khenpo Kelsang Choedak (mKhan po bsKal bzang chos grags, 19th century) under the guidance of the regent himself, who had also re-consecrated the complex with the sponsorship of the central government. However, ten years later, in 1816, the whole Samye complex was destroyed by fire.

- 17 Under the supervision of Lobsang Thapkhe (Blo bzang thabs mkhas, 1787-1827)³⁵ with special guidance by the Minister Shedra Dondup Dorjee (bKa' gung bshad sgra Don grub rdo rje, r. 1808-1839), a seven-year long project to rebuild Samye was sponsored by the central government with other donations. It was one of the longest rebuilding projects that took place after Ra Lotsawa's restoration in the 11th century and the Gadenpa in the 17th century. As the 10th Dalai Lama Tshultrim Gyatso (Ta la'i bla ma Tshul khriims rgya mtsho, 1816-1837) was a minor, the regent, the 7th Demo Rinpoche Thupten Jigme Gyatso (bDe mo rin po che Thub bstan 'jigs med rgya mtsho, 1778- r. 1811-1819) initiated the rebuilding, but after he passed away suddenly in 1819, the newly enthroned regent, the 2nd Tsemonling Rinpoche Jampel Tsultrim Gyatso (Tshe smon gling rin po che 'Jam dpal tshul khriims rgya mtsho, 1792-1864, r 1820-1844) conducted the re-consecration in 1824³⁶.
- 18 The renovated Samye did not survive for a long time due to the 1847 Lhokha Earthquake, which brought down the central structure of the main temple and its surroundings stupas. Those ruins were further damaged by successive rainfall. With official grants sanctioned by the regent, the 3rd Reting Rinpoche Yeshe Tsultrim Gyaltsen (Rwa sgrenge rin po che Ye shes tshul khriims rgyal mtshan, 1816-1863) during the reign of the 11th Dalai Lama Khedup Gyatso (Ta la'i bla ma mKhas grub rgya mtsho, 1838-1855), a renovation project was first led by Minister Sarjungpa Noejin Phuntsok (gSar byung pa gNod sbyin phun tshogs, 19th century) with 700 workers. The whole year of 1848 was spent conducting a survey, preparing, and, of course, conducting necessary rituals, and by early 1849, the actual construction work was started. In 1854, the complete renovation of the main temple, as well as other structures within the Samye boundary, was completed. In the interim, in mid-1850, the initial leader of the project, Minister Sarjungpa, suddenly passed away. The assignment was handed over to the Shedra family to complete.
- 19 Minister Shedra Wangchuk Gyalpo (bKa' gung shad sgra dBang phyug rgyal po, 1795-1864), who became the regent from 1862 until his death in 1864 after overthrowing Reting Rinpoche in an internal conflict, supervised the renovation project. Besides the structural renovations, most of the murals and paintings in the temple, as well as several parts of the complex, were restored or rebuilt. Besides the workers and supervisors, monks and lay officials, contributed to the project and the religious leaders from most of the sects performed consecrations at the site. A grand official consecration was conducted earlier during a 21-day visit of the 12th Dalai Lama to Samye in the 7th month of the year 1852. The 9th Tasak Kundeling Lobsang Tenpe Gyaltsen (rTa tshag kun bde gling Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1811-1854), who was the senior tutor of the 12th Dalai Lama, presided over this grand event with other leading monks³⁷.
- 20 There were no further renovations undertaken until 1935. This was the last restoration of Samye before the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1951, and this time also the catalyst

was a financial grant from the central government. It was completed by 1937. As the necessary materials like the wood and iron were allowed to be transported without obtaining the concerned *kalon* (*bka' blon*)'s clearance, the lead supervisor, Parkhang Khenchen Gyaltsen Phunshok (Par khang mkhan chen rGyal mtshan phun tshogs, 20th century) was able to renovate the major part of Samye main temple as well as other structures within a short period. The regent, the 5th Reting Rinpoche Jampel Yeshe Gyaltsen (Rwa sgreng 'Jam dpal ye shes rgyal mtshan, 1910, r. 1934-1941, 1947)³⁸ did the consecration himself with great fanfare.

- 21 During the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976, the majestic Samye was completely destroyed. The next rebuilding therefore happened in the 1980s after the end of the Cultural Revolution³⁹. The first mention of Samye's destruction to the outside world was by explorer and author Heinrich Harrer, who returned to Tibet in 1982, over 30 years after his last visit to Lhasa in 1951. Here is what Harrer (1984, p. 32) described of his visit:

On our approach, in the Brahmaputra [i.e. Yarlung Tsangpo] valley, the first terrible sight we saw confirmed all the bad news about Tibet's oldest monastery, Samye; it was totally destroyed. One can still make out the outer wall, but none of the temples or *stupas* survives.

- 22 Even after the publication of Harrer's travelogue in 1984, there were no official government efforts or funds to renovate it. Gradually, local Tibetans started rebuilding Samye in 1984 after Geshe Ngawang Gyalpo (dGe shes Ngag dbang rgyal po, b. 1924) was appointed as the new head of the monastery with 25 new monks. After the visit of the 10th Panchen Lama Choekyi Gyaltsen (Pan chen bla ma Chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1938-1989) in 1985, he requested a special fund from the government in addition to the public donations, and the official rebuilding of Samye started in 1986. By the end of 1987, the Samye main temple was rebuilt, and allowed to function, but more as a museum instead of as a learning and spiritual center.

Conclusion

- 23 Since its foundation, Samye monastery has played a major role in the promulgation of Buddhism. In the 10th century, when Buddhism in Central Tibet was re-introduced from Eastern and Western Tibet, Samye began to be central to sectarian debates and claims. This can be observed at the earliest in the late-10th century in a conflict between the Lume (*kLu mes*) and the Ba-rak (*sBa rag*) groups, and Atiśa's departure from Samye after his short stay there. Following that, it was only in the mid-12th century that Ra Lotsawa first initiated a rebuilding project. Since then, each successive flourishing sect and its spiritual leaders in different periods have all participated in the rebuilding and renovating of Samye, all according to their own motives. Maybe they sought legitimacy or a good reputation by undertaking these projects; but the major reasons for the successive renovations were the fires caused by butter lamps and the decay of wooden building materials. These two-materials cause led to the frequency of renovations or restorations due to the inherent fragility of Tibetan architecture necessitating regular maintenance, and the absence of giving importance to the original materials of the first infrastructure. Although many renovators in early periods may have tried to make it the center of their own sect, the diverse identities and affiliations of the successive renovators demonstrates that Samye did not lose its primary character in retaining its non-sectarian origin. While Samye could not revive its glorious position as the center of

monastic institutions, its long history and association with many of the most important figures and events of Tibetan history have led it to remain as one of the most sacred sites in the Tibetan Buddhist world. Hence Buddhists throughout the Tibetan and Himalayan world regard pilgrimage to Samye as an essential activity that they should ideally experience at least once in their lifetimes.

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NOTES

1. Throughout in this paper I use renovation for large scale projects, and restoration for minor repairs. This Samye renovations' article is related to a paper presented by me at the 15th IATS conference in Paris 2019 about an autobiography of the Khams pa monk, Lobsang Thapkhe (Blo bzang thabs mkhas, d. 1826), who had renovated Tawang monastery between 1810 and 1811 and shortly after Samye Monastery from 1817 to 1825. He is known to have renovated some more monasteries in Tibet, but his contributions are not widely known, particularly his collection of alms for the renovation of Samye. I am thankful to the suggestions given to me at the conference which finally led to this paper. I would like to thank Guntram Hazod, Kumagai Seiji, Miguel Ortega and Dhondup Tashi Rekong for their comments on the initial draft, and Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa for her critical comments and editing the language of this article. As this paper is mainly about how and when those renovations have taken place, kindly refer to Chos 'phel 2002, pp. 34-37; mKhas grub 2009, pp. 24-29; Chayet 1988; Dalton 2004, pp. 68-69; Demiéville 1952; Tucci

1958; and Buswell & Lopez 2014, pp. 146-147 for short descriptions of Samye and of the Samye Debate.

2. Cf. *dBa'bzhed* 2000, p. 63, n. 201. See also Sørensen 1994, pp. 371-390 for the English translation of the passage concerning the construction of Samye in the text, *rGyal rabs gsal ba'i me long* (1375) by Sonam Gyaltan (bSod nams rgyal mtshan, 1312-1375). See also Sørensen's study "The grand histories of bSam yas and lHa sa" (*lha sa bka' gtsigs chen mo/ bsam yas bka' gtsigs chen mo*) in the same book.

3. See *Bu ston chos 'byung* 1988; *Deb ther sngon po* 1984, p. 70, etc. The latter dates do not seem viable because both the emperor as well as his famous teacher, Śāntarakṣita (725-788) were dead by that time.

4. See Anupam 2000 for a short description of Odantapuri Mahāvihāra, and Uebach 1987, p. 99 translation of Ne'u Paṇḍita's note on Samye being modeled after Nālanda Monastery. Both these monastic institutions flourished during the Pala dynasty (8th-12th century) in the area corresponding with the present-day state of Bihar in India.

5. Cf. Snellgrove & Richardson 1995, p. 78.

6. Adamek 2007, p. 288 notes that in one of these debates "the fate of Chan in Tibet was said to have been decided in a debate at the Samye monastery". Most of Tibetan sources recorded that the Indian Buddhist doctrine prevailed, but both the Indian and the Chinese philosophical views (or practices) continued to influence the development of Tibetan Buddhism. The continuation of the Chinese tradition can be seen in the idea of "simultaneous enlightenment" (*cig car gyi 'jug pa*) concept. The influence of the Indian doctrine, which is a proponent of the "gradual enlightenment" (*rim gyi 'jug pa*), can be denoted in the subsequent development of Buddhism in Tibet, and is even more pronounced in the so-called "New Lineage" (*gsar ma*) periods. See Namkhai Norbu 1984 and van Schaik 2007 on some interesting discussions on the connections between *rdzogs chen* and *zen*.

7. See Richardson 1985 and Doney 2014 for further details about the pillar and bell and their inscriptions.

8. Although this detail is not confirmed, Samten Karmay (2003) states that he even became its ninth abbot or the last person to hold the abbacy.

9. It has to be noted that Buddhism in Central Tibet was widely believed to have been discontinued but was actually kept alive in Southwestern Tibet (Ngari) and Northeastern Tibet (Amdo) from the mid-9th century to the mid-10th century. In Ngari, it was Lha Lama Yeshe Oe (lHa bla ma Ye shes 'od, ca. 959-1036) and his successor, Jangchub Oe (Byang chub 'od, r 1037-1057), who had revived it, and their efforts were enhanced by the visit of the Indian scholar Atiśa, and the great initiatives taken by Tibetans translators (*lo tsā ba*) such as Rinchen Sangpo (Rin chen bzang po, 958-1055), Dromtonpa Gyalwe Jungne ('Brom ston pa rGyal ba'i byung gnas, 1004-1064), and Marpa Choekyi Lodoe (Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros, 1012-1097), and so on. In Amdo, the Buddhist transmission was continued by Mar Shakya Muni (dMar shākya mu ni), Yo Gejung (g.Yo dge 'byung) and Tsang Rabsel (rTsangs Rab gsal), after they had escaped to Amdo following the persecution and destruction of monasteries in Central Tibet. They passed their lineage to the local monastic communities at Yanchung Namdzong Gon (Yan chung rnam rdzong dgon). They first ordained Gongpa Rabsel (*bla chen* dGongs pa rab gsal, 832-915), who was also known as Gewa Rabsel (dGe ba rab gsal), Karaphen (Ka ra 'phan) and Se Barro (gSas 'bar ro) as his lay and *bon po* names. Gongpa Rabsel transmitted the lineage to Drumbarwa Yeshe Gyeltsen (Grum 'bar ba Ye shes rgyal mtshan, 10th century) and others. (lDe'u jo sras 1987, pp. 154-155). Although lDe'u jo sras (1987, pp. 155-156) recorded that Lachen Gonpa Rabsel had given the ordination to those novices from U-Tsang, it was more likely to have been from Drumbarwa Yeshe Gyeltsen, who had ordained those groups from U-Tsang at a hermitage called Marlung Dantik (rMar klung dan tig) in Amdo (/Khams). Different numbers of these "wise men of U-Tsang" (*dbus gtsang gi mkhas pa mi*) are recorded, such as seven, ten or twelve. In lDe'u jo sras (1987, pp. 155-156) text, they were

listed as Tsongtsun Sherab Seng-ge (Tshong btsun shes rab seng ge), Loton Dorje Wangchuk (Loton rdo rje dbang phyug), Lume Tsultrim Sherab (Klu mes tshul khriims shes rab), Dring Zakara ('Bring gza' ka ra or known as Dring Yeshe Yonten ('Bring ye shes yon tan), Batsun Lodoe Wangchuk (sBa btsun blo gros dbang phyug), Raksha Tsultrim Jungne (Rag sha tshul khriims 'byung gnas), and Sumpa Yeshe Lodoe (Sum pa ye shes blo gros). Further, the text states that the lineage of Lachen (*bla chen*) was passed to six men of Khams (*kham pa mi drug*), such as Pagong (sPa gong), Yar, Ja, Cogro (Cog ro), Allampa ('Al lam pa), and Nub (sNubs). However, Ba Tsultrim Lodoe (sBa tshul khriims blo gros), probably referring to Batsun Lodoe Wangchuk, Bongdongpa Upa Dekar (Bong dong pa u pa de kar), and two unnamed from Ngari called "two Wogyé siblings from Ngari" (mNga' ris pa 'o brgyad spun gnyis) were also included in lists in other texts. Interestingly, Sumpa was alive when Atiśa was visiting Lhasa and Samye in 1047, whereas those "wise men" had already passed away by the late-10th century or in the early-11th century. Those initially ordained monks soon split into factions, but two groups later emerged: the Ba-rak group and the rest with Lume (lDe'u jo sras 1987, pp. 157-158).

10. Rabjampa took his ordination at the age of 13 in 1319 from Khenpo Samdrup Rinchen (mkhan po bSam grub rin chen, 14th century) at Samye (Thub bstan rgyal mtshan 2008, p. 283). In the case of Thrimkhang, he took his vows at Samye under the guidance of Rongton Choeje Mawa Senge (rong ston chos rje sMra ba'i seng ge) (Deb ther sngon po 1984, p. 947).

11. Reference in *bKa' thang sde lnga* (1997, pp. 162, 166-167); *sBa bzhed phyogs bsgrigs* 2009, pp. 123, 138; *Nyang ral chos 'byung* 1988, pp. 304, 385, etc. See sNyan bzang G.yung drung tshe ring 2019 online publication of an interesting article, "discussing the Sanskrit texts of Samye" (*bsam yas kyi rgya dpe gleng ba*).

12. In Tibetan, *bsam yas kyi pe dar gyi gling/ dkor mdzod cig kha phye nas rgya dpe la gzigs pas/ sngar gsan gzigs ma mdzad pa'i rgyud sde mang po bzhugs* ('Brom ston pa 1995, p. 66). The latter translation is based on Roerich & Gedun Choephel 1996, p. 257, and in Tibetan, *sngon bod du bstan pa byung ba 'dra ba rgya gar du yang byung ba dka'* (Deb ther sngon po, p. 316).

13. However, by the early 20th century, all these Sanskrit texts cannot be traced or were lost in fires. dGe 'dun chos 'phel (1990, p. 34) notes that "among all the monasteries, most probably Samye was an archive of Sanskrit texts, but someone said that now there exists nothing in that [monastery], and it is truly the case", (Tib. *dgon 'di dag thams cad las kyang rgya dpe la re che sa bsam yas dkor mdzod yin mod/ 'dga' zhig gis der sang de na ci yang med zer te bden mchis*). The famous Indian scholar and traveler, Rahul Sankrityayan (1893-1963) did not mention in his writings that he found any texts in Samye, although his companion Beni Mukherjee states that in the great hall along a holy tangka, he found a Sanskrit grammar text written on a palm leaf and a medical text written in Pali language describing how to procure medicine.

14. It is said that then he passed these texts on to his disciple, Uepa Dargye (dBus pa dar rgyas), and from him to Tsoje Konkyab ('Tsho byed dkon skyabs), and finally entrusted it to Yuthok Yonten Konkyab (g.Yu thog yon tan dkon skyabs, 1126-1202).

15. The first text *bKa' mchem ka khol ma* is said to be retrieved by Atiśa in 1046, and it mainly recorded the historical events of the emperor Songtsen Gampo (Srong brtsan sgam po). The second text, *Mani bka' 'bum*, is also related to the emperor Songtsen Gampo with collections of various mythico-historical and doctrinal themes related to the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (sPyan ras gzigs). Even the biography of Padmasambhava, "The copper palace" (*bKa' thang zangs gling ma*) by Nyangrel Nyima Öser (Nyang ral Nyi ma 'od zer 1124-1204), is considered to be retrieved from Samye, but this is disputed since it is also widely accepted as having been discovered in Yarlung (Yar lungs).

16. In Tibetan *chu mo glang gi lo [...] ka chu bzung ste/ zhig ral gsos nas bzung* (lDe'u jo sras 1987, p. 157). In *Deb ther sngon po* (1984, pp. 87, 103-105), Lume and Sumpa's renovations of Tsuklakhang and other temples are mentioned. Cf. also Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 255-259) for short biographical details about Lume, and Samten Chosphe (2010) for a short biography of Sumpa. In

his translation of the *Deb ther sngon po*, Roerich & Gedun Choephel had converted those years related with Lume and others to be in the early 11th century. However, the mid-10th century dates are more appropriate considering that the revival of Buddhism in Central Tibet resumed within 110 years of the death of the emperor Langdarma in 842. Even though the author, Goe Lotsawa (*Deb ther sngon po* 1984, p. 104; Roerich & Gedun Choephel 1996, p. 74) had stated that prior to Atiśa's arrival in Tibet in 1042 that for around 64 years, from 982-1042, Lume and others' monks were active in Central Tibet. Those years, falling in the mid-10th century are close to Cuevas' suggested dates in his 2006 study (p. 51), particularly to the "Period of the Emergence of Monastic Principalities (ca. 1056-1249)".

17. I followed the dating of the founding year as 957 (Fire-Dragon) from Blo bzang chos 'byor 2007, p. 137. However, a different year of 1017 is mentioned in later historical works.

18. Although lDe'u jo sras (1987, p. 157) had attributed the founding of Solnak Thangchen monastery to Drumbarba Jangchub, Khenbu Shonnu Rinchen (mKhan bu gzhon bu rin chen), Ngak Yonten Nyingpo (sNyags yon tan snying po), Chim Lhungi Gyaltzen ('Chims lhun gyi rgyal mtshan), and Chimki Tsunpa Chokbu ('Chims kyi btsun pa mchog bu), *Deb ther sngon po* (1984, p. 105; Roerich & Gedun Choephel 1996, p. 75) considered the founders to be Drumer Tshultrim Jungney (Gru mer tshul khrims 'gnas) and some others eight monks. The *Deb ther sngon po* information is followed in later historical writings (cf. Sørensen 1994, p. 471, n. 1770). See Sørensen & Hazod 2005 for further details about the foundation of Sol nag Thang po che monastery.

19. Cf. n. 8. In lDe'u jo sras (1987 [12th century], pp. 155-156) text, the destruction of Samye by fire is not mentioned. It is discussed in later historical texts, such as *Deb ther sngon po*. Tib. *bsam yas kyi 'khor sa klu mes dang sba reg gi chags sdang gis me pho khyi'i lo la bsregs* (*Deb ther sngon po* 1984, p. 459).

20. Although the date Fire-Male-Dog is not mentioned in Ra Lotsawa's biography, the record of the date in *Deb ther sngon po* can be inferred to have been during at least three different years, i.e. 986, 1046 or 1106. Roerich & Gedun Choephel 1996, p. 378 simply converted the date to 986 in his translation of the book, *The Blue Annals*, while Cuevas (2015, pp. xxxv, 286) gives 1106 without a corresponding Tibetan date, and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, p. 270) also located the Fire-Male-Dog in the 2nd sexagenary cycle and noted 1106 as the corresponding year. As the Lume (Klu mes) and Ba-rak (sBa rag) factionalist conflicts happened in the mid-10th century, the date is very unlikely to be in the early-12th century. Although the year 1046 corresponds well to these events, Atiśa did not mention that Samye was destroyed by fire in his biography when he visited Samye in 1047. The date 986 is the most logical, considering the conflict between the Lume and Ba-rak factions. However, further damage might have taken place after the visit of Atiśa, because he had to leave Samye after his presence was opposed by resident monks. Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003, p. 55-59) included no details from the period, apart from the conflicts between Lume and Ba-rak factions until the renovation started by Ra Lotsawa.

21. Cf. Vitali 2003, pp. 71-79. Atiśa had arrived in Tibet in 1042 under the invitation of the kings of Western Tibet (Guge kingdom), Yeshe Oe (Ye shes 'od, ca. 959-1036) and his successor and nephew, Jangchub Oe. The year 1047 is agreed upon by most of the Tibetan historians. See also *Deb ther sngon po* (1984, p. 316) and its translation in Roerich & Gedun Choephel 1996, p. 257; Davidson 2005, pp. 188-189, etc.

22. Cf. Rwa lo tsā ba'i rnam thar 1989, p. 63. See also Cuevas 2015, pp. 231-234 translation of Ra Lotsawa's biography, particularly the section regarding the renovation of Samye.

23. The translation is based on Roerich & Gedun Choephel 1996, p. 378. Tib. gyang tshun chad 'gyel ba la 'ol kha nas shug pa rnams gtsang po la gyen la drangs| gyang btang | shing bzo| gser bzo| lcags mgar| lha bzo la sogs pa'i bzo bo lnga brgya tsam gyis lo gsum gyi bar du zhig gsos byas| de'i zhabs tog gi lag len ni ston pa rin chen rdo rjes byas| spyir na de la khal 'bum tsho cig song | de'i tshon rtsi lhag gis gtsang 'phrang gi khyams dbu rtse dang bcas pa gsos| yun lo gnyis song |

gnyer lo tsā ba rwa chos rab kyis byas| yo byad khal khri tsho gcig song| (*Deb ther sngon po* 1984, p. 459).

24. Cf. Roerich & Gedun Choephel 1996, p. 570 also. Tib. 'bri khung chos rjes phyag rdzas shin tu mang bar bsams nas bsam yas kyi zhig gsos la'ang mang du bzahag (*Deb ther sngon po* 1984 p. 674).

25. Both Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003, pp. 71-85, 86-99) and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 275-280, 283-286) have written brief biographies of Sakya Pandita and Longchen Rabjampa, but neither state that any renovations were undertaken by them. As both the scholar monks were famous figures in their respective religious sects, any activities they took part in at Samye became part of Samye's history. Sakya Pandita is especially associated often with Samye because of being *khon* ('*khon*') clan descendent, whose ancestor Khon Lui Wangpo ('*Khon klu'i dbang po*, 8th century) was a financial patron as well as overseer during the founding of Samye. In 775, Khon Lui Wangpo was among those "seven men" (*sad mi mi bdun*) who were first to be ordained by paṇḍita Śāntarakṣita. As Khon Lui Wangpo had become a monk and translator, he had to leave his position as a minister under Trisong Detsen. However, his *khon* clan lineage was carried on by his brother Khon Dorje Rinchen ('*Khon rdo rje rin chen*, 8th-9th century) with seven sons, and the successive *khon* descendants of Sakya were to be traced to him. Cf. Gardner 2020 for a short biography of Khon Lui Wangpo.

26. Sonam Gyaltsen was more or less based at Samye, and had considerably revived the importance of Samye. See the short details about him and his activities at Samye in Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003, pp. 100-108) and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 283-326). He is famously known for his historical work, *rgyal rab gsal ba'i me long*, cf. Sørensen 1994.

27. Refer to Ehrhard 2002 for details about Thrimkhang Lotsawa.

28. The translation is after Roerich & Gedun Choephel 1996, p. 822. Tib. bsam yas khrims khang gling gi zhig gsos/ dbus na byang chub chen po gtso 'khor/ zhi ba 'tsho dang/ rgyal ba mchog dbyangs rnams kyi sku/ yab rje'i gdung tsha bzhugs pa'i gser 'bum gnyis rnams dang bcas pa.

29. Cf. Thub bstan rgyal mtshan 2008, pp. 351-352. See the short biography of Ngakchang Kunga Rinchen in Tibetan by Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003, pp. 109-139) and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 329-356), and in English by Gardner (2010). The detailed biography of him in Tibetan is written by 'Jam mgon a myes zhabs (1980).

30. Cf. Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* 2003, p. 141. In this detailed note on the restoration of Samye, Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 361-377) did mention the various projects undertaken in the corresponding years in the Tibetan as well as Western Gregorian calendars. In two secondary textual works by Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003) and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008), the former included more details about the ritual aspects of the renovation and restoration, while the latter recorded the actual rebuilding and associated figures. Refer to *bSam yas dkar chag I* for further details about the renovation in the 17th century.

31. He was also known as Jamyang A-mye-zhab ('jam dbyangs a myes zhabs), and is well known for his important role played in bringing diplomatic resolutions during the Ganden Phodrang takeover of Tibet's reign from Desi Tsangpa (sde srid gtsang pa, 1565-1641), and in the successive conflicts between Tibet and Bhutan from the 1620s until his death. Refer to Tsering Namgyal 2011 for further details about him.

32. See Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003, pp. 151-156) and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 378-382) further details about the renovation and restoration of Samye during the 7th Dalai Lama's reign.

33. See Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003, pp. 155-158) and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 383-384) for further details about the restoration of Samye during the 8th Dalai Lama's reign.

34. See Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 385-387) for a short note on the renovation of Samye after the earthquake; and Flora (2013) on the brief biography about the 8th Tatsak Jedrung Kundeling Rinpoche.

35. See annotated translation and edition of the autobiography of Blo bzang thabs mkhas d. 1827.

36. See Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003, pp. 159-161) and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 387-388) for further details about the renovation and restoration of Samye. Refer to *bSam yas dkar chag* III for further details on the renovation.

37. See Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003, pp. 163-175) and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, pp. 389-407) for the short summary about the renovation and restoration of Samye. Refer to *bSam yas dkar chag* IV (2000) for detailed notes on the renovation of Samye by Shedra Wangchuk Gyalpo.

38. The 5th Reting Rinpoche became the regent (*rgyal tshab*) of Tibet during the most important and crucial time in Tibet's modern history, after the death of the 13th Dalai Lama Thubten Gyatso (Ta la'i bla ma Thub bstan rgya mtsho, 1876, r 1895-1933). The 13th Dalai Lama had ruled Tibet as a *de facto* independent nation state to respond to the quickly changing events of the 20th century. The regent, Reting could not replace the seat of the 13th Dalai Lama, although he played a major role in installing his successor, the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso (Ta la'i bla ma bsTan 'dzin rgya mtsho, b. 1935). He lost his life in 1947, even though he had resigned from the position in 1941 when the power struggle between the monastic monks and Lhasa aristocratic families intensified.

39. Both Ngag dbang rgyal po *et al.* (2003, p. 188) and Thub bstan rgyal mtshan (2008, p. 419) stated that except some broken and headless stone statues, nothing of Samye temple was left in 1984 to 1985, when they visited it in their early 30s. See Buffetrille 1992 and 1989 on how the renovation project was carried out in the 1980s.

ABSTRACTS

This paper provides remarks on the history of renovations and restorations of Samye monastery, which was Tibet's first Buddhist monastic institution, founded in the late-8th century. The research for this article was compiled from biographies of famous Buddhist masters associated with Samye, and Samye's Register (*dkar chag*) written in different periods. The historical significance of Samye Monastery in Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan political history is briefly discussed in the first section, before I turn to consider the successive renovations in chronological order, with a focus on the identities of the restorers involved and major events that led to these renovations and restorations. Exploring the history of Samye's renovations provides valuable details about the motives that compelled different Tibetan Buddhist sects to provide patronage for sacred sites in Tibetan Buddhism, and the connections of these motives with broader political and cultural events in Tibet and surrounding areas.

Cet article présente des remarques sur l'histoire des rénovations et des restaurations du monastère de Samye, premier institut monastique bouddhique du Tibet, fondé à la fin du VIII^e siècle. Cet article a été compilé à partir de biographies de maîtres bouddhistes célèbres associés à Samye et du Samye's Register (*dkar chag*), ouvrages composés à différentes périodes. L'importance historique du monastère de Samye dans le bouddhisme tibétain et l'histoire politique est brièvement abordée dans la première section, avant de passer à l'examen des rénovations successives dans l'ordre chronologique, en mettant l'accent sur l'identité des restaurateurs impliqués et les événements majeurs qui ont conduit à ces rénovations et restaurations. L'exploration de l'histoire des rénovations de Samye fournit des détails précieux sur les motifs qui ont poussé différentes écoles bouddhiques tibétaines à accorder leur patronage

aux sites sacrés du bouddhisme tibétain, et sur les liens entre ces motifs et les événements politiques et culturels plus larges au Tibet et dans les régions environnantes.

INDEX

Keywords: social history, religion, Tibetan Buddhism, monastery, renovations, sacred sites, patronage

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