Articles

A LIST OF ABBOTS OF KAŁ-THOG MONASTERY ACCORDING TO HANDWRITTEN NOTES BY THE LATE KATOK ONTUL

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In his article "A Tibetan Antiquarian in the XVIIIth Century," Bulletin of Tibetology, IV, No. 3 (Gangtok), 1967 (hereafter "Antiquarian"), p. 7, Hugh E. Richardson refers, amongst other things, to some written information by the present Kaň-thog Dbron-sprul-skü (Katok Ontul, died before 1970). When he heard that we were preparing a paper on the abbots and teachers of Kaň-thog monastery, he sent us these notes, which were most probably composed in 1967, and kindly permitted us to use them for publication. We express our deep gratitude for this generosity.

The notes are written in dbu-can on five sheets of approx. 17.8 to 22.6 cm; two of them (numbered 1 and 2, hereafter T 1 and T 2) deal with the life of Rigdzin Tshe-don-nor-bu, the other three (numbered 1 to 3, hereafter H 1, H 2 and H 3) give a brief survey of the history of Kaň-thog monastery including a list of 41 names of abbots. This list attracted our special interest, because it contains a number of names that are not found in the materials used in preparing our paper "Aebte und Lehrer von Kaň-thog. Eine erste Übersicht zur Geschichte eines Rñiñ ma pa-Klosters in Derge/Kham", Centralasiatische Studien, 13 (1979), pp. 457-509 (hereafter "Aebte").

The following paper is intended to give the 41 names from the handwritten notes of Katok Ontul in comparison with the materials already known. The notes represent a tradition divergent from that in the other accessible sources. This can be seen from the different dates assigned to the foundation of Kaň-thog monastery: Kaň-dam-pa Bde-gûrg was born in the year chu-stag, i.e. the 36th year of the second cycle; he founded the monastery in the year sa-mo-yos, i.e. the 13th year of the third rab-byuin, namely in 1159 (see e.g. "Aebte", p. 489), whereas Katok Ontul puts the year sa-yos in the second cycle (H 1, lines 6-7), thus dating the foundation sixty years earlier, namely in 1099. Since—according to the notes (T 1, lines 6-8)—600 years elapsed from the foundation of the monastery down to the birth of Rigdzin Tshe-don-nor-bu, we cannot attribute this difference to a simple mistake made by Katok Ontul, we must consider it a part of the—presumably oral—tradition he wrote down.

The list of names opens with the words:

kaň-thog rañ-gi gðan-sar, gtsos-che-ba'ī bla-ma šuñ-bsdus-zig ŋu-na... (H 2, lines 5-6)

"[Now follows]—if it is permitted—a comprehensive list of] the foremost Lamas on the see of Kaň-thog proper...."
The position of the names in the list is indicated by numerals appearing above the first letters of each name; the name of Rig-drzin Tshe-dbañ-nor-bu is marked by a canopy above it. No further information is enclosed in this list (H 2, line 6-H 3, line 1). In the following we give the names from the list with their respective numbers; additional notes are drawn from other sources as indicated in parentheses.

1. Kah-dam-pa Bde-gseqs
   Sga-dam-pa, Sga-dam-pa Bder-gseqs, Dam-pa Bder-gseqs Ses-rab (se-nge), Bde(r)-gseqs, Ses-rab (se-nge) ("Aebte", pp. 499-509, svp.); 1122-1192, founded Kah-thog in 1159 ("Aebte", pp. 489 and 463-470); a sketch of his life is given by Katok Ontul (H 1, lines 1-15); on the different dates for the foundation of Kah-thog monastery see above.

2. Chos-rje Btsan-bston
   Rje, Rgyal-tshab Chos-rje Gtsan-ston Rdo-rje-rgyal-mtshan ("Aebte", pp. 466 [note 3] and 489); 1126-1215, met Kah-dam-pa Bde-gseqs about 1142 ("Aebte", p. 470); his birth-place is known as Gtsan-zal (loc. cit.).

3. Byams-pa-bum
   Rgyal-tshab Byams-pa-bum-pa ("Aebte", p. 489); 1179-1252, entered office as abbot in 1226; between the second and third abbots the see may have been vacant for about a dozen years ("Aebte", p. 463).

4. Spyan-sha Rin-chen

5. Zah-ston-pa
6. Ye-ses-bum-pa


7. Yon-tan Ye-ses-bum
8. Byan-chub-rdo-rje
9. Se-nha-gu-ru
10. Badzra-sri

This name could refer to Rmog-ston Rdo-rje-dpal-bzahn ("Aebte", p. 475), who was a pupil of Ye-ses-rgyal-mtshan, i.e. number 13 of the list.

11. Bhu-ddha-bha-tra
A faulty transliteration of Sanskrit Buddhhabdra.

12. Bkra-(g)iis-bla-ma
13. Ye-ses-rgyal-mtshan


14. Nam-mkha'-rgyal-mtshan
This name could refer to Lab-ston Nam-mkha'-rin-chen, the second abbot of the druii lineage of Kah-thog ("Aebte", p. 476), or to Nam-mkha'-rgya-mtsho, a pupil of Ye-ses-rgyal-mtshan ("Aebte", p. 475).

15. Kun-dga'-zla-ba

16. Bsdod-rnam-rgyal-mtshan
17. Chos-dbañ-pa
18. Bsod-rnam-rdo-rje
20. Bkra'-bsis-rin-chen
21. Rin-chen-rdo-rje
22. Nam-mkha'-mkhan
23. [Nam-mkha’]-jalob (rnams gnis)
24. Rig’dzin Bdzul-dul-rdo-rje
25. Klön-gsal-sniṅ-po
26. Bsod-rnam-lde’u-btsan
27. Dri-med Žin-skyiṅ-mgon-po
Born 1722 or 1723; his next incarnation was Rig’dzin-mgon-po, i.e. number 31 of this list (“Aebte”, p. 485).
28. Gyur-med Tshe-dbaṅ-mchog-grub
29. Kun-bzaṅ-ges-don-dbaṅ-po
30. Rig’dzin Tshe-dbaṅ-nor-bu
31. Rig’dzin ‘Jigs-med-mgon-po
32. ‘Jigs-bral Chos-dbyiṅs-rdo-rje
33. Gyur-med Chos-dbyiṅs-ran-grol
34. Kun-mkhyen Chos-kyi-blo-gros
35. ‘Jigs-med-yon-tan-mgon-po
36. Rig’dzin Jam-dpal-rdo-rje
37. Si-tu Chos-kyi-rgya-rtsho
38. Mkhan-chen Nag-gi-dbaṅ-po
Nag-dban-dpal-bzaṅ, 1879-1941 (“Aebte”, pp. 487-488), his autobiography
has been published as The Autobiographical Reminiscences of Ngag-dbang-dpal-bzang, Late Abbot of Kah-thog Monastery. Gangtok 1969. (The Ngagyur Nyingmay Sungrab, I.).

39. Dge-tse 'Gyur-med-bsstan-pa-rnam-rgyal

40. Rje Dbyon Padma-rgyal-mthshan

41. Mkhan-chen Legs-bsad-'byor-ladan

He participated in a lnum and dbaṅ of the Rin-chen-gter-mdzod presided over by the Dpal-yul-mchog-srum Rin-po-che in the presence of important abbots and incarnations from the neighbouring monasteries; this was observed by Pema Tsering—a young monk at that time—in Dpal-yul monastery.

It is obvious that the list—or at least the latter portion of it—is not arranged in chronological order: as number 28 figures 'Gyur-med Tshe-dbaṅ-mchog-grub (born about 1764); as number 30 appears Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbaṅ-nor-bu, who was born 1696, i.e. more than sixty-five years earlier. This leads us to the question of the organizing principle behind the list of the 41 names. According to the notes of Katok Ontul, in the first six centuries of Kah-thog monastery there were three lineages of important teachers (T 1, lines 5-6): the thirteen members of the bla-rabs—presumably identical with the rgyal-tshab line (“Aebte”, p. 462)—, the thirteen members of the drun-rabs and the thirteen members of the rnom-rabs. If all the members of these three lineages had been recorded, the list covering the first 600 years—i.e. up to number 30, Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbaṅ-nor-bu—would contain at least 39 names and not 29. The thirteen rgyal-tshab of the literary tradition are known by name, but the personal dates are given for the first six members of this line only (“Aebte”, pp. 463 and 489-490); the drun line is counted up to its ninth member; a list of the rnom teachers is not known to us. We have to wait for further material to solve the problem.