

# Mongol and Tibetan Armies on the Trans-Himalayan Fronts in the Second Half of the 17th Century, with a Focus on the Autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama\*

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**I**t is well known that the formation of the Ganden Phodrang (Tib. Dga' ldan pho brang) state was made possible by the intervention of Oirat armies against the rivals of the Gelukpa (Dge lugs pa school) in Kham (Khams) and in Tsang (Gtsang). Without the military push and the generous and steady economic support of these Mongol groups, it is likely that the internal rivalries and skirmishes for predominance on the plateau would have continued for some time, as the ongoing conflicts between Ü (Dbus) and Tsang in the first half of the 17th century demonstrated no clear dominance of one party over the other. In contrast, not only did the intervention of Oirat troops enable the establishment of the supremacy of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho, 1617–1682) and his school over a vast area of the plateau, but their continued support solidified his new government's position against rebel provinces and strengthened its hold on contested territories for the entire period of his reign.

Mongol troops of both Oirat and Khalkha stock fought in combat against Karmapa rebels in 1642 and 1644, against Bhutan in 1648–1649 and 1656–1657, and against the kingdom of Ladakh between 1679 and 1684.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Mongol generals were also at the head of troops

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<sup>1</sup> In 1642, reports describe 300 Mongol troops commanded by the Khalkha Dayan Noyon (Karmay 2014: 175); in 1644, sources (*ibid.*: 191; Shakabpa 2010: vol. 1, 350) mention a Tibeto-Mongol army (*bod sog gi dmag*); accounts of the war of 1656–1657 refer to the employment of Mongol soldiers as well as troops from Ü, Kham, and Kongpo (Kong po) (Karmay 2014: 374); in the war against Ladakh of 1679–1684 Mongol troops fought alongside reinforcements from Tsang (Petech 1977: 72). It is likely that at least some Mongol troops were employed also for the suppression of the 1659 rebellion of the *depa* Norbu and his nephew Gonashakpa (Sgo sna shag pa), as the advance platoon of 100 soldiers commanded by the Thaiji of Ukhere (U

fighting for the Ganden Phodrang in Kham between 1674 and 1675.<sup>2</sup> While on some of these occasions, especially the earlier ones such as the rebellions of 1642, Mongol soldiers seem to have fought unaided by local troops, already from 1644 Tibetan and Mongol fighters were employed side by side, sometimes under the double generalship of a Tibetan and a Mongol commander, and at other times led by a Mongol chief alone.<sup>3</sup>

Given this co-mingling of Tibetan and Mongol troops in times of war, one may wonder how reciprocal relations between these two groups unfolded on the battleground, and how their different approaches to warfare coexisted. In particular, this paper examines what can be gleaned about the use of Mongol forces from the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama himself,<sup>4</sup> so as to ascertain at what level he was aware of the usefulness of the Mongols as a martial resource; whether he showed preference for the use of one army over another; and whether he was cognisant of the rivalries or disagreements between Mongol and Tibetan troops.

The reasons for taking the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama as a key primary source on this subject are multiple. First, the autobiography is written in a diary-like style, i.e. its entries are generally dated, thus allowing us to follow the temporal progression of a particular state of affairs. Secondly, sources on war in Tibet are often scattered and hard to find because of the prevalence given to religious-based topics even in Tibetan historiographical literature. The autobiography

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khe re'i tha'i ji) probably included (and might even have exclusively comprised) Mongol troops. The rest of the soldiers that fought to retake the fort of Shigatsé in 1659 were recruited in Ü (Karmay 2014: 412).

<sup>2</sup> In 1642, Dayan Noyon of the Khalkha and Aldar Khoshorchi were in charge of Mongol troops; in 1644 Gushri Khan himself participated in the conflict; in 1656–1657 two of the commanders were Dalai Baatur and Machik Taiji (Ma gcig tha'i ji); in 1674–1675 Uljō Taiji was among the commanders; in the war against Ladakh of 1679–1684 the general of the troops from Lhasa was Ganden Tsewang Pelzang (Dga' ldan Tshe dbang dpal bzang), a grandson of Gushri Khan.

<sup>3</sup> For a general overview of the wars fought in the period of the Fifth Dalai Lama see Venturi 2018: 23–47. For example, in the war against Bhutan of 1644 there was a dedicated Mongol division (*sog dmag dum bu*). The TibArmy project is preparing a timeline of the wars fought during the Ganden Phodrang, to be published online on the TibArmy website.

<sup>4</sup> *Za hor gyi ban de ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho'i 'di snang 'khrul pa'i rol rtsed rtogs brjod kyi tshul du bkod pa du kū la'i gos bzang*, composed between 1667 and 1681 and comprising three volumes, of which only the first so far has been entirely translated in English (see Karmay 2014). Although the Fifth Dalai Lama is technically the author, the drafting of the text itself involved the work of multiple hands, that combined handwritten notes, official records, and personal recollections into a coherent whole. This process is illustrated in detail in Schaeffer 2010: 272–273.

of the Fifth Dalai Lama, although it too is of course predominantly concerned with religious questions, also contains comprehensive information on political and military situations requiring his own top-down attention, since he regarded himself as the spiritual and secular ruler of Tibet, and theoretically all major decisions taken by the Ganden Phodrang were subject to his oversight.<sup>5</sup>

Last, the personal viewpoint of the Dalai Lama as expressed in his diary allows to focus on how a Buddhist figure at the head of a Buddhist government tackled issues of war and violence and justified their use, both in his own eyes and in the eyes of his prospective audience (including his immediate cabinet at the time of writing and those who would read his autobiography in the future). Naturally, one of the drawbacks of using a single source is that the particular viewpoint it represents, its bias, cannot be counterbalanced. But in fact this disadvantage can be turned into an advantage when one considers that the single perspective it presents affords an insight into the official position of the Ganden Phodrang vis à vis the military confrontations in which it was involved. Thus, it allows us to reconstruct the formal processes by which the Ganden Phodrang endorsed the employment of violent methods which were theoretically proscribed by Buddhism.

However, before delving into the theme of what the Fifth Dalai Lama may or may not have known about the various troops fighting on behalf of his government, it may be useful to look briefly at the general question of the reputation of Mongol troops. Among the more informative descriptions of the perils that Mongol troops posed for autochthonous Himalayan armies are a few passages from the early-18th century source, the *Miwang Tokjö* (*Mi dbang rtogs brjod*),<sup>6</sup> which dedicates some space to describing the conflict between the Ganden Phodrang and Ladakh in the years 1679 to 1684. In particular, this text summarises the events preceding the first battle of the war in 1679,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> On the Fifth Dalai Lama's self perception of his simultaneous secular and spiritual rule in Tibet see Schwieger 2015: 52–53; note however that determining who actually wielded secular power in Tibet at this time (the Fifth Dalai Lama, Gushri Khan and his successors, or the regents of the Dalai Lama) is a much less clear matter. On this see again Schwieger (*ibid.*: 53–61). To this uncertain picture must be added, after 1652, also the influential figure of the Qing emperor, whose authority as the chief political figure in East Asia could not be easily dismissed (see *ibid.*: 61–64).

<sup>6</sup> This is the biography of Pholhané Sönam Topgyel (Pho lha nas Bsod nams stobs rgyal, 1689–1747) composed by Dokhar zhapdrung Tsering Wanggyel (Mdo mkhar zhabs drung Tshe ring dbang rgyal, 1697–1763), who after 1728 was one of Pholhané's most loyal friends and allies. It was completed in 1733, while Pholhané was still alive. For this paper I have used three editions of this text, but I limit references to the 2002 edition.

<sup>7</sup> The first battle occurred in Ngari (Mnga' ris), near Tashigang (Bkra shis sgang) and close to the confluence of the Senge Khabap (Senge kha 'bab/upper Indus) and the

and illustrates the general perception of Mongol armies in the eyes of both the Ladakhi troops and the Ladakhi generals, as understood and represented by a Tibetan author. In itself, the account is rather partisan toward the Mongol and Ganden Phodrang side,<sup>8</sup> as it illustrates in unobtrusive terms the naïveté and greed of the Ladakhi commanders. Still, it reflects the perceived abilities—and perhaps the prejudices—of the armies about to engage in confrontation:

In accordance with that, when the troops gradually approached the region of Ngari, the army sentinels (*mel tshe ba*) of that side understood and left in a hurry (*tab tab pos*) to report how it would turn out (*ji ltar 'gyur*).

At that time, in front of the lord of Ladakh, the commanders (*kha lo sgyur ba po*) of the army that had been deployed (*'don dpung*)<sup>9</sup> called

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Gar (Sgar) rivers. As detailed in Petech 1988a: 27, sources provide different names for the site proper: “Zhwa dmar ldir” in the *Ladak Gyelrap* (*La dwags rgyal rabs*), “Ra la” in the “Account of the Deeds of General Sha kya rgya mtsho” by the Ladakhi King Nyi ma nram rgyal (1694–1729), and “Dalang Kharmar” in Alexander Cunningham’s *Ladāk, Physical, Statistical, Historical*.

<sup>8</sup> The devotion of Dokhar *zhapdrung* Tsering Wanggyel towards Pholhané, and the subsequent partiality of the *Miwang Tokjö*, can be easily understood when one considers the author’s own life story. He was born in one of the highest aristocratic families in Tibet, the house of Dokhar (Mdo mkhar), which traced its origins from the imperial dynasty and was attached to the estate and monastery of Taklung (Stag lung), just north of Lhasa. After studying at Sera (Se ra) monastery, he became a tax-collector in the area of Shigatsé (Gzhis ka rtse) during the reign of Lhasang (Lha bzang) Khan (1698–1717). During the Zunghar occupation of Lhasa (1717–1720) he collaborated with the invaders, and was appointed district governor (*rdzong dpon*) of Chaktsé drigu (Lcag rtse gri gu) and later *drönnyer* (*mgron gnyer*), or chamberlain, of Taktsepa (Stag rtse pa), the main collaborator of the Zunghars, who was severely punished by the Chinese when they arrived in Lhasa. He managed to escape punishment by fleeing Lhasa and hiding in Naktsang (Nag tshang), while his father, also of the pro-Zunghar faction, was saved by the intercession of Pholhané. This was the first show of magnanimity of Pholhané in Tsering Wanggyel’s regard, but other important ones ensued in the course of the tumultuous period that followed. During the civil war of 1727–1728 he fought on the side of the “Lhasa army”, i.e. against Pholhané and in support of cabinet members Lumpané (Lum pa nas) and Jarrawá (Sbyar ra ba), but when the Tsang troops captured him, he was set free by Pholhané, who pardoned him and also issued a proclamation protecting his estate. Later, after the Tsang army took Lhasa and Pholhané established a new government, the latter chose Dokhar Tsering Wanggyel as one of his ministers. In this capacity, he discharged his duties at least until 1757, well after the death of Pholhané. The generosity and open-mindedness of Pholhané on all these occasions made a strong impression on Tsering Wanggyel, who understandably adopted a tone biased in favour of his protector in his biography of the “great man”. On the bias of of the *Miwang Tokjö*, see Petech [1950] 1972: 3–4; on the life of Dokhar *zhapdrung* Tsering Wanggyel see Petech 1973: 71–73 and [1950] 1972: *passim*; Dung dkar 2002: 1137–1140.

<sup>9</sup> See *'don dmag* = “army of laymen”, “troops that are drawn up”, lit. “recruited/supplied/provided troops”. Note that in the Ganden Phodrang, *'don* is a unit of land

Nono Shakya (No no Shākya)<sup>10</sup> and Jorrà (Sbyor ra),<sup>11</sup> while stroking [their] beard with the hands, issued an order with words of fearless arrogance: “Hear! Troops, understand [this]! Concerning certain people who have come from the direction of the Mongol borderlands, they are like this: for instance, you brandish the maul and get ready to strike (*rdeg par gzas pa*) and they duck (*btud pa*) with the head. Likewise, they have clearly arrived to despise the magnificence of Senggé Namgyel (Seng ge nam rgyal),<sup>12</sup> the lord of this land appointed by heaven!” When [the troops] heard [this], they were at ease and there was no need to doubt.

“As for [our] opponents, since it is known that they have great wealth: good clothes, soft and light; good horses to ride; a gradational iron-mesh coat of mail to fully protect the body from weapons; garment linings of *mandasu*;<sup>13</sup> fierce and cruel firearms (*mtshon cha me'i 'khrul 'khor*); swords with sharp points, etc., go and strive to acquire [them], and become wealthy for all kinds of needs!”<sup>14</sup>

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used for tax-paying purposes; a certain number of men were drawn from each *'don* of land to serve as soldiers. The ratio of recruits likely changed with time and from place to place, but I am not aware of specific research on its fluctuation, which is a desideratum. Notice, however, that in this context the term *'don dpung* refers to the Ladakhi army, and thus may have no connection at all with the system used under the Ganden Phodrang. In fact, the use of this term here may be simply a transposition of a Ganden Phodrang administrative structure, with which Tsering Wanggyel was familiar, to a different context, that of Ladakh.

<sup>10</sup> His full name was Nono Shakya Gyatso (No no Shā kya rgya mthso). A brief entry on him in Dung dkar 2002: 1210 merely states that he was an important minister of the king of Ladakh, skilled at subjugating external enemies with both peaceful and wrathful [methods], as well as a trusted and expert regent of the king. A royal decree extolling his activities and his lineage was produced during the reign of Nyima Namgyel (Nyi ma nam rgyal, r. 1694–1729) and is reproduced and translated in Francke 1926: vol. 2, 242–244. He is the same as the Shākya rgya mtsho mentioned in Petech 1977: 68 ff. and 72 ff.

<sup>11</sup> This is the Jorwa Gyatso ('Byor ba rgya mtsho) of Petech 1977: 68. He seems to have been the chief minister of Ladakh, with the title of *chölön chenpo* (*chos blon chen po*), after the death of Agu Garmo (A gu 'Gar mo) in 1646. Petech adds that he was also “in charge at the time of the Mongolo-Tibetan attack of 1679” (*ibid.*).

<sup>12</sup> As it is well known, the *Miwang Tokjö* uses the name of the King Senggé Namgyel (r. 1616–1623, 1624–1642) in place of the name of his *de facto* successor, Delek Namgyel (Bde legs nam rgyal, r. 1680–1691). On this see Petech 1998: 23 fn 6.

<sup>13</sup> A fabric insulated with a layer of silk; see Dung dkar 2002: 1595.

<sup>14</sup> Mdo mkhar zhabs drung Tshes ring dbang rgyal [1733] 2002: 22 (hereafter *Miwang Tokjö*): *de ltar dpung gi tshogs mthar gyis yul mnga' ris kyi sa'i char lhags pa na* [23] *phyogs de'i dpung gi mel tshes ba dag gis rtogs nas tab tab pos song ste ji ltar gyur pa'i gtan smras so* // *de'i tshes la thag kyi rje bo'i mdun na 'don dpung gi kha lo sgyur ba po no no shākya dang sbyor ra zhes bya bas sma ra la lag pas byi dor byed bzhin du 'jigs pa med par rlom pa'i tshig gis bsgo ba / kwa ye / dpung gi tshogs rnams go bar gyis shig yul mtha' 'khob mong gol gyi phyogs nas lhags pa'i skye bo 'ga' zhis ni 'di lta ste dper na / tho ba 'phyar zhing rtes par bzas (gzas) pa la / mgo bos btud par byed pa de bzhin du / gnas gyis bskos pa'i sa'i bdag po seng ge rnam par rgyal ba'i dpal 'byor la mngon par 'khu bar lhags so zhes thos na dwogs pa mi dgos kyi bag phebs par byos shig / rgol ba de dag ni 'byor ba*

While we do not know whether this anecdote is based on factual events that may have reached the ears of Dokhar *zhapdrung* Tsering Wanggyel through the oral narratives of soldiers, or whether it is simply the product of his imagination and partisan feelings, it still provides a rather vivid snapshot of what may have been typical preparations for war. It illustrates the role of the sentinels sent to spy on the movements of the enemy, i.e. the Mongols fighting for the Ganden Phodrang, and report back on what their activities portended. It recalls the rousing call to arms of two of the generals entrusted with the command of the Ladakhi troops, Nono Shakya Gyatso and Jorwa Gyatso, both of whom served as ministers to the king of Ladakh during their careers. It shows that age-old tactics such as minimising the peril posed by the enemy were used as effective tools to galvanise the troops, together with the longstanding practice of enticing the soldiers with the prospect of riches obtained through despoliation of the enemy. Finally, by providing a list of the items that could be the object of such pillage, this passage provides a valuable catalogue of the weapons, armour and general provisions that were expected as part of the booty when plundering Mongols in 17th century war in the Himalayas.<sup>15</sup>

The continuation of this narrative, however, shows that some disagreed with the rosy perspective put forth by Nono Shakya and Jorwa Gyatso. A more temperate character, Nono Bitadzoki (No no Bi ta dzo ki),<sup>16</sup> intervened and emphasised that both the physical abilities of the Mongol soldiers and their technical and strategic skills should be taken in serious consideration and not rashly dismissed:

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*chen po dang ldan pa zhig ste / gyon pa bzang po srab 'jam yang ba dang / gzhon pa'i rta bzang po dang / lus mtshon cha las nye bar skyob pa'i ya lad kyi rim pa lcags kyi dra mig can dang / man+da su'i nang tshangs can dang / mtshon cha me'i 'khrul 'khor drag cing rtsub pa dang / ral gri rno dbal dang ldan pa sogs mchis par grags pas rnyed pa don du gnyer ba yod na 'dengs shig dang / mkho dgus mngon par 'byor bar 'gyur ro zhes [...].*

<sup>15</sup> When I presented a preliminary version of this research at Wolfson College, Oxford, it was pointed out that an unusual feature of this list of objects to plunder is that it does not include the weapon that may have been most commonly in use among Mongols, i.e. the bow and arrow. One might speculate that it was exactly the prevalence of this weapon that made it less valuable as an item of pillage. In addition, bow and arrow could be self-produced comparatively easily with readily available materials, while the other arms mentioned, the firearms, swords, and iron coats of mail, could only be produced by a skilled craftsman possessing the required technical knowledge, the ability to procure the raw materials, and access to specialised tools and workplace (a blacksmith shop). Hence, coats of mail, firearms and swords, being more costly to produce and less widespread, were more valuable as items of pillage.

<sup>16</sup> Except for this mention in the *Miwang Tokjö*, his historical role is otherwise unknown. He is only mentioned, apropos of this same episode, in Petech 1988a: 26.

When they proclaimed haughtily this clandestine roar of aggression, Nono Bitadzoki, being an honest, measured (*brtags pa*) speaker, vastly intelligent, spoke.

“Wise men (*shes ldan dag*)! To speak of war is easy, [but] to engage in war, that is not so easy. Also, the enemies who arrive are not deprived of cause or without confidence, and as for those who arrive to this place acting rashly (*gya tshoms = gya tsom*), there are none. [They have] ability for self control, fearless power, understanding of the workings of the enemy’s methods, and because they are clearly expert in the condition of physical skills, I have no doubt they have come to fight as promised (*khas ’ches*).

Because of that, having examined carefully, we [should] engage in war activities; therefore, as for those who have approached from the country of the Mongols, because they have the skill to strike with force while controlling (*bskyod*) [their] excellent horses, and to hold a single-point spear (*mtshon rtse gcig pa*) from above their mount, we should not engage (lit. “mix”) in battle [with them] in the desert plain (*mya ngam gyi thang du*).<sup>17</sup> As for our own army, it should consider strong crucial points the areas with mountain sides and river rocks. By remaining in the stronghold castles, we will subdue [them] with skill-in-means”, thus [Nono Bitadzoki] well ordered.

Others again spoke: “Hey, handsome ones, as for those who make speeches that are like this, they are not appropriate for men but they are suitable to say by those who have the support body of a woman! You are just not keen to engage in battle; as for us, we are very eager to fight. Like a thorn in the heart, [we] will not tolerate (*mi bzod*) those who are enemies of the offensive, but [we] will annihilate them; [we] will make garlands of [their] heads as a mark of valour (*dpa’ mtshan du*). [We] will take useful goods and also whatever we like!”.

Having thus proclaimed, they moved on with many of those troops.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> On the possibility, still unconfirmed, that “Mya ngam gyi thang” may have been the place name of the first battle between the Ladakhis and the Ganden Phodrang, see Petech 1988a: 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Miwang Tokjö*: 23. *dregs pa’i nga ro gsang mthon por sgrog par byed pa na / gzu bor gnas pa / brtags pa’i gtam smra ba / blo gros kyi ’jug pa yangs pa no no bi Ta dzo ki zhes bya bas smras pa / shes ldan dag g.yul gyi gtam bya ba ni sla yi / g.yul du ’jug pa ni de tsam du sla ba ma yin no / r’gol ba mngon par lhags pa yang rgyu dang bral ba / gdengs ma rnyed pa / gya tshoms su phyogs ’dir lhags pa ni ma yin gyi / rang gi brtul zhugs rngo thogs pa dang / ’jigs pa med pa’i mthu thob pa / dgra thabs kyi las khong du chud pa / sgyu rtsal gyi gnas la mngon par byung chub pas khas ’ches te r’gol bar lhags pa gdon mi za’o / de’i phyir legs par brtags nas g.yul gyi bya ba la ’jug par bya ba yin pas / de yang yul mong gol nas lhags pa rnam ni gzhon pa’i steng nas mtshon rtse gcig pa bzung nas rta mchog bskyod pa’i shugs dang lhan cig tu rdeg par mkhas pa yin pas mya ngan gyi thang du g.yul bsre bar mi bya’o / rang cag gi dpung ni ri [24] bo’i ngogs dang / chu brag gi sa’ gnad btsan po bzung bar bya’o / mkhar btsan po la gnas nas thabs mkhas pas ’dul bar bya’o zhes legs par bsgo ba las / gzhan dag gis yang smras pa / kwa bzhin bzang dag de lta bu’i gtam smra ba ni sgyes pa la ’os pa ma yin te bud med kyi lus rten can gyis gleng bar ’os so / / khyod cag g.yul gyi bya ba la ’jug par mi spro de tsam du bdag cag ni g.yul du ’jug pa la ches spro’o / / tshur r’gol gyi dgra snying gi tsher ma lta bu mi bzod kyi de dag tshar bcad de mgo bo’i*

This insight into the contrarian view of Nono Bitadzoki is useful to assess other implications of warfare against the Mongols. In this case, his speech illuminates the importance of considering the war tactics employed by the Mongols and adapting one's warring style in order to better confront them. After having pointed out their physical and technical skills, particularly the facility with which they were able to steer a horse and strike with their weapons at the same time, he emphasised the clear risks of fighting against them in an open space, and indicated the most desirable kinds of topography to seek out: mountainous areas, river escarpments, and strongholds.

This passage also reveals that his opinion was not well received. The *Miwang Tokjö* intimates that the soldiers, boastful and lured by the rich booty, vowed not to tolerate what they deemed a cowardly speech. They eagerly marched to war, and contrary to the advice of Nono Bitadzoki, their first battle against the mostly Mongol forces of the Ganden Phodrang occurred in a plain. It concluded in a solemn defeat for the Ladakhis. The end of the war eventually involved the retreat into strongholds on the part of the Ladakhis, an action that, in the long run, tired and demoralised the Mongol troops camped in the valleys below. Only in around 1682–1683, with the arrival of Mughal soldiers called as allies by the king of Ladakh, were the troops of the Ganden Phodrang forced to abandon their sieges and engage in open warfare.<sup>19</sup> The Mughals proved to be tougher opponents than the Ladakhis; at the first confrontation the troops of the Ganden Phodrang were severely defeated and began a retreat. They were pursued for a long stretch, and they were able to bring their flight to an end only after crossing the border, by using a combination of enemy-repelling rituals and the payment of a substantial bribe.<sup>20</sup> In the end, the Ganden Phodrang was able to secure Ngari as a region within the purview of

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*phreng ba yang dpa' mtshan du blangs par bya'o / / mkho dgu'i yo byad kyang ci dgar blang bar bya'o zhes dril bsgrags nas de dag dpung tshogs du ma dang chabs cig tu bskyod nas.*

<sup>19</sup> On the help sent to the Ladakhis by Ibrahim Khan of Kashmir see Petech 1977: 74 and 1988a: 31–32.

<sup>20</sup> According to the *Miwang Tokjö*, the Mughal army pursued the troops of the Ganden Phodrang from the plain between Basgo (Ba sgo) and Nyemo (Snye mo) to Spituk (Dpe thub), just south of Leh (2002: 28); in contrast, the *Ladak Gyelrap* asserts that the flight of the Ganden Phodrang soldiers occurred between Spituk and Tashigang, in Ngari; see Petech 1988a: 34. Concerning the method to stop the pursuit of the Mughal army, the *Miwang Tokjö* (2002: 29) mentions that rituals performed by the Dalai Lama in Lhasa were the only cause of the interruption of this chase, while the so-called "Namgya document", a treaty drawn between the government of the Ganden Phodrang and the king of Bashahr (Khu nu/Kinnaur) asserts that the Mughals were bribed by officials of both governments; see Petech 1988a: 34 and 40–44. On the use of "war magic" by the Fifth Dalai Lama, see FitzHerbert 2018: 49–120.



the government in Lhasa, while Ladakh remained outside its administrative domain, and closer to the broader sphere of influence of Kashmir.

Still, independently from the conclusions of the war, the citations above emphasise how the different abilities and combat techniques of the Mongol troops seem to have been well known to their opponents. But, if the Ladakhi generals were aware of the risks of confronting Mongol soldiers, and of the possible gains to be obtained if they defeated them, then is it possible to say that, for example, the Fifth Dalai Lama, who authorised this conflict,<sup>21</sup> was equally aware of the impact of Mongol forces on the battlefields?

While the Great Fifth's autobiography has no passages relevant to this question for this particular war, other wartime episodes narrated here suggest that he was well aware of the warfare techniques used by the Mongols, and did not object to their use for the purpose of supporting the Ganden Phodrang. One instance of this can be found in a resolution to the long-standing feud between the Gelukpa and the Dalai Lama on one hand, and the Karmapa (Karma pa) powers in Tsang and in Kham on the other.<sup>22</sup>

As is well known, after the defeat of the Tsangpa *desi* Karma Tenkyong Wangpo (*sde srid* Karma Bstan skyong dbang po, r. 1620–1642), the 10th Karmapa Chöying Dorjé (Chos dbyings rdo rje, 1604–1674) fled first south, to Lhodrak (Lho brag), and then east, where he established himself with a small entourage in the area of Gyeltang (Rgyal thang) in Kham.<sup>23</sup> As it happens, since at least 1652, a grandson of Gushri Khan (1582–1655) Khandro Lobzang Tenkyong (Mkha' 'gro Blo bzang bstan skyong, d. 1673),<sup>24</sup> had settled in the area of Dzachuka

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<sup>21</sup> On the role of the Fifth Dalai Lama in sanctioning this conflict, see Venturi 2018: 41–46.

<sup>22</sup> Even though a translation of the first volume of the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama already exists (Karmay 2014), the reader will notice that certain passages found there have been re-translated for this article. This in no way indicates any fault in Karmay's translation, which is excellent and represents a fundamental research tool for scholars of Tibet. However, I have found it necessary to adhere more literally to the text than he ordinarily does in order to understand with more clarity the details of military organisation, as well as the awareness of such matters on the part of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

<sup>23</sup> On the Tenth Karmapa and his role in Tibetan history, as well as his contributions to literary, artistic and folkloric facets of Tibetan culture, see Debreczeny and Tuttle 2016; Mengele 2012a, 2012b. On the flight of the Tenth Karmapa from Shigatsé, the destruction of his encampment in Lhodrak and his subsequent flight towards Kham, see Mengele 2012a: 190–211.

<sup>24</sup> A grandson of Gushri Khan, and the son of the latter's fifth son Ildüci (Yamada 201: 80). His full name was Khandro Lobzang Tenkyong (Mkha' 'gro blo bzang bstan skyong), even though the biography of the Dalai Lama often shortens it to Mkha' 'gro only. He controlled the area of Dzachukha (Rdza chu kha) in Kham,

(Rdza chu kha) in Kham<sup>25</sup> and acted as the local leader there, representing the authority of the Ganden Phodrang in the region. Both his relationship with the Fifth Dalai Lama and his support of Gelukpa institutions appear to have been solid. In 1652, when the Dalai Lama crossed Kham on his way to the imperial court in Beijing, Khandro welcomed him and accompanied him along his route, facilitating his travel by providing coracles to cross the Marchu (Dmar chu).<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in 1653, while returning from China, the Dalai Lama again rested in the area and received gifts from him.<sup>27</sup> Later, in 1660, Khandro is recorded as the major sponsor for the reconstruction of a monastery in Lithang (Li thang) that had been severely damaged during the wars with Beri Dönyö dorjé (Be ri Don yod rdo rje, d. 1641).<sup>28</sup>

However, late in the same year, Khandro unwittingly began to tarnish his reputation as a reliable Gelukpa supporter. According to the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama, a Kagyüpa (Bka' brgyud pa) monk by the name of Ling Wönpo (Gling dbon po) pretended to convert to the Gelukpa and convinced Khandro of his sincere change of heart.<sup>29</sup> Khandro then interceded on behalf of Ling Wönpo to the Dalai

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where he seems to have been originally sent to “suppress local rulers” (Shakabpa 2010: vol. 1, 378 fn 68). However, possibly also on account of the relative prevalence of the Karmapa in the area, he began to entertain relations with them. This complicated his relationship with both his family, loyal supporters of the Gelukpa, and the Dalai Lama. In addition, as it will be shown below, his newly established power at the border with China created an element of disruption in Sino-Tibetan relations that must have eventually become intolerable. According to Karmay 2014, 5: “In 1673 he was therefore surrounded at Dzachukha by an expeditionary force led mostly by members of his own family from Kokonor, and murdered”. However, a so far unidentified biography of the Tenth Karmapa ascribes this event to a preceding year (1669) and states that Khandro was merely arrested at this time, and subsequently died in prison. A passage from this biography is reported in Shakabpa 2010: vol. 1, 378 fn 68, but its original source is yet unknown. For a comprehensive article about Khandro and his wider role in Inner Asian politics as an important figure whose control extended in an area of interest both to the Qing Emperor Kangxi and to the Fifth Dalai Lama, see Yamada 2015: 79–103 (in Japanese). Also note Qinggeli 2014, in which a set of letters exchanged between the Kangxi and the Fifth Dalai Lama’s administration offer tantalising hints regarding the unsettling presence of the Karmapa in the area, which upset the balance between Han and Mongols at a time in which it was already destabilised by Khandro’s southward push in search of a share of the tea-trade business and Wu Sangui’s increasing sphere of authority. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the work of Qinggeli.

<sup>25</sup> According to Yamada 2015: 82, Khandro had settled in Kham around 1650.

<sup>26</sup> See Karmay 2014: 272–273.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*: 319.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: 423.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: 441. Fifth Dalai Lama 2009: vol. 1, 443 (hereafter *Za hor gyi ban de*): *khams nas kar lugs kyi gra rigs gling dbon po dge lugs su 'gyur khul gyi pad las la mkha' 'gro 'khrul bas sdings thang nang so rang phyogs rnga ma nag po'i tshos mdog can gyi bskul ma'i las*

Lama, asking that His Holiness himself ordain him as a new Gelukpa monk. While apparently unconvinced of the latter's sincerity, the Fifth Dalai Lama led the ceremony as a personal favour to his loyal supporter, who for good measure also happened to be a close relative of his ally Gushri Khan. However, simultaneously with the announcement of the ordination, the Great Fifth's autobiography ominously declares: "Later, Ling Wönpo deceived many officials of Khandro, in order to get them killed".<sup>30</sup> This comment, clearly recorded *ex post facto*, is meant to indicate that if there had actually been any suspicions surrounding the real intentions of the Karmapa, they were effectively confirmed. In addition, the remark reveals that Khandro had been unwise in supporting Ling Wönpo.

In fact, the decline in Khandro's fortunes seems to have begun at this point. When, four years later, in 1664, he requested the composition of a non-sectarian prayer from the Dalai Lama,<sup>31</sup> the latter hurriedly complied, but in view of what I am going to relate it seems likely that also this entreaty contributed to seal his fate. In fact, an entry dated 26–XII–1673 in the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama, sheds light on the eventual end of Khandro:

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*sna phrogs te kho par sprad / no po dge tshul sgrub par btang byung ba sa rul gyi chu thub bsam pa ma shar yang 'dod sbyar bzhin byas / rjes su kho pas bslus nas mkha' 'gro'i mi bzang mang du bsad pas nyos pa'i chang skyur gyi dper song /.*

Gling dbon po, a Karma Kagyu from Khams, by pretending to convert to the Geluk, flattered and deceived Khandro, therefore [the latter] took various exhortations of Dingtang, who is endowed with the black coloured tail of our side, he gave [them] to him [and] sent [him to me] to bring about [his] monkhood. Even though I did not think that wet soil (*sa rul*) is water resistant, I did as he desired. Afterwards, he deceived and killed many good men of Khandro, therefore he became an example of "sour beer that was bought".

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*: 442.

<sup>31</sup> *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 503–504, The entry, dated 17–I of the Wood-Dragon year (1664), is the following: *mkha' 'gros chos sde tshor 'dzugs rtsis kyis bstan pa / bstan 'dzin / sbyin bdag 'gro ba kun la 'jug pa'i smon lam gang gis bton kyang ris bcad du mi 'gro ba zhig dus kyis gtugs pas myur du dgos tshul byung ba thun 'tshams shig la brtsams pa mtshams grol nas gtad /.*

Khandro planned to establish in the monasteries a prayer of practice for the doctrine, the doctrine holders, the patrons and all the sentient beings, by which if intoned one would not go (behave) in a sectarian way; because the time had arrived (*dus kyi gtugs*) it had to occur quickly; [I] composed it in one night (*thun 'tshams = thun mtshams*) and I gave (*gtad*) [it] after having freed [myself] of the retreat.

Compare this translation with the same passage in Karmay 2014: 503. Evidently Khandro was pleased about the prayer mentioned here, since he is recorded as having donated to the Dalai Lama, only one week after its composition, "thousands of gifts, including gold, silver, tea and hides" (see Karmay 2014: 503). The production of a non-sectarian Gesar *bsang* text in the area of Dzachuka (Rdza chu ka) in this period has also been discussed as a possible indication of Khandro's involvement in non-sectarian activities; see FitzHerbert 2016: 30–31.

In Bar Kham ('Bar Khams), as for the relation as kins of Khandro and the Garpa (Sgar pa), etc. through the example of the juniper's wish to be born in the rock [i.e.], like the impossible is possible, [there was] an intensification of misfortune on our side, the doctrine of those who wear the tiara of the yellow hat, as when Langdarma Udumtsen (Glang dar ma 'U dum btsan) arose in the family of the ancestral religious king, the unblemished lineage of the "friend of the Sun" (*nyi ma'i gnyan*, the Buddha).

On the occasion of the inexhaustible vajra power of the ocean of vow-holders and the grace of the [three] precious jewels, the punishment for the time when [they] obstructed the final object of knowledge became near, and Dalai Hung Taiji's heroic bravery [made him] take up the responsibility of general (*dmag dpon*) of a great army that is like a sky filled with myriads (*rdul*) of horse's hoofs.

[His] assistants (*gnyer pa*):<sup>32</sup> Ganden Dargyé (Dga' ldan dar rgyas), Tsewang Raptan (Tshe dbang rab brtan), Tarpa (Thar pa), Erkhé Jinong (Er khe ji nong), Sechen Teji (Se chen Tha'i ji), [and] Tenzin (Bstan 'dzin), completely surrounded [them, i.e. Khandro and the Gar pa], and as soon as they reached the centre of Bar Kham, all the wicked enemies of the opposing faction (*mi mthun phyogs*) that were ill-intentioned (*ma rungs pa*) toward the other side, like the stirring of a forest-fire by the wind, were cornered in a suitable ravine, and all the insolent ones hung their heads [...].<sup>33</sup>

This passage rather vividly illustrates the juncture that led to the decision of purging Khandro, whose undivided loyalty to the Gelukpa establishment could not be relied upon. When it became known that he was in close relation with the Garpa,<sup>34</sup> it became evident that his uncertain support of the Gelukpa could be no longer tolerated, and Dalai

<sup>32</sup> *gnyer pa*, lit. "one who manages a task or an activity".

<sup>33</sup> *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 2, 274; *bar khams phyogs su mkha' 'gro dang sgar pa sku nyer 'brel ba sogs skye 'dod brag la shug pa'i dyes rang phyogs zhwa ser cod pan 'dzin pa rnams kyi bstan pa'i sku chags (sku chag) bdo ba'i mi srid pa srid pa lta bu rnam pa gcig tu nyi ma'i gnyen gyi brgyud dri ma med pa chos rgyal mes dbon gyi gdung la glang dar ma 'u dum btsan byung ba bzhin shes bya mtha' ma bkag pa'i dus kyi chad pa 'byung bar nye bar gtso bor dkon cog gi thugs rje dang dam can rgya mtsho'i mthu stobs rdo rje mi bzad pa'i stengs (steng) gnas skabs su da la'i hung tha'i ji'i dpa' mdzangs brtul phod pa rta rmig gi rdul gyis nam mkha' 'geng ba lta bu'i dpung chen po'i dmag dpon gyi khur gzung / dga' ldan dar rgyas / tshe dbang rab brtan / thar pa / er khe ji nor / se chen tha'i ji / bstan 'dzin / gnyer pa rnams kyis yongs su bskor te bar khams kyi lte bar 'byor ba tsam gyis pha rol ma rungs pa'i mi mthun phyogs kyi ngan dgra mtha' dag nags me rlung gis bskyod pa bzhin mthun pa'i g.yang du khugs nas dregs ldan thams cad gdong pa smad de rang zhabs su 'dus /.*

<sup>34</sup> In this context, the term Garpa seems to identify in general the Karmapa side. However, this term has multiple meanings. According to Tucci 1999 (1949): 68, the term *sgar pa* came to denote "powerful Lamas of the Karma sect", but originally was the family name of the *sde pa* of Rin spungs, which derived from a toponym in Khams (*ibid.*: 67). Richardson (1998: 353) followed a similar reasoning when he

Hung Taiji<sup>35</sup> dispatched his officers to Kham. Interestingly, the description of the Dalai Lama strongly suggests that the method they used to capture him was the typical hunting technique of the *battue*, in which a number of people form a gradually decreasing circle in order to prevent any possibility of escape for the prey. Khandro, thus cornered nearby a ravine, was captured (and likely killed) by his own relatives and compatriots, and the Fifth Dalai Lama was duly informed of the fact.<sup>36</sup>

The passage in the autobiography concludes as quoted above and does not furnish any clues as to what the Dalai Lama thought of the punishment of his ex-supporter, with whom he had met numerous times and from whom he had accepted gifts, as well as for whom, in

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stated that “the Sgar-pa were an east Tibetan clan, perhaps originating in the neighborhood of Karma Gdan-sa, from which sprang the line of Rin-spungs princes”. However, Petech (1977: 43 fn 2) distinguished between *sgar* as “the military camp and court of the high Kar-ma-pa and ‘Brug-pa Lamas” and “the sGar-pa Lamas belonging to the Karma-pa sect, who played a great role in the revolts against Guśri Khan and the Dalai Lama after 1642”. According to him, the two have “nothing to do” with each other. The use of Sgar pa as a family name resurfaces in Shakabpa 1987: 111, where it is stated that in 1642 “a Karmapa supporter named Garpa Yapse planned a revolt against Ganden Phodrang”. In other contexts, the term *sgar pa* has been variously translated as “field commander” (Jackson 1989: 48) and “general of the encampment” (Martin 1991: 340) when the term refers to the Rin spungs pa *sde pa*, and particularly Dönyö Dorjé (Don yod rdo rje). However, when it appears in a Karmapa context, it is most often directly rendered as “encampment” (Mengele 2012a: 193 and *passim*). In this regard, the biography of the Tenth Karmapa gives ample indications that his entourage habitually camped in the open. For example, on the arrival of Chöying Dorjé near Shigatsé in 1616, the ruler of Tsang Karma Phüntsoḱ Namgyel (Karma phun tshogs rnam rgyal, 1587–1620) welcomed him in a tent specifically built for his reception and enthronement. Later, when it was discovered that Chöying Dorjé’s father had broken the rule forbidding consumption of alcohol, the Tenth Karmapa’s own family was expelled from the encampment. Around 1618, the Karmapa travelled to Neudong (Ne’u gdong) with his encampment. In 1644, the troops of Gushri Khan commanded by the *depa* Kyishöpa (Skyid shod pa), surrounded his encampment, which was then ransacked, while the Tenth Karmapa managed to flee to Lhodrak, and from there to Kham. In Kham, the Tenth Karmapa eventually set his encampment in the area of Gyeltang (Rgyal thang) before his journey north (1648–1653) to meet the *Zhamarpa* Yeshé Nying po (*Zhwa dmar pa* Ye shes snying po, 1631–1694). The terms Garpa and Garchen, thus, may also refer broadly to Chöying Dorjé. On his biography, see Mengele 2012a, 2012b.

<sup>35</sup> Also known as Dalai Baatur (see footnote 40 below), he was the sixth son of Gushri Khan. In a sign that points at how skills and roles were seemingly transmitted within a family, also his son, Ganden Tsewang Pelzangpo (Dga’ ldan tshe dbang dpal bzang po, d. 1699?), became an important general of the Ganden Phodrang army during the tenure of the Fifth Dalai Lama, and led the campaigns against Ladakh in the years 1679–1684. On Ganden Tsewang Pelzangpo see Venturi 2018: 41–46 and Venturi 2019.

<sup>36</sup> On this episode, see also Shakabpa 2010: vol. 1, 365 and Yamada 2015: 95–96.

the past, he had written prayers and performed ritual authorisations. Similarly, nothing in the autobiography hints at an opinion on the particular method with which he was apprehended. Still, even the terse language of this passage shows that the Dalai Lama was fully aware of the event, and one may venture to infer such matter-of-fact approach denotes that he was not too stunned by the occurrence. On the contrary, the comparison between Khandro and the Emperor Lang-darma (Glang dar ma), the most notorious traitor of Buddhism in Tibetan canonical history, indicates that the treatment of Khandro was, in the eyes of the Fifth Dalai Lama, as justifiable as the famous regicide committed by Lhalung Pelkyi Dorjé (Lha lung Dpal kyi rdo rje) in 842. In fact, when some years later in 1675 the Manchu emperor sent a reward for the removal of Khandro, the Fifth Dalai Lama seems to have accepted this without any particular qualms.<sup>37</sup>

While this passage provides a window into what may have been the knowledge of Mongol military techniques on the part of the higher Gelukpa administration, another excerpt from the autobiography of the Fifth Dalai Lama illustrates his awareness of the sometimes rocky relations between Mongol and Tibetan divisions of the army. Combined Mongol and Tibetan detachments had been in use since 1644, when the flight of the Karmapa hierarchs to Lhodrak instilled the fear that this southern region could become a new centre of opposition for the Ganden Phodrang. Thus, a contingent of 700 troops referred to as *bod sog gi dmag*, i.e. comprising both Mongols and Tibetans, was dispatched there. It seems possible that at this early stage the two nationalities operated separately on the battlefield, since their subsequent foray from Lhodrak into Bhutan resulted in the imprisonment of three Tibetan commanders, while the Mongol division (*sog dmag dum bu*) is said to have escaped.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 2, 334: *dpon mkha' 'gros rgya bod kyis mtshams mi bde ba byas par brten gnas nas phyungs shig par gong nas lung byung ba ltar tshul bzhin bsgrubs pa'i bya dgar tshes brgyad kyi nyin gong gi bka' shog rten du gser srang chig brgya so lnga las grub pa'i maN+Dal dang srang chig brgya yod pa'i lcug (= lhag?) / dngul gyi mdong mo / rta rmig ma sogs srang bzhi brgya dang bcu / gan gos yug gnyis brgya / nyin bde ma dang rtags brgyad kha btags sogs khyon lnga brgya rnam kyi gnang sbyin byung ba blangs /*. Because the chief Khandro had created difficulties at the border between China and Tibet, according to the emperor's orders he should be chased away from the area, and as a reward for accomplishing [this] properly, on the eight day [of the third month of 1675] I received gifts: a *maṅḍala* made with one hundred thirty five *srang* of gold and more than one hundred *srang*, a silver churn, four hundred and ten *srang* of horse-hoof-shaped ingots, two hundred bolts of fabric, five hundred differently sized *kha btags* and "*nyin bde ma*" ceremonial scarves with the eight auspicious symbols, etc.

<sup>38</sup> On this episode, see Venturi 2018: 33–34.

As the next anecdote will show however, by 1656–1657 the two armies appear to have been more integrated. In those years the Ganden Phodrang was at war, for the third time, against Bhutan. In the previous conflicts between the two nascent polities the troops of the Ganden Phodrang had been repeatedly overcome, and this third engagement was to conclude in the same way. In this case, however, we have some information concerning the internal disagreements within the army of the Dalai Lama which likely contributed to weakening its position vis-à-vis the enemy.

To begin with, even though there was no unanimous agreement on the accuracy of the divinations performed to pinpoint the correct time and *modus operandi* of the expedition,<sup>39</sup> the two Mongol generals, Dalai Baatur<sup>40</sup> and Machik Taiji (Ma gcig Taiji),<sup>41</sup> received the spiritual au-

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<sup>39</sup> At the beginning of the seventh month of the Fire-Bird year, the regent Sönam Raptan (Bsod nams rab brtan) asked Zur Chöying Rangdröl (Zur Chos dbyings rang sgröl, 1604–1669) to make an astrological prognostication about the upcoming military enterprise. In addition, the Dalai Lama himself performed a divination using the *yangchar* (*dbyangs 'char*) method (Karmay 2014: 367). Although the predictions apparently gave similar responses, later the Nechung (Gnas chung) oracle complained that the Tibetan army was performing badly because his own specific instructions on how to enter Mön (Mon) had not been followed (*ibid.*: 374). This critique may perhaps be seen as a sign of the rivalry for influence on the Dalai Lama among different parties. On one side were the Gelukpa, and on the other Nyingmapa (Rnying ma pa) masters such as the Dalai Lama's root guru Zur Chöying Rangdröl, who had much influence on the formation of the Great Fifth's ideas on the importance of magic rituals for an effective government. On Zur Chöying Rangdröl and the transmission of key rites of destructive magic to the Dalai Lama, see FitzHerbert 2018: 89–108.

<sup>40</sup> Dalai Baatur was the sixth of the ten sons of Gushri Khan. Although at the death of the latter the regency over Tibet passed to his eldest son Tenzin Dayan, the control of the Blue Lake region was in the hands of Dalai Baatur. He is mentioned in the autobiographical diary of the Fifth Dalai Lama for the first time in 1646, when Lobzang Gyatso wrote a prayer on his request. In the successive years the Dalai Lama continued to perform many *rje gnang* and *dbang* especially for him. In 1648 he left Lhasa for Kham (Karmay 2014: 220), but in 1652 and 1653 he was in Kokonor, as he welcomed the Dalai Lama and offered him gifts on both legs of his trip to the Qing court (Karmay 2014: 273, 320). In 1658 the Dalai Lama conferred on him the title of Dalai Hung Taiji (Karmay 2014: 391). As a consequence of this, the Great Fifth's autobiography alternatively mentions him either by the name Dalai Baatur or Dalai Hung Taiji. This dual nomenclature can be used to reconstruct some portions of the text that have been recorded *ex-post facto*. On his reign in the area of Kokonor as the leader of the group of other eight sons of Gushri Khan ("the eight Khoshuts"), see Petech 1988b: 206; Ahmad 1970: 66–67.

<sup>41</sup> The autobiographical diary of the Fifth Dalai Lama provides a little information on Machik Taiji before his role as commander of the army on this occasion. His first appearance in the text is in 1642, when he was sent to invite the Dalai Lama to Tsang soon after Gushri Khan achieved control over all of Tibet (*Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 159; Karmay 2014: 164). In 1648 he received the *lung* of Tsegön (Tshe mgon)

thorisation of the protective deity Gönpo (Mgon po) from the Fifth Dalai Lama as a form of protection.<sup>42</sup> Then, the march south began in the seventh month of 1656, with the *depa* Sönam Raptan (*sde pa* Bsod nams rab brtan) following its progress from Tsang.<sup>43</sup> However, already the following month, attempts to postpone the invasion began to be made by another commander, the *nangso* Norbu. The younger brother of the regent Sönam Raptan, Norbu's political career had led him from the position of governor of Shigatsé, to which he had been appointed in 1644, to the role of commander of a division of Tibetan troops in the second conflict between Tibet and Bhutan in 1648. However, in this particular campaign he did not cover himself with honour. Apparently discouraged by the arduous conditions and the effective counteroffensive of the Bhutanese, he fled the field so precipitously (*'ur zhogs*) that he left behind his tent, equipment, and saddle, thus fomenting much gossip and complaints about his cowardice.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, his reinstatement as commander of another portion of the army for the war of 1656–1657 is puzzling, and can perhaps only be explained by his close family relationship to the regent Sönam Raptan. At any rate, in this conflict his behaviour was again not praiseworthy. The diary of the Fifth Dalai Lama records that in the eighth month of 1656:

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(*Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 219; Karmay 2014: 219). In 1656, just before the departure of troops for the military expedition against Bhutan, he had a personal meeting with the Dalai Lama, in which it can only be surmised that the conversation focused on the imminent attack (*Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 370: *zla ba bdun pa'i tshes gcig la ma cig hung tha'i ji dang phrad*; Karmay 2014: 367). In the same month, together with Dalai Baatur, he received the *dbang* of longevity and the spiritual authorisation of Gönpo (see footnote below). In the first month of 1657, when the expedition was taking place, the Dalai Lama wrote a prayer on his request (*Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 375; *ma gcig tha'i jis bskul ba'i gsol 'debs smon lam [...] brtsams*; Karmay 2014: 372). His last mention is in the passage quoted below, concerning his viewpoint on the progress of the war and his sudden death.

<sup>42</sup> *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 371; *da la'i bā thur dang ma cig tha'i ji gnyis la grub rgyal lugs kyi tshes dbang dang mgon po'i rjes gnang bar chad kun sel phul /*; Karmay 2014: 368.

<sup>43</sup> *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 371; *'di skabs mon du dpung chen phyogs shing sde pa dpon g.yog kyang zhal bkod la gtsang du phebs pa'i drag zhan thams cad 'tshub ling nge ba'i skabs su yod /*. At this time [when] the great army was going to Mön and also the *sde pa* and his entourage (*dpon g.yon*) were going to Tsang to give orders (*zhal bkod*), it was a time of anxiety for all people, of high and low rank (see the translation in Karmay 2014: 368).

<sup>44</sup> A biography of Nangso Norbu by Sean Jones, mostly based on the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiographical diary, has been published online: Sean Jones, "Depa Norbu", Treasury of Lives (last accessed on 20/02/2019 at <https://treasuryof-lives.org/biographies/view/Depa-Norbu/13614>). On his behaviour during the war with Bhutan in 1648 see Venturi 2018: 34–35.



With regard to the *depa* Nyiru<sup>45</sup> (*sde pa Nyi ru*)'s arrival to Chutsam (Chu mtshams),<sup>46</sup> the officer (*nang so*) Jangöpa (Byang ngos pa)<sup>47</sup> recognised it as the fault of the high terrain; Tsarongné (Tsha rong nas)<sup>48</sup> had

<sup>45</sup> The *depa* Nyiru is otherwise unknown.

<sup>46</sup> So far, I have been unable to identify the location of Chutsam. Literally meaning “water shore”, it may refer either to a place by the water (a lake?) from which were directed military operations, or it could be a place name. Smith (2001: 324 fn 734) mentions a place called Chutsam zangi sokpari (Chu mtshams bzang gi sogs pa ri) as one of the borders of Yeru (G.yas ru). However geographically this would not fit with the approximate location of the quote above (the border between southern Tibet and Bhutan).

<sup>47</sup> This *nangso* (official) was in fact the personal physician (*drung 'tsho*) of the Dalai Lama. He is also referred to as *pöntsang* (*dpon tshang*) or *pöntsang* Jangöpa menpa (*smän pa*). Even though more commonly translated as “ruler’s residence”, Das’s *Dictionary* defines *dpon tshang* as “physician”, after Friedrich Schröter (1826: 147). Note that Schröter’s dictionary in fact reflects the Tibetan language as it was spoken at the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama, as it is a translation of the original 25,000 entry Latin-Tibetan dictionary composed by the Capuchin missionary Orazio Della Penna (1680–1745); see De Rossi Filibeck 2019: 97–98. *Pöntsang* Jangöpa menpa seems to have been the younger brother of another doctor by the same name, who is mentioned in the autobiographical diary as personal physician of the Fifth Dalai Lama between 1644 and 1653, the year in which he died (see Karmay 2014: 296). A younger brother of Jangöpa is mentioned a propos of an epidemic of smallpox in the year 1642; the Dalai Lama states that although highly educated, this younger brother was not very experienced (*Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 150: *byang ngos nas gcung po sku yon che'ang myong byang chung ba*; see Karmay 2014: 154). Also, a “young Jangöpa” (“*byang ngos nas sku gzhon pa*”, *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 225) is mentioned for the first time in 1649 (Karmay 2014: 229), as the recipient of religious teachings. In any case, his career as a physician to the Dalai Lama seems to have started only in 1654, after the death of his family member. In this year he was called for the first time to attend the Great Fifth, who, affected by severe pain in the right leg (probably gout) could no longer preside over the assembly. Jangöpa’s treatments were effective after about ten days, but as the regent Sönam Raptan was insisting that the Dalai Lama reach him quickly in Tsang, the appropriate cures could not be completed, and the Dalai Lama only partially recovered (see Karmay 2014: 330). Later in the same year, Jangöpa’s services were retained—together with those of another physician, Lingtö Chöjé (Gling stod chos rje)—to preserve the rapidly declining health of Gushri Khan, who, however, died of old age (*ibid.*: 343; note that on this occasion the Dalai Lama shows his scepticism toward the basic services administered by “Buddhist lamas, tantrists, Bonpo and physicians”—*bla ma sngags bon sman pa mtha' dag gi zog mthil 'di rigs kyis 'don par mchis /*; see *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 343). On the occasion of the preparation for the attack on Bhutan in 1656, the Dalai Lama mentions in his diary that there was fear that the *pöntsang* Jangöpa and another official, the *nangso* Ngödrup (Dngos grub) might “suffer from epilepsy” (Karmay 2014, 367; *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 370: *nang so dngos grub dang dpon tshang byang ngos drung 'tsho gnyis la steng grib kyi dogs pa zhig snang ba*), and the Dalai Lama performed a ritual to avert this. However, in this case it is clear from the context that the two officials were getting ready to leave in the wake of the military expedition, and thus *steng grib* cannot be “epilepsy”, but rather some kind of disturbance caused either by the altitude reached when crossing the passes or by the warmer, more humid climatic conditions in Bhutan. In fact, we see in the passage quoted above that Jangöpa was present, if not on the battlefield, then at

a heavy phlegm (? *sten babs* = stick+flow) combined with (*btags*) red mouth and uncomfortable breathing, and the *depa* Norbu [said], in secret circumstances, that a suitable method [would be that I] should tell the regent (*sde pa*) the reason to delay the army from now on [was that] the pair of armies' [campaign] did not agree with any divination or prophecy. But, even in the mind of the people, this was illogical and they would have objected; in their minds it should not be again [of] a sudden nature.<sup>49</sup>

Two major points transpire from the quoted passage. First, some of the officials sent to Bhutan were returning to a base or headquarter in Chutsam on account of health problems caused by altitude. Doctors,

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least in Chutsam, where he diagnosed officials who fell ill. This proves that from the start of the Ganden Phodrang period physicians were dispatched in the train of the army to provide medical services, possibly only for officials of higher rank. As shown by Van Vleet 2018, in the later period of the Ganden Phodrang, particularly the first half of the 20th century, graduates of both the Chakpori (Lcags po ri) and Mentsikhang (Sman rtsis khang) medical colleges served as medical military officials. She ascribes the institutionalisation of the role of medics in the army as part of a global trend of modernisation of the military. Significantly, from the passage of the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography just reviewed, it seems that the presence of medics at or nearby the front was an established practice in Tibet already in the 17th century.

<sup>48</sup> Tsarongné, sometimes also called *pöntsang* Tsarongpa (Tsha rong pa) in the autobiography of the Great Fifth, was also a physician in attendance to the Dalai Lama. He seems to have enjoyed a good reputation already in 1641 (Iron-Snake), when he is mentioned regarding an outbreak of smallpox. The specific nature of the disease was not well established, and while the younger Jangöpa (see note above) was unable to pronounce a definite identification, Tsarongpa was consulted and provided a final judgement on the contagiousness of the infection. See *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 150: *de skabs 'brum dkar dang 'brum yan re mang zhig 'dug pas gang yin kyang 'gos par byang ngos nas gcung po sku yon che'ang myong byang chung pas 'di ni 'di'o zhes lung ston rgyu ma byung / rjes su dpon tshang tsha rong pa sogs la dris par na lugs kyis 'brum yan du thag bcad song zhing rang yang de ltar du sems so /*; see Karmay 2014: 154. As shown in the quote above, in 1656 he was among the medical officials sent to accompany the military expedition to Nepal, but evidently became ill at one point. In 1664 he is mentioned on the occasion of the establishment of medical schools (*gso dpyad bshad grwa*) by the government of the Ganden Phodrang. He was the teacher of a group of students from Tsang, two of whom came to the attention of the Dalai Lama for their thorough preparation in the Four Tantras. See *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 515: *dbus gtsang gnyis kar gso dpyad kyi bshad grwa tshugs pa gtsang pa tsho blo gsal ba'am brtson 'grus che ba gang yin yang tsha rong nas kyi slob ma bstan 'dzin dang dar rgyas can gyis rgyud bzhi'i rgyugs sprad /*; see Karmay 2014: 515.

<sup>49</sup> *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 371–372; *sde pa nyi ru chu mtshams su phebs thog nang so byang ngos pas ma mthos pa'i skyon du ngos bzung zhing tsha rong nas kyis dbugs mi bder kha dmar btags pa'i sten babs lci ba zhib byung ba'i sde pa nor bus lkog tu gnas tshul dang sbrags da cha dmag bshol ba'i sde bar* (read: *sde par*) *rgyu mtshan zer dgos lugs byung rung dmag gi cha mo rtsis lung bstan gang la'ang ma babs shing der ma zad mi dmangs kyi blor yang mi 'thad pa nas bshol btav kyang thugs la ma sag gshis yang bskyar la dgos pa mi 'dug [...]*. See translation of the same passage in Karmay 2014: 369.

such as Jangöpa and Tsarongné, appear to have been waiting there, on the fringes of the conflict, to assist ill soldiers, most likely higher-ranking officials.<sup>50</sup> The early date of this entry (this occurred in the eighth month, and the army had started south in the seventh month) shows that the return of sick personnel likely occurred while the troops were crossing the passes toward the lower valleys of Bhutan. In any case, the absence of a quantity of officials in the field would have weakened the structure and organisation of the army of the Ganden Phodrang even before the first action of the campaign had started.

Secondly, it appears that the *depa* Norbu, either because of his cowardice, already shown in the previous war, or because of his awareness of the difficulties that an army lacking part of its command structure could encounter, attempted to convince the Dalai Lama to employ a little subterfuge in order to delay the progress of his troops. This involved explaining to the regent Sönam Rapten that since none of the prophecies and divinations performed were in agreement with the progress of the campaign, it was necessary to slow down the movement of the army. The Dalai Lama did not implement this idea, both because he disagreed with the interpretation of the omens suggested by *depa* Norbu and because he reasoned that public opinion would not have understood a sudden change in the course of the matter.

However, the conclusion of this failed attempt at delaying the march toward Bhutan can be seen in an entry dated to 1657, though no precise month and day is provided.<sup>51</sup> It says:

In the beginning the great protector Nechung (Gnas chung) prophesied that the manner (*phyogs*) of frequently producing (*yong*) the army was not in agreement [with the wishes] of the common people.<sup>52</sup> He said

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<sup>50</sup> This seems to have been the case in the 20th century, as shown by Van Vleet 2018: 183–190.

<sup>51</sup> Readers will notice that the passage that follows is interpreted in a rather different manner in this version and in the one by Prof. Karmay. While the general essence of the discourse remains unaltered, i.e. that there was a serious dispute between Tibetan and Mongol commanders during the war, and that their spat assumed “ethnic” dimensions, some uncertainties on the details remain, especially around the exact contours of the quarrel. The ambiguities of the passage also show that there was much fingerpointing among all parties concerned, and one may wonder whether the Fifth Dalai Lama or his staff of compilers for the biography might have deliberately obfuscated the details of the dispute. I would like to thank George FitzHerbert for suggesting this intriguing hypothesis.

<sup>52</sup> Karmay (2014: 374) translates *dpung 'gro khyab yong* as “military expedition”. The literal translation above approximates this meaning. However, other alternative renderings of the same compound are possible. One could be “the manner of producing (*yong*) pervasive (*khyab*) going (*'gro*) [to] the army (*dpung*)”; this rather renders the idea of some form of widespread recruitment going on in order to prepare for the impending conflict. I thank Gedun Rabsal (Department of Central Eurasian

that because the army had not gone in accordance with what he thought hereafter was the time for entering Mon, they were not proceeding properly.<sup>53</sup> From Pakri (Phag ri) onwards, they postponed (*zhag phul*) and whiled away the time (*nyin phul*), attempting not to go, and moving slowly; [but] if they had begun without hesitation to besiege with force at Hungrelkha (Hung ral kha),<sup>54</sup> that year, with enemy shouts that said: "There are all: Tibetans, Mongols, Khampas and [soldiers from] Kongpo!", they [would have] certainly abandoned the fortress. Nevertheless, the *depa* Norbu appeared to err by being unable to [enforce the] discipline, therefore, as for the religious protector, it is not necessarily the case (*dgos rigs su mi gda'*) to view [him] wrongly.

In that regard, if we weighed the religious protectors' prophecies and divinations and whatever kinds of speech by the people, it was not appropriate to produce a widespread military expedition (*dpung 'jug*) to the south. At the time when the armies from Ü, Kham and Kongpo entered in Bumtang ('Bum thang) and its monastery, by just cutting off near the lower [part] of Bumtang, they [could] have flanked and subsequently surrounded all of Paro (Spa gro). [But] not only they did not go, "waiting for the *depa* Norbu to grow old" (lit.: for the coming of age of the *depa* Norbu, i.e. they were procrastinating): on account of the duration of the war, that had generated effeminate males (*pho ma*),<sup>55</sup> they wasted many valuable men due to the conditions (*tshad*) in the south and to epidemic diseases such as measles (*be ge*).

Taklung Mendrönpa (Stag lung Sman gron pa), a servant of the Gekhasa (Gad kha sa) [house],<sup>56</sup> in a letter that he gave to the *depa* (i.e. Sönam Raptan, aka Sönam Chöpel) in Gyantsé (Rgyal rtse) [said that]

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Studies, Indiana University) for suggesting this interpretation. Another possibility could be: "the manner of producing (*yong*) pervasive (*khyab*) army movement (*dpung 'gro*)"; this translation supports the meaning of "military expedition" chosen by Karmay.

<sup>53</sup> Alternatively: "as for the estimate (*tshod la*) of the army's entrance inside Mön, because now was not in agreement with his thought, it would not proceed properly".

<sup>54</sup> The 15th century site of Hungrelkha comprised a fort (*rdzong*) and a Drukpa Kagyu ('Brug pa bka' brgyud) monastic site. It was founded by Hungrel Drungdrung (Hung ral Drung drung) in the Paro (Spa gro) valley on land donated by local patrons. It was five storeys high and Hungrel Drungdrung is said to have employed men by day and supramundane beings by night for its construction. On the history and legends connected to this fort and monastery, see Sangye Dorji 2004, 32–34. I would like to thank Gedun Rabsal for pointing out this reference.

<sup>55</sup> Karmay (2014: 375) refers the expression *pho ma skyes pa* to the *depa* Norbu only ("he made cowardly delaying tactics"), while here the expression *pho ma* is rendered as "effeminated males" by modifying *pho* ("man, male") with the feminine particle *ma*. The passage could thus be interpreted to mean that the length of the war had made the men "effeminate" in the sense of not ready to fight. Compare this notion with the passage of the *Miwang Tokjö* quoted above, where the cautious speech of Nono Bitadzoki was mocked by the soldiers for being suitable to the reasoning of a woman.

<sup>56</sup> The *depa* Norbu had married a woman of the Gekhasa clan; as a consequence, this servant should be loyal to him.

both Dalai Baatur and Machik Taiji were the bulwark (*lcags ri*) of the doctrine, and that the *depa* Norbu, because of the great loss of precious [lives] (*gces 'phangs [=phangs] che bas*) of which he must bear the burden,<sup>57</sup> had withdrawn ('*then = 'then srung*) to Phakri during the summer.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, because there were no difficulties ('*thogs = thogs* "hindrance, obstruction") in [finding] men, even if they died, this should be recorded. [A messenger] was sent to Drepung ('Bras spungs) especially to demonstrate [this], exactly with the purpose of showing [and] providing the reason of [their] indifference, even if Tibet should empty of all the Tibetans in mass.

Even though the calculation was to withdraw, because the two Mongol generals (*dpon po*) were brave and heroic unlike [any] other, they said: "If the great army is withdrawn, we shall certainly both come, [but] we would not be able to show our face among the Mongols and to bear the offensive speech [that] the common folks remained [to fight]", thus they did not listen to [the idea of] returning.

Machik Taiji suddenly died; it was said that perhaps it was the conditions in Mön, [but] many managers (*mgron gnyer*) and attendants (*drung pa*), [in] profound and secret talks, said that there had been a food preparation (*zas sbyor* i.e. poisoning) on account of the great hostility of the Taiji to the *depa* Norbu.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> This sentence is also open to different interpretations. Karmay (2014: 375) renders it as: "Dalai Pathur and Machig Taiji were the ramparts of the doctrine and they caringly insisted that it was the *depa* Norbu who should take responsibility". In the version above, it transpires that the *depa* Norbu, through his servant, intimated he was the only one feeling the pangs of the loss of life the war was causing.

<sup>58</sup> According to Karmay (*ibid.*), it was the two Mongol commanders who remained behind in Phakri, but it seems to me that the subject of the discourse has changed at this point to the *depa* Norbu. However, Gedun Rabsal, whom I have consulted for clarifications on this passage, thinks that all three generals, the two Mongols and the *depa* Norbu, stayed back in Phakri. These uncertainties highlight the ambiguity of the language in the passage. Note that the Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography seems to be a text prone to eliciting contradictory interpretations. In this regard, see Schwieger 2015: 37 and 241 fn 108, which presents three very different translations of the same passage.

<sup>59</sup> *Za hor gyi ban de*: vol. 1, 378: *gnas chung chos skyong chen po thog mar dmangs dang mi mthun pa'i dpung 'gro kyab yong pa'i phyogs kyi lung bstan pa / dpung mon nang du chug tshod la da cha bsams pa bzhin byas ma song bas tshul ldan mi yong bar gsung ba phag ri nas bzung zhag 'phul nyin 'phul du ma song ba'i rtsol khyad kyis phyin te hung ral khar tsha shugs kyis bskor 'tshangs the tshom med pa zhig brtsams na de lo bod sog khams kong tshang ma yod zer ba'i dgra skad kyis rdzong bskur byed nges yin 'dug kyang sde pa nor bus tshul ldan ma nus pa'i skyon du snang bas chos skyong la log lta dgos rigs su mi gda' / de'ang chos skyong rnams kyi lung bstan mo rtsis / mi dmangs kyis brjod rigs gang la dpags kyang lho'i dpung 'jug de 'gro khyab che ba zhig yong rigs min 'dug rung dbus dpung dang khams kong rnams dgon dang bum thang du bcug tshe bum thang du man chad tshur chod pa tsam gyi mtha' brten pa'i rjes yong rigs la tshang ma spa gror dril ba sde ba nor bu'i che 'don la mi 'gro ba'i khar khong pas pho ma skyes pa'i dmag yun gyis be ge sogs nad rims dang lho tshad kyis mi gces mang du gron /gad kha sa'i sger g.yog stag lung sman grong pas / rgyal rtser sde par phul ba'i zhu yig la da la'i bA thur dang ma gcig tha'i ji gnyis bstan pa'i lcags ri dang sde pa nor bu khar (= khur) bzhes mdzad dgos pa'i*

Despite difficulties of interpretation, this passage illustrates the complex concatenation of events that both preceded and followed the withdrawal of the army of the Ganden Phodrang from the expedition to Bhutan in 1656–1657. To begin with, it appears that the oracle of Nechung disapproved of the conflict and had argued against waging war too often, because the general populace would not approve. In addition, he had explained to the Dalai Lama that the reason why the troops were not being disciplined and were wasting time instead of going directly toward Bhutan, was that his advice on the appropriate time in which to start the expedition had not been followed. On the contrary, if they had pressed forward, the enemies would have been easily overwhelmed by the united forces of Mongols, Tibetans, Kham-pas and soldiers from Kongpo.

On the basis of this report, the Dalai Lama determined that an error had indeed been made, but not by the oracle, rather by the *depa* Norbu, who had been unable to enforce the soldiers' discipline. In fact, the Dalai Lama reasoned, if the oracle's prediction and the people's will had been heeded, it would have been best not to proceed at all with the military expedition. However, he seems to have been well aware of the tactical mistakes that had been made, as he ventures to offer strategic advice on how the army should have proceeded. He specifically indicates that once the army had reached the area of Bumtang, instead of taking the town, it should have bypassed it, encircling it from the south and enabling the opportunity to flank and surround Paro also.<sup>60</sup>

However, while vindicating the oracle of Nechung, by asserting that the operation had not gone as hoped because the latter's predictions had not been followed, he was much less forgiving with regard to the *depa* Norbu. Not only had this commander not followed proper methods, but his time-wasting, mockingly referred to as "waiting for his coming of age", had led to widespread loss of life and the spread

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*gces 'phangs che bas dbyar gyi ring phag ri tsam la 'then / gzhan su shi'ang mi la mi 'thogs pas lo sbrel 'jog dgos zhes bod gangs can pa thams cad sdebs su stongs kyang ji mi snyam pa'i rgyu mtshan phul snang ba dgos don ji ltar yang 'bras spungs su ched bstad sten par btang byung / tshur 'then rtsis mdzad 'dug rong sog po'i dpon po gnyis gzhan dang mi 'dra ba'i dpa' mdzangs rtul phod pas dpung chen 'then na nged gnyis yong ba gzhir bcas / dimangs ma bzhas ste log pa'i gtam khur nas sog po'i khrog du gdong ston mi nus zhes 'byon ma nyan / ma gcig tha'i ji glo bur du grongs pa mon tshad yin nam zer / mgron gnyer drung pa can mang dag gis zab khog nas brjod rigs tha'i jis sde pa nor bur sdong zug ches par brten zas sbyor zhig byung 'dra gleng /; see translation of the same passage in Karmay, *The Illusive Play*: 374–375.*

<sup>60</sup> This hardly seems feasible, as Bumthang is in central Bhutan and the Paro valley (where the fort of Hung ral kha is located) is in the west of the country. The distance is further exacerbated by the craggy topography of Bhutan. More details on this campaign can be found in Ardussi 1977: 297–298.

of infectious diseases. Moreover, the extended duration of the war had weakened the strength and resolve of the soldiers.

The passage continues by outlining the scheme employed by the *depa* Norbu to finally convince the Dalai Lama that it was not advisable to push forward into Bhutan. He (Norbu) sent one of his household servants to explain that while the Mongol generals had been paragons of loyalty and heroism, they did not seem to mind how many people perished in combat, not even if the whole of Tibet should become empty of people. The *depa* Norbu wanted the Mongols' indifference toward the loss of life to be recorded, and sent his servant first to Gyantsé and then to Drepung specifically to press this point. In brief, the *depa* Norbu squarely placed the blame on the Mongols, at the same time exonerating himself from any responsibility.

Yet, when the two Mongol generals became aware of *depa* Norbu's intention to withdraw the troops, they refused to do so on account of their reputation: how could they face other Mongols after such behaviour? In this regard the Dalai Lama's autobiographical diary shows not only that he was well aware of their refusal, but also that he imputed their reasons to have been their unparalleled bravery and heroism. His words do not betray disappointment, but rather admiration for their unswerving loyalty and courage. However, while appreciated by the Fifth Dalai Lama, their valour and their refusal to halt the attack created a severe rift with the *depa* Norbu. The result was that one of the two generals suddenly died in suspicious circumstances, and the troops of the Ganden Phodrang effectively withdrew. Again here, the Dalai Lama does not openly point the finger. His language is oblique and nuanced. Instead of openly accusing, he apparently maintains the official line that the conditions in the south had caused the death of Machik Taiji, but at the same time gives ample indication of being fully conscious of the rumours which insinuated that Machik Taiji had been poisoned on orders of the *depa* Norbu.

Thus, the Dalai Lama seems to have been well aware of the disagreements that developed between the Tibetan and the Mongol sides of his army during this campaign, but he also presents himself as having been *super partes* and not interfering in their disputes. The story of the poisoning is narrated very briefly in the few lines quoted above, with no further comments or personal judgements. The only additional information we are given is that the Dalai Lama officiated at the funerary rituals for Machik Taiji.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, the autobiography shows that the Great Fifth was aware of several aspects concerning the army used to defend the interests of the Ganden Phodrang. It shows that he was cognisant of the

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<sup>61</sup> See Karmay 2014: 375.

Mongols' usefulness as a martial resource, as he considered their bravery and determination to be unparalleled. While he did not specifically indicate that he preferred the use of Mongol forces over Tibetan ones, he seems to have intuited, as in the example of the story of Khandro, that their methods were effective and often inexorable. Likewise, he was conscious of the existence of disagreements and rivalries between Tibetan and Mongol divisions, and of the larger political impact of these tactical disagreements. Whether his awareness of these issues was superficial or more profound, the Fifth Dalai Lama seems to have maintained his equanimity by not interfering or overtly taking sides in any of these disputes. However, while he maintained his equipoise, he also did not object to the use of the army and to their methods as long as they were used in support of the Ganden Phodrang.

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*Za hor gyi ban de*: see under Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 2009.

