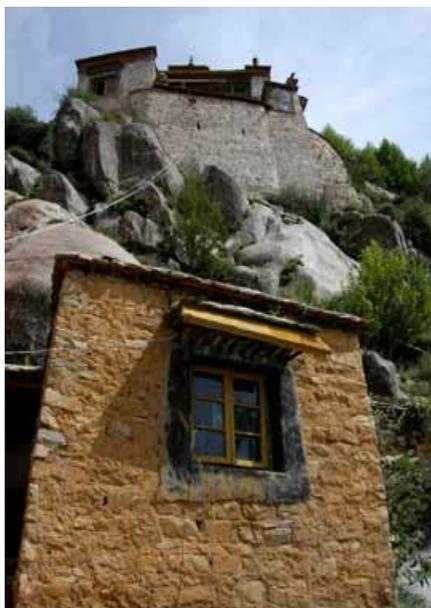


Rakhadrak Hermitage (Ra kha brag ri khrod)

Location and Layout



A view of the Ra kha brag upper temple compound (above) as viewed from the cave compound. In the foreground is a monk's hut that is a part of the cave compound.

Rakhadrak Hermitage (Ra kha brag ri khrod) is located northeast of (and one ridge over from) Se ra. It takes about forty-five minutes to walk from Se ra to the hermitage (*ri khrod*). Ra kha brag is also just a ten-minute walk up the mountain from [Keutsang Hermitage \(Ke'u tshang ri khrod\)](#). Like Ke'u tshang, it is one of the hermitages on the “Sixth-Month Fourth-Day” (*drug pa tshe bzhi*) pilgrimage circuit. (To see images of this pilgrimage taken in 2002, please click [here](#).)



A view of the lower complex of buildings from the upper temple compound. On the left, the building that used to contain monastic residences; in the middle, a small kitchen; and on the right the three-cave compound that contains the caves of Tsong kha pa (1357-1419) and his two disciples. Lha sa can be seen in the distance.

The site is divided into two parts. In the lower portion, one finds a **compound**, which is the site of the caves of **Tsong kha pa (1357-1419)**, **Rgyal tshab rje (1364-1432)** and **Mkhas grub rje (1385-1438)**. It is also the site of a **small hut** that belonged to Byams chen chos rje (1354-1435), the founder of Se ra, where the latter is said to have begun the tradition of the the Ganden Feast of the 25th (*dga' ldan lnga mchod*) commemoration of the death-date of Tsong kha pa. East of this compound, there is a **small kitchen** and a **large building** that before 1959 appears to have served as monastic living quarters.



The cave compound, where the caves of Tsong kha pa and his two disciples are found.



The inside of Tsong kha pa's meditation cave (sgrub phug).

Farther uphill from (north of) the cave compound there is another [compound](#) that contains the [main temple](#), a [kitchen](#), a [bla ma's residence](#), [rooms](#) for visiting Se ra monks, and a [temple to Tsong kha pa](#) where thousands of small pressed-clay tablets (*tsha tsha*) of Tsong kha pa are housed.

History

Ra kha brag is renowned in Dge lugs history chiefly for two things. It was the place where Tsong kha pa composed his great classic, the *The Essence of Eloquence that Distinguishes Between the Provisional and Definitive Meaning of the Scriptures (Drang nges legs bshad snying po)*, and it is one of the places where Tsong kha pa received the delegation from the emperor of China, the so-called “bearers of the golden letter” (*gser yig pa*) who had been sent with an invitation requesting Tsong kha pa's presence at the Chinese court.

One contemporary Tibetan historian¹ informs us that the site was founded as a formal monastic institution with twelve fully ordained



The entrance to the upper temple compound.

¹ Dung dkar blo zang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo [The Great Dungkar Dictionary]* (Krung go'i bod rig pa dpe krung khang, 2002), 736.

monks by Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho (1641-1713) in the eighteenth century. Another contemporary historian of Se ra identifies the founder of Ra kha brag as Ra kha brag a zhu bsod noms (b. seventeenth century). This latter account accords with the oral report of one of the monks presently living at the site, who gives the name of this figure A kha bsod noms bzang po (b. seventeenth century),² and who adds that he was a student of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa). This informant also states that the upper temple complex was founded as a formal monastery with the financial sponsorship of the mother of the Fifth Dalai Lama (Da lai bla ma sku phreng lnga pa), who apparently was the hermitage's main sponsor throughout most of her adult life. The two accounts may not be mutually contradictory. It may be that the upper temple compound, housing a handful of monks, was initially built with the financial sponsorship of members of the Fifth Dalai Lama's court in the seventeenth century. The institution may have then come under the control of the charismatic Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho several decades later, and perhaps it was at this time that it began to flourish as a formal monastery.

Apart from these few facts, we can say little about the history of Ra kha brag at this point in our research. Like all of hermitages of Sera (*se ra'i ri khrod*), Ra kha brag was abandoned and deteriorated following the events of 1959, and especially following the Cultural Revolution. It was taken over by Se ra in the 1980s, and the main sites – the lower cave complex and a portion of the upper temple compound – have been minimally restored. Today it is staffed by two elder Se ra monks, who keep the site open for pilgrims. A few rooms are made available to Se ra monks who wish to do retreat at the hermitage during inter-terms. There is no longer any active ritual life at the hermitage.



A Se ra monk is engaged in retreat in the ante-room outside Tsong kha pa's meditation cave at Ra kha brag.

² Ser smad spom ra dge bshes ye shes dbang phyug, *Ser smad thos bsam nor gling grwa tshang gi chos 'byung lo rgyus nor bu'i phreng ba* [*A History of the Sermé Tösam Norling College: A Garland of Jewels*] (Bylakuppe: Sermey Printing Press, 1984), 41. On this figure, see [TBRC P2275](#).