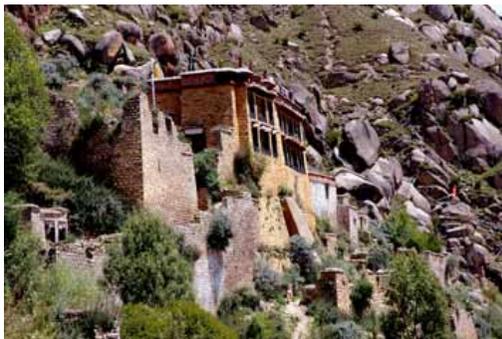


Sera Utsé Hermitage (Se ra dbu rtse ri khrod)



Se ra dbu rtse as seen from below.

Location and Layout

The words “*se ra dbu rtse*,” sometimes abbreviated *se ra rtse*, literally mean “Sera Peak.” The name is fitting since, of the several small hermitages (*ri khrod*) that are located on the mountain behind (to the north of) Se ra, this is the one that is highest on the mountain, very close to the peak. Even at a brisk pace, it is a strenuous one hour to walk up to Se ra dbu rtse from Se ra. Tradition has it that the site contained one of Tsong kha pa’s (1357-1419) meditation huts or *sgrub khang*, and so when Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho (1641-1713) started living at this site at the end of the seventeenth or early eighteenth century, he came to be known as “the man from the *sgrub khang*,” or Sgrub khang pa.



The assembly hall (‘du khang) at Se ra dbu rtse.

The hermitage was quite large before 1959. Most of it was destroyed after 1959, and only a portion has been rebuilt. What exists today is:

1. One large building complex with two courtyards. This large complex contains:
 - A small [assembly hall](#). Since only three monks live here, it is not in use, but it is still well maintained. The assembly hall before 1959 – which, in fact, may have been located in another building – contained a large metal statue of Vajrabhairava (Rdo rje 'jigs byed), a magnificent statue of Yamāntaka Ekavīra, statues of the Buddha and the sixteen arhats, a speaking Tārā (Sgrol ma) statue, large images of Tsong kha pa and his two disciples, and statues of the *bla mas* of the Drupkhang incarnation (Sgrub khang sprul sku) lineage. There were also copies of the *Bka' 'gyur* and *Bstan 'gyur*, and a Bka' gdams pa *stūpa*. But no such statues or texts exist today, and indeed it is difficult to imagine them fitting into a temple this size.¹
 - The *bla ma*'s residence for the Sgrub khang *bla mas* consists of two rooms with a waiting room between them.
 - The meditation hut or “[cave](#)” where Sgrub khang pa meditated has been made into a chapel, and has an [ante-room](#).
 - A small [protector deity chapel](#).
2. A separate [hut built underneath a boulder](#) was built by the patron (*sbyin bdag*) who was responsible for financing the rebuilding of the hermitage.
3. A [Dharma enclosure](#) (*chos rwa*).
4. A [dilapidated kitchen](#) that is no longer used.
5. Various and [sundry smaller buildings](#) that today are used mostly for storage.

¹ 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), 140.



The entrance to Sgrub khang pa's meditation hut.

History

We know nothing of the history of this site before the fourteenth century. The monastery was originally one of the places where Tsong kha pa did retreat. This is what gives the site its name: “*sgrub khang*” means “retreat house.” It was the fact that it had been a retreat spot for Tsong kha pa that drew the founder, Sgrub khang dge legs rgya mtsho,² to the site. Sgrub khang pa was advised to make it his residence by the abbot of the Jé College (Grwa tshang byes) of Se ra, Jo ston bsod nams rgyal mtshan (seventeenth century). Sgrub khang pa lived in Tsong kha pa's retreat house at the site for many years, leading an extremely frugal and ascetic existence. It was his reputation as a great meditator, combined with his knowledge of the philosophical tradition that drew students to him.³ The most famous of these became posthumously recognized as the first incarnations of important *bla ma* lineages of Se ra. Following the example of their teacher, they also lived in retreat for a good portion of their lives, either founding or serving as the head lamas (*gnas kyi bla ma*) of important Se ra-affiliated retreat centers. Sgrub khang pa's students include, for example, Phur lcog ngag dbang byams pa (1682-1762), and Mkhar rdo bzod pa rgya mtsho (1672-1749). There is a tradition, reported by Dung dkar rin po che, that Sgrub khang pa was responsible for founding three hermitages as practice-centers (*sgrub sde*): his own hermitage with seventeen fully ordained monks, Purchok Hermitage (Phur lcog ri khrod) with one hundred monks, and Rakhadrak Hermitage (Ra kha brag ri khrod) with twelve monks.⁴

² On Sgrub khang pa, see the Introduction to the Hermitages, [history section](#).

³ See the Introduction to the Hermitages, [history section](#) for more on this important figure.

⁴ Dung dkar blo bzang 'phrin las, *Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen mo* [*The Great Dungkar Dictionary*] (Krungr go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2002), 736. For the possible source of these figures see Bshes gnyen tshul khriims, *Lha sa'i dgon tho rin chen spungs rgyan* [*A Catalogue of the Monasteries of Lhasa: A Heap of Jewels*] (Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 2001), 94.



An image of Sgrub khang pa at Se ra dbu rtse.