



## **Kaḥ-thog-pa bSod-nams rgyal-mtshan (1466–1540) and his activities in Bhutan**

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A first assessment of the history of the lHo-mon Ka-thog-pa in Bhutan was provided by the late Michael Aris in his book *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom*, Warminster 1979, pp. 153–154. According to the historical sources available to him, a certain dBu-'od Ye-shes 'bum[-pa] from the Kaḥ-thog monastery in eastern Tibet went in the 13th century to Bhutan on his way to Sikkim and founded in sPa-gro sTag-tshang the sanctuary O-rgyan rtse-mo. It was further stated that this teacher had two disciples, namely bSod-nams rgyal-mtshan and his son, rNam-grol bzang-po, both of whom took up residence in sPa-gro sTag-tshang.

It was also noted by Michael Aris that there existed an autobiography of bSod-nams rgyal-mtshan, but he was obviously not able to consult it. As the biographical tradition of this Kaḥ-thog teacher closely connected with the religious history of Bhutan is now available, I want to readdress the issue of the arrival of the lHo-mon Kaḥ-thog-pa in Bhutan and their presence at the famous Padmasambhava shrine in the northern part of the sPa-gro valley. This will be done in three steps: clarifying the identity of Ye-shes 'bum from the Kaḥ-thog monastery, giving an overview of the life of bSod-nams rgyal-mtshan with special reference to his activities in Bhutan – the first transmission of the “Collected Tantras of the Early Translation Period” (*rnying ma rgyud 'bum*) in Bhutan is credited to him – and, finally, relating the story of the foundation of O-rgyan rtse-mo, the original residence of the lHo-mon Kaḥ-thog-pa, located on a cliff immediately above the main shrine of sPa-gro sTag-tshang.

With these observations it should become clear that the arrival of the Kaḥ-thog-pa teaching lineage in Bhutan in a formal sense can be dated to the beginning of the 16th century: a period when members of the rNying-ma-pa school in general became attracted to the southern Himalayan valleys and the sacred sites associated with Padmasambhava.