



The temple of Mani Lhakang

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The tiny temple of Mani Lhakang, named after the huge mani wheel dominating its interior, is known only to a few Western scholars. Located in bDe-chen County, in the obscure village of Rigs-lnga and nestled between the Pa-lam and Glang-sgo mountains to the east and south, respectively, the temple may have lain on an important old trade route to Samye Monastery. Little is known of the temple's ancient history by villagers who still support the temple, or by the present married Gelugpa lama-caretaker trained at Ganden Monastery, though local stories state that the temple is at least 1000 years old. In recent times the temple was briefly owned (in the 1940s) by a noble family whose power declined; and subsequently (until 1959) it was under the jurisdiction of Ganden Monastery. The back wall of the temple was completely rebuilt during the 1930s; and, due to damage suffered during the Cultural Revolution, additional repairs were made in the 1980s to a chamber adjoining the main room. However, the beautiful paintings on the remaining three walls of the main room are quite well preserved and depict groupings of images reflective of the Nyingmapa Sect, except for the right entrance wall which portrays Atisha and his two main disciples. All of the paintings, however, may date from the same period (perhaps from the 17th century, according to Tibetan art historians), a seeming sectarian contradiction which this article hopes to resolve, among other problems connected with the imagery displayed in the paintings.