CHAPTER SEVEN

GREAT FIFTH DALAI LAMA ASSUMES POLITICAL POWER OVER TIBET

TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the foundation of Tsepön Shakabpa’s case for Tibet’s political status in that the central argument of the book is rooted in events that unfolded during the life of the fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lozang Gyatso (1617–1682). It was during his lifetime that significant portions of Tibet were unified through the military conquests of the Mongolian Gushri Khan, and in 1642, the khan presented the territory he had won as an offering to his revered spiritual teacher, the fifth Dalai Lama. Shakabpa argues that the Dalai Lama became the actual ruler of Tibet, despite the fact that the Qoshot Mongolian Gushri Khan and his heirs maintained the title of king of Tibet. The khan’s gift of Tibet was intended to echo the preceptor-patron relationship (mchod gnas dang yon bdag) that had been established in 1254 between Pakpa Rinpoche Lodrö Gyeltsen and Kublai Khan. For Shakabpa, the essentially religious nature of this relationship did not diminish in any way the Dalai Lama’s political authority over Tibet, and since his rule ought to be taken as paradigmatic of Tibet’s political status up to contemporary times, any interruption of religio-political rule under subsequent Dalai Lamas or their regents should be regarded as a merely temporary disturbance in an enduring order.

In this chapter, Shakabpa has several parallel objectives. He outlines the birth, discovery, enthronement, and rise to power of the fifth Dalai Lama. He contextualizes the Dalai Lama’s emerging political career within the religious and political history he developed in chapter six, and he constructs a careful justification for the sequence of events that culminated in the Dalai Lama’s ascent to political power. Shakabpa describes key episodes in the Dalai Lama’s rule of Tibet, including his construction of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, and the chapter ends with

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a A large variety of different Mongolian tribes make an appearance in Tibetan history. The Qoshots were part of a larger coalition called the Oirats.

b See p. 269 above.
Map 2  The inset map shows the area of Lhasa surrounding the Jokhang Temple, a region dense with important monastic estates, temples, monasteries, and notable historical sites.