The temple called Mani Lha khang by the local population is located near the Lhasa-Sichuan Highway before reaching Ganden and shortly after the turnoff to Tshalgungthang Monastery. The nearby mountains to the east, as well as the valley in which the temple is located, are called Balam,² while the mountains to the south are called Lango (Glang sgo). On the route to Mani Lha khang, which is situated approximately seven miles south of the highway, one passes three villages, the last of which, named Ringa (Rigs Inga), lies across a small stream from the temple, which is accessed by a bridge (plate 55).

Entry to the temple is gained by a door (usually kept locked) in the small walled courtyard in front of the temple (plate 56). On the left side of the inner courtyard is another door opening into a storage room, while the front wall of the shallow porch is pierced by two doors, one to the right leading to a tiny room containing numerous miniature clay figures (*tsha tsha*), and the other, to the left, opening into a somewhat

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¹ I thank Guntram Hazod and Guge Tshering Gyelpo for their assistance in locating this temple. The fieldwork for this article was undertaken in 2001 and 2002.

² Hazod 2003: 34, citing Uebach concerning Balam Lag (or Lag Balam) as a dynastic place of early kings, identifies Balam as a valley to the east of Tagtse, including the two valleys of Balam Shar and Balam Nup. Lag (Glag), however, is a name which is today forgotten. Hazod notes that the temple is actually situated in the upper part of Balam Shar. Though Uebach (1988: 506) does not mention Mani Lha khang, specifically, she notes that Balam and its monasteries are cited in a manuscript by Sde srid San ryas rgya mcho as being included in the region of Kyi Lag located in the Kyichu Valley east of Lhasa on the left bank of the Kyichu River. Balam and the passes of its surrounding mountains also lay on the main route to Brag mar, the residence of kings in the 7th to 8th centuries who were named Lags pa after the region they settled. Though the annals of these early kings do not mention Balam as connected with a particular region, in fact, the bodies of deceased kings were first brought to Balam Lag, then to Bragmar on the main highway leading to the Tsang po River, where ferries transported their bodies to Phyin ba in the Yarlung Valley (Uebach 1988: 509).
larger, albeit still small room, the walls of which are adorned with paintings.\(^3\) The two rooms are each dominated by an immense mani wheel, hence the name of the temple.

Sherab Yontan, the monk in charge of the lhakhang in 2002, was born in 1945, and was affiliated with Ganden Monastery as a novice, but was forced to marry by the Communists. Since he was the only monk in the area, he was placed in charge of the temple shortly after part of the building was rebuilt in 1985. The villagers, who know little of its history, still support the temple financially, since nowadays it is no longer affiliated with any monastery. Prior to 1959, however, the temple was attached to Ganden Monastery, and from 1930 to the 1940s it was owned by the Mindupu (Rmin drug spug) family, a somewhat powerful family of the fourth-grade level of officialdom, perhaps at the level of a bka’blon or mgo zhabs (?) in Lhasa in the 1930s.\(^4\) When the family’s fortunes declined in the 1940s, the family was forced to sell the temple. According to Sherab Yontan, the temple is said to have had a history of one thousand years, and to have been founded at the time of the famed storyteller, Agu Tomba, though the monk admitted he was unsure when the storyteller lived. In fact the temple, or at least the foundation, is in all probability ancient, since it lies near an old trade route that went from Dechen (Dagze) Dzong in the neighboring valley of Tagtse through Shingjang to Samye and thence to Monyul (the modern Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan).\(^5\) Moreover, another temple in the vicinity, the Balam Shatsa Temple (also called Lag Balampa) was erect-

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\(^3\) The extreme darkness of this room due to the small entryway, coupled with the fact that the wall paintings appear to have been heavily varnished, makes photography of the paintings exceedingly difficult.

\(^4\) Information concerning the history of the temple was kindly provided by Lama Sherab Yontan.

\(^5\) I have not traversed this route to Samye, though the map may be seen in Chan (1994: 626). Regarding the ancient Balam Valley’s connection with Samye, the path from Balam to Samye was known in ancient history, since it was traversed by Vairocana, Sāntaraksita and the legendary Padmasambhava. Moreover, Basenang (Sba gsal snang), an important supporter of Buddhism in the period of Samye’s foundation, made his home in Balam (see Hazod 2003: 34). Hazod (ibid.) also notes that the place name of Balam may have originally derived from Basenang’s Ba (Sba) clan, but was later interpreted to mean “cowpath,” while the other ancient place name of “Lag” was subsequently taken to mean “dead cow”, in accordance with the story concerning Vairocana, the smithy and the smith’s wife.