

Potala Palace



The Potala Palace is a dzong fortress in Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region in China. It was the winter palace of the Dalai Lamas from 1649 to 1959, has been a museum since then, and a World Heritage Site since 1994.

The palace is named after Mount Potalaka, the mythical abode of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.[1] The 5th Dalai Lama started its construction in 1645[2] after one of his spiritual advisers, Konchog Chophel (died 1646), pointed out that the site was ideal as a seat of government, situated as it is between Drepung and Sera monasteries and the old city of Lhasa.[3] It may overlies the remains of an earlier fortress called the White or Red Palace on the site,[4] built by Songtsen Gampo in 637.[5]

THE SITE ON WHICH THE POTALA PALACE

History

The site on which the Potala Palace rises is built over a palace erected by Songtsen Gampo on the Red Hill.[9] The Potala contains two chapels on its northwest corner that conserve parts of the original building. One is the Phakpa Lhakhang, the other the Chogyel Drupuk, a recessed cavern identified as Songtsen Gampo's meditation cave.[10] Lozang Gyatso, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama, started the construction of the modern Potala Palace in 1645[2] after one of his spiritual advisers, Konchog Chophel (died 1646), pointed out that the site was ideal as a seat of government, situated as it is between Drepung and Sera monasteries and the old city of Lhasa.[3] The external structure was built in 3 years, while the interior, together with its furnishings, took 45 years to complete.[11] The Dalai Lama and his government moved into the

Potrang Karpo ('White Palace') in 1649.[3] Construction lasted until 1694,[12] some twelve years after his death. The Potala was used as a winter palace by the Dalai Lama from that time. The Potrang Marpo ('Red Palace') was added between 1690 and 1694.[12]

The new palace got its name from a hill on Cape Comorin at the southern tip of India—a rocky point sacred to the bodhisattva of compassion, who is known as Avalokitesvara, or Chenrezi. The Tibetans themselves rarely speak of the sacred place as the "Potala", but rather as "Peak Potala" (Tse Potala), or most commonly as "the Peak".[13]

The Lhasa Zhol Pillars

Lhasa Zhol Village has two stone pillars or rdo-rings, an interior stone pillar or doring nangma, which stands within the village fortification walls, and the exterior stone pillar or doring chima,[29] which originally stood outside the South entrance to the village. Today the pillar stands neglected to the East of the Liberation Square, on the South side of Beijing Avenue.

The doring chima dates as far back as circa 764, "or only a little later",[30] and is inscribed with what may be the oldest known example of Tibetan writing.[31]

The pillar contains dedications to a famous Tibetan general and gives an account of his services to the king including campaigns against China which culminated in the brief capture of the Chinese capital Chang'an (modern Xi'an) in 763[32] during which the Tibetans temporarily installed as Emperor a relative of Princess Jincheng Gongzhu (Kim-sheng Kong co), the Chinese wife of Trisong Detsen's father, Me Agtsom.[33][34]

The Chinese Putuo Zongcheng Temple, also a UNESCO World Heritage Site, built between 1767 and 1771, was in part modelled after the Potala Palace. The palace was named by the American television show Good Morning America and newspaper USA Today as one of the "New Seven Wonders".[28]

BUILT AT AN ALTITUDE OF 3,700

Architecture

Built at an altitude of 3,700 m (12,100 ft), on the side of Ri Marpo ('Red Mountain') in the centre of Lhasa Valley,[25] the Potala Palace, with its vast inward-sloping walls broken only in the upper parts by straight rows of many windows, and its flat roofs at various levels, is not unlike a fortress in appearance. At the south base of the rock is a large space enclosed by walls and gates, with great porticos on the inner side. A series of tolerably easy staircases, broken by intervals of gentle ascent, leads to the summit of the rock. The whole width of this is occupied by the palace.[citation needed]

The central part of this group of buildings rises in a vast quadrangular mass above its satellites to a great height, terminating in gilt canopies similar to those on the Jokhang. This central member of Potala is called the "red palace" from its crimson colour, which distinguishes it from the rest. It contains the principal halls and chapels and shrines of past Dalai Lamas. There is in these much rich decorative painting, with jewelled work, carving and other ornamentation.

The lower white frontage on the south side of the palace was used to hoist two gigantic thangkas joined representing the figures of Tara and Sakyamuni during the Sertreng Festival on the 30th day of the second Tibetan month.[26][27]

REFERENCES OF POTALA PALACE

References

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