



## The Raven Crown: The Origins of Buddhist Monarchy in Bhutan

By Michael Aris

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**The Raven Crown: The Origins of Buddhist Monarchy in Bhutan** By Michael Aris

The hereditary monarchy of the Wangchuk dynasty was established in 1907 in the independent Himalayan state of Bhutan, thus introducing one of the world's most recent experiments in kingship. The new order quickly replaced a theocracy founded in the seventeenth century by the first of the "Dharma Rajas", a lineage of reincarnating lamas known by the title of Shabdrung. The first king of the new dynasty, Ugyen Wangchuk (1862-1926), was a charismatic figure who came to power against a turbulent background of incessant and complex feuding. He adopted as the unique symbol of his authority a crown surmounted by the head of a raven. The bird represents a form of Mahakala, Bhutan's guardian deity. The prototype of the founding monarch's Raven Crown had first been devised as a battle helmet for his father, Jigme Namgyel (1825-81). Known as the Black Regent, he had worn it in bloody struggles against his many rivals within the country and against the British who tried, unsuccessfully, to subdue him. The story of the Wangchuk dynasty's rise and triumph moves from a picture of turmoil and chaos to one of relative peace and stability. In contrast with earlier published accounts based solely on the colonial records of British India, here the narrative is founded on the Bhutanese chronicles which offer a new perspective and bring many new details to light. The ethnic and historical context is outlined before recounting the turbulent career of the Black Regent, followed by the lives and achievements of the first two kings. The book is copiously illustrated with rare historical photographs that have come to light in private and public collections in the United Kingdom. Most of these vivid images have never previously been published. They provide a lively depth and focus to the unfolding narrative.

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### Editorial Review

#### About the Author

Michael Aris (1946-1999) was Research Fellow in Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at St Antony's College, Oxford. He had also been Visiting Professor at Harvard University and a Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies. In 1967-72 he lived in Bhutan and worked there as a royal tutor, government translator and historical researcher. On returning to England he obtained a doctorate in Tibetan literature from London University. His earlier publications include *Bhutan: The Early History of a Himalayan Kingdom* (1979), *Views of Medieval Bhutan: The Diary and Drawings of Samuel Davis, 1783* (1982), *Sources for the History of Bhutan* (1986), and *Hidden Treasures and Secret Lives: A Study of Pemalingpa (1450-1521) and The Sixth Dalai Lama (1683-1706)* (1986). Michael Aris was married to Aung San Suu Kyi, a prisoner of conscience and winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize. This book was written while under house arrest with his wife in Rangoon in 1994.

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