The Great Stupa of Gyantse

A Complete Tibetan Pantheon of the Fifteenth Century

Franco Ricca & Erberto Lo Bue

Lumbini International Research Institute

Serindia Publications
London
# Contents

List of Plans and Plates 6
Foreword 8
Preface by David Snellgrove 9

**Chapter One**
The Rise of the House of Gyantse 11
The Princes of Gyantse and their Role as Patrons of Art and Religion 14
The Construction and the Decoration of the Great Stūpa 27

**Chapter Two**
The Symbolism of the Stūpa 33
The Stūpa of Gyantse 36
The Ideal Structure of the sKu-'bum 46

**Chapter Three**
Iconography and Style 52
Buddhas and Bodhisattvas 57
Wrathful Deities 74
Vaiśravaṇa: Yakṣa and Lokapāla 87
Female Deities 95
Paradises, Scenes, Characters 103

Bibliography 111
Colour Plates 113
Appendix – Iconographic Survey 225
Indices – Sanskrit, Tibetan and other languages 314
Plans

CHAPTER TWO

Fig. 1 General Plan 40
Fig. 2 South Elevation and Axial Section 41
Fig. 3 Cut-away Axonometric of Vertical Connections (SE corner) 44
Fig. 4 South Elevation of the Harmikā and Spire (detail) 45
Fig. 5 Cut-away Axonometric of the Harmikā and Spire 46

APPENDIX

Fig. A Plan of the First Storey 224
Fig. B Plan of the Second Storey 246
Fig. C Plan of the Third Storey 263
Fig. D Plan of the Fourth Storey 288
Fig. E Plan of the Bum-pa 301
Fig. F Plan of the Lower Storey of the Harmikā 306
Fig. G Plan of the Upper Storey of the Harmikā 306
Fig. H Plan of the Top Temple 307

Colour Plates

Pl. A The Great Stūpa 113
Pl. B The Great Stūpa 113
Pl. C The Castle 114
Pl. D The Town and Religious Enclave (1937) 115
Pl. E The Town and Religious Enclave (1990) 115
Pl. 1 Vairocana (Temple 3E) 116
Pl. 2 Vairocana (Chapel 3Ea') 117
Pl. 3 Vairocana (Chapel 3Eb') 118
Pl. 4 Mahāvairocana (Temple 3E) 119
Pl. 5 Mahāvairocana (Temple 3W) 120
Pl. 6 Ratnasambhava (Chapel 3Wb') 121
Pl. 7 Amoghasiddhi (Chapel 3Wa') 122
Pl. 8 Vajrasattva (Chapel 3Wa') 123
Pl. 9 Vairocana (Chapel 3Wa) 124
Pl. 10 Dharmadhatuvāgīśvara (Temple 3W) 125
Pl. 11 Lokeśvara (Temple 3S) 126
Pl. 12 Vajrasattva (Temple 3S) 127
Pl. 13 Detail of the mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana (Temple 3N) 128
Pl. 14 Vairocana (Chapel 3Wb) 129
Pl. 15 Peaceful Vajrapāṇi (Chapel 3Nb') 130
Pl. 16 Avalokiteśvara (Temple 3W) 131
Pl. 17 Vajrasandhi (Temple 3S) 132
Pl. 18 Gaganagāñja (Temple 3S) 133
Pl. 19 Lokeśvara (Chapel 3Sa) 134
Pl. 20 Mahāsukha /Vajrārāga (Chapel 3Na) 135
Pl. 21 Statue of Vajradhāma (Temple 3S) 136
Pl. 22 Statue of Vajrāheta (Temple 3S) 137
Pl. 23 Statue of Vajrasattva (Temple 3E) 138
Pl. 24 Statue of Maitreyā (Temple 3S) 139
Pl. 25 Statue of Vajrasattva (Temple 3W) 140
Pl. 26 Sarvasattvāśikaraṇa Mañjuśrī (Chapel 2Nb') 141
Pl. 27 Dharmadhatuvāgīśvara Mañjuśrī (Chapel 2Nb') 142
Pl. 28 Statue of Samantabhadra (Chapel 2Eb') 143
Pl. 29 Cittaviśrāmanā Avalokiteśvara (Chapel 2Eb') 144
Pl. 30 Statue of Śākāśkara Avalokiteśvara (Chapel 2Sa') 145
Pl. 31 Ekādaśāmukha Avalokiteśvara (Chapel 2Sa') 146
Pl. 32 Ekādaśāmukha Avalokiteśvara according to the Padmajāla (Chapel 2Wb') 147
Pl. 33 Avalokiteśvara Padmanarteśvara (Chapel 2Wb') 148
Pl. 34 Amoghapāśa (Chapel 2Wb') 149
Pl. 35 Mahāmuni (Chapel 2Na) 150
Pl. 36 Śākyamuni in the Tusita heaven (Temple 1E) 151
Pl. 37 Maitreyā in the Tusita heaven (Temple 1E) 152
Pl. 38 Vajrapāṇi (Chapel 2Ea) 153
Pl. 39 Nartakavāra Vajrapāṇi (Chapel 1Sb) 154
Pl. 40 Vajravidāraṇa (Chapel 2Na') 155
Pl. 41 Vajrahāmkāra (Chapel 3Nb') 156
Pl. 42 Trailokyavijaya (Chapel 1Eb') 157
Pl. 43 Detail of the manḍala of Trailokyavijaya (Chapel 1Eb') 158
Pl. 44 Vajrajalānālārka (Chapel 3Na') 159
Pl. 45 Hayagriva according to the dPal-mo system (Chapel 2Wa) 160
Pl. 46 Hayagriva according to the sKya-rgang
system (Chapel 1Wb) 161

Pl. 47 Detail of the mandala of Hayagriva (Chapel 1Wb) 162

Pl. 48 Raktayamārī (lower storey of the Harmikā) 163

Pl. 49 Vajramahabhairava (lower storey of the Harmikā) 164

Pl. 50 Detail of the mandala of Māricī (Chapel 1Sa) 165

Pl. 51 Uṣṇiṣacakravartin (Vestibule 4V) 166

Pl. 52 Yamāntaka (Vestibule 4V) 167

Pl. 53 Sīta Acalā (Chapel 1Nb') 168

Pl. 54 Krodhatrailokyaloka (Temple 3N) 169

Pl. 55 Krodhatrailokyadhāraśana (Temple 3N) 170

Pl. 56 Krodhatrailokyabandhaka (Temple 3N) 171

Pl. 57 Krodhatrailokyanāsaya (Temple 3N) 172

Pl. 58 Detail of the mandala of Krodhatrailokyadhāraśana (Temple 3N) 173

Pl. 59 Detail of the mandala of Krodhatrailokyabandhaka (Temple 3N) 174

Pl. 60 Deities of the outer cycle of the Vajradhātumandala, western and northern quarter (Temple 3E) 175

Pl. 61 Deities of the outer cycle of the Vajradhātumandala, eastern and southern quarter (Temple 3E) 176

Pl. 62 Detail of the mandala of Padmāntaka (Temple 3W) 177

Pl. 63 Deities of the northern door of the mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana (Temple 3N) 178

Pl. 64 Cakrasaṃvara (upper storey of the Harmikā) 179

Pl. 65 Hevajra Kapāladhara (upper storey of the Harmikā) 180

Pl. 66 Buddaheruka (upper storey of the Harmikā) 181

Pl. 67 Kālacakra (upper storey of the Harmikā) 182

Pl. 68 Ratnaḍāka (upper storey of the Harmikā) 183

Pl. 69 Avalokitapadmajāla (upper storey of the Harmikā) 184

Pl. 70 Vasudhārā (Chapel 1Na) 185

Pl. 71 Vaiśravaṇa as Lord of the Horses (Chapel 1Ea) 186

Pl. 72 Two of the Eight Aśvapatis (Chapel 1Ea) 187

Pl. 73 Vaiśravaṇa in the Alakāvati (Chapel 1Ea) 188

Pl. 74 Detail of Vaiśravaṇa’s palace (Chapel 1Ea) 189

Pl. 75 Detail of Vaiśravaṇa’s palace (Chapel 1Ea) 190

Pl. 76 Detail of Vaiśravaṇa’s mandala (Chapel 1Ea) 191

Pl. 77 Detail of Vaiśravaṇa’s mandala (Chapel 1Ea) 192

Pl. 78 Śaḍbhujasuklatārā (Chapel 2Nb) 193

Pl. 79 Aṣṭabhujasūyatārā (Chapel 2Nb) 194

Pl. 80 Durgottarinī Tārā (Chapel 2Sb) 195

Pl. 81 Prasanna Tārā (Chapel 2Sb) 196

Pl. 82 Māyājala Kurukullā (Chapel 2Wb) 197

Pl. 83 Grahamāṭkā Mahāvidyā (Chapel 1Na) 198

Pl. 84 Paṃśabārī (Chapel 1Wa) 199

Pl. 85 Sitatapatrā (Chapel 1Wa) 200

Pl. 86 Aṣṭabhujasūyatapatrā (Chapel 1Wa) 201

Pl. 87 Śaḍbhujamāricī (Chapel 1Sa) 202

Pl. 88 Aṣṭabhujamāricī (Chapel 1Sa) 203

Pl. 89 Golden Māricī (Chapel 1Sa) 204

Pl. 90 Scene from the Sukhavati (Temple 1W) 205

Pl. 91 Scene from the Sukhavati (Temple 1W) 206

Pl. 92 Scene from the Maṇjuśrīvihāra (Temple 1N) 207

Pl. 93 Scene from the Maṇjuśrīvihāra (Temple 1N) 208

Pl. 94 Scene from the Tuṣita heaven (Temple 1E) 209

Pl. 95 Scene from the Tuṣita heaven (Temple 1E) 210

Pl. 96 Scenes from Maitreya’s previous lives (Temple 1E) 211

Pl. 97 Scenes from Maitreya’s previous lives (Temple 1E) 212

Pl. 98 Detail of the mandala of Śākyasimha (Temple 3N) 213

Pl. 99 Arhat (Temple 5S) 214

Pl. 100 Arhat (Temple 5S) 215

Pl. 101 Arhat (Temple 5S) 216

Pl. 102 Arhat (Temple 5S) 217

Pl. 103 rJe gNya’-khri-btsan-po (Chapel 4N2) 218

Pl. 104 Thon-mi Sambhota (Chapel 4N2) 219

Pl. 105 Buddhaguhya (Chapel 4NE) 220

Pl. 106 Ka-ba dPal-brtsegs (Chapel 4NE) 221

Pl. 107 Po-to-ba Rin-chen-gsal (Chapel 4S1) 222

Pl. 108 Gling-ras-pa Padma-rdo-rje (Chapel 4NW) 223
Foreword

In 1937 Giuseppe Tucci undertook the first ever study of the great monuments of Gyantse, whose results appeared in the fourth volume of his *Indo-Tibetica* in 1941 together with Fosco Maraini’s fine black and white photographs. Fifty years later, in 1987, we were entrusted by CESMEO, in the person of its President, Prof. Botto, with an exploratory mission aimed at surveying the monuments and libraries of Tibet after the disasters of the Cultural Revolution. We were happy to ascertain that the two chief monuments in Gyantse, namely the sKu-'bum and the gTsug-lag-khang were spared the fate of the other buildings in the dPal-'khor-chos-sde and were saved from destruction.

Thus we were able to integrate, to update and, in a few instances, to correct Professor Tucci’s remarkable work, which was always taken by us as a fundamental reference. In particular we surveyed some twenty chapels of the sKu-'bum which had not been discussed by Tucci. The results of that study have appeared in our *Gyantse Revisited*, which was published by CESMEO in its “Collana di Studi Orientali”.

Being aware of the extraordinary importance of the Great Stūpa of Gyantse from both an art-historical and an iconographic viewpoint, we decided to build upon our data and photographic materials with a new expedition in 1989, especially devoted to the sKu-'bum. For that expedition we obtained the generous sponsorship of “Istituto Bancario San Paolo di Torino”, but unfortunately political events in Lhasa prevented us from immediately fulfilling our plans.

Our project was then postponed to the following year, and in the summer of 1990 one of us (F.R.) was able to complete our previous investigations at Gyantse and to provide a better photographic documentation of the paintings and statues in the sKu-'bum, as well as a survey of the Great Stūpa. This occurred with further substantial funding by “Banca CRT- Cassa di Risparmio di Torino”. We wish to express our gratitude to both the above banks.

The historical, structural, iconographic and stylistic study of this volume consists of contributions produced individually by us, but we have endeavoured to integrate them in the best possible way in order to achieve a comprehensive view of the subject matter through constant comparison and the closest collaboration. Erberto Lo Bue is the author of chapter 1 and Franco Ricca is the author of chapters 2 and 3, as well as of the Appendix.

The surveying and architectural drawings are by Simone Ricca. The colour and black-and-white photographs are by the photographer of the second visit, Mr. Gabriele Mariotti. A few photographs, here published by courtesy of CESMEO (Pls. 1, 50, 58, 59, 76, 98, 103), were taken by Mr. Ernani Orcorte on our previous visit in 1987.

Franco Ricca
Erberto Lo Bue
Preface
by Prof. David L. Snellgrove

The Stūpa of Gyantse may well be accounted the chief wonder of the Tibetan Buddhist world in that it records iconographically in its interior practically the whole pantheon of Indo-Tibetan religion up to the time of its construction during the first half of the 15th century. Its wall paintings and its images, although relatively fragile, have survived remarkably well the wear and tear of five centuries, and it is a further wonder that they should have survived at all the ruthless destruction deliberately perpetrated during the Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1960-70s.

A survival period of five centuries may seem comparatively little when one thinks of other such "wonders", and perhaps in particular of the Great Stūpa of Borobudur in Central Java, which was built during the second half of the 8th century, or at the very latest in the early 9th, and which still survives (thanks to fairly recent restoration works) in excellent condition today. But there we have a building of solid stone-work, built around the crest of a hill, and such damage as it suffered mainly resulted from subsidence. It also benefitted greatly by being forgotten and buried in the jungle for so many centuries, thus being spared much of the damage caused by man himself.

The Stūpa of Gyantse is constructed of far more fragile materials, certainly some stone, but also much clay for the wall building, and wood for the supporting pillars. It is also hollow within its inner circumference which is constructed around a central core; this inner space provides for separate and circumambulatory temples and passages. I may presume to remind our readers that the early traditional stūpas are essentially "cenotaphs", viz. solid domed monuments, often containing relics, raised in honour of Śākyamuni Buddha (and occasionally other Buddhas, Arhats or revered lamas), while at the same time symbolizing the whole body of his teaching (dharmakāya). However the Stūpa of Gyantse, like several others in Tibetan Buddhist lands constructed on a smaller scale, is by no means solid, since its interior consists of decorated temples and passages. It thus becomes a monument to the Buddhist doctrine in the particular form in which it was known in 15th century Tibet. In its religious intention, it serves the same purpose as Borobudur. As the worshipper circumambulates the stūpa, in one case exteriorly and in the other internally, so he or she advances (if well instructed) to ever higher states of self-realization or self-identification with the iconographic forms presented at each succeeding stage.

An essential difference between these two stūpas relates to the period in which they were built. Borobudur belongs to the early Mahāyāna period, where it is enough to pass from the realm of continual rebirth (kāmadhātu) with its warning depictions of the fate awaiting one in the hells and its encouraging scenes of life in the transitory Buddhist heavens, to the practice of the vows of a Bodhisattva (Sudhana in particular) and so to the life-scenes of Śākyamuni as perfected Buddha (rupadhātu), resulting (at the summit) in the supreme enlightenment of Buddhahood as Fivefold, which is represented by the Buddhas of the Four Quarters and the One Central Buddha (arūpadhātu).

The Stūpa of Gyantse, constructed seven centuries later, has a far more complex system of iconography, resulting from the evolution of Buddhist doctrine in the meantime, as developed in particular in Tibet. It is the self-appointed task of the two authors of this book to unravel these complex details.
As far as I know, the temples of Gyantse, and this stūpa in particular, first attracted Western interest at the
time of the British invasion of south Tibet in 1904, which in effect led, once Britain and Tibet had established
friendly relations (from 1912 onwards), to the opening of Tibet to some limited Western exploration. British
interest (e.g. that of Austine Waddell, Charles Bell, and later Hugh Richardson) concentrated on history and
religion, using largely literary sources and ethnographical materials, and especially ancient stone inscriptions.
It was left to Giuseppe Tucci, who made his first visit to Tibet in 1932, continuing his various expeditions up
to 1950, to investigate the religious buildings and the religious art of the country within the general context
of the history of Tibetan religion, in which he remains an acknowledged master, despite the vast increase of
research work and resulting publications that have become available since 1959, when the Dalai Lama and
many thousands of Tibetans left Tibet as exiles, making readily available new stores of information.

Eventually the Chinese government, having forcibly established its authority over Tibet, began to allow
foreign tourists into the country in exchange for the foreign currency that they brought with them. Gradually
they have also permitted a limited amount of research work *in situ* by foreign scholars, however usually under
careful supervision, if not actual interference.

It is on such terms that Dr. Ricca and Dr. Lo Bue were able to visit Gyantse in 1987, setting themselves the
enormous task of improving and where necessary correcting Giuseppe Tucci’s account of the Gyantse Stūpa
as available in his *Indo-Tibetica*, vol. 4. It now lies with me to perform the task of writing this preface to their
work. This is already partly known thanks to the publication of their recent work, *Gyantse Revisited*, which
relates closely to the work of their distinguished predecessor, whose researches they supplement and amend.
The present work is on a larger scale, dealing with the whole monument, thus going far beyond what had been
done previously. The general description of the religious complex, comprising the stūpa, is set within a lucid
historical framework, drawing upon indigenous sources, historical texts and inscriptions. Likewise the
iconography, as described in detail, is related to relevant texts and liturgies. Plans to scale of all the various
temples have been carefully prepared.

This book, primarily directed to those who are interested in the art history and Buddhist iconography of
Tibet, also serves to draw the attention of a rather wider public to the cultural importance of Tibet within the
general historical context of Buddhism throughout Asia.

David L. Snellgrove

Publisher’s Note

This is the first occasion that these beautiful, but difficult to photograph, fifteenth century wall paintings are
published in colour. Most of the stūpa’s seventy-five temples and chapels are very small, with little ambient
light, and some are of restricted access. It is thus not always possible to obtain the necessary distance from their
walls, nor the correct angle, in order to include the entire painted surface and, moreover, an ever-present
varnish inevitably causes light spills from the reflections of flash photography. The choice of colour plates was
determined by a wish to show a truly representative range of subjects and to illustrate the authors’ text.
Chapter One

THE RISE OF THE HOUSE OF GYANTSE

Before investigating the structure and symbolic meaning of the Great Stūpa of Gyantse, it will be useful to trace the background of the historical and political events which brought the principality of Gyantse (rGyal-mkhar-rtse, "Peak of the Royal Fortress") to the fore of Tibetan history in the 14th century, and relate them to the cultural and artistic trends which were to influence the iconography and style of the art works contained therein.

The scene of these events corresponds to the southern belt of the present Tibetan Autonomous Region, south of the river gTsang-po. But the clan of the princes of Gyantse originated in north-eastern Tibet and only in the 13th century did their ancestor, 'Bum-nyeg, move to gTsang. Although he followed the teachings of the rNying-ma-pa school, he was forced by current political circumstances to place himself under the protection of the monastery of Sa-skya, which, under the 'Khon family, was ruling thirteen districts of southern and central Tibet on behalf of Mongol overlords. Most of his descendants followed a religious career, but two of them entered into the administration of Sa-skya, one at the monastery itself, the other in the fief of sTag-thog. The latter's son married a lady of the Zhwa-lu family, which had very close relations with Sa-skya, since their female offspring used to marry into the 'Khon clan to provide the abbots with nephews to succeed them on the throne: that is why the princes of Zhwa-lu were known by the title of sku-zhang, meaning "respected uncle" (Vitali 1990, p. 99). From that marriage the true founder of the Gyantse dynasty, dPal-ldan-bzang-po, was born in 1318.

The story of dPal-ldan-bzang-po is one of real success, and he gradually established control over territories further and further south-east of Zhwa-lu, until he gained hold of Gyantse, which became the capital of his principality. The first building he erected was at sTe-po, in lDan-yul, an area south of the river Myang (or Nyang), halfway between Zhwa-lu and Gyantse. He was then about thirteen, and was busy learning the scriptures according to the lDan system, which an inscription in the Great Stūpa of Gyantse (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 45) relates to the rDzogs-chen teachings of the rNying-ma-pa tradition.

In the Water Bird year 1333 dPal-ldan-bzang-po went to the monastic fortress of Sa-skya, applied for a post at the bzhi-thog-bla-brang, the palace of the four towers (Ferrari 1958, p. 150, n. 500) rising in the centre of the monastic town and the official residence of the Sa-skya bla-ma, and then returned to lDan-yul. The following year his application was accepted and, because of his good calligraphy, he was soon promoted to the rank of first secretary. Then he invited 'Phags-rgyal-ba, a religious master belonging to the dPyal clan, to consecrate his dwelling in lDan-yul. Along with the lCe, who ruled the fief of Zhwa-lu, the dPyal were the most prominent clan in Myang (Tucci 1941, 1, p. 54), tracing their origin back to the monarchic period. The relationship of dPal-ldan-bzang-po's family with that famous rNying-ma-pa clan became very strong and from then on all the leading male descendants in his family, including his brother, added the dPyal master's epithet, 'Phags-pa, in front of their names.

In the Wood Pig year 1335 dPal-ldan-bzang-po returned to Sa-skya and established good connections at the lHa-khang-bla-brang (or lHa-khang-chen-po, lHa-khang-chen-mo, also lHa-chen), the great fortified temple still to be seen with all its towers on the left of the 'Grum river in the Sa-skya plain. There he urged the dge-bshes (religious master) dGe-'dun-rgyal-mtshab to accept him in his retinue in a military expedition that the latter was preparing against the lHo-dung, a western Bhutanese clan (Aris 1979, pp. 120-121) which was trying to
establish its rule over Phag-ri and other areas in southern Tibet. The campaign took place in the Iron Dragon year 1340 and the lHo-dung were heavily defeated. dPal-ladan-bzang-po was a valiant archer (Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, p. 110) and he must have acted bravely, for two years later his Sa-skya-pa lords put him in charge of another expedition against the lHo-dung. Having overcome them once again, he was appointed shar-kha-pa, a title which was given to one of the four chief dignitaries of the Sa-skya court and which his successors were to retain (Tucci 1941, 1, p. 83; 1949, p. 702, n. 753).

In the Water Sheep year 1343 dPal-ladan-bzang-po founded a monastery at Shol-bla-tsam and later he provided a summer retreat for the monastery of Chos-lung-tshogs-pa, one of the institutions which preserved the tradition of Sakyaśrīhadrā's teachings, and which was founded in 1255 by the latter's disciple, bSod-nams-stobs, about five kilometres north-east of Gyantse (Tucci 1949, pp. 134 and 702, n. 756; Ferrari 1958, p. 124, n. 231). It is conceivable that dPal-ladan-bzang-po sponsored the erection of these religious buildings in order to purify himself from the defilements accumulated during his military campaigns, following a custom which was already in use among Tibetan Buddhist generals during the monarchic period. That is even more likely since he, his mother, and his younger brother, 'Phags-pa Rin-chen, had taken the eight vows of lay devotees in the Wood Dog year 1334.

In the Fire Pig year 1347 the bZhi-thog palace appointed dPal-ladan-bzang-po administrator of western lHo-brag, an area north-west of Bhutan, where the 'Khon family pursued their struggle for supremacy against the lHo-dung clan. Three years later dPal-ladan-bzang-po married Padma, the daughter of Kun-dga'-don-grub, the sku-zhang of Zhwa-lu since 1333 (Vitali 1990, p. 101), who was responsible for completing the renovation of the gSer-khang with the help of Bu-ston Rin-po-che. Padma was then sixteen-years old, according to the Tibetan custom of calculating both the initial and the final year, which means that she was fifteen according to the Western system of reckoning age. Her dowry consisted in the fief of ICang-ra, on the left side of the Myang river, immediately west of Gyantse. The estate included a temple with all its sacred objects.

In the Water Dragon year 1352 dPal-ladan-bzang-po founded lHun-grub-rdzong, in Gam-pa (now Kampa Dzong), and made many offerings to the four chief monasteries following Sakyaśrīhadrā's tradition, placing himself under their spiritual authority. This amounted to an application of the purely Central Asian concept of "patron-priest" (yon-mchod) in which the temporal support of the lay power is given in return for the spiritual support of the religious power. That was precisely the formal description of the bond which had been established between the Mongol emperors of China and their viceroys at Sa-skyā. The same year dPal-ladan-bzang-po again defeated the lHo-dung at Rin-chen-sgang, in the Phag-ri area (Aris 1979, pp. 121, 168), a place which should not be confused with the monastery immediately east of Gyantse bearing the same name. Both Gam-pa and Phag-ri are southern Tibetan border areas which the Sa-skyā-pa administration was obviously eager to control through its enterprising and successful officer. On this account dPal-ladan-bzang-po had received the insignia and patent of rgon-po (elder) authorizing him to subdue the lHo-dung as well as the Shar-dung (Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, p. 110), another clan dwelling on the Himalayan slopes north of Bhutan. None the less in 1352 dPal-ladan-bzang-po reached an agreement with the Shar-dung, whose chiefs entered his service as petty officials (Petech 1990, p. 115).

In the Wood Horse year 1354 dPal-ladan-bzang-po's brother, 'Phags-pa Rin-chen, led a fourth victorious military expedition against the lHo-dung in lHo-brag, and the following year he was appointed by the lHa-khang-chen-mo as administrator of the mDol-byung fief ('Dul-chung, 'Du-chung, now known as Drojung; 'Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 22), south-west of Zhwa-lu. But in the Earth Dog year 1358 the 'Khon clan suffered a major blow at the hands of the Tibetan prince Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan, of the Rlangs clan, which belonged to the Phag-mo-gru-pa religious order and ruled the Phag-gru district from its capital, sNe'u-gdong, in south-eastern Tibet. The Phag-mo-gru-pa myriarchy was one of the thirteen districts entrusted by the Yuan dynasty to the Sa-skyā-pa administration, and the Rlangs lords, who bore the hereditary title of governor (khri-dpon), were thus subject to the 'Khon clan. In 1345 Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan, who had received his religious and
administrative training at the bZhi-thog palace and had been appointed ruler of the Phag-mo-gru-pa district since 1322, rebelled against his corrupt overlords. In the following years he managed to free central and southern Tibet from the rule of the Yuan dynasty and its viceroy, and in 1358 he occupied the lHa-khang-chen-mo of Sa-skya with his army, thus becoming the supreme ruler of Tibet.

dPal-lidan-bzang-po was compelled to come to terms with a new political situation, but it is apparent that at the same time he aimed at gaining the status of an independent prince by establishing direct contacts with the last Yuan emperor, Toghan Temur. Myang does not seem to have been included in the thirteen districts ruled by the 'Khon family (Tucci 1941, 1, pp. 85-86, 92), and therefore the princes of Gyantse owed obedience directly to the emperor of China.

Although the Yuan dynasty was on its last legs, Toghan Temur was still in touch not only with his former viceroy at Sa-skya, but also with those Tibetan princes who were subject to his direct authority. The lord of Gyantse maintained his contacts with the imperial court through the most prominent Tibetan religious figures in Myang, including not only Bu-ston Rin-po-che, then abbot of Zhwa-lu, but also Chos sku-'od-zer and the Black-Hat Karma-pa reincarnations, who often travelled to China for political and religious reasons because of their "patron-priest" relationship with the emperor. dPal-lidan-bzang-po sent two envoys from lCang-ra in the retinue of the 4th Karma-pa, Rol-pa'i-rdo-rje ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 23) as Rang-byung-rdo-rje, which obviously does not refer here to the 3rd Karma-pa, but must be understood as a mere title; cf. Kapstein 1985, pp. 361-362, n. 12). The Karma-pa abbot was leaving for the imperial court together with Chos-sku-'od-zer, who had been the chaplain of Oljaitu Temur and was then the highest religious authority in Myang. According to the Myang chos-byung, an ecclesiastical history of the Myang area which in a recent edition has been attributed to the Jo-nang-pa scholar Taranatha (1575-1634), Chos-sku-'od-zer, a famous master of the Kalacakra, was regarded as the reincarnation of Śākyasribhadra and had founded the monastery of rDo-rje-gdan, in Magdse-sding, where the lords of Gyantse used to gather once a year (Myang chos-byung 1983, pp. 108-109). The aim of dPal-lidan-bzang-po's mission was to seek permission from the Mongol emperor to build a temple on the Sham-bu-rtse-dgu, a mountain ridge north-west of lCang-ra.

In the Earth Pig year 1359 dPal-lidan-bzang-po's wife died at the age of twenty-four giving birth to a child. On that occasion he dedicated to her an image of the goddess Tara made of silver set with precious stones, according to the Indian style. That is the first image mentioned in the history of the princes of Gyantse, which is specifically attributed to dPal-lidan-bzang-po's munificence, though others must have been executed for the temples he had erected after the first one in 1343. It should be pointed out that the statue was not made in Tibetan, but in Indian style, following a custom which was continued for centuries to come and which sometimes makes difficult the dating and attribution of images in Pala-Sena style still to be found in Tibetan monasteries.

In the Iron Mouse year 1360 Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan conferred upon dPal-lidan-bzang-po the title and office of chief attendant (nye-gnas chen-po) of the bZhi-thog palace (Petech 1990, pp. 128-129). Furthermore Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan (1332-1364), 15th abbot of Sa-skya from 1337, appointed dPal-lidan-bzang-po nang-chen of the bZhi-thog, in full nang-so chen-mo, that is supreme advisor and head of the Sa-skya-pa administration, a title which was superior to that of shar-kha-pa (Tucci 1941, 1, pp. 83-84). In spite of the fact that in 1349 Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan had to hand over power to the Phag-mo-gru-pa conquerors (Blo-bzang-bstan-'dzin 1987, p. 54; this author regards Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan as the 14th abbot of Sa-skya because he omits from his list the 4th Great Abbot, Slob-dpon bSod-nams-rtsi-mo), he still held the title of ta'i-dben (dben corresponds to the Chinese yuan; cf. dben-pa in Petech 1992, p. 669: president of a detached section of the Department for Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs). dPal-lidan-bzang-po was also entrusted with important matters concerning the lHa-khang-chen-mo palace and the fief of lHa-rtse, a town north-west of Sa-skya, on the main road connecting central and southern Tibet to the Nepal Valley.
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

In the Wood Dragon year 1364 dPal-idan-bzang-po married bSod-nams-'bum, also known by the epithet of dPon-mo-chen-mo. Because of his good relationship with Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan, that same year the Sa-skya-pa administration entrusted him with the delicate task of leading a mission with presents to the Phag-mo-gru-pa capital, sNe'u-gdong. Unfortunately this embassy was seized at Rin-spungs by a Phag-mo-gru-pa faction which had obviously slipped from the Tibetan ruler’s control: Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan was ill at the time and died that very year. Thanks to the mediation of three authoritative religious masters including Chos-rgyal-blama-dam-pa bSod-nams-rgyal-mtshan (1312-1375), formerly 14th abbot of Sa-skya, dPal-idan-bzang-po was released unharmed after five months of captivity. Shortly afterwards Chos-sku-od-zer returned to Myang at the head of the embassy which dPal-idan-bzang-po had sent to the Yuan court six years earlier. Toghan Temur, who had by then lost his control over Tibet, sent dPal-idan-bzang-po gifts, confirmed with a patent the appointment of nang-chen which had been conferred upon him by the 15th abbot of Sa-skya, and granted him permission to build a temple on the Sham-bu-rtses-dgu ridge.

THE PRINCES OF GYANTSE AND THEIR ROLE AS PATRONS OF ART AND RELIGION

Having become the master of a vast territory extending from Myang to the borders of Bhutan, dPal-idan-bzang-po embarked upon the construction of a number of secular and religious buildings. The monk ‘Jigs-med-grags-pa, author of the rGyal-rtses chos-rgyal-gyi rnam-par-thar-pa dad-pa’i lo-thog dngos-grub-kyi char-'bebs (a history of the princes of Gyantse written between 1479 and 1481), records that, in the second month of the Wood Snake year 1365, dPal-idan-bzang-po laid the foundations of rTse-chen, mKhar-kha, lHun-grub-rtses and of the great palace (plate C) which is called Gyantse (pho-brang chen-po rGyal-mkhar-rtses shes bya-ba; ‘Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 30). In his history of Tibet (Bod-kyi rgyal-rabs rdzogs-lidan gzhon-nu’i dga’-ston) the Fifth Dalai Lama specifies that dPal-idan-bzang-po founded at rTse-chen not only a monastery but also a castle, one of the many which he erected at various other places: Phag-ri rNam-rgyal (possibly in the district of Phag-ri, then subject to his authority), sNa-bo (founded on the same day as the castle of Gyantse) and Khyung, most probably corresponding to Nor-bu-khyung-rtses, a strategic site placed near the junction of the main road from Gyantse to Shigatse with the road leading to Drojung, south of the river Myang (Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, p. 110).

rTse-chen, five kilometres west of Gyantse, is a site of prehistoric importance on the Sham-bu-rtses-dgu ridge, where dPal-idan-bzang-po had obtained Toghan Temur’s permission to build a monastery. mKhar-kha (or ‘Khar-dga’) is a village in a large valley east of sTag-rtses (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 259, n. 3) and north of Gyantse, the birth-place of at least two of the painters who worked between 1479 and 1481, the editor of Mi-la-ras-pa’s biography (Ferrari 1958, p. 127, n. 266). lHun-grub-rtses is a site in Pa-snam, an area placed between Zhwa-lu and Drojung. rGyal-mkhar-rtses is the very crag where a fortress of Khri Ral-pa-can’s had been built long before (sngon mnga’-bdag chen-po’i pho-brang btab-pa’i sa). In the same year, 1365, bSod-nams-’bum gave birth to a child who was to be known as grub-chen Kun-dga’-blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan. The author of the history of the princes of Gyantse specifies that he was the son of dPal-idan-bzang-po and of his brother, ‘Phags-pa Rin-chen, thus reminding us that both polyandry and polygyny have always characterized traditional Tibetan society.

In the Fire Horse year 1366 dPal-idan-bzang-po laid the foundations of the main monastic building at rTse-chen (‘Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 32: rTse-chen chos-sde’i gtsug-lag-khang-gi ‘gram btungs). The following year he met the young lady who was going to be his third wife, Byang-sems-bzang-mo. In 1367 he again received presents from the Yuan emperor, as well as the title of ta’i-bwsi-tu g.yang-lo-ta-ho (the status attached to the title si-tu or ta’i si-tu, corresponding to the Chinese daisitu, is not at all well-defined; g.yang-lo-ta-ho corresponds to the Chinese yongludaifu, a military title of the first rank). He also obtained the patent of thu-gon
The Princes of Gyantse

(or thus-dkon, thugs-dkon, corresponding to the Chinese dugang), namely head of the office for the affairs of the Buddhist monks in a district (Tucci 1949, p. 702, nn. 783, 786). Furthermore the emperor of China bestowed on him the lands of upper Myang from sKu-ril-thog upwards and from Mt. Gangs-bzang (also Gang-bzang; Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, p. 110: Gangs-dkar-po) downwards, as far as 'Bri-mtshams, as his personal appanage. This means that at the time dPal-lidan-bzang-po's domains extended eastwards as far as the Rwa-lung area, where the Myang river springs from Mt. Gang-ba-bzang-po (Tucci 1941, 1, p. 57). His brother, 'Phags-pa Rin-chen, received the patent of du-dhen-sha (corresponding to the Chinese duyuanshuai), namely commander-in-chief, of Western Tibet, a title, rather than an appointment, which in the 14th century was freely granted to noblemen (Petech 1992, p. 670). Although the Yuan dynasty no longer ruled Tibet and was about to be swept away by the Ming, it is conceivable that such a patent had been solicited by the lords of Gyantse with the idea of using it one day to claim suzerainty over the vast territories west of Sa-skya.

In the same year, 1367, dPal-lidan-bzang-po asked Bla-ma-dam-pa bSod-nams-rgyal-mtshan to perform a consecration at the monastery of ICang-ra, and for the occasion he invited the monks of the important monastery of gNas-rnying and informed them of the fact that he had received the imperial patent of dugang, which meant that they were subject to his authority. The monastery of gNas-rnying (or gNas-snying), lying south of Gyantse, on the main route leading to Phag-ri, was one of the most ancient and flourishing religious institutions in Tibet, and its abbots had beautified it with works commissioned from Newar artists (ibid, pp. 144-145). It appears to have become one of the most important bka'-gdamgs-pa centres and was eventually brought into the dGe-lugs-pa fold, though always under the control of the lords of Gyantse who, around 1400, were to authorize its abbot, Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan, to renounce his vows and to take a wife in order to ensure the continuity of his line (Aris 1979, pp. 191-192).

In the Earth Monkey year 1368 the dar-ra-kha-che (on this title see Laufer 1918, pp. 487-488, No. 158) Kun-dga'-dpal ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, pp. 34-35), namely Kun-dga'-bkra-shis-rgyal-mtshan (1349-1425), arrived at Gyantse from the Yuan court. This is the same Sa-skyi-pa master who was to receive the title of theg-chen chos-kyi rgyal-po, that is king of the Mahayana doctrine (Tucci 1949, p. 703, nn. 795, 810), from the Ming emperor Chengzu. The appearance of Kun-dga'-bkra-shis-rgyal-mtshan on the political scene in Myang is important because, thanks to his special connections with the imperial court, first with the Yuan and later with the Ming dynasty, he was to play an important role at Gyantse. With the fall of the Yuan dynasty in China in 1368 dPal-lidan-bzang-po was ready to embark upon an independent policy of his own, although he always kept close ties with the former imperial representatives at Sa-skya. On a national level he could thus place himself as a kind of mediator between that monastery and the government of sNe'u-gdong. On an international level he could hope that his relationship with the Ming dynasty in China would bring him more advantages and less interference than the one with the Yuan. Like other Tibetan princes and abbots, dPal-lidan-bzang-po continued to recognize the supremacy of the Chinese imperial court by seeking titles and patents from the Ming emperors. On the other hand the title of nang-chen during the Ming dynasty continued to be recognized in China as applying to hereditary lama chiefs "in an arrangement which granted them rights over a specific territory in exchange for a tribute that was determined anew every year" (Aris 1989, p. 246, n. 245). But in practice the princes and abbots of southern Tibet in the 15th century ruled independently of China.

The same year saw the completion of the main monastic building (gtsug-lag-khang) at rTse-chen. It included an assembly-hall with thirty-six pillars supporting a veranda above it (khyams, a term applying either to the assembly-hall or to the veranda supported by it) and, behind it, the main temple (gtsang-khang, the inner sanctum) with eight pillars, containing a statue of the Buddha as at the age of twelve. 'Jigs-med-grags-pa (1481, pp. 34-37) lists in great detail all the statues and wall paintings which were executed both in the assembly-hall and in the main temple. Their images depicted buddhas, bodhisattvas, peaceful and wrathful deities, and also two series of eighty siddhas which were painted on cloth applied to the walls, following a technique which is still used in the Himalayan area, from Ladakh to Bhutan, and also in the Tibetan settlements in Karnataka, southern India.
For the consecration ceremony at rTse-chen, dPal-ladan-bzang-po invited Rin-po-che Dharma'i-mtshan-can of the 'Khon family, Chos-rje bZung-kyi-dpal-ba, the mkhan-chen Rin-po-che Grags-pa-rgyal-mltshan, then abbot of gNas-rgying, Gu-shri-ba from the Khang-gsar palace of Sa-skya, the great bla-ma dByung, and also Thar-pa, gNas-rgying Zur-pa, 'Dzim-pa and many other prominent religious figures. The ceremony took place in the third month of the Monkey year 1368, and it is quite clear that dPal-ladan-bzang-po intended to make the monastery of rTse-chen a symbol of his political power over the clergy, just as the palace of Gyantse was a symbol of his political power over the lay people of Myang.

In the first month of the Iron Dog year 1370 dPal-ladan-bzang-po died in his private apartments at rTse-chen before the monastery was completed. On that occasion his brother and successor, 'Phags-pa Rin-chen (1320-1376), made many offerings to the monks of the monasteries of southern Tibet, starting with those of Sa-skya. In the fourth month of the same year 'Phags-pa Rin-chen ascended the throne and became the ruler (sde-srid) of the principality of Gyantse. One month later he achieved the construction of rTse-chen by building the residence for the abbot together with its assembly-hall (ibid, p. 39: bla-brang tshogs-dang bcas-pa bzhangs; Myang chos-'byung 1983, p. 93: bla-brang tshogs-khang-dang bcas-pa bzhangs).

In the eighth month of the Iron Pig year 1371 'Phags-pa Rin-chen invited to rTse-chen the nya-dbon (also nya-dben and nya-dpon, a title akin to that of abbot; see Tucci 1949, p. 703, n. 798) Kun-dga'-dpal with six hundred clergy, including masters and monks, and appointed him abbot (mkhan-po) of the newly built monastery (Jigs-med-grags-pa 1987, p. 16). According to Tucci (1949, p. 703, nn. 795 and 798) this Kun-dga'-dpal should not be confused with the theg-chen chos-kyi rgyal-po mentioned above and his full name was Kun-dga'-blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan. However, he should not be confused either with the grub-chen Kun-dga'-blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po, the son born to dPal-ladan-bzang-po's and 'Phags-pa Rin-chen's common wife, bsod-nams-bum, in the Wood Snake year 1365, one year after Bu-ston's demise ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 31; 1987, p. 13), who seems to be identical with Bu-ston's reincarnation, the grub-chen Kun-dga'-blo-gros. The monastery attracted immediate attention thanks to the presence of outstanding masters ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1987, p.17): in 1375 Tsong-kha-pa went to rTse-chen to receive teachings from the nya-dbon Kun-dga'-dpal and from the latter's pupil, the famous Sa-skya-pa scholar Re-mdal-ba gZhon-nu-blo-gros (1349-1412; Thurman 1982, p. 8), who, according to the Chos-rgyal nam-thar mentioned in an interlinear note of the Myang chos-'byung (1983, p. 93), was also appointed abbot of rTse-chen (Myang chos-'byung 1983, p. 94). The grub-chen Kun-dga'-blo-gros became nya-dbon of the monastery at the age of nineteen (according to the Myang chos-'byung 1983, p. 94, this was in the Wood Tiger year 1374, perhaps a mistake for the Wood Monkey year 1384).

The fact that the princes of Gyantse decided to confer the abbotship of rTse-chen upon a son of theirs who was recognized as Bu-ston's first reincarnation means that they thus intended to confer the highest prestige upon their main monastery, while keeping it under strict control. Indeed the monastery of rTse-chen prospered and became a renowned centre of studies, providing an important link between the Sa-skya-pa tradition and the dGe-lugs-pa school. Unfortunately it was used as a fortress against the invading British in June 1904 and severely damaged during the attack launched by them on the 28th of that month. Like many other famous buildings in Tibet it lay in ruins at the time of Tucci's expedition in 1937 (Tucci 1941, 1, p. 65), although it was subsequently repaired (Ferrari 1958, p. 142, n. 416), only to be destroyed once again during the Cultural Revolution.

According to an interlinear note in the history of the princes of Gyantse, in the same Iron Pig year 1371 'Phags-pa Rin-chen requested mKhas-grub lHa'i-dbang-po to build the monastery of rDo-rje-gdan and he also erected sPyil-po-bde-idan ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 40). In this connection it should be pointed out that the name rDo-rje-gdan, referring to the Diamond Throne at Bodhgaya, was applied to monasteries, and that gNas-rgying was also called thus (Tucci 1941, 1, p. 144).

In the following years 'Phags-pa Rin-chen confirmed his family's relationship with the Mongol princes, no longer emperors of China, and through Chos-skur-od-zer he received from them the title and patent of husi-
The Princes of Gyantse

...which was added to that of duyuanshuai of Western Tibet. Chos sku-'od zer also conferred the appointments of nang-chen and of dugang upon his nephew, Kun-dga' Phags-pa, who was born to his brother's first wife, Padma, in the Fire Bird year 1357 ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, pp. 22-23).

Phags-pa Rin-chen died in the Fire Dragon year 1376, and on that occasion Kun-dga' Phags-pa made several objects of worship which were consecrated by Thugs-sras Lo-tsa ba Rin-chen-rnam-rgyal (1318-1388), Bu-ston's spiritual son, who continued the lineage of that foremost master and made the Kālacakra the main object of his teachings. The following year, the nyab-dbon of rTse-chen consecrated an important golden statue of the Buddha Śākyamuni, and Kun-dga' Phags-pa ascended to the throne: Phags-pa Rin-chen's son, born to Byang-sems-bzang-mo, was then only two years old. In the Earth Sheep year 1379 Kun-dga' Phags-pa laid the foundations of sPel-mo-che in Drojung (ibid, pp. 44-45) and five years later he made a census of the population in his principality.

Kun-dga' Phags-pa's greatest achievement was probably the construction of bSam-phem-rin-po-che-gling, the gtsug-lag-khang in the palace of Gyantse. According to the two historical sources taken into consideration here, an old decree (bka'-shog) concerning the images, texts and ornaments of the palatine temple states that the gtsug-lag-khang was started in the Iron Horse year 1390 and completed in the Fire Sheep year 1427 (ibid, pp. 47-50; Myang chos-'byung 1983, p. 49). Both 'Jigs-med-grags-pa and the author of the Myang chos-'byung mention in some detail the statues and wall paintings which were made in that monastery. The chief image depicted Śākyamuni as at the age of eight, and the walls of the gtsang-khang, the main temple at the end of the veranda, were painted with various deities and with the lineage of the masters of the Lam-'bras tradition. In the same temple there was also a set of the eight basic stūpas (see Tucci 1932, 1, p. 21 ff.), which was later carried to the gzhal-yas-khang, namely the "divine palace", a term generally applying to the temple which is built above the gtsang-khang in Tibetan monasteries (Tucci 1941, p. 62).

The veranda (khyams) in front of the main temple was painted with images of the Buddhas of the Three Times, the parinirvas of Sukhavati and Abhirati, the Medicine Buddha, Śākyamuni and the Elders, the Twelve Acts of Śākyamuni, Tārā, Uṣṇīṣavijayā, the Four Guardian Kings, and so forth, all drawn according to their sādhana s and to the explanations contained in the relevant sūtras and tantras. The deities of the Five Families, the chief deities of the Three Families, Sitatapatrā, gZa'-yum, sGrol-ma bkra-shis-don-grub, Hayagriva, White Tārā, and White Aksobhya, were painted at the sides of the image of the Tathāgata along the circumambulation corridor ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 49: skor-khang) surrounding the main temple, whereas the mandala of Kālacakra and other fundamental mandalas were painted on the walls of the gzhal-yas-khang built above it. Few of these paintings and of their many inscriptions are extant, but their remnants are still visible along the two surviving walls of the veranda, in the circumambulation corridor and in the gzhal-yas-khang, hidden among the ruins of the palace of the princes of Gyantse. The iconographic themes are divided in frames and developed in rows of images, in accordance with a tradition inherited from Newar art. The only name which is mentioned by 'Jigs-med-grags-pa in connection with the decoration of the palatine monastery is that of 'Jam-dbyangs Rin-chens-rgyal-rtsam-pa, who planned and made the guardian deities in the chapel of the protecting deities (mgon-khang).

The palatine monastery was consecrated by the mghan-chen Rin-chen Thar-pa (possibly the same master who had taken part in the consecration of rTse-chen) in the Rat year, which, according to an interlinear note to 'Jigs-med-grags-pa's text, may be either the Fire Rat year 1396 or the Earth Rat year 1408, when the lord of Gyantse was fifty-two inore tibetico. Like the palace in which it is found, this temple suffered from the shelling of the British attack of the 6th July 1904, as well as from the Cultural Revolution sixty years later. The erection of the palatine temple of Gyantse marks the conclusion of a first phase of building and artistic activity, described with a wealth of information in historical sources, but inadequately documented by extant remains.
Kun-dga’ ‘Phags-pa died on the fifth day of the ninth month in the Water Dragon year 1412 in the eastern apartments of the palace of Gyantse (ibid., pp. 103-104). Of his three sons the eldest, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang ‘Phags-pa, born to Byang-sems-bzang-mo in the Earth Snake year 1389, was to be the greatest of the princes of Gyantse. The youngest son, Rab-byor-bzang-po, born to the same mother, was to be appointed Prime Minister. As such they are both mentioned in the inscriptions in the Great Stupa of Gyantse. The youngest son, bKra-shis ‘Phags-pa, was born of Kun-dga’ ‘Phags-pa’s marriage with Byang-sems-bzang-mo’s younger sister, rGyal-mtsan-rdor-ba of Zhwa-lu, in the Water Ape year 1392. He was to succeed Rab-brtan-kun-bzang after the latter’s death in 1442.

Rab-brtan-kun-bzang ‘Phags-pa received his name from a master of the dPyal clan, Kun-dga’-rgya-mtsho, according to a tradition which had been established at the time of his grandfather, dPal-ldan-bzang-po. Like dPal-ldan-bzang-po, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang had dealings with his Phag-mo-gru-pa overlords and was appointed personal attendant (gzims-dpon) of the Tibetan “emperor” (gong-ma) Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan, and also of the latter’s overlord, the Ming emperor Chengzu, often called Yongle after the period of his reign. Whereas it is doubtful that he ever fulfilled the function of attendant of the Chinese emperor, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang did go to the court of the Tibetan ruler in sNe’u-gdong, and even received from him a small image of Śākyamuni which in the Fifth Dalai Lama’s time was still kept in the li-ma-khang of Gyantse (Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, pp. 90, 110).

The princes of Gyantse played a role as ministers of the Phag-mo-gru-pas and supported them in their struggle against the lords of Rin-spungs (Aris 1979, p. 120). However, it should be pointed out that Rab-brtan-kun-bzang levied troops twice against Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan and succeeded in gaining full independence (Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, pp. 90, 95; Sum-pa mKhan-po 1984, 2, p. 161). On the first occasion, in the Fire Dog year 1406, he was supported by the monastery of Sa-skya, which was eager to get rid of the Phag-mo-gru-pa rule (Tucci 1949, p. 694, n. 275). On the second occasion, in the Wood Tiger year 1434, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang sent his half-brother, bKra-shis ‘Phags-pa, to attack the Phag-mo-gru-pas with a large army. bKra-shis ‘Phags-pa managed to conquer the Phag-mo-gru-pa camp in the Drojung area and to set fire to two big enemy cannons. Rab-brtan-kun-bzang must have been in a strong position, for the gong-ma ceased demanding tribute of Gyantse.

By the early 15th century the princes of Gyantse had managed to acquire a status of virtual independence from the Phag-mo-gru-pas. This was achieved both through strength of arms and thanks to skilful statecraft. By maintaining their ancient ties with the Sa-skya-pas and by playing a role of mediator between Sa-skya and sNe’u-gdong since the time of Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan, dPal-ldan-bzang-po and his successors had already succeeded in making Myang an independent buffer state between those two rival powers. The political results thus achieved were further strengthened by the direct relations which the princes of Gyantse maintained with the Mongol rulers as well as with the Chinese emperors, hence gaining international status in the eyes of their Tibetan rivals. Not only did Rab-brtan-kun-bzang keep strong ties with the Ming court through the theg-chen chos-kyi rgyal-po Kun-dga’-bkra-shis-rgyal-mtshan, but he also established direct contacts with what survived of Buddhism in India. It was during this particularly happy period, falling between the two successful military campaigns waged by Rab-brtan-kun-bzang against the Phag-mo-gru-pas, that Gyantse enjoyed the peace and prosperity which enabled its prince to embark upon the most ambitious building project ever undertaken by a lay ruler in Tibet: the construction of the dPal’-khor-bde-chen, later known as dPal’-khor-chos-sde.

In the Water Dragon year 1412 Rab-brtan-kun-bzang gave a feast for the arrival of the emperor Chengzu’s envoys, who had come to invite Kun-dga’-bkra-shis-rgyal-mtshan to China, and bestowed great gifts on them. The same year the theg-chen chos-kyi rgyal-po tried to persuade bSod-nams-dam-pa and his nephew to regain possession of the IHa-khang-chos-mo, which was still garrisoned by the Phag-mo-gru-pas’ troops. As we have seen, Kun-dga’-bkra-shis-rgyal-mtshan had arrived at Gyantse in 1368, and he must have been an influential religious and political figure at the court of its princes, because he had strong ties not only with Sa-skya but
also with the imperial court, being the son of a Sa-skya-pa master who died in China (ibid, Table I). Although such contacts were chiefly exploited for political aims, in this specific instance to counter the Phag-mo-gru-pa influence in southern Tibet thanks to the support of the prince of Gyantse and perhaps with the tacit consent of the Ming emperor, it is clear that they also resulted in Chinese cultural influence and in the adoption of Chinese fashions. The exchanges with the Yuan and Ming courts affected the style of southern Tibetan artistic schools, which were also susceptible to Chinese influence, however much they depended upon the Newar style. The blending of the various artistic experiences of different local schools in the huge decoration work undertaken at Gyantse eventually led to the creation of a national style of painting in southern Tibet. It is significant that sMan-bla Don-grub, the first Tibetan painter who, according to tradition (Kong-sprul 1977, p. 364), was influenced by Chinese art and created a national idiom at a time when the Newar style was still predominant, was born in 1409 (Dagyab 1977, 1, p. 140) in the lHo-brag area north of Bhutan, with which the princes of Gyantse had many dealings since dPal-ladan-bzang-po had been appointed administrator of western lHo-brag in 1347.

In the Water Snake year 1413 a large imperial delegation arrived from China on its way to India to invite Śākyasīrī Śāriputra, the abbot of Bodhgayā, to the Ming court. The Chinese envoys gave presents not only to the theg-chen chos-kyi rgyal-po, Kun-dga’-dpal, but also to the Fifth Karma-pa, De-bzhin-gshegs-pa, and showered the princes of southern Tibet and the abbots of various religious orders with titles. In particular they granted the “one of dBus”, that is the Phag-mo-gru-pa ruler (Tucci 1949, p. 703, n. 826), a patent authorizing him to reside in the IHa-khang-chon-mo of Sa-skya. That the Ming emperors recognized the government of sNe’u-gdong while keeping on good terms with the Sa-skya-pas is confirmed by the Fifth Dalai Lama’s statement that at the time of the emperor Yung-lo Ta Ming (Chengzu), Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshon received the golden seal as well as the rock crystal seal and the patent conferring the authority upon him (Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, p. 90). The Chinese emperor also provided for the erection of a golden pinnacle at mTshur-phu and for whitewashing the stupa of Svayambhu, in the Nepal Valley (’Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 115). On that occasion, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang received the imperial patent of yongludaifu and many presents.

The following year Rab-brtan-kun-bzang erected a six-arcade bridge over the river Myang, thus preparing a suitable reception for the abbot of Bodhgayā, who was on his way to Tibet after a stay in the Nepal Valley, where in 1413 he had restored the stupa at Svayambhu (Ehrhard 1991, pp. 15-16, n. 9) thanks to the funds supplied by the emperor of China. Nothing is left of that bridge, but ’Jigs-med-grags-pa (ibid, pp. 117-118) and the author of the Myang chos-'byung (1983, pp. 51-52) have left us a detailed description of the nine mandalas and of the images of buddhas and bodhisattvas which decorated the stupa erected in the middle of the bridge as a gateway through which the road passed. The consecration ceremony of the bridge and of its stupa was performed by the abbot of Bodhgayā himself, who spent two months at lCang-ra as a guest of the prince of Gyantse before leaving for China.

In the Earth Dog year 1418 Rab-brtan-kun-bzang went to Sa-skya to receive the titles of ta’i-bwsi-tu, nang-chen and dugang (ibid, p. 52: thus-dkon), which the Mongol emperors had already granted to his grandfather. It is not clear whether those titles were conferred upon Rab-brtan-kun-bzang by the Sa-skya-pa administration or by the Phag-mo-gru-pa ruler who resided in the IHa-khang-chon-mo, though it is likely that in the former case the sNe’u-gdong government would have given its assent. In either case those Mongol titles placed the prince of Gyantse in a particular position before the sNe’u-gdong government. Indeed it should be pointed out that while Byang-chub-rgyal-mtshan got rid of all aspects of Mongol culture and domination in Tibet and encouraged the rediscovery of her ancient and glorious monarchic past, it appears from the long edict published by Tucci (1949, p. 746) that the princes of Gyantse continued to apply the Mongol law on their territory well after 1440.
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

On the thirtieth day of the third month in the same Earth Dog year, thirty-seven artisans started to make a large scroll with pieces of coloured silk placed upon a support of cotton material, for which three hundred and thirty bolts of cotton were used. The work was based upon drawings made by the great master dPal-'byor Rin-po-che and it took twenty-seven days to complete it. It depicted Śākyamuni flanked by Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, IHa-mgron, Dipaṅkara, Maitreya, the Sixteen Elders, and so forth ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, pp. 132-141; Myangchos-'byung 1983, p. 52). Rab-brtan-kun-bzang sponsored many religious and artistic activities, for instance the decoration of the monastery of sPos-khang (also known as Chos-lung sPos-tshogs and sPos-tshogs-chos-sde), founded in 1213 by Śākyasrīhabha’s disciple, Byang-chub-dpal-bzang-po, in a gorge branching off the right side of the Myang Valley, along the road from Gyantse to Shigatse (Tucci 1949, pp. 170, 201-202). But the most important and lasting of his undertakings was to be the construction of the monastic enclave of Gyantse.

In the summer of 1418 Rab-brtan-kun-bzang laid the foundations of the gtsug-lag-khang of the monastery (chos-sde) of Gyantse ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, pp. 146-147; Myangchos-'byung 1983, pp. 52-53; Jia Xiang Yun and He Zongying 1990, pp. 165-166). An inscription copied by Tucci (1941, 2, p. 8), mentioning that the chos-rgyal dPal-bzang, namely dPal-ldan-bzang-po, was the donor of the wall paintings on the eastern wall of the gtsug-lag-khang illustrating one hundred and twenty-five images of the Bhadrakalpa cycle, seems to suggests that the central structure of the temple had already been raised by Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s grandfather, that is before 1370. None of the names of the three painters mentioned in the inscription appears among those of the artists who worked in the Great Stūpa in the following century. The suggestion that a temple already stood in what was to become the dPal-'khor-chos-sde is indirectly strengthened by the statement made in the Myangchos-'byung (1983, p. 54) with reference to the Earth Pig year 1419, that since Rab-brtan-kun-bzang found that the gtsug-lag-khang previously built was too small (gtsug-lag-khang sngar-ba brtsigs-pa khyon chung 'dug-pas), he decided to build an inner sanctuary (gsang-khang) with eight pillars, a large assembly-hall (kyams) with forty-eight pillars supporting a veranda above it, and two projections (glo-bur) corresponding to an eastern and to a western extension with temples having six pillars each. ’Jigs-med-grags-pa (1481, pp. 147-148) gives some details of the financial transactions carried out and of the subscriptions called in order to raise money for the project as far as the Nepal Valley.

The new monastic foundation was called chos-grwa chen-po (great theological school) dPal-'khor-bde-chen (plates D, E), a name connected with that of the Tibetan king dPal-'khor-btsan (c. 892-923) who, according to a local tradition, ruled this area from his castle on the crag of Gyantse; the two names are associated in an inscription in a chapel on the fourth storey of the Great Stūpa (Tucci 1941, 1, p. 61; 1941, 2, p. 225). Rab-brtan-kun-bzang was assisted in his task by Tsong-kha-pa’s famous disciple, mKhas-grub-chos-rje (1385-1438) (Wylie 1962, p. 139, n. 220; Jia Xiang Yun and He Zongying 1990, p. 162), the greatest dGe-lugs-pa expert in tantric literature.

In the ninth month of the Earth Pig year 1419, on the occasion of the Kālacakra festival, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang consecrated a huge scroll depicting the Buddha of the Future, Maitreya, and a number of other deities, made from twenty-three bolts of silk. Another appliqué scroll, representing Manjuśrī surrounded by several deities, was completed in one month and eight days (Myangchos-'byung 1983, p. 54; ’Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, pp. 149-152) the same year. We do not know the lot of such images, except that one was kept in the palatine temple and another was still carried in procession in Tucci’s time (Tucci 1941, 1, p. 62). The massive wall upon which they were unrolled in order to be displayed on the occasion of important religious festivals stills stands behind the residence of the abbot in the dPal-'khor-chos-sde. Thirteen years later, in the Water Mouse year 1432, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang consecrated an appliqué scroll representing the image of the Buddha, which added to other similar works produced since 1419.
The production of such images, made of dyed silk and cotton, is possibly related to the manufacture of kesi, Chinese textiles in which several pieces of silk are woven separately and then sewn together so that all the seams are clearly visible when held up to the light. It should be pointed out that the Chinese thread scrolls (s-thang) which influenced sMan-bla Don-grub, the founder of the Tibetan school of painting, in the first half of the 15th century, were apparently temple banners of the Yuan dynasty, and in particular the elegant embroideries which came to Tibet in a steady stream as offerings to the religious masters of Sa-skya from the 13th century onwards. Other painters belonging to the sMan-bris (or sMan-bris; also sMan-thang) school founded by sMan-bla Don-grub, especially the 16th century painter Nam-mkha'-bkra-shis from Yar-stod, in southwestern Tibet, were open to the influence of Ming tapestry work and eventually established the sGar-bris tradition of painting, which during the following centuries became particularly popular in Karma-pa monasteries (Kong-sprul 1982, 1, p. 575; Smith 1970, pp. 43-44). But in southern Tibet the production of appliqué scrolls on a large scale in the early 15th century seems to have been a characteristic of Gyantse.

Major works on the first storey of the gtsug-lag-khang in the dPal-'khor-chos-sde were carried out from the second month of the Iron Mouse year 1420 with the construction of the assembly-hall and of the circumambulation corridor (mda'-yab-kyi khor-yug) surrounding the inner sanctuary (’Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, pp. 155-158). The gilded copper statue of Śākyamuni, sitting on a throne and surrounded by a decorative arch (rgyab-yol) in the middle of the inner sanctuary, was made following the same proportions as the main image in the temple of the Great Enlightenment at Bodhgaya, whose abbot had been Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s guest in 1414. The sculptor sKyabs-pa started to work on that statue in 1420 and completed it the following year. Rab-brtan-kun-bzang himself fixed the traditional wooden “life” pole (srog-shing) inside the image in order to hold it together. The statue was apparently filled with thirty relics of Śākyamuni, some holy objects belonging to the ancient religious kings of Tibet and many relics which were taken from the treasury, as well as ashes of the Buddha. It was flanked by statues of Mahājñāna and Avalokiteśvara, placed respectively at its right and left, and further by those of Dipaṅkara and Maitreya. This part of the gtsug-lag-khang was consecrated by ’Jam-dbyangs-rin-chen-rgyal-mtshan (Myang chos-’byung 1983, pp. 54-55).

The temple corresponding to the western extension of the gtsug-lag-khang, to the left as one enters the assembly-hall, was devoted to the cycle of the rDo-rje-dbyings (Vajradhātu), drawn from the Sarvatathāgatātattvasamgraha, the most ancient and important text belonging to the class of the yogatantras. The five Cosmic Buddhas with their attendant Bodhisattvas are painted with the usual gouache technique on the walls of the temple and also modelled in statues made of clay and painted, placed on two main registers below the wall paintings along the southern, western and eastern walls. Clay is the material most often used in the statuary of the dPal-'khor-chos-sde, and it should be pointed out that Tibetans were acquainted with at least three different techniques of making clay statues since the 8th century, when about a hundred clay statues were erected in the three storeys of the central temple (dbu-rtse) of bSam-yas using Tibetan, Chinese and Indian techniques respectively (Chayet 1990, pp. 112-113).

It is likely that both the layout and the position of the rDo-rje-dbyings temple within the gtsug-lag-khang of the dPal-'khor-chos-sde were modelled upon the Vajradhātu temple placed to the left of the assembly-hall in thegesSer-khang of Zhwa-lu. Besides following an identical iconographic theme, both temples house the volumes of the bKa‘-gyur. In this connection, it should be noted that the rDo-rje-dbyings-lha-khang at Gyantse was consecrated in the Water Tiger year 1422 by the prince-abbot (sku-zhang) of Zhwa-lu, Chos-rje Nam-mkha’i-mtshan-can, with whose monastery the princes of Gyantse continued to entertain a privileged relationship (Myang chos-’byung 1983, pp. 55-56).

In 1422 Rab-brtan-kun-bzang also attended to the decoration of the walls of the assembly-hall and of the circumambulation corridor (khyams bskor-khang-dang bcas-pa) departing from it and surrounding the inner sanctuary. The iconographic themes mentioned by the Myang chos-’byung (1983, p. 57) in connection with this work are a paradise (zhing-khams) drawn from the Maṇjuśrīnāmasamgiti, painted on cotton (ras-bris) applied
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

to the walls, and wall paintings depicting Vairocana, Maitreya and the Sixteen Elders. The consecration ceremony was performed by the “great abbot of gNas-ryying, 'Jam-dbyangs-rin-chen-rgyal-ba” (Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 196: 'Jam-dbyangs-rin-rgyal), the same master who had already consecrated the inner sanctuary and who had by now become the abbot of his own monastery. 'Jam-dbyangs-rin-chen-rgyal-ba is likely to be identical with Rin-chen-grub (1403-1452), the son of the previous abbot of gNas-ryying, Rin-chen-rgyal-mtshan, who had received permission from Kun-dga’ Phags-pa to break his vows and marry in order to ensure the continuity of his line. Both Rin-chen-grub and his brother, rGyal-mtshan-rin-chen (1405-1468), had received some of their training at the hands of Tsong-kha-pa’s two foremost disciples, mKhas-grub and rGyal-tshab.

Rin-chen-grub headed the monastery of gNas-ryying from 1422 to 1452 (Aris 1979, p. 192), and his presence at Gyantse should be related not only to his tenure of the abbotship of gNas-ryying, by then an important dGe-lugs-pa institution which we know was under the jurisdiction of the princes of Gyantse, but also to the role played by mKhas-grub-chos-rje in the erection of the gtsug-lag-khang in the dPal-'khor-chos-sde according to historical sources. The special links already existing between the highest authorities of the monastery of gNas-ryying and the princes of Gyantse, and in particular, the yon-mchod relationship established between Rab-brtan-kun-bzang and mKhas-grub-chos-rje in the construction of the monastic enclave of Gyantse, may also be responsible for the choice of some of the artists summoned to work in the dPal-'khor-chos-sde: the inscriptions there mention at least two painters from gNas-ryying working in the gtsug-lag-khang and four working in the Great Stūpa.

In the Water Hare year 1423 Rab-brtan-kun-bzang directed his attention to the decoration of the Chos-rgyal-ha-khang, the temple of the Religious Kings, corresponding to the eastern extension of the gtsug-lag-khang, and to the right as one enters the assembly-hall. The name of that temple was particularly meaningful because, just like the ancient kings of Tibet, the princes of Gyantse bore the title of chos-rgyal (religious king) and must have competed with the Phag-mo-gru-pas in regarding themselves as the inheritors of the glorious monarchical past of the country. Mention of the Tibetan kings Ras-pa-can and dPal-'khor-ptsan in connection with Gyantse has already been made. The monastery of gNas-ryying, now placed under the direct control of the princes of Gyantse, had been founded by rGya 'Jam-dpal-gsang-ba, a chaplain of Khri Ras-pa-can, who resided at the royal monastery of bSam-yas, the first Buddhist foundation established in Tibet (Tucci 1941, 1, p. 142). The Myang area played an important role during the monarchical period and some religious figures belonging to old local clans, such as the masters of the dPyal family, later had special connections with the princes of Gyantse.

In the temple devoted to the religious kings Avalokitēśvara occupies a prominent place not only because from an early period he became the most popular Bodhisattva in Tibet, but also because the Tibetan king Khri Srong-btse-sgams-po was already regarded as his manifestation during the monarchical period. Avalokitēśvara is painted on the walls of the Chos-rgyal-ha-khang along with various manifestations of the Cosmic Buddha Amitābha, to whose Family he belongs. He is also modelled in a clay statue erected along the main wall (the eastern one) in his aspect with eleven heads and one thousand arms (Ekādaśamukha Avalokitēśvara). The statue is flanked by those of two other Bodhisattvas with whom Avalokitēśvara forms a triad which is very popular in Tibet and the Himalayas: Mañjuśrī and Vaiśravaṇī, who came to be regarded respectively as manifestations of Khri Srong-lde-btse-sgams-po and of Khri Ras-pa-can. In this way the three most popular Bodhisattvas were identified with the three most famous religious kings, and in the course of time this triad obscured other important Buddhist kings of Tibet, such as Sad-na-legs.

The statues of the three religious kings, modelled in clay and painted, are placed along the southern wall of the temple, while that of Šantarakṣita followed by those of Padmasambhava and Kamāsāla, three Indian masters who had a decisive part in the diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet during the monarchical period, are placed respectively along the eastern and northern wall. On the northern wall the images of Padmasambhava and
The Princes of Gyantse

Kamalaśīla are followed by the statue of Atiśa, who, like the Kashmiri master Śākyamīruḥhadra, played a crucial role in the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. The statue of Śākyamīruḥhadra, whose teachings were especially followed in four monasteries placed under the protection of the princes of Gyantse, is found along the southern wall of the temple. The consecration ceremony of the Chos-rgyal-ha-khang was performed by the already mentioned 'Jam-dbyangs-rin-chen-rgyal-mtshan (Myang chos-'byung 1983, pp. 56-57).

The Chos-rgyal-ha-khang is the celebration of the political and religious role played by the princes of Gyantse, who associated themselves ideally with the great Buddhist kings of ancient Tibet. That ideal connection was deliberately obscured two centuries later, when the Fifth Dalai Lama and his Mongol allies destroyed the last independent kingdom of Tibet occupying its capital, Shigatse, gaoling and murdering its ruler, and crushing the revolt which broke out after their occupation of Gyantse. The dGe-lugs-pa theocracy attempted to erase all recollection of the great independent lay past of Myang and went as far as withdrawing the copies of its ecclesiastical history from circulation. The huge statue of Maitreya now found in the middle of the Chos-rgyal-ha-khang is not mentioned in the Myang chos-'byung and probably belongs to the period when the dGe-lugs-pa order took over the monastery, namely the mid-17th century. It was probably intended to distort the original meaning and iconographic layout of the Chos-rgyal-ha-khang, since then has been known by the name of Byams-pa'i-lha-khang, that is temple of Maitreya.

Jigs-med-grags-pa (1481, pp. 159-167) gives a wealth of detailed information concerning the paintings and statues that were erected in the gtsug-lag-khang, including a statue of the Buddha made from a mould of the image of Jo-bo Śākyamuni kept in Lhasa, and a copy of the image of Śākyamuni housed in the Temple of the Great Enlightenment at Bodhgaya. The relics of famous masters such as Sāntarakṣita, Padmasambhava and king Indrabodhi, the hair and ceremonial clothes of the kings of Tibet, and even the nails and hair of the scholar Sāriputra, the abbot of Bodhgaya, who was regarded as a root-guru in the entourage of the princes of Gyantse, were placed inside the statues.

In the Wood Dragon year 1424, dBang Nam-mkha'-'legs-pa'i-rgyal-mtshan (1399-1444) of Sa-skya, who had received the title of jiaowang from the Ming emperor Chengzu in 1415, and who was the lord of IHa-rtse and of the nang-so of Rin-spungs (Tucci 1949, p. 703, n. 824 and Table I), decided to offer the fief of IHa-rtse to Rab-brtan-kun-bzang, who took possession of it after informing the theg-chen chos-kyi rgyal-po of the matter. IHa-rtse is an important town on the main route connecting southern Tibet to the Nepal Valley, and a Newar community lived there until the Chinese invasion of Tibet in the mid-20th century. West of IHa-rtse lies Shel-dkar-rdzong, a town which apparently was for some time under the control of the king of the Nepal Valley, Jayayakaša Malla (1428-1482) (Kirkpatrick 1975, p. 266; Petech 1984, p. 178). A dozen of the thirty-four painters and four of the nine sculptors who were summoned by Rab-brtan-kun-bzang to decorate the temples and chapels of the Great Stūpa of Gyantse came from the IHa-rtse area, and it is likely that, being closer to the Newar artistic influence than their colleagues in other parts of southern Tibet, these artists played a decisive role in giving a distinctly Newar flavour to the paintings and sculptures they executed in the monument.

In the same year, 1424, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang was entrusted by the Sa-skya administration with the IHa-khang-chen-mo. The fact that the Sa-skya-pa authorities decided to place both IHa-rtse and the IHa-khang-chen-mo under the jurisdiction of Rab-brtan-kun-bzang confirms that at the time the prince of Gyantse was the only ruler having the military strength to oppose the Phag-mo-gru-pa government of sNe'u-gdong. That appointment marked the climax in the career of Rab-brtan-kun-bzang and in the fortunes of his dynasty. In the second quarter of the 15th century the princes of Gyantse ruled over a vast area of south-western and southern Tibet, extending from IHa-rtse to Rwa-lung and Phag-ri, and their newly acquired wealth enabled them to play an even more important role as builders and patrons of the arts. The Wood Snake year 1425 saw the completion of the gtsug-lag-khang in the dPal-khor-chos-sde with the erection of not less than three temples on its upper storeys: the gzhal-yas-khang, built above the inner sanctuary; the temple of the Path and the Fruit, above the rDo-rje-dbyings-lha-khang; and the temple of the Elders, above the Chos-rgyal-lha-khang.
Like the gzhal-yas-khang crowning the palatine temple of Gyantse, the “divine palace” in the monastic enclave was decorated with a series of *mandalas* of which the central one, occupying the middle position along the main wall (the northern one), was devoted to the Kālacakra. But the latter is a larger temple, with a ceiling supported by eight pillars, and fifteen large *mandalas* are painted along the central band of its walls. Forty small *mandalas* are distributed along the segments formed by the contiguity of the large *mandalas*, and the little spaces left between them are occupied by figures of deities and masters (for a detailed description of this temple see Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, pp. 461-506). In layout and style these *mandalas* can be related not only to those surviving in the gzhal-yas-khang of the palatine temple, but also to those painted between 1333 and 1335 on the walls of the four chapels on the upper storey in the gSer-khang of Zhwa-lu (Vitali 1990, p. 110) under the supervision of the abbot of that monastery, Bu-ston.

All the *mandalas* painted in the gzhal-yas-khang of the gtsug-lag-khang in the monastic enclave of Gyantse are listed in the Myang chos-byung (1983, pp. 58-62) and are also described in the long inscriptions running below the paintings along the western, northern and eastern walls of the temple. Some of them are badly defaced, whereas the inscriptions painted on two *mandalas* placed at the sides of the entrance and exit doors along the southern wall specify that those two *mandalas* were painted anew in a Fire Mouse year, which probably corresponds to 1876. However, there is little doubt that the *mandalas* painted on the other walls belong to the original decoration of the temple. One of the inscriptions along the eastern wall states that the *mandala* of the five *dakinis* drawn from the mkHod-lha-khang was painted by rDo-grub Rin-chen of gNas-rnying and his pupils according to the instructions given by Bla-ma-dam-pa bSod-nams-rgyal-mtshan, the 14th abbot of Sa-skya.

The deep shades of colour and the use of medallions surrounding minor images link the wall paintings in the gzhal-yas-khang to the Newar style which was adopted both at Zhwa-lu and at Sa-skya. In this connection it should pointed out that Zhwa-lu preceded Sa-skya in its cultural, religious and artistic contacts with the Nepal Valley. The first prince-abbot of Zhwa-lu, I-ce-btsun Shes-rab-'byor-rgyas-gnas, who founded the gSer-khang in 1027, obtained the patronage of a king of the Nepal Valley (Tucci 1949, p. 700, n. 626; Vitali 1990, p. 96), perhaps Lakṣmi-kāma-deva I, whereas Newar benefactors built a *stūpa* at the foot of Mt. Zhal, near Zhwa-lu (Tucci 1949, p. 658), two centuries before the prince-abbots of Sa-skya started inviting teams of Newar artists to decorate their monasteries in southern Tibet.

The second temple erected on the upper storeys of the gtsug-lag-khang was built by Rab-'byor-bzang-po, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s younger brother and Prime Minister, in the western wing, above the rDo-rje-dhyings-lha-khang. Its centre is occupied by a big three-dimensional *mandala* (blos-bchang) devoted to the tutelary deity Śambhara according to Luipa’s tradition, which was particularly cherished by the Sa-skya-pa school as part of the teachings known as Lam-'bras, namely the Path and the Fruit, after which the temple is called; a Lam-'bras-lha-khang was also built in the monastery of Ngor E-wam, founded in 1429 by the Sa-skya-pa master Kun-dga’-bzang-po (Ferrari 1958, p. 62). The painted clay statues placed along the southern, western and northern walls of the Lam-'bras-lha-khang portray the greatest Indian and Tibetan masters of that tradition, starting from the primordial Buddha, Vajradhara, whose image sits at the centre of the main wall (the western one), flanked by two standing *bodhisattvas*. The rather realistic features of these portraits and the style of the thrones on which they sit show traces of the Chinese taste which penetrated Tibet at the time of the Yuan dynasty and which continued to influence Tibetan artists during the Ming dynasty, particularly in the reign of the emperor Chengzu. In this connection it is quite significant that the statue closing the array of portraits in the temple represents the theg-chen chos-kyi rgyal-po Kun-dga’-bkra-shis-rgyal-mtshan, who since 1368 had played such an important role in maintaining and establishing contacts between the Chinese court and the princes of Gyantse (for a detailed description of this temple see Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, pp. 411-460). The fact that the temple of the Path and the Fruit was built in the very year of Kun-dga’-bkra-shis-rgyal-mtshan’s death was not a mere coincidence. In the intentions of the princes of Gyantse the temple was a tribute to that prominent
political and religious figure as well as a sign of devotion to the important tradition he represented.

The cycle of the eighty great siddhas, painted in two rows along the walls above the statues, is probably related to the similar cycles once found at rTse-chen and is ultimately related to the set of drawings (bris-ma) of a series of eighty mahāsiddhas (grub-chen brgyad-cu) which is mentioned in literary sources (ibid., pp. 414, 430), and of which Bu-ston prepared the layout (bkod-pa mdzad) for the gSer-khang at Zhwa-lu (Seyfort Ruegg 1966, f. 21b). Not all the names of these masters, clearly indicated in the captions beneath each figure, may be found in Abhayadatta’s well-known series of eighty-four. The presence of the Tibetan grub-thob Gling-ras-pa and of the abbot of Bodhgaya, Śāriputra, both painted on the northern wall at the end of the series, may have some relevance to the preference for this particular set in the gtsug-lag-khang of the dPal-khor-chos- sde. But it is clear that this cycle of eighty mahāsiddhas must be related to the Sa-skya-pa tradition of the Lam-bras teachings, as well as to the iconography fixed by Bu-ston on the basis of his careful editing of literary sources. The style in which these masters are portrayed betrays a degree of Newar influence and in this connection, it may be worth mentioning that a Newar artist had been responsible for fashioning the statues of a series of eighty siddhas during the later diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet (Sum-pa mKhan-po 1984, 2, p. 284).

The third temple, built in 1425 on the upper storey of the gtsug-lag-khang, rises above the Chos-rgyal-lha-khang and is devoted to the cycle of the Sixteen Elders (sthaviras; tib. gnas-brtan), a particular group of arhats (Worthy Ones, a term rendered by Tibetans as dgra-bcom-pa, “foe-destroyer”). The cycle of the Elders gives this temple its name, gNas-brtan-lha-khang. These masters were charged by Śākyamuni (according to a much later tradition) with the task of guarding the Buddhist doctrine in our dark aeon, awaiting the arrival of Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future. The Sixteen Elders are traditionally helped in their task by the Four Guardian Kings and by two more arhats, Hwa-shang and Dharmapāla, to form a group of eighteen masters. The painted clay statues of the Eighteen Arhats, along with those of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī and of the goddess Green Tārā, are arranged along the northern, eastern and southern walls around the main image of the Buddha Śākyamuni, which is placed at the centre of the main wall (the eastern one) and is flanked by two bodhisattvas, perhaps Maitreya and Vajrapāni, rather than by the more traditional pair of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. The statues of the arhats are fashioned in Chinese style and also the Four Guardian Kings, painted against a white background on the western wall, show characteristic Chinese features, which are ultimately of Central Asian origin. It may be interesting to point out here that a gnas-brtan-lha-khang had also been built on the upper storey of the gSer-khang at Zhwa-lu during Bu-ston’s abbotship there (Vitali 1990, pp. 90, 110; Seyfort Ruegg 1966, f. 21a). With the erection of the temple of the Elders the gtsug-lag-khang was completed and came to appear as it still does today.

In the same Wood Snake year 1425 Rab-brtan-kun-bzang brought to completion the construction of a large residence for the abbot (bla-ma’i pho-brang) in the very middle of the monastic enclave (chos-sde ’di nyid-kyi dbus-su), endowed with all the necessary religious images and texts. In his account, ’Jigs-med-grags-pa (1481, pp. 237-239) adds that on the top of the monastery (sde), there is a private apartment (gzi-m-’khang) known as gSer-po-mkha’-spyon (which an interlinear note states was built in the Earth Dog year 1418, at the same time as the gtsug-lag-khang), and that mKhas-grub dByangs-can-dga’-ba consecrated it with a eulogy. Tucci (1949, p. 703, n. 842) seems to identify this mKhas-grub with Tsong-kha-pa’s famous pupil, sMra-ba’i-nyi-ma dB Legs-dpal-bzang-po, who assisted Rab-brtan-kun-bzang in the foundation of the dPal-khor-chos-sde. His suggestion is probably based upon the Fifth Dalai Lama’s statement that the prince of Gyantse, being linked with mKhas-grub Rin-po-che by a “patron-priest” relationship, founded the gtsug-lag-khang of the dPal-khor-chos-sde together with its sde, namely the monks’ residence (Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, p. 110). Be that as it may, it should be pointed out that, according to the Vaidurya ser-po, a history of the dGe-lugs-pa order written by the regent of the Fifth and Sixth Dalai Lamas, the great scholar Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho (1653-1705), the relationship between Rab-brtan-kun-bzang and mKhas-grub-chos-rje ended (Tucci 1949, p. 696, n. 412), and that after 1431 mKhas-grub-chos-rje declined Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s repeated invitations to go to
Gyantse (Jia Xuan Yun and He Zongying 1990, p. 164).

Thus, through intense building and artistic activity, the monastery of the dPal-khor-chos-sde was completed in 1425, seven years after the beginning of its construction. It was then surrounded by a boundary wall provided with sixteen turrets and six doors, which, according to Tucci (1941, 1, p. 146), was subsequently included in the later Chinese fortifications. The boundary wall was further modified following the Chinese occupation in the mid-20th century, when the main gate in the southern wall giving access to the monastic compound was shifted westwards in order to align it with the entrance to the gtsuglag-khang and with the wide avenue going through the new part of the city.

Besides supporting important building and decoration projects, the prince of Gyantse promoted the publication of important religious works. In particular he entrusted the great translator (lo-chen) Thugs-rgyed-pal with the task of preparing a new handwritten edition of the sNar-thang bKa'-'gyur, which was to be known as Them-spangs-ma (or Them-dpang-ma) (Bethlenfalvy 1982, p. 6; Skorupski 1985, p. xviii). That translator cannot be the same as Bu-ston's spiritual son, biographer and successor at Zhwa-lu, Thugs-sras Lo-tsā-ba Rin-chcn-nam-rgyal (1318-1388; Seyfort Rüegg 1966, p. 41, n. 2), who in the Fire Dragon year 1376 had consecrated several objects of worship for Kun-dga' Thags-pa before the latter succeeded his uncle, Thags-pa Rin-chen, to the throne of Gyantse ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, pp. 43-44). In all likelihood Thugs-rgyed-pal was one of Thugs-sras Lo-tsā-ba's pupils, and the later tradition that Bu-ston himself corrected the Them-spangs-ma and prepared its list of contents probably reflects the circumstance that Thugs-rgyed-pal's work was actually based upon Bu-ston's earlier editing of the sNar-thang bKa'-'gyur (Harrison 1992). That new edition of the bKa'-'gyur was completed in 1431 and is presently kept in the rDo-rgye-dbyings-lha-khang, in the main monastic building of the dPal-khor-chos-sde. It is handwritten in gold and its volumes are protected by beautifully carved gilded wood covers, measuring 73 x 29 x 4 cm.

In the Earth Horse year 1438 Chos-rgyed Phyogs-las-rnam-rgyal (1375-1450), one of three famous masters from Bo-dong (Ferrari 1958, p. 156, n. 371), and an expert in the Kālacakra (Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtho 1967, p. 69), went to Gyantse on the occasion of the feast commemorating Śākyamuni's enlightenment. This master is probably identical with the mkhas-grub-chen-po Phyogs-las-rnam-rgyal, who had composed a eulogy on the occasion of the completion of the gtsuglag-khang in 1422 ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 196).

In the eleventh month of the Wood Hare year, corresponding to the end of the winter 1345-1346, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang's mother, Byang-sems-bzang-mo-dpal, died. Around that period Rab-brtan-kun-bzang invited another famous Indian scholar to his court, the Bengali Vanaratna, who, after his first journey to Tibet in the Fire Horse year 1426, had established his residence in the Nepal Valley, at Swayambhū. Vanaratna bestowed several precepts upon the prince of Gyantse before proceeding to Lhasa, rTse-thang, Gong-dkar, sPag-ro (Bhutan) and sNe'u-gdong, which he reached in the Fire Dragon year 1436 (gZhon-nu-dpal 1985, pp. 935-936). Like Bu-ston, Chos-sku-'od-zer, Thugs-sras Lo-tsā-ba Rin-chcn-nram-rgyal and the grub-chen Kun-dga'-blo-gros-rgya-mtshan, all prominent religious figures who fulfilled important functions in the principality, and like his fellow countryman Śāriputra, the abbot of Bodhgaya (cf. Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, p. 69), Vanaratna was an expert in the tantric tradition of the Kālacakra, which played an important iconographic role at Gyantse from the time of the erection of the gzhal-yas-khang in the palatine temple to the completion of the topmost chapel in the Great Stūpa of the dPal-khor-chos-sde.

In spite of the flavour which Tsong-kha-pa's teachings started to enjoy also in Myang from the 15th century onwards, the figure of Bu-ston continued to be of crucial importance in the religious circles of Gyantse, where the great scholar had gone himself in 1357, the very year in which the Kashmiri master Sumanaśri arrived at his hermitage in Ri-phug, near Zhwa-lu (Seyfort Rüegg 1966, f. 33b). The importance of Bu-ston's role is witnessed not only by the inscriptions in the Great Stūpa of Gyantse referring specifically to his iconographic instructions, but also by the fact that in the Earth Sheep year 1439 Rab-brtan-kun-bzang had new printing
blocks carved to replace those reproducing the dhāranis found in the four great classes of tantras, which had been collected and edited by Bu-ston, and made a new collection of dhāranis which were to be found in the tantras but had not been collected by that great master. Another remarkable piece of work made during his rule is an imposing copy of the Prajñāpāramitā in eight thousand verses, which was apparently executed in 1442. Its fully-carved wood covers measure 105 x 54.3 x 14.5 cm. Like the Them-spangs-ma volumes, it is kept in the rDo-rje-dbyings-lha-khang.

THE CONSTRUCTION AND THE DECORATION OF THE GREAT STupa

In the Fire Female Sheep year 1427, when Rab-brtan-kun-bzang had reached the age of thirty-eight (thirty-nine more tibetico), on the 10th of the month of chu-stod (corresponding to July), there was the particularly auspicious conjunction of the eighth constellation known as rGyal (corresponding to the first part of the name of Gyantse) with the planet Jupiter. On this well-omened day were laid the foundations of the “auspicious (Stūpa with) many doors symbolizing the many doors of the holy religion, which is unrivalled, since it surpasses the imagination of Brahmā, Indra and the like” ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 240: dgung-lo so-dgu bzhes-pa mo-mlug-gi lo chu-stod zla-ba'i tshes bcu, skar-ma rGyal-dang bza' phur-bu 'dzoms-pa'i 'grub-shbyor khyad-par-can-dang, byed-pa bzang-po'i nyin, thugs-dam chos-kyi sgo du-ma mtshon-par byed-pa'i bkcis sgo-mangs Tshang-pa-dang dBang-po sogs-kyi blo'i yul-las 'das-shing, 'gran-pa'i zlas dben-pa 'di nyid rmangs bting). An interlinear note in the history of the princes of Gyantse adds that, although in the old guide the Great Stūpa is said to have been made in the Earth Female Sheep year 1439, this is certainly the scribe’s mistake (sngon-kyi dkar-chag-na, sa-mo-lug bya-ba gan-na'ang, yi-ger nor-bar zad-do).

The Great Stūpa of Gyantse (plates A, B) is generally referred to in Tibetan texts as bka'-shis sgo-mang mchod-rten (ibid, p. 85), sKu'-bum bka'-shis sgo-mang (Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho 1967, p. 110), or simply sKu'-bum, both in the inscription in the eastern temple of the bum-pa (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 91) and in the history of the princes of Gyantse ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, p. 241). The date of its foundation appears to have been a vexed question since 1481. Tucci (1941, 2, pp. 286-287) pointed out that the dates provided by the chronological tables drawn from Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho’s Vaidurya dkar-po (1685) and from Sum-pa mKhan-po Ye-shes-dpal-'byor’s dpag-bsam ljon-bzang (1747) give the year 1438, to be amended to 1440, as the date of construction of the Great Stūpa, but concluded that the sources he studied left no doubt that the date was 1427, as stated in the interlinear note mentioned above. However, the Italian scholar later suggested that since Byang-sems-chen-mo Nyi-ma-khye-'dren, the wife of Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s successor, bKra-shis Phags-pa (b. 1395), and mother of the heir to the throne, bKra-shis rab-brtan-bzang-po (b. 1427), is often mentioned in the inscriptions in the upper chapels of the Great Stūpa, the work undertaken by Rab-brtan-kun-bzang was not completed during his lifetime, but was continued “for some scores of years after his death” (Tucci 1949, p. 705, n. 933). We shall come back to this point below and, for the purpose of the present discussion, suffice it to say that ‘Jigs-med-grags-pa does not state that the Great Stūpa was completed or consecrated in 1427, but that its foundations were laid in that year.

Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s erection of the temples in the dpal-khor-chos-sde, of the Stūpa, of the turrets and encircling wall, and of the dwellings for the monks, as well as the consecration of religious images and books, are also mentioned by ‘Jigs-med-grags-pa with reference to the Iron Monkey year 1440, that is one year after the date of construction of the Great Stūpa suggested by the old guide. Wylie (1962, p. 139, n. 219) interpreted the same passage translated by Tucci (1949, p. 666) as meaning that the Great Stūpa of Gyantse was built around 1440. Since there is no reason to doubt the date of the foundation of the Great Stūpa as given by ‘Jigs-med-grags-pa (1427), it may be suggested that the dates provided in the old guide to the dpal-khor-chos-sde, as well as in Sangs-rgyas-rgya-mtsho’s and Sum-pa mKhan-po’s much later texts, are not wrong, but merely refer to the
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

completion of the building, meaning that its decoration continued until 1440. The view that work on the Great Stupa lasted for a dozen years is also echoed in recent Chinese publications (cf. dByang-zhi'u-yun 1991, p. 20, where, however, the dates provided are 1426-1438).

That work in the dPal-'khor-chos-sde of Gyantse continued until at least 1439 is confirmed by Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s edict issued on the fifth day of the first month in the Iron Monkey year 1440. In that document the prince of Gyantse addressed his subjects stating that the supply of labour for the construction of the monastic enclave had continued without interruption since the previous year, namely 1439 (na-ning-nas, chos-sde’i mkhar-las rgyun ring-ba; cf. Tucci 1949, p. 745). Acknowledging that his people had been burdened for a long time with various kinds of labour and had suffered greatly from tax-collectors, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang wished to thank them for their contribution to the construction of the dPal-'khor-chos-sde, in spite of the fact that taxation in the form of supply of compulsory labour and military service were “very important”, that is unbreakable commitments.

It should be noted that in Tibet major religious buildings were traditionally erected by resorting to the corvée system: that was certainly the case for the construction of the great stūpa built by Thang-stong rGyal-po (or Thang-ston rGyal-po; also Thang-rgyal) at Ri-bo-che in the years 1449-1456, for the restoration and decoration work carried out by Taranātha on the great stūpa at Jo-nang, particularly in the years 1617-1618, as well as for the building of the Dalai Lamas’ palaces on the Potala in the years 1645-1648 and 1690-1694 (Meyer 1987, p. 17). But Rab-brtan-kun-bzang had no wish to oppress his subjects with any further hardships and his edict exempted them from such taxation for three years starting from New Year’s day of 1440. Furthermore, other kinds of taxes and compulsory labour were either altogether abolished or else reduced, some of them by stages, and measures were taken to counter bribery.

That Rab-brtan-kun-bzang was an enlightened ruler is confirmed not only by the tax-reliefs he granted to his subjects, but also by the non-sectarian attitude he showed in the same edict towards all people practising religion with zeal, whether Buddhist monks of any school, practitioners of mantras, or followers of Bon (cf. Tucci 1949, p. 746: ban-de kun-dang, sngags-bon-rnams). That the prince of Gyantse was also a pious man is suggested by the general tone of that edict and of a subsequent ordinance, in which it is stated that all monks should be held in veneration. In particular, both decrees contain numerous references to restrictions on hunting, fishing, poaching, selling and eating meat. Hunting and fishing in the mountains and valleys were forbidden for good, and in the plains they were restricted or forbidden on the occasion of Buddhist festivities. Rab-brtan-kun-bzang recommended people not to be greedy for meat and animals’ blood, nor to kill animals on the occasion of funeral banquets or of banquets offered in order to restore health, pointing out that they should not harbour the false opinion that eating the flesh of a slaughtered animal is not a sin. Quite appropriately ‘Jigs-med-grags-pa concludes his account of the deeds of that great prince stating that on the twelfth day of the fourth month he manifested a perfect entry into nirvāṇa.

Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s half-brother and successor, bKra-shis ‘Phags-pa, was born in the Wood Pig year 1395 to Kun-dga ‘Phags-pa and rGyal-mtshan-rdor-ba, the younger sister of Kun-dga ‘Phags-pa’s first wife, Byang-sems-bzang-mo-dpal. In the Earth Dog year 1418, without transgressing his father’s orders and with the consent of his half-brother, bKra-shis ‘Phags-pa married Byang-sems-chen-mo-dpal Nyi-ma-khye-dren, who, in 1427, gave birth to his son and successor, bKra-shis-rab-brtan-bzang-po. In 1434 he led an important military campaign against the Phag-mo-gru-pas on behalf of Rab-brtan-kun-bzang, and in the Fire Dragon year 1436 he founded the temple of Khang-gsar at sP(r)e’u-(dmar: Samada), on the road from Gyantse to Phag-ri. When he ascended the throne of Gyantse the principality still extended well beyond the boundaries of the Myang district, including lHa-rtses, Gam-pa (Kampa Dzong) and Phag-ri, all sites mentioned in Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s edict. In the Wood Mouse and Wood Ox years, 1444 and 1445, bKra-shis ‘Phags-pa made a survey of the lands of the principality and added new estates to those already assigned by Rab-brtan-kun-bzang to
the fiefs of the monasteries. Finally, in the Fire Hare year 1447, he placed his twenty-year-old son, bKra-shis-rab-brtan-bzang-po, on the throne of Gyantse and invested him with power.

Let us now attempt to establish a chronological framework for the completion of the decoration of the Great Stūpa of Gyantse on the basis of some of the names of the people mentioned in the inscriptions of its upper section, for whom we sometimes possess precise dates as well as titles and indications of kinship. In so doing we shall leave aside the lower storeys of the Sku-'bum, working on the assumption that the various chapels and temples were decorated from 1427 onwards in a sequence starting from the lowest storeys and ending with the topmost chapel in the spire, following the progress of the construction of the building, as was traditionally done in Tibet.

The inscriptions in the Great Stūpa mention a queen with the title of bdag-mo dpal-chen (Great Glorious Lady) in two chapels on the third storey, and with the epithet byang-sems bdag-mo dpal-chen rgyal-mo (Bodhisattva Lady Great Glorious Queen) in three chapels on the third storey (Tucci 1941, 2, pp. 47, 48, 49, 55, 56, 61), often along with her son (yum sras). Tucci (ibid, p. 188, n. 3) understood that expression, meaning “mother and son”, to refer to Rab-brtan-kun-bzang and to his mother, Byang-sems-bzang-mo-dpal. That queen is no longer mentioned in the inscriptions of the chapels on the fourth storey, but the epithet bdag-mo byang-sems dpal-chen rgyal-mo appears once again in the inscription in the northern temple of the bum-pa, where the name of Rab-brtan-kun-bzang is also mentioned (ibid, p. 108; Tucci’s “Tempio Terzo” on pp. 104-110 and 247-253 does not actually correspond to the western temple, but to his fourth and northern temple in the bum-pa: the inscriptions gathered by the Italian scholar in the bum-pa of the Great Smpa were somehow mixed up in Indo-Tibetica, and therefore the reader will not always find a correspondence between his and our ordering of the inscriptions in the temples on the fifth storey). If the expression yum sras, in the context of the above mentioned inscriptions, refers indeed to Rab-brtan-kun-bzang and to the Queen Mother, that implies that the decoration of the third storey and of at least part of the bum-pa took place before the winter 1435-1436, when Byang-sems-bzang-mo-dpal died.

The decoration of the fourth storey, of the bum-pa and of at least part of the turret (harmikā), must have certainly been completed by 1442, since Rab-brtan-kun-bzang, who died in that year, is mentioned several times as a donor in the corresponding inscriptions in the upper section of the Great Stūpa. In particular, the chos-rgyal’s name appears in the inscriptions in the eastern, southern and northern temples (gzhal-yas-khang in the inscriptions) of the bum-pa, and also in the lower storey of the turret (ibid, pp. 90-91, 99, 105, 121), whereas his brother, the nang-so, that is, Rab-‘byor-bzang-po, is mentioned in the inscriptions in the eastern, western and northern temples of the bum-pa (ibid, pp. 95, 101, 115, 116, 120). We do not know the latter’s dates of birth and death, but he is mentioned in the history of Gyantse as late as the Iron Bird year 1441. Rab-brtan-kun-bzang’s half-brother, bKra-shis ’Phags-pa, is not mentioned in the inscriptions, and from this we may infer that, by the time of his accession to the throne, the decoration of the Great Stūpa had been completed.

The southern temple of the bum-pa yields the highest number of references to the princely family: Rab-brtan-kun-bzang, the religious king to whom the author of the inscription wishes a long life (ibid, p. 99: chos-rgyal yon-mchod sku-tshe brtan); the nang-so, that is, Rab-‘byor-bzang-po; Byang-sems-chen-mo Nyi-ma-khye-’dren, that is bKra-shis ’Phags-pa’s wife; and again the dhannaraja, “the father together with his son”, to whom long life is wished (ibid, p. 102: chos-rgyal yab sras tshe brtan). The inscription in the southern temple also reports the name of the dge-bshes Rin-chen-dpal-grub, who surveyed the layout of the maṇḍalas painted therein basing himself upon Bu-ston’s explanations. Rin-chen-dpal-grub is also mentioned with an identical function in a chapel on the fourth storey and again, with the same title, in the eastern temple of the bum-pa (ibid, pp. 72, 96). That important master, who planned and supervised the execution of complicated maṇḍalas and paradises, is in all likelihood none other than the already mentioned Rin-chen-grub (1403-1452), mKhas-grub-chos-rje’s disciple and the abbot of gNas-rnying from 1422 to 1452 (Aris 1979, p. 192).
While the expression yum sras in the inscriptions of the Great Stūpa can be safely assumed to refer to Byang-sems-bzang-mo-dpal and to Rab-brtan-kun-bzang, the expression yab sras found in the inscription in the southern temple of the bum-pa cannot possibly refer to Rab-brtan-kun-bzang and to his father, Kun-dga' Phags-pa, who had died in 1412. On the other hand, the reference to a son of the chos-rgyal is puzzling, for Rab-brtan-kun-bzang apparently had no sons of his own and was in any case succeeded by his half-brother, bKra-shis Phags-pa. It would be easier to interpret it as a reference to bKra-shis Phags-pa and to his son, bKra-shis-rab-brtan, who succeeded to the throne of Gyantse in 1447. The latter hypothesis would be strengthened by the frequent mention of the latter in association with the name of his mother, Nyi-ma-khye-'dren, which predominates over the other names of the ruling family in the inscriptions of the harmikā: as we already know, Byang-sems-chen-mo Nyi-ma-khye-'dren was bKra-shis Phags-pa's wife since 1418.

The name Byang-sems-chen-mo Nyi-ma-khye-'dren appears in the upper section of the Great Stūpa, once in the already mentioned southern temple of the bum-pa and not less than eight times in the upper temple of the harmikā. She is variably qualified as "firmly sitting on the vast throne, endowed with the sincerity which produced the moon of the lineage, of which she is the nurse" (yangs-pa'i khri-la rab bzhugs-pa / rigs-kyi zla-ba bkrun-pa'i lhag-bsam-can / gang-gi ma-ma); "endowed with candid sincerity, mother of a sun" (nyi-ma'i yum / lhag-bsam dkar-ladan); mother of the moon of the lineage sitting on the great throne (chen-por khrir bzhugs rigs-kyi zla-ba'i yum; also: chen-po'i khrir bzhugs rigs-kyi zla-ba'i yum / lhag-bsam rnam-dkar); "mother of the lineage sitting on the great throne, waving greatly the banner of candid sincerity" (chen-po'i khrir bzhugs rigs-kyi yum / lhag-bsam dkar-po'i ba-dan cher g-yo-ba); "great mother sitting (on) the vast throne, endowed with candid sincerity" (yangs-pa'i khri bzhugs chen-po'i yum / lhag-bsam dkar-ladan) (Tucci 1941, pp. 124-130).

In his translation of the inscriptions Tucci understood the term zla-ba (moon), used in the verses as a poetic device to parallel the first part of Nyi-ma-khye-'dren’s name, meaning “sun” (nyi-ma), to refer to her son (ibid, pp. 268-270). In fact in the first of these inscriptions Nyi-ma-khye-'dren is called “nurse”, “producing the moon of the lineage firmly sitting on the throne”. The expression “sitting on the throne” in the inscriptions of the harmikā seemingly refers either to Nyi-ma-khye-'dren or to the dynasty of Gyantse, but not necessarily to bKra-shis-rab-brtan-bzang-po, who was born in 1427 and ascended the throne in 1447. The latter interpretation would imply that the turret was decorated in or after 1447, that is several years after the completion of the southern temple of the bum-pa, which we know was certainly decorated before 1442, since its inscription wishes a long life both to Rab-brtan-kun-bzang and to the chos-rgyal’s son. Such interpretation would further imply that during the years 1442-1447, the ruling prince, bKra-shis Phags-pa, did not afford any personal contribution to the decoration of the Great Stūpa, for his name is never mentioned in the inscriptions. But it seems unlikely that such an important prince, who played a crucial role in the defence of the principality and who furthermore founded a temple at Samada, should not have wished to appear among the members of the princely family who sponsored the decoration of the building.

The inscriptions in the Great Stūpa of Gyantse praise Nyi-ma-khye-'dren not just for possessing a pure heart, but, in particular, for having ensured the continuity of the Gyantse dynasty. It is on account of her important role as “mother” that she is suitably mentioned in the inscriptions in the upper storey of the harmikā, which is devoted to the “mother” tantras. Although the pious king Rab-brtan-kun-bzang does not seem to have married, according to the Tibetan custom he could share his brothers’ wives, including his half-brother’s. Hence he could be regarded not only as Nyi-ma-khye-'dren’s husband, but also as bKra-shis-rab-brtan-bzang-po’s “father”, though, in fact, he was his uncle. The inscription in the southern temple of the bum-pa referring to the chos-rgyal and his “son” must therefore be understood as an indirect reference to this particular situation concerning the succession to the throne of Gyantse, and in any case is meant to emphasize the fact that the continuity of the dynasty was ensured.

The references in the inscriptions of the turret to Nyi-ma-khye-'dren’s offspring, bKra-shis-rab-brtan-bzang-po, must be understood as related to the circumstance that the Crown Prince was born in 1427, the very
year of the foundation of the Great Stupa. bKra-shis-rab-brtan-bzang-po saw the light in the castle of Nor-bu-khyung-rise, which was regarded as a second royal palace by 'Jigs-med-grags-pa, who wrote his history of the Gyantse dynasty there. In all likelihood, bKra-shis-rab-brtan-bzang-po was still ruling Gyantse at the time 'Jigs-med-grags-pa wrote his history, for he is the last prince to be mentioned in the text and is also very highly praised by its author. Thus it appears that both 'Jigs-med-grags-pa's praises of bKra-shis-rab-brtan-bzang-po and the inscriptions in the Great Stupa celebrating Nyi-ma-khye-'dren as his mother were specifically intended to mark the birth of the prince heir in the very year of the foundation of the Great Stupa in 1427.

The above discussion demonstrates beyond any reasonable doubt that the construction and decoration of the sKu-'bum were completed before Rab-brtan-kun-bzang's death in 1442, and in all likelihood by the year 1439. However, Tucci was right in suggesting that the work on the building may have lasted for much longer than that. In fact, after completing the description of the sKu-'bum as reported in its old guide, 'Jigs-med-grags-pa states that later, in order to completely fulfil the chos-rgyal's wishes, it was decided to place a statue of Vajradhara sitting on a throne with those of two attendant deities, all three made by the artist dKon-mchog-bkra-shis and his brothers, inside the topmost chapel (chos-'khor-gyi stod-kyi-cha). The spire surrounding this chapel, already housing a group of twelve images, headed by one of Vajradhara and placed along the four sides of the srog-shing ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, pp. 338 and 340-342; 1987, pp. 146-148), was then decorated with gilded copper covering. Five hundred and sixteen khul of red copper (the two editions of 'Jigs-med-grags-pa's text have smar-bzang and smar zangs respectively, perhaps instead of dmar zangs) in sheets were used to make the covering of the spire, which was fire-gilded using an amalgam made up of two thousand one hundred and forty-one zo of gold and seven thousand seven hundred zo of mercury. The melting operations were started on the eighth day of the fourth month in the Water Male Dragon year 1472, during the auspicious conjunction of the constellation of rGyal with the planet Jupiter, that is in the same astrological conjunction which saw the undertaking of the construction of the building forty-five years earlier. A very talented artisan, Sangs-rgyas-dar, along with his pupils, came especially for the task, and the fire-gilding was completed by another skilled craftsman, Chos-skyong, with the help of his attendants.

Two years later, on the fifteenth day of the fourth month of the Wood Male Horse year 1474, the bstan-pa rin-chen mnga'-bdag (Lord of the Precious Teachings) 'Jam-dbyangs-dkon-mchog-bzang-po, arrived at Gyantse to conduct the consecration ceremony together with Kun-dga'-blo-gros. The former master is portrayed in a statue which was subsequently added in a chapel of the sKu-'bum (Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, pp. 300, 304). The latter is probably identical with the Sa-skya bla-ma mThu-stobs-kyi-dbang-phyug Kun-dga'-blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan, the son of mThu-stobs-kyi-dbang-phyug bSod-nams-rgyal-mtshan, who lived from 1450 to 1495 and had close relations with the prince of Gyantse, bKra-shis-rab-brtan-bzang-po (Tucci 1949, p. 705, n. 934). The final consecration of the Great Stupa was performed by the monks of the monastery of Chos-lung-tshogs (corrected Chos-lung-phun-tshogs by the copyist) according to the three parts of the ritual and in conformity with the four classes of tantras ('Jigs-med-grags-pa 1481, pp. 343-344). Chos-lung-tshogs is the same monastery which the founder of the Gyantse dynasty, dPal-lidan-bzang-po, had endowed with a summer retreat one hundred and thirty years earlier, and the first important religious foundation in Myang of which he became the patron. It is conceivable that in 1474, when the sKu-'bum assumed the aspect which it still has today, 'Jam-dbyangs-dkon-mchog-bzang-po was the abbot of that monastery.

The Great Stupa of Gyantse was erected at a time when Tibetan aristocracy was still powerful and able to check the growing political power of the various monastic orders and to cope with their conflicting interests. It was above all the celebration of the Gyantse dynasty, but also an act of religious devotion by all the people of the principality who, in various ways and for so many years, contributed to its construction and decoration. The labourers who built it, the artists who decorated it, the monks who surveyed the layout of the decoration,
as well as the members of the army, of the court, of the aristocracy and of the ruling family, all gave a contribution to what still stands as the most important religious and artistic monument in Tibet prior to the establishment of the Dalai Lamas' theocratic rule over the whole of the country. The seventy-five temples and chapels distributed on the eight storeys of the sku-'bum, representing the deities of all the chief tantric cycles and the spiritual lineages who propagated them, afford a global view of the world as conceived in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist culture of the 15th century, a visual summa of all the knowledge of the time, as well as a true pantheon (sku-'bum) of images, which for years to come will be an inexhaustible reference source for students of Tibetan art and religion.
Chapter Two

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE STūPA

One of the most ancient references to the stūpa in Buddhist texts is that contained in the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra, which is part of the Vinaya of the Mulasarvāstivādin school. In this text, as in the corresponding Mahāparinibbānasutta of the Dīghanikāya in the Pāli Canon, the Buddha gives instructions to Ānanda about the funeral ceremonies which will have to follow his entry into nirvāṇa. We are interested, in particular, in two aspects of such instructions: firstly, the bones must be stored in a golden urn (sauvāraṇa kumbha) and placed inside a stūpa; secondly, the worship of the relics is not the task of monks, but of lay people.

The stūpa is thus seen as a sepulchral monument, a receptacle of relics (Sarira stūpa), while on the other hand the community of monks (saṅgha) is seen to be concerned with loftier issues. It seems therefore, that stūpas and their worship are originally alien to Buddhist thought, but inherited from the past and deeply rooted in the Indian tradition, and then gradually introduced into Buddhist practice through the worship of relics practised by the community of lay people. As in many other instances, it is possible to see also in this process the adoption and the transformation of a pre-existent Brahmanical tradition.

As a matter of fact, a Vedic symbolism can easily be seen in the structure of the stūpa. The fundamental feature of the stūpa (structurally rather than conceptually) is the central pillar coming out at its top, which is called yūpa in Pāli literature. The term yūpa is a Vedic term, applied in some cases to the sacrificial pole (śvarū), apparently to underline its more general sense of axis mundi. This meaning of sacrificial pole in Vedic ritual is clarified by its actual form, since its lower portion has a square section, the intermediate one has an octagonal section, and the top one is round-shaped. Squareness is universally associated with solidity, hence with the earth, whereas the hemisphere is associated with the vault of heaven. The polygonal shape obviously represents an intermediate situation between those two worlds, and in particular the octagonal structure characterizes this intermediate world in which we live by defining the main and secondary directions of our horizon. The proof of the connection between the central pillar of the stūpa, the sacrificial pole of Vedic ritual and the axis of the world in Indian cosmogony, is given by the reproduction of the above morphology in the central stone pillars discovered among the ruins of early stūpas in Sri Lanka. Its implicit cosmological meaning is further revealed by the name indrakila, which in Sri Lanka is normally given to such a pillar. The pole is a tool used by Indra to separate the sky from the earth, and is the prop of the vault of heaven, preventing it from falling down with a consequent return to primordial chaos (Irwin 1980).

Other concepts of Indian cosmology appearing as representations of the axis of the world are those of Mt. Meru and of the tree of life. Both find their correspondences in the stūpa and in the tree of enlightenment. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the Tibetan term for the central pillar of the stūpa is indeed srog-shing (tree of life) and that, in Tibetan, sacred mountains are also called sa-yi phur-bu (peg of the earth), a name very nearly recalling the term indrakila. Tibetan terminology seems to establish a further connection, however indirect, with the altar of Vedic sacrifice in the very naming of the Buddhist stūpa (mchod-rt’en, namely repository of offerings), which apparently reveals a correspondence between the Buddhist offering and the earlier sacrificial practice.

The cosmological symbolism of the central pillar is reinforced and emphasized by the overall structure of the stūpa, with the square basis of its “throne”, the rounded dome of its urn, and the spire which establishes contact with the supramundane sphere. The dome, which is the prevalent feature in the classical shape of the
Indian *stūpa* is often called *anda* (egg) and, in Buddhist texts, *garbha* (matrix, embryo). The egg-matrix is the centre of the universe, and the *stūpa* is the cosmic egg potentially containing the whole of the world. From that derives the naming of the *stūpa* as *dhātugarbha* (matrix of elements), contracted to *dagoba* in Sinhalese.

A structure marking the spot where the central axis emerges from the inside of the building appears on top of the dome. Originally a fence placed around the *bodhi* tree, this structure subsequently evolved into a true pavilion with a square section (*harmikā*), defining a second sacred space ruled by the same cosmic symbolism as the *stūpa*. Here too, it is possible to establish a connection with pre-Buddhist conceptions. We may, in fact, be dealing with a Buddhist version of the *uttaravedi* (high altar), which in Vedic ritual stood on the eastern side of the base altar, but which was symbolically thought to be at the zenith, because the east-west axis represented the vertical axis in the layout of the Vedic altar (Snodgrass 1985, p. 250). With the *uttaravedi*, the transfer of the ritual to the heavenly abode on top of Mt. Meru was realized.

From the *harmikā* starts the spire which is inseparably connected with the parasol (*chattra*), which in turn duplicates the shape and meaning of the *stūpa* as a whole. A similar duplication can also be found in *manḍalas*, in which a second belt of *vajras* and lotus petals isolates the central portion of the *sanctum* inside the sacred space of the *manḍala* itself. The parasol too is an *imago mundi*: the base in which it is stuck is the earth, the pole which supports it is the cosmic pillar, its canopy is the vault of heaven. In India the central axis of the *stūpa* merged quite early with the pole of the umbrella: the *yūpa-yaśti* and the *chattra-yaśti* became one and the same. Furthermore the *chattra* enabled the cosmic symbolism to be enriched by distinguishing different heavenly worlds: a series of discs (*cakra*) piled on top of one another along the pole of the parasol represents the manifold vaults of those worlds. If the *harmikā* corresponds to the heaven of the Thirty-three Gods (Trayastrimśa) which is on top of Mt. Meru, the last layer of the spire corresponds to the Akanīṣṭha heaven, marking the boundary of the *rāpaloka*, the world of form. The heavenly regions of Buddhist cosmology may be placed between those two extremes.

Besides the cosmic symbolism, a second symbolic system is generated around the *stūpa* by the web of correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm which is an essential constituent of Indian thought. If the *stūpa* is a symbolic representation of the cosmos, it is also bound to be a symbolic representation of man (*purusa*) and, in a Buddhist environment, of the Buddha (Snellgrove 1978, *passim*). The base of the *stūpa* was then identified as the legs (*jaṅghāvedi*), the dome as the trunk, the *harmikā* as the head (and for this reason Newars and Tibetans were to paint the Tathāgata’s eyes and *urnā* on it), the spire as a crown and the finial as a *cūḍāmaṇi*, the jewel shining on the *uṭṭīṇa*. This symbolism offered a further possibility: since all over Asia the parasol was an attribute of royalty, the *chattra* of the *stūpa* characterized the Buddha as a *cakravartin* (universal monarch). In Newar and Tibetan *stūpas* the *chattra* also came to be distinguished from the pile of *cakras* and was placed upon the spire as an honorific canopy hanging above the royal crown.

Another text of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin*, the *Vinaya Kṣudrakavastu*, reflects a different situation compared to that found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. In the *Vinaya Kṣudrakavastu* the Buddha authorizes the layman Anāthapiṇḍada to raise a *stūpa* for the relics of Śāriputra, and in so doing, he characterizes its essential components. Whilst such authorization does not transfer to the monks the burden of building the *stūpa*, the definition of its structure and the inclusion of such description within the *Vinaya* seems implicitly to confer the duty of its supervision upon the *saṅgha*. It is not a coincidence that, in the same text, it is said that the *stūpas* of “holy” people are to be placed within the monks’ residential quarters: towards the 2nd century AD the *stūpa* came systematically to be part of the monastery (*vihāra*).

The structural elements of the *stūpa* identified in the chapters of the *Vinaya Kṣudrakavastu*, of which both a Tibetan and a Chinese translation are known (Roth 1980), are the following: 1) the four terraces of the throne (*pariśāṇḍa; khri-'phang/bang-rim*); 2) the base of the urn (*karaṇḍaka/kanṭṭhaka; bum-rten*); 3) the urn (*kumbha; bum-pa*); 4) the bushel, tub/pavilion (*drona/harmikā; bre/pu-shu*); 5) the pole, axis (*yaśti; srog-shing*); 6) the parasol/
disc, pile of thirteen discs (chattra/cakra, trayodasa/cakravali; gdugs/khor-lo, 'khor-lo rtseg-ma bcu-gsum); 7) the umbrella (vargasthali; char-khebs). Thirteen chattras characterize the stūpa of a tathāgata, whereas a lower figure may be found in stūpas related to holy people of various ranks.

That type of description is also found, with more or less details, in the Vinaya of the Māhiśasakas, of the Dharmaguptakas, of the Mahāsāṃghikas and of the Sarvāstivādins, whereas it is not found in the sections of the Vinaya of the Theravādins, who seem to retain the original criterion, according to which the construction of a stūpa is not a task or a duty for monks, but for lay people. The same description was faithfully followed by Buston in his Byang-chub chen-po'i mchod-rten-gyi tshad.

The introduction of the stūpa into the vihāra raised the problem of defining its meaning and assuring its correct interpretation by the monks. A need arose for a catalogue of symbolic correspondences explicitly established between the structures of the stūpa as described in the Vinaya and the basic notions of the Buddhist doctrine. Such association appears rather arbitrary, so that the new symbolic values of the stūpa are not self-evident: it is rather a teaching device aimed at calling the monks’ attention to the dogmatic structure of the doctrine through the analysis of the stūpa.

The mChod-rten-gyi cha-dbye-ba’i dūl-ba-las byang-ba’i mdo, a fragment included in the bsTan-’gyur (Cordier 1909-1915, rGyud LXIX, 139) which is a Tibetan version of the now lost Caityavibhāga vinayodbhavasūtra (Tucci 1932, pp. 40-43), supplies the catalogue of these new symbolic correspondences. The four steps of the khris-phang symbolize: a) the four applications of mindfulness (catavāriṃśyupasthāna; dran-pa nye-bar gzhang-pa bzhi), b) the four right exertions (catvāri prahāna; yan-dag spong-ba bzhi), c) the four constituents of magic power (catvāri rddhipāda; rdzu-phrub-gyi rkang-pa bzhi), d) the five psychic faculties (pañcendrya; dbang-po lnga). The bum-rten corresponds to the five moral powers (pañča-bala; stobs lnga) and the bum-pa corresponds to the seven constituents of enlightenment (saptabodhiṅga; byang-chub-kyi yan-lag bdun). The bre represents the eightfold noble path (āśṭangiṛyunārga; ‘phags-pa’i lam yan-lag bṛgyud-pa) and the srog-shing stands for the ten awarenesses (daśājñāna; shes-pa bcu). The ‘khor-lo rtseg-ma bcu-gsum corresponds to the ten powers of a tathāgata (daśatathāgatajñānabala; de-bzhin-gshegs-pa’i mkhyen-pa’i stobs bcu) plus the three self-recollections of a tathāgata (triṇatathāgataśrīyupasthāna; de-bzhin-gshegs-pa’i dran-pa nye-bar gzhang-pa gsun), while the char-khebs symbolizes the great compassion (mahākārūṇa; snying-rje chen-po).

The terms employed in this catalogue correspond exactly to the definitions supplied in the Mahāvyutpatti (Csoma de Körös 1984). The culminating position assigned to the symbol of the great compassion reveals that the text in question no longer falls within the fold of the Old Vehicle, but belongs to the Mahāyāna school.

A different reading concerning the cakras of the spire is supplied in another text of the bsTan-’gyur. In fact, according to Chapter 8 of Kuladatta’s Kriyāsamgraha (Bya-ba bsdus-pa) (Cordier 1909-1915, rGyud LVII, 16), the thirteen discs piled up along the axis of the stūpa correspond to the thirteen spiritual stages (trayodaśabhūmi) in the career of a bodhisattva (Bénisti 1960). These thirteen stages are listed in the Dharmasamgraha and the first ten of them correspond to the ten stages of a bodhisattva (daśabodhisattvabhūmi; byang-chub-sems-dpa’i sa bcu), mentioned in the Mahāvyutpatti. In a sense, this list of the stages of a bodhisattva is slightly reminiscent of the early cosmological layout, matching the stages of the path of enlightenment with the succession of parasheds up to the formless world, in which full enlightenment can be achieved beyond all influence of discriminating knowledge.

As previously said, the linking between cosmos and puruṣa, which is a typical feature of Indian thought, quite naturally brought forward the conception of the stūpa as a symbolic representation of the Buddha. On the other hand, the cult of the stūpa as the receptacle of the Buddha’s relics shifted the focus towards his parinirvāṇa, the final release from rebirth and transmigration. Hence, the worship of the stūpa became quite naturally the worship of the nirvanic body of the Buddha, thus changing the sepulchral monument (caitya) of the ancient Indian tradition into the symbol of the extinction of the Buddha and of his total identification with
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

The cult of the stūpa took root in the theory of the two buddhakāyas, and, more precisely, in the concept of dharmakāya (body of the law), the very essence of Buddha as the body of the Buddhist Doctrine itself. This theory later evolved into that of the trikāya, which received a definite systematization by Asaṅga in the late 4th century AD. Such theory distinguishes three different buddha-bodies: the nirmanakāya (body of appearance), the sambhogakāya (beatific body), and the dharmakāya. The nirmanakāya is the body taken on by a buddha in the different realms of phenomenal existence to instruct living beings in order to lead them to release. It includes the human form of all the buddhas who appear in our world (mānuṣībuddha), hence, in particular, the individual form of Śākyamuni. The sambhogakāya is the glorious form of the body of fruition, taken on by a bodhisattva in the final stage along the path towards full buddhahood, in which he enjoys the benefits deriving from the practice of the perfections, and is the form in which the buddhas appear to enounce the dharma in the pure lands. Finally, the dharmakāya is the supernatural state of buddhahood, identical for all buddhas and identical with the dharmadātu, the sphere of the absolute, made up by the totality of the pure elements (buddhadhātu) and coinciding with the totality of the words of the Buddha, that is with the dharma as a universal law. As such, the dharmakāya cannot possibly have any real representation except for a symbolic one, and the stūpa was implicitly predestined to that type of symbolic representation since the time of its appearance as an aniconic symbol of the Buddha. As the sacred texts are the verbal expression of the dharma, so the stūpa is its architectural expression.

THE STUPA OF GYANTSE

An inscription on a wall in the chapel on the fourth storey of the Great Stupa of Gyantse devoted to the major Indian masters and great Tibetan translators who introduced the tantras into the Land of Snows, presents this outstanding monument with the following words: “In the middle of the great monastery of dPal-'khor-bde-chen, in the divine territory of rGyal-mkhar-rtse [...] in a land which is a source of knowledge, in the region of Upper Nyang in the Land of Snows, [there is] the auspicious great mchod-rten of the dharmakāya of the sugatas releasing through its being merely seen... (bde-bar-gshegs-pa'i chos-sku'i mchod-rten mthong-grol chen-mo bkra-shis-pa...)” (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 82).

The inscription explicitly recalls the fundamental meaning of the Buddhist stūpa as a symbol of the dharmakāya and defines this great stūpa of Gyantse as one able to direct those who contemplate it towards the path of release (mthong-grol). Seeing it therefore belongs to those mystical experiences leading to the acquisition of a disposition to undertake such a path. It is a manifestation of one of those aspects of tantric Buddhism which, on the basis of the transmission of merits recognized by the Mahāyāna, envisages the possibility of events having a sacramental character capable of leaving a lasting mark on the mind. The Bar-do thos-grol, a text the mere hearing of which is able to lead the consciousness to release in the intermediate state between life and death (antarabhava), belongs to this same category of magic-sacramental agents.

The other adjectival clause appearing in the inscription on the wall (bkra-shis-pa = propitious, auspicious) directly recalls the name of this specific kind of stūpa: bkra-shis sgo-mang mchod-rten (the auspicious stūpa with many doors). It is, in fact, one of the eight fundamental types of stūpa that Tibetan tradition claims to be derived from Indian prototypes which, according to legend, were erected in places where decisive events in the life and teaching of Śākyamuni took place (Snodgrass 1985, p. 357).

In the Mahāparinibbānasutta the Buddha himself indicates four places deserving to be visited by his followers, since they were the site of four fundamental events in his appearance in this world (his birth at Kapilavastu, his enlightenment at Bodhgaya, his first sermon at Sarnāth, his passing into Nirvāṇa at Kuśinagara), and suggests the erection of a stūpa in each such place. The number of the main destinations of Buddhist pilgrimage and of the related stūpas was then brought to eight by including the site of the four great miracles
performed by the Buddha. Two of these are the descent from the Trāyastrimśa heaven and the miracle of Śrāvasti, though different traditions exist concerning the other two. The stūpas locating these events, which must not be confused with those which were built to keep the relics of the Buddha, are not mere memorials, but take on an autonomous symbolic value. Each of them marks not so much an episode in historical time, as a hierophany, a breaking point in ordinary phenomenality through which a contact with supramundane reality may be established.

In Tibet, a structurally and morphologically differentiated definition was fixed for each of these stūpas. Only scanty fragments from Indian literature have reached us concerning these definitions, but there are several texts on that subject in the bsTan-'gyur and in other collections of Tibetan texts. One may quote for instance the 'Phags-pa kun-nas sgor 'jug-pa'i 'od zer gtsug-tor dri-ma med-par snang-ba'i gzungs bklag-cing mchod-rten brgya-risa-brgyad dam mchod-rten Inga gdab-pa'i cho-ga mdo-sde-las btus-pa (Cordier 1909-1915, rGyud LXIX, 129) and the mChod-rten-gyi cha rnam-par dbyae-ba (ibid, rGyud LXIX, 139). The different shapes taken by the stupa according to the above classification actually reflect the variety of outcomes produced by its evolution through the centuries with its diffusion in different areas and cultural environments. In the course of such evolution the orientation of the stupa according to the points of the compass, which was already foreshadowed by the four toranas found in the early stūpas with a circular mound, was more and more emphasized, and eventually it gave rise to the square shape of the monument. This process was paralleled by a radical variation in the relationship between the volumes of the base and of the dome: the anda, which was initially the main part of the stūpa resting almost directly on the ground, became gradually smaller and rose to the top of a more and more imposing tower-shaped or pyramidal structure representing a sort of square plinth.

The first examples of terrace-stūpas, dating back to the 1st century AD, were found at Taxila, but the systematic replacing of the original stupa with a circular plan by a terrace-stupa with a square plan occurred in the region of Gandhāra during the period of the Kusāna dynasty, between the 2nd and the 4th century AD (Franz 1980). Whereas the Deccan and southern India kept to the stūpa with the original round plan (Amaravati and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa), the new type of terrace-stūpa quickly spread into Central Asia. A terrace-stūpa with a star-shaped plan and four flights of stairs on the four sides is found at Rawak, near Turfan (A. Stein 1907, 2, pl. XL). At Syrkuṣ, still in the oasis of Turfan, there is a big stupa whose step-like storeys, separated by cornices, show regular rows of hollow niches which are already reminiscent of the Great Stūpa of Gyantse. The model which developed in Central Asia was quite soon imported into China. Already in the reliefs of the early cave-temples at Yungang, dating back to the last quarter of the 5th century, we may see the record of a sequence starting with the terrace-stūpa and ending with the typically Chinese multistorey pagoda. But a similar process also occurred in northern and north-eastern India: the big terrace-stūpas erected at Nālandā, Pahārpur, Antichak from the end of the Gupta period and throughout the Pāla period, would not have been possible without the introduction of the square stūpa which originated in Gandhāra, and the same may be said for many stūpas of the Licchavi period in the Nepal Valley. Even the big Mahābodhi temple at Bodhgaya may be traced back to the original conception of a pyramidal tower having many storeys with a square base, topped by a small stūpa.

It is conceivable that relations with the rest of Central Asia were responsible for some of the shapes of the Tibetan stūpa, in particular perhaps, of the one with which we are directly concerned here, but it is certain that the very definition of the eight fundamental stūpas in Tibet fed on the variety of shapes realized in the Nepal Valley. In fact, since the 7th-8th century, in the Nepal Valley there were a number of stūpas whose plinth had taken on the aspect of a true temple, whose cut-off top supported the simple semisphere of the anda. This plinth often appears to be made up of successive storeys which gradually taper towards the top and may either have identical plans or plans differing from one storey to the next. Such plans may be square, circular, octagonal, cruciform or resulting from intersected squares and rectangles, so as to form a figure with twenty angles (vinīśatikona) (Shepherd Slusser 1982, 1, p. 171). Newar votive stūpas of that period actually seem to be
miniaturized reproductions of big multi-storey buildings, rather than plain bases rendered in architectural terms like those making up the platform of Gandhāra stūpas. In particular some of them may be assimilated to a type of Indian square temple with rows of outside niches superimposed one upon another, turned towards the four points of the compass and therefore called sarvatobhadra (all-round auspicious), a name in which one might also possibly recognize the origin of the Tibetan term bkra-shis, adopted by Tibetans for the kind of stūpa which concerns us here.

The peculiar inverted shape of the dome in Tibetan stūpas, flaring from bottom to top and taking the aspect of an upside-down pot (bum-pa), appears to be the fruit of an original elaboration and marks the extreme stage in the evolution of the anāda, which in the cave temples at Ajanta and Ellora had already seen a shift from hemispherical to cylindrical shape. But the upper section of Tibetan stūpas, made up of a harmikā in the shape of a plain square turret and a spire with thirteen rings, is borrowed directly from the Nepal Valley. The new shape of the harmikā had, in quite a late period, replaced the structure of an inverted pyramid, which in the Lichchavi and transitional periods was born out of the progressive development of high projecting cornices. The custom of painting eyes on it must have been adopted at a still later time, possibly by the early 15th century, as seems to be indicated from the comparison of two Newar cloth paintings, both reproducing the mandala of Vasudhāra and dated to 1367 and 1515 respectively. That motif does not appear in the stūpas of the former painting, but it does appear in the latter (Shepherd Slusser 1982, 1, p. 167).

The presence of several discs superimposed upon each other as a finial of the stūpa may be found in the carvings at Ajanta and Ellora, and also in a painting in cave 303 at Dunhuang dating back to the Sui dynasty, around 600 AD (Seckel 1980, pl. XIX/5; Xia Nai 1980-1982, 2, pl. 14). But the standard shape taken by this element in the Nepal Valley, and subsequently in Tibet, seems to be specifically connected to the spread of the Kriyasamgraha. The date when that text was composed by the mahapandita Kuladatta is unknown, although Roth (1980) places it between the 8th and the 9th century. However, the time of its introduction into Tibet is well known, since its colophon states that it was translated in the mahavihara of Dhanvarama, in the capital of Nepal (Bal-po'i mthil), by Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan, the lo-tsa-ba of Yar-klungs, which would give us a date of around 1300 (Cordier 1909-1915, rGyud LVII, 16).

The type of Tibetan stūpa designated by the term bkra-shis sgo-mang mchod-rten is made to correspond with the stūpa which, according to tradition, was erected in Varānasi by the first five followers of Śākyamuni (bhadravargiya) to celebrate the time of the Buddha’s first sermon in the Deer Park at Sārnāth, a moment commonly referred to as, “the setting in motion of the wheel of the law” (dharmačakrapravartana; chos-khor bskor-ba’i tshe). Distinctive features of this type of stūpa are the plan of its stereobate with twenty angles and the presence of a regular row of five openings for each side of the four steps of the throne. Each of these openings corresponds to one of the five segments in which the faces of the stūpa are articulated in accordance with the vimśatikona plan of the throne. Since each opening is generally made to correspond with a chapel which must be accessible to pilgrims, the stūpa in question reaches an imposing size. The term sku-'bum (one hundred thousand images) is often applied to this kind of building because of the multitude of statues and paintings crowding its various chapels.

The erection of a sku-'bum implies great economic effort, entails the massive employment of local labour through the imposition of heavy and prolonged corvées, and requires the intervention of numerous painters and sculptors who often must be brought from other places. Such conditions can only be realized by one in full political control of the region in which the enterprise is carried out. Hence the construction of a sku-'bum always marks a high moment in the political history of the clan or dynasty ruling the region and bears witness to its power and authority. Since these kinds of undertakings can only be realized with the consent, support and doctrinal backup of monks and abbots, the local lords must also be able to establish and entertain good relationships with the monastic orders which are found there.
In spite of the obvious difficulty of fulfilling all these conditions, from the 13th century onwards Tibet saw a great flourishing of this type of *mchod-rten*, and many such buildings are still extant, even though often fallen into ruins. A sizable *sku-bum*, whose date of foundation is unfortunately unknown, is found in Ladakh at Changs-pa, near Leh (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977, 1, fig. 147). In Tibet proper one of the earliest examples is represented by the *stūpa* at Tshal Gung-thang, on the left bank of the eKyid-chu river, whose erection was begun by Bla-ma Zhang-brtson-grags in 1187 and completed by his successor, Dar-ma-grags (Lo Bue and Ricca 1991, p. 51). A second example is the *stūpa* at Khro-phu, on the road linking Jo-nang to Shigatse, erected by Tshul-khrims-shes-rab, the lo-tsā-ba of Khro-phu (Khro-lo), at the beginning of the 13th century, but restored in Taranātha’s time. Another *stūpa* of the same type is that of Jo-nang, built towards the mid-14th century by Dol-po-pa Shes-rab-rgyal-mtshan, but likewise restored in the 17th century by Taranātha. Although it is smaller and built only on two storeys, mention should also be made of the *stūpa* of sNar-thang, which was built by sNyang-grags-bzang-po in the last quarter of the 14th century and completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Yet another example of a *bkra-shis sgo-mang mchod-rten*, known as rGyang Bum-mo-che, was built between the 14th and 15th century by the Great Abbot of Sa-skya, bSod-nams-bkra-shis, assisted by the famous master and builder of bridges, Thang-stong rGyal-po, but it is nowadays in ruins. The same Thang-stong rGyal-po also built the great *stūpa* of Ri-bo-che, whose construction was completed in 1456, and which has been partially restored of late. Perhaps the last great *sku-bum* erected in the 15th century is the mThong-grol chen-mo of Byams-pa-ling, which was built after 1472 by bSod-nams-mam-par-rgyal-ba and Lo-chen bSod-nams-rgya-mtsho. Among constructions of this kind, the Great Stūpa of Gyantse may in many ways be regarded as the highest product of that fervent building and artistic activity.

The *sku-bum* of Gyantse rises in the middle of a natural enclave made up by a rocky dale opening southwards, in the direction of the bazaar, at the opposite end of the crag occupied by the fort (*rdzong*) to which the town owes its name. It occupies a quadrilateral with sides of about fifty metres, oriented according to the points of the compass, on slightly sloping ground whose highest point is placed in the north-eastern corner with a difference in height of about one and a half metres. A rocky crag surfaces inside chapel 1Nb, whose floor proves to be raised by over one metre in comparison with the first step of the throne, and it is possible that other crags are included inside the building. The rocky bottom certainly offered an ideal base for the huge weight of the construction and it is likely to have contributed to ensuring its good preservation.

The base of the *stūpa*, built in green bricks like the rest of the construction, and resting on a stereobate represented by a cornice of three steps, varies in height from 2.15 m on the southern front to 0.70 m in the north-eastern corner. The shape and size of the base are illustrated by the plan of Fig. 1. This plan shows how the same geometrical structure characterizes the four levels of the throne, progressively receding so as to free the open passage enabling access to the chapels of the storey from the outside. This graduated arrangement of the different storeys confines upon the whole the shape of a truncated pyramid which is peculiar to this type of *stūpa*. The access to the monument opens along the axis on the southern front, with a short flight of stairs leading to a double door and a landing from where a second flight leads to the level of the first step of the throne. A secondary entrance, nowadays walled-up, is placed at the eastern end of the northern side.

The building technique is typical of traditional Tibetan architecture, with load-bearing walls and ceilings with wooden trusses made up of rafters embedded in the masonry and supporting small battens placed perpendicularly. The ends of the rafters jut out of the walls, thus making up part of the cornice which separates the storeys. The small dimensions of the chapels, whose depth corresponds to the width of the open corridor on the storey above, does not make it necessary to resort to pillars. The floors of the storeys and the terrace coverings are realized by placing small flat stones on the battens covered by layers of compressed earth and a mix of rubble. Notwithstanding the size of the building, which reaches a height of thirty-five metres at the top, the stepped structure and the leaning of the inside walls against a central core, which is possibly full, spares
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

Fig. 1 General Plan
Fig. 2 South Elevation and Axial Section
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

the individual walls an excessive load. In this way, the builders avoided the necessity for great thicknesses as well as for the adoption of the device usually applied to avoid eversion in Tibet, which consists in reducing the thickness of the walls from bottom to top, thus conferring an inclination of some degrees upon the outside surface, while the inside surface is kept plumb.

The outside walls are plastered in white, but the various storeys are marked by elaborate coloured cornices, representing an essential aspect of the decoration of the building. Such cornices, which include the structural elements of the ceiling and of the flooring, are protected by a sloping skid, heavily jutting out like a roof, as an integral part of the pisé parapet surrounding the outside ambulatory on each storey. The band included between the cornice and this roof is plastered in white (blue on the base) and is richly decorated with painted ornamental motifs reproducing various Buddhist symbols, such as the dharmachakra, the lotus flower, the vase of amṛta, and so forth. The parapet itself is painted red outside and, together with the underlying band, contributes to an effective rhythmical subdivision of the fronts of the building. The inside structure of the stupa and the outside ornamental function of the string-courses are clearly visible in the section and front view of Fig. 2.

The section reveals an important feature of this monument, which is not perceptible from the outside and which is not generally found in other similar buildings. The temples occupying the central projections at the four sides of the building on the first and on the third storey, unlike the chapels flanking them, extend on two floors. A sort of vestibule, having the height of the storey to which the temple belongs, leads to an inner space which extends in height to the storey above, thus allowing very large statues to be included. In these temples, the builders had to resort to inner pillars at the junction of the two sections of the room. Whereas the progressive receding of the subsequent steps of the throne involves a reduction in the dimensions of the chapels as one proceeds upwards, that does not happen in the case of the central temples of the third storey. For these, the wider surface afforded above by the plane cutting off the pyramid of the throne enables a considerable increase in the depth of the inside space cut out in the volume occupied by the last step. The detailed plan of the various storeys and the dimensions of the temples and chapels are provided by Figs. A-H and by the individual charts in the Appendix.

From the above plans it appears that the first three steps of the throne house sixteen chapels each, besides the temples placed in the central projections of the first and of the third storey. The heavily reduced perimeter of the fourth floor lowered this number to twelve and led to the modification of the layout adopted for the corners of the building, corresponding to its main diagonals. The pairs of chapels meeting in such corners on the first three storeys draw a jointed motif, causing the appearance of inside projections in some of them and cutting out at the corners of the outer walls empty spaces used as secret receptacles of votive offerings (tshatsha). But on the fourth storey, the reduction in the number of rooms enabled the erection of corner chapels of larger dimensions, each with the shape of an irregular pentagon having its two external sides of equal size. In these chapels the inner wall opposite the outside comer shows a slight sweep revealing how this wall belongs to the cylindrical core inside the stupa, whose presence is already discernible on the third storey in the inner space of the stairs, but which probably starts from the base level, coming out at the top as the outside wall of the bum-pa.

One enters the chapels through small doors with one leaf (the central temples have a slightly larger entrance with double doors). The threshold is placed above the level of the floor and the lintel supports small modillions holding up cornices which slightly jut out. The differences between the plans of the various storeys are not translated into any apparent break in the external symmetry of the many doors of the bkra-shis sgo-mang mchod-rten. That is achieved in the corner chapels on the fourth storey by fitting a mock door to the outside wall perpendicular to the entrance one and, in the central projections of the second and fourth storey, by making openings corresponding to the doors in the storeys below. These openings are windows enabling the light to reach the upper portion of the imposing statues housed in the temples.
Communications between the various storeys of the throne are ensured by a system of masonry staircases inside the building, which one reaches from the vestibules placed at the southern end of the eastern side of the sKu-'bum. The steps are realized with composite materials (green bricks, rubble and mud used as mortar) and are covered with small and thin stone slabs: there is no trace of steps realized by fitting large stone slabs in the side walls. The relative placing of the vestibules, staircases and landings is illustrated in the cut-away axonometric of Fig. 3.

On the floor defining the upper surface of the throne, seventeen metres above the base level, rises the bum-pa in the shape of a cylinder with a diameter of about twenty metres and with a height of about six metres, slightly flaring towards the summit and terminating at the top in a slightly sloping circular roof which juts out considerably, and is supported by a complex system of balance bracketing clearly of Chinese inspiration. The four temples obtained in the body of the bum-pa are oriented towards the points of the compass and open onto the terrace of the throne with four double portals framed by big toranas in high relief. In these relief one finds the mythical beings of Indian tradition, according to patterns which may be traced back to the Gupta period, even though it is very likely that their direct source of inspiration were the frames of the niches of Newar stūpas. In fact, the motifs of the decoration of many stūpas of the Licchavi period in the Nepal Valley are known to have been drawn from the repertoire of the Gupta sculptors of Madhyadesā (Pal 1974, 1, p. 103). Moreover, those very motifs are well represented in the toranas of Tibetan paintings by the end of the 11th century.

The access from the fourth storey of the throne to the bum-pa is gained through a wooden staircase leading into a space enclosed between the eastern and southern temples, and the usual course followed by pilgrims goes through the latter. Going out of the southern temple onto the outside terrace, they effect the ritual circumambulation, visiting successively the temples oriented westwards, northwards and eastwards (the plan of the bum-pa is shown by Fig. E in the Appendix). Inside the eastern temple, behind the big gilded copper statue of Vairocana, one finds a staircase with flights partially in masonry and partially in wood, leading from the bum-pa to the harmikā above. The staircase leans against a solid central core which continues into the harmikā in the shape of a big prism with a square section. Inside the same harmikā, which is divided up into two storeys connected by a wooden staircase and whose structure is illustrated in the elevation and cut-away axonometric of Figs. 4 and 5, the massive prismatic body sees a partial reduction of its size on the second storey. A plain masonry pillar, still with a square section, then continues up inside the quasi-conical hollow of the spire, to support the big gilded copper pot which is the top of the stūpa. These massive central step-like structures, which were given the precise function of supporting the top of the stūpa, were also meant to reproduce the image of Mt. Meru, the axis of the world.

The harmikā to some extent repeats the motifs characterizing the base of the stūpa. It reproduces the same square plan with twenty angles and rests upon a similar stereobate made up by three low steps. However, it only shows four openings, one at the centre of each side, which give light to the narrow inner corridor on its first storey. It further inherits from classical harmikās an extended jutting out cornice, which is bounded on the upper side by the band corresponding to the plane which separates the two inside levels and by the wooden structures supporting the small roof. The lower boundary of the cornice is marked by polychrome bands reproducing the motifs of the string-courses of the throne. Besides the usual ornamental motifs, four pairs of eyes turned towards the points of the compass, are painted in the space of the cornice, plastered in white, which is enclosed between those two series of bands.

The inside corridor on the second storey of the harmikā extends in height above this cornice, also occupying the big basket-like lotus corolla connecting the harmikā to the spire, in which four small windows open to give light inside. As far as the spire is concerned, since arches and vaults are unknown in Tibetan architecture, the inside hollow turns out to be pyramidal rather than conical, being obtained through the successive superimposition of big beams and low walls placed to form octagons which shrink as they proceed upwards. The outside surface, however, assumes a conical aspect due to the wide gilded copper rings, each
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

Fig. 3 Cut-away Axonometric of Vertical Connections (se corner)
The Symbolism of the Stupa

about 40 centimetres in height, representing the thirteen cakras prescribed by the texts.

The imposing parasol placed at the top of the spire is supported by the continuation of the central pillar and by three concentric crowns of eight wooden poles each. The whole of this rather complicated structure is illustrated in Figs. 4 and 5.

Fig. 4 South Elevation of the Harmikā and Spire (detail).
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

Fig. 5 Cut-away Axonometric of the Harmika and Spire
THE IDEAL STRUCTURE OF THE SKU-'BUM

Between the 6th and 12th century, on the basis of the Mahāyāna doctrines (and closely parallel to similar developments occurring in Saivite circles), a further form of Buddhism known as Vajrayāna (Adamantine Vehicle) developed in India and subsequently spread all over Asia, from Tibet to Japan. Vajrayāna Buddhism introduced elements of an esoteric and sacramental character which were considered capable of leading to liberation in the course of a limited number of existences or even within a single lifespan. Beside the sūtras, which it shared with the Mahāyāna schools, it introduced the tantras, texts which are regarded as revealed by a Buddha and which prescribe rituals and techniques largely based upon yoga practices and upon processes of introspection and visualization. This form of Buddhism is characterized by the acceptance of a number of deities of pre-existent religions (viewed as indirect and partial manifestations of buddhahood), by the recognition of the positive role of the female component of human nature, and by the systematic employment of the symbolism of the mandala. Such is the form of Buddhism which has inspired most of the sacred art of Tibet.

The SKU-'bum of Gyantse adds tantric symbolism to the general symbolism of the stūpa and to the more specific one which is typical of the "stūpa of the preaching".

The continuity in the transition from the first Buddhist conceptions to the later Vajrayāna ones is indicated by the role assigned to the main temples on the first storey of the SKU-'bum, which restate the traditional function of this type of stūpa by celebrating the moment of the spread of the doctrine. The southern temple in fact celebrates the promulgation of the dharma among mankind in our time: the Buddha Śākyamuni (the historical form of the Buddha) sits on the great throne at the centre of the temple with his hands displaying the symbolic gesture (mudrā) which symbolizes the setting in motion of the wheel of the law (dharmacakrapravartana) with his first preaching (prathamadeśana) at Vārānasi. The northern temple evokes the preaching performed by Dipākara (the Buddha of the past) in aeons previous to ours, while the eastern temple celebrates the figure of Maitreya (the Buddha of the future), who will come down to preach the dharma after the teaching of Śakyamuni is forgotten. The superhuman aspects peculiar to Mahāyāna Buddhism are evoked by the western temple, which is devoted to the preaching of the doctrine by the Buddha Amitabha in the pure land known as Sukhāvati, a preaching which is no longer solely addressed to mankind, but which extends to the whole universe, as the eternal manifestation of the dharma on the verbal plane.

The further transition to Vajrayāna Buddhism then becomes fully apparent in the succession of chapels and temples which illustrate the universe of maṇḍalas belonging to the various tantric cycles on this and on the following storeys.

The criteria for classifying the tantras were first fixed in Tibet by bSod-nams-rtses-mo (1142-1182) and then received their virtually final form thanks to Bu-ston (1290-1364). Such criteria establish a division of the tantras into the four great classes of kriyātantras (bya-ba'i rgyud), caryātantras (spyod-pa'i rgyud), yogatantras (rnal-'byor rgyud) and anuttaratantras (bla-med-kyi rgyud). The kriyātantras are addressed to those who essentially base their practice upon ritual behaviour and outer action, and the caryātantras to those who couple outer action with inner yoga, whereas the yogatantras and the anuttaratantras are basically focused upon the yoga of inner samādhi, which in the last case consists primarily of physiopsychological techniques of meditation.

Before the systematization worked out by Bu-ston, Tibetan masters had neglected the tantric cycles of the first two classes, regarding them almost as autonomous separate cults, since in many instances the related texts had been translated during the first diffusion of Buddhism in the monarchic period (sngar-dar) and the lineages of their transmission had often been lost. To this, one may add that only the tantras of the third and fourth class
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

were then considered to include traditions of how the Buddha obtained his full enlightenment: whereas all four classes of tantras might be used to conjure up deities in order to obtain the lower siddhis, only the last two were therefore thought to represent alternative ways to achieve buddhahood through the "quick path". The restoration of the importance and authority of the kriyatantras and of the caryatantras took place thanks to Bu-ston, who in his colossal exegetical work made use of long quotations drawn from the Manjuśrīmālākalpa and from the Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi, belonging respectively to the first and second of these classes.

A residual difference in the evaluation of the different classes of tantras was however kept by Bu-ston by establishing a correlation of the former two with the Hinayāna and of the latter two with the Mahāyāna. It was actually Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419) who, in the stNgaš-rim chen-mo, his great compendium of Buddhist tantras, explicitly brought the whole system of tantras back to the Mahāyāna by claiming that the siddhanta of the Praśaṅgika Madhyamika school was the philosophical base of all the four tantra divisions. That position was then adopted by Tsong-kha-pa's main disciple in tantric teachings, mKhas-grub Thams-cad-mkhyen-pa dGe-legs-dpal-bzang-po (1358-1438), commonly known as mKhas-grub-rje, in his work tGyud-sde sphyi' rnam-par gzhags-pa rgyas-par brjod, an introduction to the general system of the tantras.

The sku-bum of Gyantse represents the full acceptance of the usefulness of all the tantras, and the arrangement adopted for the representation of the various tantric cycles in the different chapels reflects the precise arrangement which was given to tantric literature in the Tibetan Buddhist Canon. The sequence of maṇḍalas in the chapels of the bkra-shis sgo-mang mchod-rtue represents a spatial and visual version of this complex systematization of the canonical corpus of tantras. The chapels on the fourth storey too, although they are not directly devoted to the deities of the maṇḍalas, may be included in the same layout in as much as they illustrate the spiritual lineages through which those tantric cycles reached Tibet and were spread there.

The chapels on the first and second storey are devoted to cycles belonging to the kriyatantras and caryatantras, and include various categories of deities of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon, among whom wrathful deities hold a prominent position. These irate manifestations of deities often reflect the assimilation of creations of Śaivism or the heritage of early cults of the populations distributed on the Himalayan slopes, but they find a specific place in the conception of tantric Buddhism which aims at channelling all forms of energy to liberation, even those which may appear as most remote from the Judaic and Christian conception of the sacred. The kriyatantras are classified into "families" which are divided up into the two groups of laukika and lokottara (respectively mundane and supramundane). The latter are in turn divided into the Families of the Tathāgata, of the Lotus and of the Vajra; the former are distributed among the Family of Prosperity (Pauṣṭikakula), the Family of Wealth (Manikula) and the Family of devas, asuras, yaksas and the like (Laukikakula). The tantras of these last three families, however, were gradually absorbed into the first three, which are the only ones to be found in the caryatantras.

All the chapels on the first storey are devoted to cycles belonging to the kriyatantras and only in one of them are found maṇḍalas drawn also from the caryatantras. The second storey is also largely devoted to the illustration of cycles belonging to the kriyatantras, but in two chapels the maṇḍalas drawn from the Mahāvairocana-abhisambodhi (a fundamental text of the caryatantras) play a crucial role. Individual maṇḍalas deriving from the yogatantras are found in a chapel on the first storey, and maṇḍalas traceable to the yogatantras and even to the anuttaratantras prevail in two chapels on the second storey. In those instances, however, the maṇḍalas relate to deities playing an important role in the Sa-skya-pa school, to which many sūdhānas (rituals of evocation) are devoted in the collections associated with that tradition: they are possibly part of complex homogeneous rituals which, however, exceptionally do not correspond to the canonical classification (obviously an a posteriori one).
To consider the overall picture which emerges from the two storeys, omitting the central temples (which have already been discussed) and the vestibules, we have twenty-eight chapels out of thirty basically devoted to the kriyātantras, three of them including maṇḍalas deriving from the caryātantras belonging to the Tathāgata Family. Hence, the layout of the sKu-'bum is not aimed at emphasizing the distinction between the first two classes of tantras, but seems to view them globally as introductory to the upper classes, so that the pilgrim, by performing the ritual circumambulation and climbing progressively from one storey to another, may gradually rise to loftier forms of mystical practice.

The twenty-eight chapels devoted to the kriyātantras and the caryātantras appear to be distributed unevenly among the three fundamental families: thirteen are devoted to the Tathāgata Family (prevalently on the first storey), nine to that the Padma Family (prevalently on the second storey) and six to the Vajra Family. This distribution seems to reflect mKhas-grub-rje’s judgement on the comparative importance of these families (Lessing and Wayman 1983, p. 103).

Even though some forms of Jambhala and of other yaksas appearing on these first two storeys may be traced back to the laukika families in the kriyātantras, these forms are always only partial components of the overall iconography. The chapels to which they belong are never specifically devoted to these families. The inclusion of laukika forms in the chapels devoted to one or another lokottara family makes their progressive absorption in those families apparent. In fact, there were initially many more than three laukika families in the class of the kriyātantras, while they disappeared altogether from the caryātantras.

The chapels and temples of the third storey and the temples of the bum-pa are devoted to the cycles belonging to the yogatantras, which are basically focused on the conception of Vairocana (the Resplendent One), a deified form of the Buddha, from which emanate the Four Cosmic Buddhas (Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha and Amoghasiddhi), each of whom is associated with a quarter of space and with a colour in the maṇḍala.

The canonical systematization of the yogatantras is based upon the distinction between the root-tantra (mālatantra; rtsa-ba’i rgyud), which is the Sarvatathāgata-tattva-samgraha (compendium of the essence of all the buddhas), and the tantras explanatory of this. The Tattva-samgraha is divided into four kalpas (sections containing the ritual instructions) corresponding to the four families of the Tathāgata, of the Vajra, of the Dharma-Padma, and of the Karma-Ratna, followed by a fifth section listing the benefits attainable through the rituals performed within each family. The explanatory tantras are divided into two groups: one of texts which refer to the root-tantra as a whole (ākhyatantra; bshad-rgyud); the other of texts which illustrate individual sections of the root text (bhāgiyatantra; cha-mthun rgyud).

These classifications are accurately reflected in the layout of the sKu-'bum. The ideal centre of the yogatantra system is represented by the statue of Vairocana in the eastern temple of the bum-pa and by the statues of the four jinas in the temples on the third storey, situated at the centres of the four sides of the stūpa. These temples, by extending in height to the whole of the fourth storey, establish a direct connection with the bum-pa. The order in which the statues are arranged reproduces the succession of the kalpas in the Tattva-samgraha (Lo Bue and Ricca 1991, pp. 144-146).

The maṇḍalas drawn directly from the Tattva-samgraha are all painted on the walls of the four temples of the bum-pa, in which, besides the statue of Vairocana, one finds the statue of Prajñāpāramitā and those of Mahāmuni (Great Sage) and of Śākyasimha (Lion of the Śākyas), which are both devoted to Śākyamuni. Prajñāpāramitā, as the personification of supreme transcendent knowledge, is conceived of as the Great Mother (Yum-chen-mo) of all the buddhas, but she is also the deified hypostasis of the canonical literature bearing the same name, which is the theoretical foundation of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the theoretical basis for the unification of all the tantras in Tsong-kha-pa’s compendium.
The chapels on the third storey are entirely devoted to the bshad-rgyud. Four of the most important of these explanatory tantras preside over the chapels on each of the four sides of the stūpa. The manḍalas of the chapels on the eastern side are all drawn from the Vajraśekhara, those on the southern side from the Paramādya, those on the western side, from the Nāmasāṃśiti and those on the northern side from the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana. In some chapels on the western and northern sides one also finds manḍalas drawn from two more bshad-rgyud, the Vajramandalaṃkāra and the Guhyalakṣāvatāra. Manḍalas deriving from these last two tantras are also found on the walls of the bum-pa, together with those deriving from some cha-mthun rgyud especially devoted to the Prajñāpāramitā.

As already mentioned, the fourth storey is devoted to those Indian and Tibetan masters who spread and transmitted the different categories of tantras. The conception according to which the tantras are authenticated by the ascertained continuity of the teachings from master to master through spiritual lineages, is precisely reflected in this part of the sKu-'bum. These lineages may coincide with the masters of the great schools of Tibetan Buddhism, like for instance those of the Sa-skya-pa, masters in the doctrine of the Path and Fruit (Lam-'bras), or those of the bKa'-brgyud-pa, masters in the teachings of the Great Seal (Mahāmudrā), but they may also include masters belonging to various schools and monastic traditions, as is the case for the lineages of Zhi-byed (“pacification” of afflictions) and of gCod (“cutting off” any grasping at self). On the whole, the chapels on this storey provide an exceptionally rich review of the major figures of Tibetan Buddhism and, they too, reflect the effort made by Bu-ston to systematize the religious history of Tibet.

The two storeys of the harmikā house the manḍalas deriving from the anuttaratantras which canonical classification divides into “father” tantras and “mother” tantras. The former, also known as mūhāyogatantras, dākatantras and upāyatantras, are chiefly focused on the means to achieve release. The latter, also known as yoginitantras, dākinītantras and praṇītatantras, are specifically directed to the acquisition of transcendent wisdom, which is the essence of release.

Since all the anuttaratantras teach the inseparability of means (upāya) and insight (praṇītā), the distinction between upāyatantras and praṇītatantras, albeit essential, is subtle and has been the object of several interpretations, among which one of the most authoritative is provided by mKhas-grub-rje: “In short, the basic classification of the Anuttara Tantras is into those which teach elaborately the subject matter of the Knowledge of the indissolubility of Beatitude and Void on the side of the Void (mother tantras), and into those which teach elaborately the coming forth with skill in the method of accomplishing the Illusory Body (father tantras)...” (Lessing and Wayman 1983, p. 265; italics ours).

The first storey of the harmikā is devoted to the upāyatantras, which may be divided into groups respectively associated with Akṣobhya, Vairocana, Amitābha and Vajradhara (in the bKa'-'byur there are no “father” tantras associated with the Jewel Family or with the Karma Family). The manḍalas painted on the walls of this storey can be traced to the first group (cycles of Guhyasamāja and of Vajrapāṇi) and to the second group (cycles of Vajrabhairava and of Yamā) respectively.

The second storey is devoted to the praṇītatantras, which again may be divided into groups respectively associated with Heruka (Aksobhya), Vairocana, Vajraprabhā (Ratnasambhava), Padmanarteśvara (Amitābha), Paramāśva (Amoghasiddhi) and Vajradhara. A seventh group may be further singled out, which is made up of tantras referring equally to all these Buddhas. Nearly all the manḍalas painted on the walls of this storey can be traced to the first group, with the cycles of Cakrasamvara, Hevajra, Vajradaka, Buddhaheruka and Buddhakapala. On this storey, furthermore, there is the cycle of Kālacakra, which reveals the influence of Tsong-kha-pa’s views on the religious culture of the time. It was in fact Tsong-kha-pa, followed by mKhas-grub-rje, in his analysis of the system of the tantras, who brought the Kālacakra-tantra into the fold of the “mother” tantras, unlike Bu-ston, who chose to place it in a section apart, which he called “non-dual” (advaya;
The Ideal Structure of the sKu-'bum

gnyis-su med) (Wayman 1974, p. 234, n. 6). The influence of Tsong-kha-pa's position may have been felt both through mKhas-grub-rje's initial intervention in the planning stage of the sKu-'bum, and through the advice which Rin-chen-grub (the abbot of gNas-rnying, an important dGe-lugs-pa monastery placed under the jurisdiction of the princes of Gyantse) is likely to have continuously given during the construction of the stūpa.

Finally, we must consider the octagonal chapel inside the spire which crowns this symbolic building, and houses the gilded copper statue of Vajradhara at the centre. Vajradhara is here conceived as the Ādibuddha (the primordial and timeless Buddha from which all other buddhas and the whole universe emanate), a conception which definitely asserted itself with the spread of the cycle of the Kālacakra. In fact, in this chapel there is a precise evocation of the Kālacratantra, through two series of figures painted around the walls.

The first series reproduces the kings of Śambhala, according to the tradition of the Kālacakra as codified by Bu-ston and received by gZhon-nu-dpal (Roerich 1976, p. 753). Śambhala is a mythical kingdom, vaguely placed in the north, whose kings are supposed to have treasured and handed down the teachings of the Kālacratantra for many generations, before these were taken to India. According to legend, the Kālacakra had been initially promulgated by Śākyamuni himself at the stūpa of Dhāanyakataka, another mythical place variously identified in Tibetan tradition (Bénisti 1981, pp. 140-144).

The second series reproduces the various lineages through which the teachings of the Kālacratantra were handed down in India and Tibet. In this latter series the figure of Bu-ston appears to be particularly relevant, for he undertook to accomplish the synthesis of the two distinct lineages of the lo-tsa-bas of Rwa and of 'Bro. Bu-ston attributed an exceptional importance to the Kālacratantra and placed it at the head of the tantra section in his final arrangement of the bKa'-gyur. This second series of figures seems also to testify the influence of the Indian master Vanaratna, whose second journey to Tibet falls within a span of years corresponding to the construction of the sKu-'bum, for it includes a considerable number of masters of the Śadāṅgayoga (shyor-ba yan-lag drug-gi gdams-pa) according to Anupamarakṣita's system, which Vanaratna particularly contributed to spread in Tibet (Roerich 1976, p. 800).
Chapter Three

ICONOGRAPHY AND STYLE

The Great Stūpa of Gyantse affords an impressive illustration of Tibetan figurative culture: seventy-three statuary groups and over two thousand square metres of painted walls make up an inexhaustible source of information. The analysis of such artistic heritage requires a long and thorough study, which it will be possible to carry out in a fully satisfactory manner only if future changes in the social and political conditions of Tibet allow scholars free access to this monument.

However, a worrying competition with time is within sight, since man and the inclemency of the weather are insidious dangers and a permanent peril. Cracks and clefts are manifest in various parts of this building which, none the less, is one of those better preserved in the whole region. Water drippings have partially erased some of the paintings or have altered their colours. Clumsy patchings, carried out with modern and unsuitable materials (concrete and synthetic colours) have often produced further damage. One should not forget that wall paintings in Tibetan temples are not produced with the fresco technique, but merely painted with tempera colours on a layer of chalk and plaster covering the earthen walls made of green bricks, or with the pisé technique. A protective action has been achieved to some degree by the application, more and more frequent since the second half of the 19th century, of transparent resins which, however, alter the paintings by laying a yellowish component upon them and by introducing unpleasant reflections. But that technical expedient is obviously ineffective against the water leakages occurring inside the walls, which in several places have produced bulges and peelings in the surfaces. In spite of this situation, which ought to be brought to the attention of international organizations engaged in the preservation of the artistic and cultural treasures of mankind, it must be said that the general picture offered by the paintings in the Sku-'bum remains on the whole rather good, and that the vast majority of the wall paintings lend themselves to aesthetic appreciation and critical analysis.

A different question is posed by the statues, which are sometimes disregarded, being viewed as late replicas of the originals. The complete documentation of these works in the black-and-white pictures of the Appendix will suffice to show how summary those judgements are. Such opinions, however, have their objective foundation in the relative brittleness of those works, the statues being almost exclusively made of clay (only the big statue of Vairocana in the eastern temple of the bum-pa and the small statue of Vajradhara inside the spire are, in fact, made of metal).

The construction technique of such statues has been described several times. The earliest Tibetan description is perhaps that provided in sBa gSal-snang's sBa-bzhed, quoted in recent research on the central temple of bSam-yas in connection with its “three styles” (Chayet 1990). A cotton cloth is applied to a core of straw and tow, placed beforehand around a rough wooden support generally in the shape of a cross, and is then “fixed” with very liquid clay. The wooden framework and the core of straw and grass are clearly visible in the remnants of the statues at g.Ye-dmar (Vitali 1990, pp. 37-68). The coating is repeated by applying successive layers (seven according to the text, with a technique conjuring up that of the production of big statues in dry lacquer), until a thickness of one to three centimetres has been reached, according to the size of the statue. The clay is of a very fine golden kind, mixed and kneaded with a considerable amount of paper in order to make it lighter and tougher (Dagyab 1977, 1, p. 46). The surface is then modelled by adding and
scraping away with simple wooden tools. The hollow statue thus obtained is left to dry in the air. In the case of very big statues the drying process may be speeded up by introducing a brazier into the hollow, with a result which is, however, entirely different from what is known as terracotta. After the drying process has been completed, the surface is covered with a layer of plaster and then painted with the same tempera colours which are used in wall paintings, with a large application of gilding and of decorations in gilded plaster. The thinner and more elaborate parts of the statues thus obtained, such as the crowns and the attributes of the deities, or the scrolls of the toranas (arched portals, triumphal arches) surrounding them, are obviously subject to breakage. The interventions to repair and replace those details have certainly always been frequent, but lately such partial remakings seem to have been carried out cursorily and without much aesthetic sensitivity. Thus one may come across the deceptive exchange of attributes between bodhisattvas belonging to the same group, or the improper use of rough iron wires as unlikely stalks for renovated lotus flowers. However, such misdeeds have seldom touched the essential and more massive parts of the statue, like the trunk, the throne, the drapery or the face.

The situation concerning the colouring of the statues is quite different, since a disastrous enthusiasm for modern synthetic colours, sparkling white lead and opaque enamels, is now evident. It is as though in statuary the colour is felt to be a subsidiary and decorative element, which can be “freshened up” and meritoriously “reactivated” through repainting. This seems to be similar to the continuous superimposition of gold leaves on Burmese and Siamese Buddhas or to the periodical whitewashing of many Nepalese stupas. Unfortunately, the more aesthetically interesting details of the statues, the faces and the hands displaying the various mudrás, are often the privileged objects of such interventions. Furthermore, the overindulgence in transparent, bright, yellowish resins, similar to those covering the wall paintings, is generally widespread. The very vivid contrast between the loud repainting of the faces and the sober colouring and natural patina of the cloaks and drapery gives a measure of the damage thus provoked.

However, it must be said that many statues still appear basically intact and this is particularly true for the big statues in the main temples inside the mchod-rten. These colossal clay statues, plastered and painted, appear as essential documents of Tibetan art, whose value cannot be in any way underestimated. They are figures of great dignity and power, whose imposing proportions and massive heads combine with an extreme refinement in the treatment of the drapery and ornaments, and with an extraordinary elegance and preciosity in the reproduction of fabrics and in the decoration of thrones.

A most interesting feature of the paintings and statues of the dPal-khor mchod-rten chen-po is that they provide us with a substantially isochronous section of the development of Tibetan religious art. Historical texts and inscriptions on the walls concur to place the erection and completion of the sku-bum of Gyantse fully within the second quarter of the 15th century, and do not raise those tiresome problems of analysis of the temporal stratification of the interventions, which often can only be solved very conjecturally. This is a period sufficiently short to allow us to view those paintings and statues as a snapshot which fixes trends, styles and currents acting at that moment in southern Tibet.

The picture likewise appears well-defined in space, since the names of the artists mentioned in the inscriptions (all of them Tibetan) are generally accompanied by the indication of their places of origin. Except for a few instances, all those places are located in a circumscribed area of gTsang (southern Tibet) and more particularly around lHa-rte and Jo-nang, also including a few centres not far from Zhwa-lu and Gyantse. However, such spatial delimitation must by no means be mistaken for a possible provincial characterization of the works which we admire in the great stūpa. We are dealing, in fact, with an area including centres of art and culture which had seen the concourse of the main religious, artistic and literary currents coming from northern India, the Nepal Valley and China during the two previous centuries.
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

The political and religious authority exerted by the great Sa-skya-pa abbots on gTsang in the 13th and 14th century had made this area the vital centre of the whole of Tibet, and their role at the imperial court had made Sa-skya the prime site for cultural exchanges with Yuan China. The monastery of Zhwa-lu witnessed Bu-ston Rin-po-che's exceptional critical endeavour, leading to the final arrangement in the bsTan-'gyur of the huge heritage of exegetical texts of Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, Lha-rtsa, a trade mart of prime importance on the main route to the Nepal Valley, was probably the seat of one of the strongest Newar colonies in Tibet. So it is not surprising that the first important schools of Tibetan painters and sculptors were born around Newar masters in gTsang. The magnificence of the courts, the fame of the monasteries and the flourishing of trade had called the intelligence and culture of the entire country there, while the patronage and the support granted by the emperors to the dpon-chen of Sa-skya and to the sku-zhang of Zhwa-lu had allowed them to summon teams of artists and artisans from Nepal and China. The latter enriched the already fertile ground of Tibetan culture with their contribution, favouring its luxuriant development and exceptional blooming.

That Tibetan painters and sculptors belonging to schools flourishing in those centres of southern Tibet worked at Gyantse must be viewed as a sign of the fruitfulness of the cultural inseminations which had already taken place. It is also evidence of the fact that external currents and influences had become the object of a complex and active process of assimilation and of artistic growth. The cosmopolitan character of artistic production in gTsang at the beginning of the 15th century, which suitably matches the universalistic character of Buddhist thought, reflects the central role played by that area in Tibetan history during the two previous centuries. The mastery of forms, conventions and styles of artistic production belonging to various and diverse countries by the local schools, clears away all suspicion of provincialism and places the activity of those artists well within the mainstream followed by the development of Tibetan art.

The stylistic acquisitions and the aesthetic results achieved with the realization of the works produced for the sku-bum of Gyantse may therefore be regarded as characterizing the Tibetan artistic production in the first half of the 15th century. Moreover, the extraordinary wealth and quality of the works gathered in this monument offer a unique occasion to analyse the constituent elements of the expressive language which was gradually being fixed as the original Tibetan form of a symbolic and figurative heritage belonging to all Asia. Such analysis shows the interlacing of iconographic inventions and stylistic solutions which had been worked out in different places and times, and reveals the complex balance which came to be established between the role played by the texts dictating the norms for visualization in mystic practice, and the weight exerted by the visual examples as provided by previous artistic elaborations. Both in the instance of precise textual references and in that of respectful veneration for artistic forms previously established, the subordination of style to an iconographic norm seems to be prevalent. But such subordination is neither inert nor total, and leaves room for the artist's continuous and original interventions, whose outcome, however, will have to be searched for especially in the details and atmosphere, as a creative modulation of essentially set themes.

In dealing with this analysis, we are necessarily confronted with the age-old and rather academic question of the relative importance of the Indo-Nepalese and Chinese traditions. Since both the establishment of the Tibetan monarchy and the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet occur against a cultural background which is essentially of Indian origin (whether it comes from Bihar and Bengal through the Nepal Valley, from Kashmir, or from the Indianized kingdoms along the Silk Route), the question poses itself essentially as a problem of defining the quality and measure of the Chinese influences which manifested themselves against such a background. In this connection, one needs to distinguish between the influence of the Chinese art of the Han and Tang periods, which was surely great, but exerted in an indirect and mediate way, and that, much more immediate and direct, as well as closer in time to the period we are concerned with, which could be exerted by the Chinese art of the Yuan and Ming dynasties.

The former occurred through the elaboration of stylistic and iconographic solutions which gave rise to the forms typical of Central Asian Buddhist art, merging with Western (Indo-Greek and Persian) influences
Iconography and Style

and interacting with the models proposed by Indian art (first Gupta and then Pāla). Tibetans came into contact with those forms from the monarchical period, when, competing with China, they succeeded in establishing their control over the Silk Route. From that point of view, the prolonged occupation of Dunhuang (from 781 to 847) was particularly important. The active presence of a Tibetan colony at Dunhuang, its full integration into the local culture and its active participation in local religious worship and practices are proved by the construction of temples by the representatives of the central power, as well as by the names of donors and by the Tibetan inscriptions on painted “banners” and cloths. Tibetan artists worked at Dunhuang leaving their mark, but surely also borrowing artistic forms and expressions. Besides this fundamental episode, other episodes may be singled out, which concurred to transmit to Tibet specific contributions from Central Asian cultures: in particular, the vicissitude of the Khotanese monks who were given shelter in 703 and, later on, the flight to Tibet of the Tangut nobles who escaped the slaughter perpetrated in Xixia by Jingis Khan in 1227. The Chinese influence realized through those episodes, however, manifests itself in the works of Gyantse as something already firmly deposited in the collective imagination of Tibet and in the figurative heritage available to her artists.

The latter and more recent type of influence exerted by Chinese art and culture must be related, rather, to the intense exchanges which followed the establishment of the “patron-priest” relationship which the Grand Lamas of Sa-skya succeeded in establishing with the Mongol emperors of China and which, after the collapse of the Yuan dynasty in 1368, the Ming emperors partially re-established with leaders of the most powerful orders of Tibetan Buddhism.

On the artistic side, there was in the first place the introduction of the Newar tradition to the Yuan court through the creation of the school of Aniko in Beijing. In that instance, the exchange proceeded from the Nepal Valley to China through the filter of Tibet, where Newar painters and sculptors had worked for a long time and built up great fame, largely monopolizing the manufacture of the works of art which were enriching its temples and monasteries. On the other hand it is not impossible that the return to Tibet of artists trained at the school of Aniko was capable of conveying the new skills and technical competence acquired in the circles of the imperial court, together with the experience of a new architecture and a new vision of landscape. Vitali believes it possible to identify a specific instance of this phenomenon in the paintings realized in the monastery of Zhwa-lu, during the renovation and extension of that foundation which were carried out by the sku-zhang Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (Vitali 1990, pp. 100-112). But, apart from that possible reflux, the constant presence at the Yuan court in Beijing of a Sa-skya-pa Lama with the title of dishi (Imperial Preceptor) and with a prominent role in the Xuanzhengyuan (the Office for Tibetan and Buddhist Affairs), which implied the presence of a retinue of monks and possibly of Tibetan artists, was in itself an effective vehicle for transmitting concepts, manners, habits and fashions of that court to Tibet. Moreover, in the same period, the administration of central Tibet was placed under the Xuanweishi (Pacifying Commission), which was made up of Mongol and Tibetan officials, and also in this case it is conceivable that Mongol and Tibetan dignitaries representing the imperial court surrounded themselves with Chinese staff and imported into Tibet Chinese forms of life (ceremonial, funeral, cooking, and so forth) which could influence the Tibetan imagination and taste.

The creation by the Yuan emperors, after their conquest of southern China, of a second Office for the Direction of Religious Affairs at Hangzhou, which was entrusted to a Tibetan monk in 1277, was a further occasion for religious and artistic exchanges between the two countries. The great importance of that channel appears in its correct light if one bears in mind that the second part (Yuan kan) of the xylographic edition of the Xixia Tripitaka which Qubilai Khan ordered in 1302 was carved at Hangzhou, and that this edition was prepared under the direction of the monk Guanzhuba, probably of Tangut origin, but of Tibetan education. The possible role of that second channel, and more generally the role of the exchanges of Tibet with central and south-eastern China through Sichuan and Yunnan, may have so far been underestimated: it is conceivable that the opening of Kham to Western scholars may one day provide more useful elements for the history of Tibetan
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

art. Certainly in the woodcuts of the Xixiazang one finds that same mixture of Tibetan and international Pāla features (in the central images) with Chinese features (in surrounding figures), which are so striking in the wall paintings of Tibetan temples, from Grwa-thang to Zhwa-lu and Gyantse. The same may also be said of the xylographs of the jishazang, the Chinese Canon which was realized in the nearby island of Jisha, whose section devoted to the tantras was also edited by Guanzhuba at the beginning of the 14th century (its colophon bears the date 1307).

The phase of cultural and artistic exchanges between Tibet and China during the early Ming period raises a series of other questions worth considering. Heather Stoddard, comparing the wall paintings at Gyantse to the Chinese bronzes of the Yongle period (1403-1424) and to the xylographs of the Beijing edition of the bKā-'gyur (1410), reaches the conclusion that they are the result of Tibetan influence on Chinese religious artistic production of the period. The Beijing bKā-'gyur is, in fact, the xylographic edition of a Tibetan manuscript which, although unknown, was probably drawn from the manuscript edition of sNar-thang. The Yongle bronzes which have come to us were chiefly gifts of the emperor Chengzu to the Sa-skya-pa, Karma-pa and later dGe-lugs-pa Grand Lamas, hence they were certainly inspired by the religious conceptions and aesthetic conventions of their recipients. However, one cannot exclude the possibility that iconographic suggestions and stylistic solutions as worked out in China during the Yongle period had an influence on the Tibetan artistic production in the period which immediately followed. Heather Stoddard could regard the Yongle bronzes and the paintings of Gyantse as virtually contemporary since she believed that the decoration of the sKu-'bum was brought to an end in 1427, but that opinion is no longer tenable when that year is rightly considered as the date of the beginning of the construction of the Great Stūpa, whose completion did not take place before 1439. The time elapsed since the Beijing edition of the bKā-'gyur, or the gift of images by Chengzu to Shākyay-ye-shes (1408) and Kun-dga'-bkra-shis (1412), was certainly sufficient for the lively artistic milieu at Gyantse to assimilate and appropriate the suggestions which were possibly provided by Yongle art.

In conclusion, Chinese cultural contributions to the soundly post-Pāla and Newar framework of the Tibetan artistic tradition may be of various kinds and may be placed at various levels, either directly affecting canonical iconography or being restricted to an influence upon ornamental motifs. Above all, one must bear in mind that such contributions may prove to have been somewhat elaborated by the creative intervention of Tibetan artists.

Another aspect of the fundamental importance of the images in the sKu-'bum is the extraordinary wealth of the iconographic documentation which they afford and which represents the most complete panorama of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon which has come to us. The arrangement of the deities according to patterns which clearly recall their position in the specific mandalas of the various tantric cycles, the information and textual references provided by the inscriptions on the walls, and the accurate denominations assigned by the captions which generally accompany the images, allow the researcher to inventory the manifold forms in which deities were represented. It is an inventory which, besides being at least as rich as the well-known xylographic catalogues and obviously much more compact and consistent on account of its specific temporal and spatial setting, turns out to be especially precious because of the incomparable contribution which is represented by the use of colour. On these walls, which are intentionally devoted to the systematic exposition of the universe of tantras and often aimed at illustrating the different readings and interpretations as provided by exegetes and masters of the various schools, the prescriptions of the sādhanas take shape with an immediate, unsuspected evidence. The combined play of colours, postures (āsanās), mūdrās and attributes, reveals itself in full as a versatile means for the orderly proliferation of images and, at the same time, as a key to the conceptual unification of an otherwise endless universe of symbols.

But something else adds to that, something which, without the heat of oral exposition and the fascination of ritual, can hardly be gathered from the mere reading of the dry plot of the sādhanas. The indications afforded
to the practitioner for the utpattikrama, that is for the conjuring up and visualization of the deities with whom he aims to identify himself in samādhi (the deepest form of abstract meditation), show here all their emotional and fantastic potential besides their role of powerful technical support to meditation. Before this level of artistic achievement, it becomes possible to grasp the weight which must have been exerted by aesthetic emotion in the difficult process of renouncing the narrow subjective world through the way of the tantras.

By taking into account this twofold importance of the works gathered in the sKu-'bum, that is by considering the exceptional nature of the iconographic documentation and the extraordinary occasion for stylistic analysis afforded by such works, we shall undertake in the following pages and plates to examine a certain number of statues and paintings, devoting as much attention to the specificity of the symbols and of the mudrās as to the figurative conventions and formal solutions.

So far as the representation of deities is concerned, stylistic evolution takes place through circumscribed breaches of the constraints which are imposed by traditional iconography and the fidelity to inherited aesthetic models. Such evolution is expressed accordingly by the appearance or disappearance of certain backgrounds, by the application of new decorative motifs and of different draperies in the clothes, by the modification of thrones and haloes, by the preference given to certain chromatic tones and so forth, but all those changes seldom occur at the same time, so as to mark a clear break from the previous manner. A certain admixture occurs among the solutions adopted, and the coexistence of forms inspired by different sources lasts for quite some time. Furthermore, the persistence of iconographic elements generally absorbs the intervening changes and reduces them to relatively marginal phenomena.

Thus the need arises to distinguish the iconographic scheme from stylistic devices, and often it is advisable to confine stylistic analysis to minor aspects. One is naturally tempted to apply analysis to more subtle elements: the artist’s hand and stroke, the expression of the faces, the background of the work. But here the difficulties are great because very little is known about the artist, about his masters and pupils, about his personal history and his inner world. It is therefore difficult to establish how much in his work is the outcome of a personal invention and how much is the elusive symbol of a culture that we do not possess. A great deal of work and study will still be necessary in this area. Documentation, comparison, and minute analysis are the necessary tools for this arduous task, in which, however, one is sustained by a feeling of aesthetic pleasure.

BUDDHAS AND BODHISATTVAS

The centre of the sKu-'bum is represented by the chapels devoted to the yogatantras and, more precisely, to the Tattvasamgraha and its commentaries. The heart of the yogatantra system is represented by the figure of Vairocana, from whom the universe emanates and the dharma radiates. Vairocana is the centre of the divine pentad of the Cosmic Buddhas: as such, he occupies the centre of the great mandalas which are the visual translation of the Tattvasamgraha and, first of all, the centre of the Vajradhātumandala, the mandala of the diamond sphere of absolute reality.

The cult of Vairocana, firmly established in Magadha by the 7th century, was brought to China by Vajrabodhi around 722 and transmitted to Japan around 736. It was probably also introduced into Tibet during the 8th century (Richardson 1990). The main image of the central hall in the temple of bSam-yas, erected by Khri Srong-lde-brtson, is that of Vairocana, and his cult was held in special consideration by the Buddhist kings who followed, as is shown by the several temples devoted to him during the monarchic period. The only large gilded copper statue in the sKu-'bum of Gyantse (plate 1) is devoted to Vairocana, and it is placed in the eastern temple of the bum-pa leading directly to the temple which is located at the very top of the building and which contains the statue of Vajradhara, the Ādibuddha. And around the figure of Vairocana is displayed a large part
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

of the wall paintings which, on the third storey of the sKu-'bum, are devoted to the great *tantras* explanatory of the *Tattvasamgraha*.

Plate 2 reproduces the figure of Vairocana painted on the main wall of chapel 3Ea and drawn from the *Trailokyavijayamandala*, in the second section of the *Vajraśekharatantra* (henceforth the chapels and temples of the sKu-'bum will be indicated according to the numbering provided in the Appendix). Vairocana, white, with four heads topped by a five-pointed crown, sits in *vajrāsana*, his hands displaying the *bodhiyagrimudrā* (*byang-chub-mchog phyag-rgya*), a gesture expressing the full possession of supreme knowledge and the most complete realization of *bodhi*. His rear head, the second at the right of the central one, is painted in profile in conformity with the current convention, and the central headdress culminates with an ornament in the shape of *triratna* (triple jewel) topped by a *vajra* (thunderbolt-diamond). A long scarf running along the loins and forming two large symmetrical loops lies upon the large rounded shoulders of the god. His rounded face is finely outlined and his eyes, with the eyelids lowered to express a wholly interior look, have a narrow and wavy outline. The thin and arched eyebrows almost join the root of the nose which is narrow and straight, with clearly outlined nostrils. The mouth, corners slightly upturned, seems to smile faintly, whereas the slight turgidness of the lips is delicately drawn by very fine traits.

His neck-ornament (*mgul-rgyan*) is a threefold golden necklace whose outer circle, richly festooned and set with stones, covers the upper part of the chest, whereas his garland (*do-shal*), in the shape of a single string of pearls, falls from the shoulders onto the naked bust down to the navel. The armlets, bracelets and anklets show the same pattern as the necklace, each of these ornaments being formed by two thin rings and by a third one bearing in its centre a decoration of gems piled in a triangular shape. The plain motif of this decoration occurs again at the centre of the bejewelled belt which girdles the god's waist, forming two symmetrical prongs pointing upwards. The large round earrings show a similar motif in the lower part resting on the shoulders, and are further characterized by a sort of inside lock with a vaguely vegetal shape.

The deity is framed in a *torana* of a clearly Newar origin. Two orders of small club-shaped columns come out as vegetal stems from golden vases, separated at their junction by the corolla of a lotus. The usual motifs of stylized and golden leaves appear at the sides of the small columns, while other lotus flowers and buds, like shoots emerging from bracts, add to the floral character of the decoration. At the top of the columns, the corollas of two blue lotuses bear small capitals supporting *makaras* (marine monsters, the vehicle of Varuṇa), whose very long feathered tails draw large golden scrolls on each side. At the centre of the *torana* a small horned *garūḍa* (mythical bird, the vehicle of Viṣṇu) holds in his beak two snakes reaching the scrolls with their coils.

The image of plate 3, which is painted on the narrow northern wall of chapel 3E b', is very similar to the previous one. It reproduces Vairocana on the lion throne in the aspect described in the *Karmamāṇḍala*, which belongs to the same second section of the *Vajraśekharatantra*. Slight differences are met in the shape of the crown and of the earrings, which have no inside locks. Two strips of cloth, perhaps the ends of the belt knotted at the back, emerge from the sides and fall on the thighs, ending in a lily-shape.

As in the previous case, the halo and nimbus, both with a horseshoe shape, have edges richly decorated with motifs of stylized golden flames, perhaps a symbol of radiating light. Halo and nimbus are of different colours, with an even background, while the backdrop of the *torana* shows the typically Newar motif of thin and closely intertwined vegetal scrolls worked *en camaieu* in red on red. The *torana* itself is different from the previous one because its arch, still resting upon small club-shaped columns separated by double corollas of lotus flowers, does not include the usual mythical animals, but is entirely made up of vegetal motifs, stylized leaves and golden tendrils. A peculiarity of this image is represented by the triangular projections emerging next to the junction between halo and nimbus. Such projections, which have a long history and have been interpreted either as flames indicating the *tapas* (warmth) produced by the ascetic or as structural elements of
the back of the throne, are in this case made up by pyramidal heaps of jewels.

This plate, like the previous ones, allows us to discern clearly the features of the bodhyagrimudrā which differentiates the representation of Vairocana in the Vajradhatumāṇḍala from that of the same deity in the fundamental mandala of the Durgapatisādhana-tantra, where Vairocana displays the samādhirūpā (the gesture of meditation). The bodhyagrimudrā does not symbolize the propagation of the dharma, but the aspect of the knowledge of Vairocana as supreme deity, hence the knowledge of all the buddhas taken as a whole, which is, furthermore, a militant knowledge because it represents the power of destroying passions in this world. This mudrā is performed here by surrounding the forefinger of the left hand with the thumb and index of the right hand joined in a ring and with the middle and ring fingers of the same hand bent in a similar way, while both little fingers remain stretched, extending outwards. There is, therefore, a slight difference from the kindred mudrā of the previous plate, where only the thumb, middle and ring fingers of the right hand are closed upon the finger of the left hand, while the forefinger and little finger both remain stretched in a manner which is slightly reminiscent of the threatening gesture (tarjanimudrā), and which is perhaps meant to conjure up the militant character of Vairocana’s knowledge. Both plates show the differences between the Tibetan version of this most important mudrā and its Japanese version, in which Dainichi Nyorai tightly holds the forefinger of his left hand with the right hand, while the left hand itself is clenched in a fist, with its back, rather than the palm, turning outwards (Saunders 1985, pp. 102-107). Another important feature of the bodhyagrimudrā in these two paintings of the sKu-'bum is the presence of a vajra resting vertically upon the tip of the left forefinger.

Plate 4 reproduces the figure of Mahāvairocana as painted on the southern wall inside temple 3E and drawn from the central mandala of the Vajraśekharatantra, which is devoted to the Family of the Tathāgata. From an iconographic point of view this figure is in all respects similar to the previous ones, except for the more precious jewels adorning it, especially noticeable in the large decorative motifs of the armlets and anklets, as well as in the decoration of the belt. Vairocana sits in vajrāsana (with tightly crossed legs and both soles turned upwards) on a multicoloured lotus with composite petals of a highly elaborate structure, resting upon a polygonal throne in whose base are depicted two elephants on the front side, and two lions on the other two visible sides. It is known that the polygonal throne does not belong to the Indian tradition, but that it made its appearance very early in the Buddhist iconography of Tang China, and more particularly at Dunhuang (Auboyer 1941, pp. 45-58).

A peculiarity of this painting is the inclusion of the deity inside a temple with a multistorey roof surmounted by small stupas and placed among trees in flower. This temple is reminiscent of certain Pala miniature paintings and in many respects can be compared with the one reproduced in a beautiful thang-ka of Tārā in the Cleveland Museum, which Pal believes to have probably been executed in Tibet by a Newar painter and to show some affinities with the paintings of Gyantse (Pal 1984, pl. 18). It is interesting to notice how in the wall painting in the sKu-'bum the adherence to the Newar model is, in a way, stressed even further, because the trilobate arch framing the figure of Vairocana rests upon a fourfold order of columns with the usual club-shaped aspect, connected to each other by double corollas of lotus flowers joined with golden bands. On the other hand, one cannot help seeing in the aspect, a bit too rigidly frontal, of the two Bodhisattvas in the side niches a sort of well-meant but imperfect imitation of the Newar masters by the Tibetan painter, which is particularly obvious in the little harmonious tribhairagā (triple bending) of Vajradharma.

Another figure of Mahāvairocana is painted at the centre of the Dharmanata-sādhana-māṇḍala on the southern inner wall of temple 3W (plate 5). White, four-headed (the rear head is in this case represented by doubling the outlines on the left side of the deity) and with his hands displaying the bodhyagrimudrā, the god bears at the centre of his chest the image of the Adibuddha-Mañjuśrī. This supreme incarnation of gnosis is depicted with four heads in the colours of the four directions, surmounted by the white head of Vairocana, the synthesis of the Cosmic Buddhas, and with eight arms. He brandishes four swords with his right hands, while
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

supporting four copies of the Prajñāpāramitā with his left hands, and in turn bears on his heart a tiny figure of Mañjuśrījanasattva with six heads and two hands. Here we are facing an iconography of the highest interest, of which no examples are so far known to us except those collected in the skU-'bum (partially documented in the following plates), which originated from the interpretation of some commentaries to the Namasamgiti and which we have discussed elsewhere in greater detail (Lo Bue and Ricca 1991, p. 216 ff.): one of many examples of the extraordinary importance of the paintings in the skU-'bum as a source of information on the iconography of Tibetan Buddhism.

Plate 5 is also interesting for other iconographic and stylistic features which distinguish it from the previous ones. The crown is reduced to a narrow golden band, decorated with three rosettes laying bare the top of the head. An unusually tall usniṣa with an almost cylindrical shape stands upon the very low and flat hair, while small locks appear on the forehead below the crown. All trace of jewelry is wanting (the belt itself has no decoration of gold or gems), probably to indicate that we are dealing here with a representation of the deity in the dharmaśākya. The lunar disc rests upon the double corolla of a lotus. The lion throne bears at the sides of its back a series of mythical figures: starting from the base, an elephant, a rampant lion and a nyāla (a mythical beast with lion's and gryphon's features) ridden by a human figure. Such figures are typical of the torāṇas in Pāla style (Huntington 1984) and are present in the archaeological finds of Nalanda (Paul 1987), but are already found in a more or less complete form in Indian works of the Gupta period. Two makanas, with the usual exuberant development of feathered tails, rest on the slanting ends of the top crossbar of the throne whereas, on the top of the arch drawn by the latter, there is a horned figure of a garūda with a human body, with bent legs and outspread arms and wings. Two nāgārājas (serpent kings) with human chests and heads and long coiled snake tails are placed at the latter’s sides.

A particularly clear view of the figure of the Adibuddha-Mañjuśrī is provided by plate 6, reproducing the image of Ratnasambhava according to the commentaries of the Nāmasamgiti. This image is painted on the western wall of chapel 3Wb’. Comparison with the Adibuddha of plate 5 allows us to determine the criteria which are followed when representing this perceptible form of the Absolute: the main face here displays the yellow colour which is proper to the southern quarter and to Ratnasambhava himself, who presides over it, whereas in the previous case it was of the blue colour which belongs to Akṣobhya and the eastern quarter. Furthermore, the tiny figure placed at the centre of the Adibuddha’s heart, also of a yellow colour, can be identified as the jñānasattva Vāgīśvara. The iconographic rule followed here can be easily reconstructed: the figure of the Adibuddha, summing up the Four Cosmic Buddhas in his fourfold face and expressing their synthesis in the white head of Vairocana on top, is oriented according to the quarters of space and is seen from the inside of each quarter with a face of the corresponding colour. Since the Adibuddha contains in himself the germ of all possible knowledge, the various aspects in which the latter manifests itself are characterized by the corresponding jñānasattvas, incarnating particular aspects of supreme wisdom.

The figure of Ratnasambhava, adorned with the bodhisattva crown and the jewels which are typical of the manifestations of the sambhogakāya, sits in vajrāsana upon a lunar disc, on the horse throne. Between the lunar disc and the throne is placed the corolla of a lotus flower opening upwards, with rather elaborate multi-coloured petals, like those in plate 4. The left hand rests on the lap with the palm turned upwards, while the right hand displays the varadamudrā (the boon-giving gesture) showing a flaming triratna on the palm.

A feature of this painting, as of others which we shall see later, is the absence of a toraṇa: both halo and nimbus are entirely included in a horseshoe-shaped aura which starts from the lunar disc and whose background is worked in red upon red with an intricate pattern of motifs vaguely inspired by vegetal tendrils, in a manner similar to that found for the backdrops of the toraṇas in the previous plates. This particular treatment of the background, and the absence of the decoration with golden flames on the edge of the aura, seem to characterize the latter rather as a background abstractly cut-up in space, than as a further representation of the deity’s radiance.
Two bent wooden projections turning upwards depart from the upper edge of the nimbus, bifurcating at the end where they are transformed into supports of big flaming jewels. In such wooden elements one can recognize the ends of the top crossbar delimiting the back of the throne, as is confirmed by the fabrics wrapped around them and falling on both sides in skilfully set folds. Bent ends of this or of a similar kind trace their origin to paintings widely spread in China from at least the 12th century in the iconography of the arhats. A thang-kha in the British Museum recently shown at San Francisco (Rhie and Thurman 1991, pp. 76-79) offers a whole range of thrones and seats of that sort. Similar curvilinear motifs, generally terminating in a dragon or phoenix head, but in some instances also in a jewel, may be found here at Gyantse in the seats of the siddhas and Sa-skya-pa masters gathered in the Lam-'bras-lha-khang.

An interesting feature of this motif in the painting under consideration lies in the relief and dimension taken by the flaming jewels and in their position at the junctions of the halo with the nimbus. This seems to reveal that our present doubts concerning the interpretation of the well-known “flames” at the sides of the nimbus were already present from at least the 15th century and that the painters working at Gyantse meant to overcome such difficulty of interpretation with a true “knight’s move”, by merging the symbol of the flame and the structural element of the back of the throne into one synthetic representation.

A solution somehow similar to the previous one is found in the painting on the southern wall of chapel 3Wa’ (plate 7). The deity depicted here is Amoghasiddhi in the aspect described in Māñjuśrīmitra’s Nāma-saṅgitiyātīti, that is green, with the left hand resting upon his lap and the right one raised to the height of the heart, displaying the abhayamudra (the gesture of reassurance) and supporting the viśvavośira (double thunderbolt, crossed vajra) on the palm. The god sits in vajrāsana on a throne with two kimnaras (mythical celestial musician, half-bird, half-human in form), having the function of Atlases, and shows on his chest the image of the Ādibuddha with the central face green, bearing in turn the jñānasattva Jñānakāya painted in a hardly discernible way at the centre of his heart.

The flaming jewels supported by the projections of the throne are the starting point of a series of spirals, partly flames and partly vegetal scrolls, which rise to draw a sort of simplified and slightly contrived torāṇa where the mythical creatures generally used to provide the structure of the arch with their fantastic shapes are altogether missing.

A recurring feature in the paintings of the 3Ku-'bum, which plate 7 allows us to illustrate, is the decorative band which defines their upper edge. This is a rhythmically repeated motif, made up of festoons of pearls which, together with stylized tendrils, hang at the sides of the mouths of small kṛttimukhas (“face of glory”, stylized lion’s face). In the half-circle drawn by each of such festoons, the corolla of a lotus flower supports a five-pronged vajra standing vertically and, on the latter’s top, are the combined symbols of the sun and moon, which alternate with the kṛttimukhas in the upper edge of the band. Other pairs of simpler festoons fall from the crescent down to the sides of the vajra, interlacing with the previous ones, whereas a further complex decorative motif, still emerging from the mouth of the kṛttimukha, occupies the extant free spaces.

Another element which deserves some attention, for it seems to represent a specific stylistic feature of the paintings in the 3Ku-'bum (and which can be found in plates 2 and 6), is the peculiar drawing of the clouds in the upper section of the painting. It is a layered structure, created by horizontal lamellar clouds from which fleecy clouds depart irregularly, curling sometimes upwards, sometimes downwards. Such fleecy clouds often join the adjacent layers and isolate elongated hollows, of a more or less rectangular shape, which are placed in such a way as to make up a sort of network. This layout, which is found in several other paintings of this monument and is often treated in a more geometric and rigid manner than in the instances seen so far, has been indicated by Béguin as one of the elements allowing the differentiation of the features in the wall paintings at Gyantse from the “Nepalizing” Sa-skya-pa style (Béguin 1990, p. 12). Béguin very effectively describes these kinds of clouds with the term verniculaire and attributes a manifest Chinese origin to them.
It should be pointed out, however, that if the bursting of clouds into Tibetan painting is certainly of Chinese origin, such irruption generally manifested itself in a different form, with soft and puffy clouds, often curling in scrolls similar to spirals of smoke or big question marks. On the other hand, that peculiar network of clouds and vapour is no longer found in the sinicizing painting of the following centuries, even though such painting abounds in clouds; in fact very few examples of a kindred stylization are known to us outside Gyantse. One such example is given by a painting in the skor-lam of the temple devoted to Yum-chen-mo in the monastery of Zhwa-lu, which Vitali attributes to the early 14th century (Vitali 1990, pl. 60), but which might be even later. Another example is provided by a thang-ka devoted to the mandala of Mahâcakra Vajrapâni, which, also on account of its other stylistic features, ought probably to be dated to the 15th century (Tucci 1949, p. 602 and pl. 218). It seems possible to suggest that we are dealing here with one of the features, however induced by Chinese models and anticipated by the wall paintings of Zhwa-lu, of what might be termed as the “school of Gyantse”. This term is employed here to indicate the blossoming of an artistic activity which ripened and developed at Gyantse, during the years of the construction and decoration of the dPal-'khor chos-sde, out of the meeting and reciprocal influence of masters coming from various places.

The figure of Vajrasattva painted on the western wall of the same chapel may be related to Mañjuśrimitra’s vṛtti, from which the mandala of Amoghasiddhi is also drawn. He too displays in his heart the image of the Ādi-Buddha and, inside it, the white figure of the jñānasattva Arapacana (plate 8). We are always within the fold of conceptions which, viewing the Nāmasamgiti as a tantra explanatory of the Tattwasamgraha, see in Mañjuśrī the embodiment of the gnosis and therefore the “father and mother of all the Buddhas”, the primordial and eternal Buddha from which all the buddhas emanate.

Vajrasattva, white, seated in vajrāsana on the lion throne and endowed with all the bodhisattva ornaments, holds the ghaṇṭā (bell) in his left hand resting upon the hip with the palm turned upwards, and the vajra in the right at the height of his chest. Both hands show the forefinger and little finger extended in a gesture conjuring up the tarjanimudrā, although this does not give an impression of threat because of the absence of tension in the limbs and because of the suppleness of the lines outlining the fingers.

An element which is iconographically differentiated with respect to the previous plates is provided by the radiant nature of the aura surrounding the nimbus and halo. This bright orange-coloured aura is streaked with green, blue and red sinuous “rays”, alternating with thin golden winding lines. It is interesting to note the different representation of rays of light in western and eastern art: the former underlines the rectilinear character of the propagation of light, whereas the latter seems to perceive its vibrational nature. The usual flaming jewels at the junctions of the halo and nimbus appear also in this case. In this, as in the previous paintings, the jewel is represented by a pearl whose bright convexity is rendered with a motif in the shape of a tadpole or of a swirl which, in other instances, takes on exactly the shape of the Chinese yin-yang, the symbol of forces opposing and integrating each other in nature that Tibetans interpret as a symbol of the overcoming of duality.

A final example of a deity bearing the image of the Ādi-Buddha on the chest is given in plate 9, which reproduces the figure of Vairocana, seated in vajrāsana and with his hands displaying the bodhyāgrimaudrā, drawn from the Mañjuśrimāyājala and painted on the western wall of chapel 3W. In this case, the nimbus and halo are surrounded by floral and vegetal motifs. In particular at the sides of the halo, surmounted by a large tree in flower, there are two beautiful trees which, while achieving a certain degree of symmetry, have spread branches and foliage drawn with a remarkable freedom.

Akin to Mahāvairocana is the aspect of Mañjuśrī known as Dharmañātuvāgīśvara, which is painted on the innermost northern wall of the temple 3W, in accordance with Mañjukriti’s commentary to the Nāmasamgiti (plate 10). The god, entirely white, with four heads and eight arms, is seated in vajrāsana on the lion throne. The hair coming out of his five-pronged crown shows a slight inflexion in the middle of the forehead and an outline of tiny curls which almost appear to be part of the ornament. The large earrings reaching the shoulders show
Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

an exuberant development of motifs which were only in embryo in the previous instances: they are no longer more or less decorated closed rings, but spirals opening outwards in an elaborate vegetal motif on the end of which a flaming jewel is inserted.

The two central hands, with very long and tapering fingers, elegantly display the dharmacakramudrā (the gesture of the exposition of the doctrine), with a masterly articulation of the wrists. The other three pairs of arms bear, from bottom to top and in the right and left hands respectively, a vajra and a ghanṭā, a śāra (arrow) and a dhanu (bow), a khaḍga (sword) and a pustaka (book). The dark blue halo and the green nimbus circumscribe the figure in the usual manner, but the halo shows at its top a projection which, however merely hinted at, partially modifies the usual horseshoe-shaped outline.

A trend towards an evolution of the decorative elements into vegetal shapes, which has already been pointed out with reference to the earrings, manifests itself overwhelmingly in the structure of the torāṇa. The club-shaped columns of the Newar tradition, which soberly hinted at the arboreal metamorphosis of the supporting elements of the arch, are here translated into great green stalks which uncoil sinuously from vases supported by lotus flowers. The link with the original shape is maintained by the stylized golden leaves flanking the stalk, by the manner in which the two orders of columns are joined one above the other through a corolla inserted between them, and by the insertion of a tiny capital supporting the hamsa (a sort of wild goose, the vehicle of Brahmā), from whose tail the arch develops. But even the white hamsas, which for their position and function take us back to the Indo-Newar tradition, show that the curvilinear elements of the drawing have been stressed, and their long S-shaped neck can be traced back to Chinese models. The rest of the arch is entirely made up of light green and golden tendrils, inside which are placed corollas of flowers in full bloom. Large flowers and clouds of clear Chinese inspiration surround the torāṇa, standing out against a dark background, which is, in turn, spread with tiny corollas in the manner of a Newar background.

Similar solutions have been adopted for the torāṇa (if such denomination may be still applied in these cases) surrounding the figures of Lokeśvara and Vajrasattva reproduced in plates 11 and 12, both drawn from the first section of the Paramādhyanātāntara. In the former, the stems of the columns are barely recognizable in the stalks of the flowers, which no longer uncoil from vases, but start directly from the big central lotus supporting the deity. The ancient model, however, is echoed by the hamsas resting upon the corollas blooming at the top of such stalks and by the arch still unfolding from their tails. In the latter plate, on the other hand, there is virtually no trace of the old structure and the whole is shown as a marvellous climber, perhaps the wish-fulfilling creeper, surrounding the figure of the god as a garland.

This great exuberance of vegetal and floral shapes is especially perceptible in the depiction of the lotus emerging from the waters to support the deity placed at the centre of the maṇḍala. In this connection, an extraordinary example is provided by the detail of plate 13, drawn from the maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana painted on the innermost eastern wall of temple 3N. The mountains in the foreground are here depicted in the Chinese manner, quite remote from the abstract stylization of geometrical rocks, derived from the Newar idiom. The waters are rendered with the traditional tangle of humpy waves, in which black stripes outline in a new way the curling of the crest which, however, is not yet underlined by the whiteness of the foam, as in the following pictorial production. A splendid couple of red-crested cranes dance on the golden ground surrounding the lake. In this scene the break-up of symmetry, the suppleness of shapes, the dancing attitude of one of the two cranes and the stretching forward of the other (with its neck arched in a U-shape and the unfolding of its wing-quills and tail feathers) leave no doubt about the Ming character of the model which inspired them. It is very likely that this model was obtained from the precious fabrics brought back to Tibet by the frequent missions which, at the end of the 14th and during the first half of the 15th century, went to China to pay homage to the emperor. It is known that in China cranes are an auspicious symbol, and in this case the well-wishing connotation is strengthened by the pomegranate at the centre of the composition. Even the
beautiful red flowers placed at the sides of the central stalk, while unconcerned with a faithful realistic rendering, seem to conjure up the shape of the pomegranate flowers.

The features common to the decorative floral aspects of the last paintings, as well as the progressive abandonment of the traditional shapes of the torana for a more and more original invention, might induce us to recognize the hand of a particular painter who made the training-school occasioned by work on the sKu-'bum the abode of his personal artistic evolution. Unfortunately this cannot be firmly established, because the name of the artist is missing.

The painting of plate 11, on the eastern wall of the inner portion of temple 3S, depicts Lokesvara seated in vajrasana on the corolla of a lotus opening upwards. His left hand, resting on the hip, holds the stalk of a lotus opening its large red corolla at the height of the heart, where the right hand grazes the petals of the flower to "make it bloom" (vikāsayaṁimudrā). As in the figure of Vajrasattva in plate 8, a slight inclination of the trunk corresponds here to the non-symmetrical disposition of the arms. As in the classical tribhaṅga posture of standing figures in the Indian tradition, the deviation from the vertical is compensated for by the gracious leaning of the head in the opposite direction, which implies a partial disaxing of the crown with respect to the headdress, whose top, ending in a jewel, appears to be bound to the central axis of the composition.

An aspect which partially differentiates this image from the others which have been examined previously is the accentuated presence of ribbons and scarves unfolding in wide swirls. The scarf is no longer laid to cover both shoulders, but is placed across the left one in the direction of the right hip, with a pattern of V-shaped folds in the upper part and a knot at the centre of the chest from which long snakelike ribbons depart. The belt too is realized with a band of material which has a wide knot at the front, partially covering an underlying golden belt. Another feature of this figure is the fusion of the nimbus and the halo in one trilobate outline circumscribing a background in red and gold brocade. The whole is surrounded by a radiant aura with wide, blue and green stripes, furrowed by thin golden serpentes.

A similar description of the positioning of the trunk, arms and head can also be given for the figure of Vajrasattva painted on the wall opposite the previous one and reproduced in plate 12. In this case, the five points of the crown contain the images of the five Jinas and the hair coming out of it on the forehead is arranged in small waves or festoons, rather than in a contour of locks. The left hand resting on the hip holds a ghanta turned upwards in an almost vertical position, while a red vajra is placed vertically in an unstable equilibrium on the tip of the middle-finger of the right hand brought up to the height of the heart in the rather unusual tripatākamudrā (the "triple-flag" gesture, indicating dominion over the three worlds).

The figures of many other deities painted in the chapels of this same third floor of the sKu-'bum, however diverse from an iconographic point of view, are stylistically similar. This seems to be evidence of the close correlations which are automatically established between the nature of the texts (in this instance, the Tattvasamgraha and its commentaries) and the emotional and aesthetic atmosphere of their pictorial representations.

Plate 14 again shows an image of Vairocana, with one head and his hands displaying the samādhi mūdṛā as described in the Śrīvajramanḍalālaṁkāratantra, painted on the western wall of chapel 3Wb. One should note, besides the fineness of the details in the jewels and crown, the suppleness of the folds shown by the stole hanging from the shoulders and the vigorous formalism with which the ends of the same stole are interlaced at the feet of the deity in vajrāsana.

The following plates 15-19 are all devoted to the Great Bodhisattvas. Plate 15 reproduces the pacific aspect of Vajrapaṇi at the centre of the maṇḍala of the Ten Guardians of the Directions (Śakra, Yama, Varuṇa, Yakṣa, Śaṅkara, Agni, Rakṣasa, Vāyu, Āditya, Indra), deriving from the first section of the Durgātipariṣodhanatantra and painted on the northern wall of chapel 3Nb. The attitude and attributes of this Bodhisattva are the same as those shown by the figure of Vajrasattva in plate 12. It should be pointed out that Vajrapaṇi, like Vajrasattva,
is depicted here in the *vajrāsana* posture, whereas all the other Bodhisattvas of this group sit in their usual *virāsana* ("noble posture", with the legs folded but not crossed and with only the sole of one foot visible). However, the images of the five Jinas which were present in Vajrasattva’s crown are now missing, and there is no trace of those sumptuous vegetal scrolls which described a kind of *torana* around Vajrasattva’s aura. The usual endings of the throne in the shape of flaming jewels, and the cloth of embroidered material set on its back, are visible here too. The images of the two great Indian *paññātas* and translators Anandagarbha and Abhayākara-gupta are painted above the deity’s shoulders.

Plate 16 reproduces the figure of Avalokiteśvara at the centre of the *māṇḍala* of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas, drawn from the *Manjuśrīnāmasamgiti* and painted on the southern wall of the front part of temple 3W. Avalokiteśvara sits in *virāsana* on the lunar disc resting upon a great lotus with quite elaborate many-coloured petals. His right arm stretches forward with the hand displaying the *varadamudrā* and his trunk is tilted slightly leftwards, whereas the figure appears to be elegantly re-balanced by the slight inclination of the head in the opposite direction and by the left hand withdrawn to the chest in the *vitarkamudrā* (the gesture of argumentation). Each of his two hands holds the stalk of a lotus flower whose white corolla opens at the height of the deity’s shoulders. Behind the five-pointed tiara one can clearly see the red figure of Amitābha, the head of the Padma Family, placed upon the *jatāmukūṭa* (the hair tied up in the form of a tiara), terminating with a little *cakra* (wheel) at the top. Five deities belonging to the group of the krodhas of the ten directions, namely Śumbharāja (nadir), Trailokyavijaya (north-east), Padmāntaka (west), Vighnāntaka (north) and Paramāśva (north-west), are placed in the lower portion of the painting. The presence of Trailokyavijaya and Paramāśva for the two intermediate directions allows us to recognize that those deities belong to the set of krodhas appearing in the *māṇḍala* of Dharmadātuvāgīśvara.

Plates 17 and 18 reproduce the paintings which are found on the southern wall of temple 3S, at the two sides of the entrance door. The former shows the figure of Vajrasandhi (also Vajramuṣṭi) at the centre of the Sixteen Vajrabodhisattvas, the latter that of Gaganagañja at the centre of the twelve deities of his cycle and of the four symbols of the “heavenly treasure” (gold, pearls, rubies and coins). Both *māṇḍalas* belong to the great esoteric *māṇḍala* described in the first section of the Śripaṃḍātyatantra, which is explanatory of the Tattvasamgraha.

In the figure of Vajrasandhi, one should note the particular *mudrā* with which each of the two hands brought to the height of the chest and with interlaced fingers, clasps a red-coloured *vajra* between the thumb and the forefinger. That seems to be the interpretation given in the Gyantse religious circles (in fact the same *mudrā* recurs several times in other representations of this Bodhisattva) to the iconographic description in the *Nispannayogāvalī*, according to which the two joined hands tightly hold a five-pronged *vajra* (Mallmann 1975, p. 398). A quite different interpretation of that *mudrā* is given, for example, in the small bronze of the Qianlong period belonging to the Baoxiang in Beijing, in which Vajramuṣṭi holds a single *vajra* with his two hands resting in his lap (Clark 1937, 2, p. 145, 4854).

The figure of Gaganagañja too is iconographically interesting, being again quite different from its description as provided in the Sādhanamālā and in the *Nispannayogāvalī*, both because of the many-coloured aspect of the Bodhisattva, who retains the prescribed golden yellow colour only in his face and feet, and because of his position and attributes. In fact, his attitude is still basically traceable to that of Vajrasattva, except for the replacement of the *vajrāsana* with the *virāsana* and of the *vajra* with the *viśvavajra*. Like Vajrasattva, in this painting Gaganagañja holds the *ghanţa* turned upwards in the left hand resting upon the thigh, and the *viśvavajra* on the tip of the middle-finger of the right hand raised before chest in the *tripatākamudrā*. Here, however, the inclinations of the trunk and of the head prove to be inverted, and the possibility of such an inversion leads us to believe that those inclinations must actually be regarded not so much as the natural effect of the non-symmetrical arrangement of the two hands in the *mudrā* (or of the two legs in *virāsana*), but rather as an iconographic convention adopted for the representation of *bodhisattvas*. That appears to be confirmed by the fact that a similar attitude is shown in a specular way by the figure of Vajrasandhi in spite of the symmetrical
character of his mudrā. Vice versa, it may be be seen that neither Ratnasambhava’s varadāmudrā in plate 6 nor Amoghasiddhi’s vitarkamudrā in plate 7 affect the rigid frontal verticality of those Buddhas with their asymmetry.

It is conceivable that the above iconographic convention has its origin in the tri bluetootha generally characterizing the figures of the two bodhisattvas placed at the sides of the Buddha in the typical layouts of international Pāla art, as is confirmed by the symmetrical character of Vajrasandhi’s and Gaganagañja’s attitudes in their position at the sides of the entrance. This suppleness in the representation of the bodhisattvas in the sKu-’bdum, which is also retained when their figures are placed at the centre of maṇḍalas of their own, seems to have a deep motivation. The gently bending body appears as a tangible sign of kindness, just as the slightly reclining head is perceived as a sign of attention and receptiveness towards the faithful. The position of the bodhisattva thus characterized seems to manifest his merciful and relieving function much better than a symmetrical and hieratic attitude can do. In short, it seems that a specific expressive value must be recognized in the adoption of this iconographic feature, just as an expressive value is recognized in the didha (the posture of an archer drawing a bow, stretching leftwards) and pratyālīdhika (a posture symmetric with the preceding one, stretching rightwards) of wrathful deities, which are indicative of a militant and warlike attitude.

Plate 19 is still devoted to a manḍala which is part of the same great esoteric maṇḍala of the Śrīparamādhyatantra (first section), to which reference has already been made for plates 17 and 18. In this case we have the figure of Lokeshvara (also Lokanātha), white, painted on the northern wall of chapel 3Sa, surrounded by the twelve deities of his cycle, sitting in virāśana on a lotus with many-coloured petals, in the same attitude as described for the Bodhisattvas in the previous plates and displaying the vikāsayanimudrā. The jewels adorning this image of Lokeshvara appear particularly rich and elaborate. The crown is enriched by the presence of large red corollas at the base of each of its five points, and the central point contains a red figure of Anuttabha enclosed within elegant vegetal scrolls. The jatāmukuta in which the Bodhisattva’s hair is gathered up culminates in the corolla of a red lotus supporting a red flaming jewel. The throne itself is sumounted by an aśoka tree, also with red flowers.

In this case the back of the throne, rather different from all those so far met, is fully visible. Its basic wooden structure, which is again reminiscent of certain seats of the arhats in the Chinese tradition, frames some panels painted red en camarieu following the Newar usage. For a similar conception of the throne one may refer to the already mentioned thang-ka in the British Museum, but thrones with those features are found in the sKu-’bdum itself, as seats of great lamas in the paintings of some of the chapels on the fourth floor devoted to the Tibetan lineages. Other thrones of the same type are visible, still at Gyantse, in the paintings of the Lam-’bras-ha-khang illustrating Sa-skya Pañ-chen’s and ‘Phags-pa’s biographies and the former’s meeting with the Mongol prince Godan. Besides the general pattern of these thrones, mention should be made of the star-like shape of the metal studs fixing the wooden frame at the intersections in all these paintings at Gyantse. Studs with a similar shape are found in the seat of the arhat Bhadra in a 15th century thang-ka which Pal regards as painted in eastern Tibet and inspired by a Chinese model (Pal 1984, pl. 57). In short it seems that in this case too, we are confronted with the Tibetan evolution of a motif of Chinese origin, which was fixed at Gyantse in a pattern that must have exerted its influence on the thang-ka painting of the period.

Plate 20, the last one here devoted to the paintings of the third floor, hence to the maṇḍalas of the yogatantras centred around the Tattvasamgraha and its commentaries, raises some problems of interpretation. It reproduces one of the three figures painted on the southern wall of chapel 3Na, which the inscription locates at the centre of the maṇḍala of the four Cakravartins, one of the six esoteric maṇḍalas drawn from the second section of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhana.
All uncertainty should apparently be removed by the inscription itself, which specifies “dbus-na rDo-rje-sems-dpa’/g.yas-na Kun-tu-bzang-po/g.yon-na bDe-ba-chen-po” (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 59) and which thus defines the deity reproduced in this plate, placed at Vajrasattva’s left, as bDe-ba-chen-po (Mahāsukha). As a further confirmation, the same name appears in black on the red edge of the central petal of the corolla of the lotus upon which the deity sits in vajrāsana. And yet that name cannot be matched with any of the deities listed in the many catalogues which are available today. There exists one Mahāsukha (Buddha) among the small bronzes reproduced in Clark’s Buddhist pantheons (Clark 1937, 2, p. 141, 4B37), but it refers to an aspect of Śāṃvara corresponding to the Tibetan bDe-mchog-dkar-po which has nothing in common with the image in question nor can find a place within the Sarvadurgatiparīśodhana. On the other hand, it seems that a trivial confusion between bDe-ba-chen-po and bDe-ba-can, due to a possible transcription error, must be excluded. Sukhavati Avalokiteśvara, whose description is not found in the Sādhanamālā, but in the later Dharmaśasāṅgagraha by Amṛtananda (Bhattacharyya 1985, p. 50) is, in fact, white, with three heads and six arms, sitting in lalitāsana (“agreeable posture”, with the left leg folded on the seat and the right one hanging down; also ardha-prasthānākha: “half-sitting posture”) and embracing Tārā; the only remote point of contact is the presence of an arrow and a bow among his attributes. An image of Sukhavati Avalokiteśvara with one head and six arms, embracing Tārā, is illustrated among the five hundred xylographs making up the “Narthang Pantheon” (Chandra 1987, p. 289, No. 764), but the arrow and bow are not found in that xylograph, nor in the image corresponding to the same name which is found among the 108 painted aspects of Avalokiteśvara in the Jana Bāhā devoted to the White Matsyendranāth in Kathmandu.

On the other hand, the iconographic features of that figure correspond exactly to those of Vajrarāga (one of the Sixteen Vajrabodhisattvas), red, with one head and two arms, of a peaceful aspect, endowed with the ornaments of a bodhisattva and seated in virāsana, holding the arrow in his right and the bow in his left hand according to sādhana No. 19 in the Nispannayogavali, or else the arrow “drawn”, that is, stuck in the bow, according to sādhana No. 2 in the Kriyāsāṅgagraha (Mallmann 1975, p. 397). These two versions are paralleled by a small bronze in the Baoxiang lou Pantheon and by a xylograph in the Zhu Fo Pusa Sheng Xiang Zan (Clark 1937, p. 120, 4A13; p. 272, No. 191). Furthermore, a statue of Vajrarāga corresponding exactly to the painting of plate 20 is found on this very floor of the sKu-’bum, among the four bodhisattvas surrounding the great statue of Aksobhya in temple 3E. But the Tibetan name for Vajrarāga is rDo-rje-chags-pa and not bDe-ba-chen-po.

The above contradiction might perhaps be explained if one considers the text of the Durgtiparīśodhanatāntra related to the maṇḍala of the four Cakravartins, as made available today in the beautiful edition by T. Skorupski (1983, pp. 230, 231). The Sanskrit text referring to the centre of the maṇḍala reads: “madhye vajraṃ samālīkhet / atha vā vajrasattvam tu samantabhadram mahāsukham” and the Tibetan version reads: “dbus su rdo rje bri bar bya / yang na rdo rje sems dpa’ ’am / kun tu bzang po bde ba che”, which Skorupski correctly translates: “in the centre he should draw Vajra(pañjī), or Vajrasattva, or Samantabhadra the great Bliss”, recognizing in bDe-ba-che an epithet of Samantabhadra.

Although this is a mere hypothesis, it is difficult to avoid the impression that whoever directed the operations in this chapel of the sKu-’bum mistakenly understood the first part of the sentence to mean: “in the centre he should draw Vajra, that is Vajrasattva” and therefore obtained the other two names of the triad from the twofold term Samantabhadra Mahāsukha. At that point the red colour, the arrow and the bow of Kāma (the Indian god of love and passion) would have led him to give shape to the supposed Mahāsukha adopting the image of Vajrarāga, one of the vajrabodhisattvas.

The Sixteen Vajrabodhisattvas are represented in the four central temples of this third storey of the sKu-’bum by statues arranged in groups of four around each jiña, and distributed according to the layouts of the Vajradhātumāṇḍala. In each group two of them are represented as standing at the sides of the Buddha and two, smaller and seated in virāsana, are placed in the upper corners of the back wall of the temple. The following plates reproduce the statues of Vajradharma, Vajrahetu and Vajrasattva. All three statues, representing the
Bodhisattvas in the classical *tribhaṅga* posture of the Indian tradition, are of exquisite workmanship, even though the partial repainting and the gross substitution of some attributes and ornaments slightly spoil their image. The abundant revarnishing with yellowish and glossy lacquers has unfortunately cancelled the patina which must have characterized them, and which is still visible at the base of the big central statues and in some parts of the thrones, where the supposed protection of the transparent varnish was not deemed necessary.

In the figures of Vajradharma and Vajrahetu (plates 21, 22) the close adherence to the Newar version of the post-Pāla style is obvious, and it is further confirmed by the small columns standing at their sides. In both, the chest is completely bare and the lower part of the body is covered with a transparent *paridhāna* (lower garment) leaving the legs perfectly visible, upon which a short richly decorated loincloth (*laṅgoti*), tightened at the hips with a bejewelled belt forming a point at the centre, is placed just below the navel. Furthermore, Vajrahetu also wears a hip sash decorated with a beautiful geometrical honeycomb motif. In both Bodhisattvas the headdress shows the classical rather tall conical shape, whereas locks of wavy hair fall on the shoulders at both sides.

The figure of Vajrasattva belonging to the group of statues around Aksobhya in temple 3E shows some differences from the previous ones. His shoulders are covered with a shawl (*uttariya*) and a no longer transparent *paridhāna* falls symmetrically along the two legs, forming typical U-shaped folds at the height of the knees. Furthermore, the dimensions of the head appear enlarged and a certain squaring is manifested in the face. Such a trend was already perceptible in the statue of Vajradharma which, for this very reason, did not appear to match perfectly that of Vajrahetu, which is placed on the other side of the central deity. On the whole, it seems possible to state that in the figure of Vajrasattva one may perceive the remote influence of certain Central Asian elaborations of the Indian model.

The shape of the costume is typically Indian in all the three statues, even though it lacks the Brahmical cord which is a component generally found in the *bodhisattva* figures in Pāla-Sena style. The cloth band emerging from underneath the belt falls over it at the front, either forming a single central drapery, or parting into two side loops, thus mixing two fashions which in Indian art appeared at different times. The armlets and bracelets are relatively plain, whereas the necklaces are very rich and elaborate. Those necklaces, albeit of a differing shape in each case, are all formed (according to a pattern which can already be recognized in many paintings at Dunhuang) by a rigid circular ring to which pendants are hooked, joined by garlands and arranged symmetrically around a larger central element.

Very similar features and heavier defacing are seen in the statue of Maitreya in temple 5S (plate 24) and that of Vajrasattva in temple 5W (plate 25).

With the following plates we proceed to images, still relating to the Great Bodhisattvas, which appear in the paintings of the chapels on the second storey, chiefly devoted to the *kriyātantras* and to the *caryātantras*. In these paintings we still find tantric aspects of Maṇjuśrī, but in particular we find a series of images illustrating some of the many aspects of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

Plate 26 reproduces the image of Mahārāja Maṇjuśrī painted on the western wall of chapel 2Nb', in accordance with the *سارواسات笈達起訛羅訶睏末帝* (*Sarvasattvavāsikaraṇaśamādi*). This aspect of the deity is white with pink shades along the outlines which create an appearance of relief, and is characterized by four heads and eight arms. The two heads at the right of the main one are respectively saffron-coloured and red; that at the left is orange-coloured. The two central arms support the arrow, brought with the right to the height of the chest, and the bow, held in the left resting on the hip. The attributes held in the other three pairs of hands are an *ainkuśa* (hook) and a *pāśa* (noose), a *khadga* and a *pustaka*, a *vajra* and a *ghaṅṭa*, from bottom to top.

Maṇjuśrī, adorned with all the *bodhisattva* ornaments and with a tall *jatāmukuta* swelling towards the top, is surrounded by a halo and a nimbus showing the usual flames at the points of intersection, and is surmounted by a suspended canopy, with long floating ribbons. The Bodhisattva sits in *vajrāsana* on a big lotus flower.
coming out of a lake surrounded by a square enclosure of walls, inside a niche with a red background made up of a trilobate arch resting on two columns which approximately follow the Newar model. At the upper end there are the figures of two masters on a background made up of the usual grid pattern of clouds, and in the lower register figures enclosed in a frame of vegetal tendrils, among which one may recognize three of the Eight Masters of the Horses (aśva-pati; rta-bdag).

The image of Dharmadhātuvaḍiṣvara Māṇjuśrī, deriving from the Dharmadhātuvaḍiṣvaraṇamaṇjuśrīmanḍala-vidhi, is painted on the northern wall of the same chapel 2Eβ' and reproduced in plate 27. This aspect of Māṇjuśrī is also white, endowed with four heads (all white) and eight arms, but the Bodhisattva retains the two central hands in the dharmacakravāra, while in the other three pairs of hands, he holds a vajra and a ghanta, an arrow and a bow, a sword and a book, from bottom to top.

Dharmadhātuvaḍiṣvara Māṇjuśrī sits in vajrāsana on a lotus flower whose petals show an excessively complicated structure, which impoverishes its aesthetic quality and symbolic value. Here too, as in the previous painting, one perceives some contrast between the formal elegance of the central figure and a certain roughness of the frame, a contrast which is probably indicative of the intervention of different hands. However, the redundance of shapes and colours achieves a pleasant result in the floral arch which, starting from the figures of two kinnaras, delimits the niche at the top.

The mahābodhisattva Samantabhadra, flanked by Maitreya and by Padmapāṇi, is represented in the group of statues making up the ideal centre of chapel 2Eβ, reproduced in plate 28. This is one of the bodhisattvas who were made objects of worship from a very early period. He appears at the head of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas in the manḍala of the Māṇjuśrīvimulakalpa, and is referred to in the 26th chapter of the Saddharma-puṇḍarīka.

One element of interest in these statues is the fact that Samantabhadra is represented on the back of an elephant, just as he is depicted, for example, in the paintings of the Stein collection in the British Museum, coming from Dunhuang and dating back to the 8th-9th centuries (Whitfield and Farrer 1990, p. 26, No. 3 and p. 28, No. 5; Karmay 1975, pp. 10-11, fig. 4). In that same form he proceeded from China to Japan, but no description of such kind seems to be available in the tantra collections (Mallmann 1975, p. 333). We are therefore confronted with an instance in which the artist, or the religious master overseeing the work, did not base himself directly upon the authority of a textual source, but upon the iconographic tradition which was vouched for through the centuries. The iconographic documents of this kind in China and in Japan show elephants with six tusks: in our instance the tusks have been broken, but from the extant stumps it seems that there were only two. The naturalistic intention which is found in the shape of the head and ears and in the harness itself is missing in the disproportionately short legs.

The Bodhisattva, yellow, sits in lalitāsana and holds a jewel resting upon a bunch of flowers (ratnamāṇjari) between his hands, before the chest. The tall five-pointed crown almost hides the jatākamukta culmination in a flaming jewel. The hair comes out in small regular waves below the crown and falls in long locks upon both shoulders. An unusual ornament seems to be represented by wide anklets coming down to surround the ankles. Those anklets, which are totally different from the armlets and bracelets, look like thin strings of pearls with bud-shaped pendants hanging on them, oddly upside down in the case of the right foot.

In spite of some repainting (the small makaras, pink with black dots, at the top of the columns are ugly) the basic tones which must originally have characterized all those sculptures seem to have been left basically unaltered. They are relatively sober tones, essentially based on the use of brown and green colours which recall Chinese pottery. The sobriety in the use of colours has, in this case, been respected to some extent in the torāṇa too, allowing a better appreciation of its quality and features.

Plate 29 reproduces the figure of Cittavīśramanāvalokiteśvara, surrounded by the Sixteen Bodhisattvas, deriving from the Mahāvairocanābhisambodhitantra and painted on the eastern wall of the same chapel 2Eβ'.
The deity, bare in the upper part of the body, bright white and completely deprived of ornaments, sits upon a lunar disc resting on a lotus, in a position which appears to be halfway between the lalitasana, in which the right leg is hanging from the seat, and the mahārājaliśasana (royal ease posture), in which the same leg is brought up to lay the foot on the seat and to support the right arm with the knee. The latter position is perhaps closer to our instance, as is suggested by the ease with which the right arm leans on the knee at the height of the wrist, letting the hand hang loose with the palm turned inwards, while the left arm supports the weight of the trunk stretching to the ground, with the hand hidden behind the bent leg. This attitude is found almost exclusively in certain aspects of Avalokiteśvara, such as Cintāmaṇi Avalokiteśvara, Śīrṣanāda Lokesvara and Lokanātha (Mallmann 1948, p. 254), and only a limited number of examples are extant in India (Pal 1967-68, pp. 39-48; Mukhopadhyay 1985, figs. 5 and 6). It is not inconceivable that those very forms of Avalokiteśvara inspired the adoption of such an attitude in the representation of Šrong-brtsan-sgam-po (who is regarded as a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara) in many Tibetan statues and paintings.

This posture had a wide diffusion in China during the Tang and Song periods and is matched by a drawing found by Sir Aurel Stein at Khara-khoto (K. K. II 013113d). In China first, and then in Japan, it underwent an interesting evolution through a variant which brought the right elbow to lean upon the raised knee, with the hand lifted to graze the cheek in a sort of anticipation of the famous “pensive Buddha”. Many Chinese examples of Shuiyue Guanyin (“water-moon” Avalokiteśvara), that is Avalokiteśvara like the moon reflecting in water, and the first forms of Nyō-iri Kwan-non (Cintāmaṇika Avalokiteśvara) in Japan belong to that evolution of the image of the Bodhisattva in a relaxed posture.

The simplicity and purity of lines of the image of plate 29, together with the complete absence of ornaments, suitably express the peace of mind which that form of the Bodhisattva conjures up.

The group of statues reproduced in plate 30 is found in chapel 2Sa’, which is devoted to Avalokiteśvara, with Mahākārūnikā (Śaḍākṣara Avalokiteśvara) at the centre, flanked by Śaḍākṣari Mahāvidyā on the right and Mahāmanidhara on the left. The Bodhisattva, white, sits in vajrasana on a double lotus and is endowed with four arms. His two central hands display the samputañjali-mudrā (a sort of modified añjali, the gesture of devotion and offering, with the hands placed cup-like and the tips of the thumbs touching each other) in front of the chest, and hold a lotus flower with a jewel in the middle, while the other two hands bear a rosary (the right) and the stalk of a lotus flower (the left). The jewel in the lotus is evocative of the six-syllable mantra from which the name Śaḍākṣara derives (om maṇi padme hūm). The two figures sitting in virūṣaṇa at the sides are both endowed with four arms, and show the same mudrā and the same attributes as the central one. Manidhara, white or pinkish, is the “jewel-bearer”, and Śaḍākṣari, yellow, is the embodiment of the mantra seen as the mystic condensation of supreme knowledge (mahāvidyā). Both these deities bear a lotus bud at the top of their headdress, whereas a flaming jewel is found on Avalokiteśvara’s jaṭāmukūṭa.

Although two of the minor figures’ arms have been remade, and the lotus flowers and five-pointed crowns have been garishly repainted, the group reveals a certain fineness of execution, which is particularly obvious in the soft flowing of the draperies in the central figure and in the plastic tension of the trunk in the side ones. Furthermore, the torana framing them is quite interesting: the pentalobate arch, resting on columns in typical Newar style, is in fact surmounted by a rocky structure which, although presently painted green and blue, is utterly remote from the Chinese patterns, and rather conjures up the stylized rocks of some ancient painted scrolls inspired by 12th century Pāla works (Pal 1984, p. 47, pl. 6 and the plate in the Appendix).

The same chapel 2Sa’ shows on the main wall, facing south, the painting reproduced in plate 31. We are dealing here with one of the typical aspects of Ekādaśamukhāvalokiteśvara inspired by the Padma-jālamilatantrarāja and derived from the Āryaśhasrābijāvalokiteśvara by the mahāsiddha Nāgārjuna, who is specifically mentioned in the accompanying inscription (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 43). The presence of eleven heads has
received many interpretations, the most widespread being that the ten heads added to the central one correspond to the ten directions in space, thus making concretely perceptible the epithet samantamukha (the one with all-sided faces) which the Saddharmapundarika attributes to Avalokiteśvara. But the undeniable points of contact which Avalokiteśvara shows with Rudra-Śiva make plausible also the hypothesis that the eleven heads derive more or less directly from the eleven Rudras in the Upaniṣads.

The only ancient representation of Ekādaśamukhāvalokiteśvara extant in India is a relief in cave 20 at Kanheri, dating back to the 7th century, but there are examples of the same period in the Turfan region and at Dunhuang, where Tang influence was particularly strong: this form of Avalokiteśvara in fact enjoyed imperial patronage during the rule of Gaozong (650-683). Its introduction to China is related to the strengthening of communications between Tang China and post-Gupta India, which favoured the diffusion of tantric Buddhism: its earliest iconographic description is in the Sanskrit literature translated into Chinese by Yaśogupta in the middle of the 6th century (Denès 1976). The proliferation of the arms, however, is later: starting from the 8th century, with the new translation of the sūtra on behalf of Amoghavajra (705-755), the two arms increased to four, and only in the 10th century did they increase to eight or ten. The aspect with one thousand arms appears for the first time with the miniature of a Sahasrabhūja Lokanātha in a Newar manuscript of the Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā dated 1015, now kept in Cambridge University Library (Mukhopadhyay 1985, p. 149 and fig. 28). It is, therefore, very likely that the images of this aspect of Avalokiteśvara so widespread in Tibet came from the Nepal Valley.

This tantric aspect of the Bodhisattva endowed with one thousand arms is generally conceived with an eye in the palm of each hand, so as to endlessly multiply the merciful looks addressed to the beings tossing about in samsāra (the continual revolving of rebirths). The thousand arms may, however, be symbolically represented by a lower number, generally eight, or else forty-two, as in the present painting. Here the first eight of the forty-two hands display different mudrās: the central pair displays the ajñāmudrā, both hands of the second pair perform the varadāmudrā, the third pair holds a cakra in the right and a bow and arrow together in the left, and the fourth one bears a mālā (rosary) and a padma (lotus flower) in the right and left respectively.

The purely Newar character of the torana, in particular the two orders of stem-like columns departing from vases and culminating in the usual capitals supporting hamsas, reinforces the hypothesis, formulated above, concerning the Newar origin of this iconographic form in Tibet. The bare chest and the long transparent dhotī (lower garment, paridhāhāna), upon which a short opaque loincloth is placed, reproduce the bodhisattvas’ usual clothing in post-Pāla art, even though the long scarf passing behind the neck and falling to the front in wide loops is reminiscent of contributions which are typical of Central Asia in the Tang period, and in particular of two 10th century paintings on cloth, both reproducing Guanynin with eleven heads and six arms, which Paul Pelliot brought from Dunhuang, and which are presently kept at Musée Guimet (EO 3582, EQ 3583). An iconographically significant feature, even though of rather naïve execution, is given by the black antelope skin worn by the god on his left shoulder, conjuring up ascetic practices of Śaivite origin. Finally one should note at the bottom of the painting the two small figures of Tārā and Hayagriva who accompany Avalokiteśvara on two distinct lotuses flanking the big central one.

A different aspect of Ekādaśamukhāvalokiteśvara is painted on the western wall of chapel 2Wb’ and is here reproduced in plate 32. This figure, which is placed at the centre of a maṇḍala deriving from the Aṣṭāvajrakalāpadmajālamalatantarāja, is characterized by a high aesthetic quality and is of great iconographic interest because of its rarity.

The Bodhisattva sits in vajrāsana on a lunar disc above a lotus flower resting upon a lion throne of a polygonal shape, surrounded by a radiant aura and surmounted by a canopy. He is endowed with twelve arms, of which the central ones are bent on his chest with both hands displaying the vitarkamudrā and supporting a rosary in the right and a lotus in the left. But the dominant feature in that figure is given by the
arrangement of the eleven heads, nine of which are distributed at the two sides of the central face, surmounted in the middle by the head of the Buddha Amitābha. Only the three central faces, white, and that of Amitābha, red, have a peaceful mien, while the others (four on the right and three on the left) display a fierce mien, with grinning mouths and flaming hair, and bear a third eye in the middle of the forehead.

It is known that in the Tibetan tradition the eleven heads of the Bodhisattva may be distributed in a different way from the one illustrated in plate 31, and there is, for instance, in the “Narthang Pantheon”, one Gaganarāja Avalokiteśvara whose heads are ordered according to the series 3/3/2/2/1 (Chandra 1987, p. 244, No. 629), rather than following the usual series 3/3/3/1/1. Yet, in no other case known to us are ten heads arranged on one level. The different solutions for the representation of this deity in China and in Japan seem to be indirectly recalled here. But the Jū-ichi-men Kwan-non and the Sen-ju Kwan-non of the Nara and Heian periods generally show a series of small heads placed in a ring on the main head, which is surmounted by Amitābha’s head emerging from the mukuta (diadem) (Takaaki 1976, pls. 11, 28, 29, 31, 73, 74, etc.). Alternatively, they have heads with a bigger size, but always smaller than the main head, placed in two lines of three and one intermediate line of five (Getty 1978, p. 93), that is with the same arrangement which one comes across in the examples of Dunhuang and in the Pelliot Collection already mentioned for plate 31. The uniqueness and the interest of the iconographic type illustrated in plate 32, which seems to be worth investigating through textual comparison, is further increased by the insertion within the halo of the minute figures of the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, which obviously confirms in this case the interpretation of Avalokiteśvara as samantamukha.

The same chapel 2Wb’ also contains other interesting and rare forms of Avalokiteśvara, two of which are shown here in plates 33-34.

Plate 33, reproducing a figure painted on the southern wall, illustrates an aspect of Padmanarēśvara, the lord of dance, a manifestation of the Bodhisattva which clearly echoes the Hindu Śiva Nātarāja. The identification is unequivocally established by the caption below, reading rje-btsun sPa-yas-gzigs-dbang-phyug Padma-gar-gyi-dbang-phyug, and is confirmed by the adherence of the image to the essential features of the description provided in the Saññanamāla (Mallmann 1975, p. 110), according to which the Bodhisattva, white, with one face and eighteen arms, holds a lotus in each of his eighteen hands. However, there are significant differences, because the deity does not bear the figure of Amitābha on his jatāmukuta and, above all, he does not show the classical dancing posture with a single foot resting on the ground (tāṇḍāvārdhaprayatikā). Instead, he appears sitting in a rather relaxed posture, with his ankles merely crossed in front and, therefore, far from the tensions of the vajrāsana, but also far from the seated form of the ardhaprayatka. While taking into account that the reference to dance might be indicated even by the mere displaying of the nṛtyābhinaya (one of the hand gestures belonging to the dance repertory), it does not seem possible to recognize such an attitude in the gesture here displayed by the two central hands, which appears to be rather closer to the dharmacakramudrā. The iconographic interest of this figure is obvious because images of Padmanarēśvara are extremely rare: the only example mentioned by Bhattacharyya (1985, p. 42 and pl. XXIIe) is the decoration of a small stūpa on Mañjuśrī Hill at Swayambhunāth.

Also the painting reproduced in plate 34, drawn from the eastern wall of the same chapel, proves of great interest from the iconographic point of view. The red colour, the five-pointed crown and all the bodhisattva ornaments, as well as the skin of an antelope on the left shoulder, enable us to recognize in it an aspect of Avalokiteśvara, although deprived of the image of Amitābha on the head. Furthermore, its presence in a mandala which the inscription relates to the Āryāmohapāsakalparāja allows us to regard it as a form of Amoghapāśa.
The Bodhisattva is seated on a lotus in vajrasana and is endowed with one head and sixteen arms. Two hands are held in the lap displaying the samputāñjalimudrā, four other hands perform the same mudrā with the arms bent towards the chest and the palms turning inwards, and two more repeat it with the arms rising above the head. Of the other eight hands, seven hold the following attributes: a khaṭvāṇīga (magic staff), a padma, a pustaka, a pāśa, a śāṅkha (conch-shell) full of flowers, a ratnapatā (vessel loaded with jewels) and a kamaṇḍalū (water-pot), proceeding clockwise from the bottom left. The eighth one displays the śramaṇamudrā (gesture of ascetic renunciation).

Therefore, none of these three figures in chapel 2Wb' show a precise correspondence with any of the aspects described by Bhattacharyya, Getty or Mallmann, or with images belonging to the pantheons published by Clark or Lokesh Chandra. But Mallmann herself (1975, p. 114) acknowledges the existence of many aspects of Avalokiteśvara whose descriptions have not yet come to light or have been lost, and also of many images of this deity in public and private collections which still await to be studied.

Another painting on this second storey, devoted to Mahāmuni and reproduced in plate 35 (southern wall of chapel 2Na), appears to be just as interesting from the iconographic point of view. This is a rare esoteric aspect of the Buddha Śākyamuni, which was the object of a particular cult by schools focusing their attention upon the usṣnīsa of the Buddha, regarded as the highest symbol of the superior knowledge which is reached with enlightenment. The image derives from the Sāmantamukhapravesāraśāmivimaloṇḍsparābhāsa and represents an iconographic and liturgical echo of the esoteric value which was attributed to the usṣnīsa.

Mahāmuni appears endowed with four heads, eight arms and four feet, sitting in a sort of virāsana posture with his ankles crossed in pairs and the soles of the two right feet turned upwards, with only one of the left feet visible. The two central hands display the dharmacakramudrā, the gesture which means the setting into motion of the wheel of the law, hence, the start of the preaching of the doctrine. All the other arms are extended outwards with the hands displaying the vitarkamudrā. In this mudrā, the most explicit aspect of which is the gesture of argumentation, there are symbolic values which the esoteric character of that representation of the Buddha perhaps makes prevalent. The circle formed by the thumb and the forefinger is a form without beginning or end, which can be raised to a symbol of the perfection and eternity of the dharma (and at the same time to a symbol of the perfect enlightenment achieved by the Buddha), while the three extended fingers may be interpreted as the indication of the way of release through the “threelfold refuge”. The bodhisattvā ornamentals, the virāsana posture and also the design of the curly hair falling onto the shoulders qualify this image as a representation of the Buddha in the sambhogakāya and in that sense bring it close to the bodhisattvā figures which have previously been taken into consideration.

Finally, rather different forms of buddhas and bodhisattvas, found inside the temples of the first floor, are generally included in scenes related to the various Buddhist paradises in accordance with the descriptions provided by the Mahāvaiśāpyatantra and by the Mahāratnakūta.

Plate 36 reproduces the figure of the Buddha as painted on the southern side of the eastern wall in temple 1E, at the left of the entrance door. The scene is drawn from the Saddharmaumpundarikakāyavamsāsūtra and describes the preaching of the law by Śākyamuni, sitting in vajrāsana under the bodhi tree and displaying the dharmacakramudrā, flanked by two monks. The lotus supporting the Buddha rests upon a throne whose polygonal base bears the usual images of roaring lions on the two outer sides, but shows the typically Chinese motif of a couple of phoenixes in flight on the central plaque. The pedestal upon which the throne is laid is also clearly of Chinese style.

The figure of the Buddha, with wide and rounded shoulders, wears a richly decorated cloak and shawl. A striking difference from the previous Buddha images is apparent in the lower part of the garment, which is tightened at the waist so as to form a series of regular vertical folds on the chest, in accordance with Chinese and also later Tibetan custom. The broad face is surmounted by thick hair showing a slight pointed inflexion
in the middle of the forehead and is surrounded by a series of tiny locks along its outer contour. The *uṣṇīsa* has the rather unusual shape of a rounded globe. The green halo and nimbus merge into each other and are both delimited by a single border worked in gold, red and green on a black background. A canopy adorned with ribbons and pendants magically hangs above all.

Plate 37 reproduces the figure of Maitreya in his *sambhogakāya* form as painted on the northern side of the same eastern wall of temple 1E (at the right of the entrance), deriving from the section of the *bkā'-gyur* which is known as *dKon-brtsegs*. This unusual aspect of the Bodhisattva belongs to a series of paintings devoted to his paradise in the Tuṣita heaven. Here Maitreya, adorned with all the *bodhisattva* jewels and wrapped in precious cloths, is seated in *vajrāsana* on a double corolla of two-coloured petals of a lotus opening upwards. The lotus rests upon a golden and richly decorated polygonal throne, on whose base are painted, in the side panels, the figures of two lions and, in the central panel, two fighting elephants with intertwined trunks. The foliage of trees in flower spread at the sides of the nimbus and a small radiant aura, surmounted in the centre by a canopy with a very elaborate shape, partially emerges above the halo.

Maitreya, saffron-coloured and endowed with three heads and six arms, holds in his right hands (proceeding outwards) a *nāgakesara* flower with a *cakra* on its corolla, a white lotus (*puṇḍarīka*) and a *vajra*. In his left hands, still proceeding from the inside towards the outside, he holds a *ghañtā* resting on a red flower, a flaming *cintāmāni* (the gem fulfilling every wish) and a sword. An aspect of Maitreya with three heads and six arms and those attributes is described by the *Nispannayogavali* in the third circle of the *mandala* of Akṣobhya, but in that case, as a member of Vairocana’s *kula*, the Bodhisattva is white, with the right head black and the left one red.

**WRATHFUL DEITIES**

A wrathful aspect and a threatening and terrifying mien are characteristic of various categories of deities in the Tibetan pantheon. In his foreword to the catalogue of a recent exhibition in Brussels, Béguin classifies the multiplicity of the deities endowed with those features into two large groups: the *dhnrapalas* (*chos-skyong*), guardians of religion who share their role as protectors with a great number of other sectarian or local deities, and the *iṣṭadēvatās* (*yi-dam*), personifications of tantric cycles, connected with esoteric teachings and initiation ceremonies (Béguin 1989, pp. 8-15). Although this is not a rigid division, it offers a tool for a differentiated iconographic characterization.

Most protectors have a non-Buddhist origin which can generally, though not exclusively, be traced back to the Hindu world. The integration of the main figures of the Śāivite pantheon and the adoption of Tibetan autochthonous deities through the mechanism of subjugation and vow (deities bound by an oath) have been particularly important in that process of assimilation. From this derive iconographic features which are largely typical of the Himalayan area: macabre elements which have been raised to symbolic representations of the negative forces which such deities are called to combat. Their active role as warlike protectors is generally expressed by the militant and aggressive attitude of the *āṭīḍha*, a posture which is reminiscent of that taken in archery, with one knee bent and the other leg stretched backwards, but which is here achieved with the whole of the body stretching out sidewardly in a threatening attitude. In addition, ostentatious strength and power is represented by means of stocky bodies and massive limbs and sometimes through the ithyphallic condition. Other iconographic elements with a similar role are the gaping mouth revealing protruding canines and overturned tongue, bulging and bloodshot eyes, dishevelled and flaming hair.

On the other hand, the *yi-dam* are original creations of Indian tantric Buddhism and are related to the ritual cycles which were developed mainly by the *siddhas* at a period extending roughly from the 7th to the 11th
century, and which achieved their fullest realization with the anuttarayogatantras. One of the most frequent features of yi-dam with a wrathful aspect is the dancing attitude (tāṇḍava), which is usually obtained by representing the deity standing on one foot, with the other leg bent and the foot pointing downwards or lifted above the knee of the supporting leg, and with a circular distribution of the several arms with which such deities are generally endowed. It is obvious that this type of representation is directly influenced by the great model of Śiva Natarāja and therefore connected to Śaivite archetypes. The macabre connotation is therefore also to be found here, often represented by attributes which are typical of the Śaiva sects’ paraphernalia, such as the kapāla (skullcap used as a vessel) and the khatvāṅga (the trident and magical sceptre on top of which are stuck three human heads in various degrees of decay), or by ornaments such as the crown of skulls or garland of severed heads. The mien of these figures is generally less frantically ferocious, the body more slender and elegant, the hair often dressed like that of peaceful deities in a jatāmukūṭa which is reminiscent of the usnīṣa.

Sexual symbolism is particularly important in the representation of yi-dam, generally with the depiction of the sacred embrace (maithuna) through various types of yab-yum (“father-mother”) postures. This embrace represents the mystic union (yuganaddha) of the male pole of upāya (the means to achieve enlightenment) with the female pole of prajñā (supermundane wisdom as awareness of the emptiness of all things).

As we have already said, however, the distinction ought not to be understood in a rigid manner, and there are several wrathful deities who share the two roles of chos-skjong and yi-dam. In this connection, one may regard as typical the case of the wrathful manifestations of Mañjuśrī, Yamāntaka and Yamārī, who can be met both as krodhas (wrathful deities) belonging to the raksacakra (sphere of protection of the manḍala) and as yi-dam at the centre of manḍalas related to the anuttaratantras of the group associated with Vairocana: in both cases they maintain the iconographic features of the dharmapalas. Even as regards sexual symbolism, the yab-yum posture is not a necessary requirement in the representation of yi-dam, who can also be depicted as isolated deities (ekavīra).

The variety and complexity of this universe of wrathful deities is anyway very great, perhaps even greater than that afforded by the pantheon of the peaceful and benevolent ones, and its wealth of implications and references requires a detailed analysis of the individual deities and of their manifold manifestations.

Plate 38 reproduces an aspect of Vajrapāṇī, painted on the western wall of chapel 2Ea’. The vajra was the thunderbolt of the Vedic god Indra: in spite of the fact that Indra is not given the name of Vajrapāṇi or Vajradhara, epithets such as vajrin, vajrahasta, vajrahāhu and vajradākṣīna are attributed to him in the Rgveda. The thunderbolt was subsequently transferred to a yakṣa who, in the early periods of Buddhism and in Gandharan art, appears as Śākyamuni’s escort. With the name of Vajrapāṇi, he became the head of the yakṣas and of the guhyakas (genii of mysteries) and later, with the spread of Mahāyāna Buddhism, he acquired the role of bodhisattva and as such, he soon came to occupy a prominent rank, meanwhile keeping the position of head of a true host of deities belonging to the Family of the Vajra (Staal 1990).

The aspect of Vajrapāṇi which is reproduced here is related to a group of kriyātantras and caryātantras (among which are the Āryapāṭalānanamantantararāja and the Bhagavānnilambaradharavajrapāṇītantra) and to the sādhanaś compiled by Sugatigarba. The deity, black-blue, with sneering mouth, protruding fangs, shaggy hair and eyebrows, appears in the act of trampling on the nāgas, stretching out rightwards in pratyālīḍha. His figure stands out against a halo of fire painted red on red, the flames drawing a sort of lace with scrolls of an almost vegetal aspect. In his upraised right hand he holds a vajra, while in his left, before the chest, he holds a ghanṭā; both hands also display the tarjanimudrā.

In this connection, we should point out the existence of two different forms for that gesture of threat, as conveniently exemplified by this plate. One, here visible in the attitude of the right hand, consists in stretching the forefinger and little finger outwards, with the middle and ring fingers bent (in this case closing up on the central part of the vajra) and with the thumb closing upon them. The other, recognizable in the attitude of the
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

left hand, consists in stretching and pointing the forefinger alone, the other fingers being clenched in a fist. Some authors attribute different names to these two mudrās, applying the term tarjani to the former and karānamudrā to the latter, but apparently there are not adequate textual references to support such a specificity of the two terms. What is noticeable from the available iconographic records is rather a certain statistical prevalence of the mudrā performed with the forefinger alone in earlier works and, vice versa, a prevalence of the other mudrā in later works. That does not exclude, however, the coexistence of the two forms in works of the same period or even, as in the exemplary instance considered here, their contemporary presence within one work.

Vajrapāṇi, who inherited the role of god of rain from Indra, controls the régime of the waters and therefore holds sway over the nāgas. His position is revealed by the fact that he treads upon a many-coloured bundle of therioanthropomorphic nāgarājas. However his role as lord and ruler, rather than opponent, is clearly indicated by the attitude of homage and devotion expressed by the latter with the ānijalimudrā. His dominion over the waters is further emphasized by the presence, in the lower part of the painting, of a garuḍa like him also blue, with human arms and body, but with white wings and with the spur and talons of a bird of prey, clenching the nāgas in his rostrum. The head of a garuḍa also appears at the centre of Vajrapāṇi’s crown, while a small snake crowns the tuft of his flaming hair.

The Tibetan representations of garuḍa, which in Tibet (but not in India) is provided with horns, reveal the accomplished merging of the mythical bird of the pan-Indian tradition (a heavenly being and principle of light and goodness) with the khyung of the Tibetan pre-Buddhist tradition, and its cult is generally connected with exorcisms against snake-bite or with magic ceremonies meant to produce rain. In this painting its heavenly and luminous origin is recalled by the presence of the symbols of the sun and moon on his head.

Another element worthy of attention in plate 38 is the curious white garment covering the shoulders and upper part of the trunk of the deity, and replacing the usual lion or elephant skin flung on the shoulders and knotted at the neck. This peculiar garment is reminiscent of the armour of the Four Guardian Kings (Caturmāhārājas; rGyal-chen sde-bzhi) and shares with it the theriomorphic protomes at the two side openings for the arms.

It would seem that the origin of the armour of the Guardian Kings is to be sought in Western Asia and that it reveals the influence of Sassanid Persia. The earliest example of guardian deities is provided by the stūpa at Rawak (4th century), in the region of Khotan. Their cult was introduced to Dunhuang towards the 5th century, but the characteristics which were fixed in their iconography reflect those of the military costume in use during the following century, when their cult spread to China. From that time they remained virtually unaltered for centuries over an area which extends from Central Asia as far as Japan, obviously including Tibet.

Confining ourselves here to the particular component of the cuirass aimed at protecting the shoulders and the upper part of the trunk, we find it in its simplest form in the representations of Sogdian warriors, whereas in the figure of a three-headed and four-handed Maheśvara (also coming from Sogdiana), it shows four leonine protomes from which emerge the armed hands of the god (Azarpay 1981, pp. 29-30, fig. 5). It therefore seems likely that the presence of animal protomes is connected with a religious concept and is meant to enhance the terrifying aspect of warlike deities. It is interesting to notice how, in subsequent examples, the head of the makara (chu-srin), the monster representing the water and fire of the storm, is prevalently adopted for this purpose (Denès 1976, pp. 44-61). This is the same sea monster from whose throat emerge the fiery prongs of the rdo-rje (Tibetan rendering of vajra) and phur-bu (ritual dagger) (R.Stein 1987): a creature of storm from which the armed hand of the god bursts out as a thunderbolt.

One is therefore tempted to see in the unusual iconographic detail of plate 38 a tangible manifestation of the link between Indra and Vajrapāṇi in a form which was historically realized through the cult of the warlike gods of Central Asia. Even though in this case the association between vajra and makara has been lost, the
adoption of this element of the armour seems essentially to stress the militant and pugnacious aspect of the deity. The conversion of the makara (or of the Mongolian wolf, or of the Persian lion) into the figure of the “snow lion” merely represents the Tibetanization of the theriomorphic element through the resort to a motif which is typical of Tibetan imagery.

The figure of plate 39, painted on the northern wall of chapel 1Sb and derived from the Āryavajrapātālanāmajantrarāja, introduces us to an aspect of Vajrapāni which conjures up the great models of the Śiva Natarāja and of the cosmic Viṣṇu of the Bhagavadgītā. This is Nartakavara Vajrapāni, whose dark blue body stands out against a halo of fire of a splendid bright red colour, with a border of flames whose spirals are silhouetted against a dark background, like the hem of a precious lace. Endowed with eight heads, sixteen arms and six legs, the deity is represented dancing, his left feet treading upon the nāgarājas and the right legs bent, with the soles of the feet turned upwards (tandava ardhaparyāṇaka). His eight heads are distributed on three superposed levels: four on the first, three on the second and an isolated one on the third. All heads are endowed with a third eye and all have a fierce look, except for the one placed at the top. The two central arms bear a vajra raised up with the right hand, and a kapāla full of blood brought to the chest with the left, while the other fourteen arms are skilfully placed to create the impression of their whirling in the dance. All hands, each one endowed with a different attribute, display the tarjanimudrā.

This splendid painting, one of the most extraordinary in the sKu-'bum, lends itself well to an analysis of the conventions adopted to express the fury and wildness of the wrathful deities. The fundamental element is the contraction of the face in a mask of wrath. A conspicuous bulge at the centre of the forehead seems to reveal the furious pulsing of the arteries, while deep transversal wrinkles, with reliefs and furrows extending to the sides to mark the eye-sockets and the relief of the cheek-bones, appear at the root of the nose. Also, the lower part of the nose, wide at the base and with flattened nostrils, is strongly contracted, so that new furrows appear to delimit and isolate the various segments. The eyes are wide open and bulging out to the extent of appearing circular, but are partially covered at the top by a pointed inflexion of the eyelids, reflecting the wrinkling of the forehead and of the eyebrows. The mouth, gaping in an effective visual rendering of the terrible shout which the deity lets out, with the tongue vibrating, pointed and turned inwards, shows a roughly rectangular or trapezoidal contour, making obvious the tension of the lips. The wall of teeth, completely bare, shows the lower canines pointed and the upper ones transformed into fangs which, in an utterly unnatural way, turn their curvature outwards.

All those features may be stressed by the use of an elementary “ chiaroscuro ” technique, as is the case here for the head which is at the centre of the second row. Moreover, all those elements can achieve a great elegance through a strong stylization, whose forms are multifarious, as is shown by the various heads of this Nartakavara Vajrapāṇi. The violent wrinkling at the root of the nose, for instance, is rendered either by the play of single thin curves traced in gold on the main face, or by the almost vegetal-like lock characterizing the side faces, or by the polylobate excrescence which is found in the one topping them in the middle.

It is important to understand that the exaggeration of the traits of violence in the faces does not impair the deity’s beauty. Just as powerful bodies do not carry an aesthetically negative connotation, but symbolically emphasize strength and energy, so the wide open eyes and yelling mouths are not the deformation of a face which might also be serene, but express the quintessence of the active and militant passion which is the utterly positive reason for the existence of those deities. It is here that the possibility lies for distinguishing their enraged and wrathful nature from wickedness: we are not dealing with evil deities, but with powerful aids to man in his search for release.
Other deities who, in spite of being regarded as autonomous, show features very similar to those found in the manifestations of Vajrapāṇi which have been examined above, are Vajravidāraṇa, Vajrāhmūkāra and Trailokyavijaya.

The figure of the first, painted on the southern wall of chapel 2Na' and derived from the Vajravidāraṇanāmadhāraṇi, is reproduced in plate 40. The black-blue colour and many of the characteristics of the previous figures are also found in this painting which, however, displays some distinctive features, among which is the body stretching leftwards in ādīdha, that is to say, in a posture which is specular to the one illustrated in plate 38. Also, the arrangement of the arms is different, for the right hand is withdrawn to the chest and the left one rests on the hip. The former holds a visvavajra and the latter a ghanṭā (with the handle again in the shape of a visvavajra). Vajravidāraṇa wears the skin of a white elephant flung on his shoulders, a tiger skin wrapped around his loins, and a crown with five skulls surrounding his big tuft of flaming hair, within which one may discern the coils of two little snakes.

The figure of Vajrāhmūkāra, drawn from the Durgatiparīśodhanatantra, is reproduced in plate 41 as found in the southern part of chapel 3Nβ. Black-blue, on the elephant throne which recalls his belonging to the Family of the Vajra headed by Aksobhya, he is depicted in the pratyalidha posture. Girded with a tiger skin, his head crowned by a coronet with five skulls, and with a snake wound around his bust like a sacred cord, Vajrāhmūkāra is endowed with four arms. Of these, the two central ones display the vajrahumkārīmudrā peculiar to him, whereas of the other two, the upraised right hand holds a vajra, and the left, brought downwards on the hip, holds an arrow and bow.

The vajrahumkārīmudrā is performed by crossing before the chest the two arms at the wrists, the right upon the left, with both palms turned outwards and the two little fingers intertwined, while the forefingers are extended in the gesture of threat and the other fingers are folded. This mudrā should not be confused with the one which belongs, for instance, to Vajradhara, in which the hands are always crossed at the wrists, but with the palms turned inwards, in a gesture which proves to be natural in the act of embracing the prajñā in yab-yum, and which accordingly is called prajñālinganabhinaya (independently of whether or not the prajñā is actually present). In both mudrās the hands may be free of attributes, or may hold a vajra and a ghanṭā as in this plate, or else may bear other attributes.

The image of Trailokyavijaya reproduced in plate 42 is drawn from the Trailokyavijayasādhana and is painted on the western wall of chapel iEb'. Black-blue, endowed with four faces (all blue and three-eyed) and eight arms, Trailokyavijaya appears in the pratyalidha posture and performs the vajrahumkārīmudrā, holding a vajra and a ghanṭā in his two central hands, while in the other six hands he holds a khaḍga, an aṅkuśa, a sāra, a vajra, a pāśa and a dhanu (proceeding clockwise from the bottom left). It should be pointed out that the deity appears here with his loins wrapped not in the usual tiger skin, but in a sort of short green skirt. The same green colour makes up the background against which the elegant spirals drawing the aura of flames stand out in red.

Another remark which may be ventured at this point, but which also applies to the figure of Vajravidāraṇa in plate 40, concerns the stiff aspect of that part of the stole which passes behind the deity's shoulders, and its almost circular shape which appears to substitute for the head halo in the representation of wrathful deities.

The presence of widely fluttering stoles behind the head, which may also be found in the figures of Vajrapāṇi and Vajrāhmūkāra already examined in plates 38 and 41, certainly has remote origins. The wide loops drawn by kindred stoles in the images at Dunhuang are well known: suffice it to mention the figures of Avalokiteśvara painted on silk and, in particular, the heavenly kings painted on paper, from cave 17 and dating back to the 9th-10th centuries (Whitfield and Farrer 1990, pp. 39, 50, 97; Nos. 12, 21, 77). However, what we would like to underline here is the stereotyped aspect which that detail came to take in many of the paintings at Gyantse, especially in the numerous small representations of wrathful deities crowding the walls of many
chapels, as components of the parivāra (retinue of attendants) of the main deity inside the various mandalas (with reference to this one may see, for instance, the four deities of the detail drawn from the mandala of Trailokyavijaya reproduced in plate 43).

Significant precedents, at least with regard to the stiffness of this motif, are discernible in some thang-ka of post-Pala style, chiefly from bkā-'gdams-pa monasteries or other foundations in central and southern Tibet (Pal 1984, pls. 15, 16; Béguin 1990, pp. 21, 22, Nos. 2, 3), as well as in some scrolls from Khara-khoto (Pal 1984, p. 31, fig. 9), or in the wall paintings of the lIHa-khang So-ma at Alchi (ibid, pl. 14), which may be regarded as provincial versions of the same style. In all these instances, however, the motif is less heavily emphasized and shows a less baroque curvature, hinting rather at a virtual horizontality.

That motif seems to be absent from 14th century Newar art but turns up enhanced and further stylized in the Sa-skya-pa “Nepalizing” productions of the 15th and 16th centuries. The clearest comparison is probably the one offered by the two sculptures of Mahākāla (the great protector of the Sa-skya-pas) recently shown at the Musée Guimet on the occasion of Fournier’s donation. The stole surrounding the head of the deity like a sort of halo is entirely absent in the big stone Mahākāla dated 1292, which fully belongs to the Newar artistic universe (Béguin 1990, pp. 52-56, No. 21), whereas it is an essential feature in the small wood and ivory Mahākāla (ibid, p. 65, No. 27) which Béguin regards as executed in Tibet or more probably in China in the 15th century. It is as if an iconographic element of distant Pala origin, having asserted itself in time in Tibet and Central Asia, came back to be added as a vigorous complement to an otherwise clearly Newar stylistic and iconographic structure.

In this connection perhaps it is not out of place to recall that in the 11th-13th centuries the artistic inspiration in central and southern Tibet came from India, the seat of the great Buddhist universities, and that, notwithstanding the active presence of Newar artists in Tibet, the Indian tradition exerted a major influence through the circulation of both works and masters (all this period is characterized by the constant presence of Tibetan monks in the most famous Indian monasteries). From the 13th century onwards, with the disappearance of those monasteries, the Nepal Valley became the main source of inspiration for Tibetan Buddhism. Since then the post-Pala style, having previously asserted itself mostly in association with bkā-'gdams-pa and other monasteries of the period, gradually dried up while, with the assertion of the power of the Sa-skya-pa order, a more specifically Newar stylistic influence became particularly conspicuous. But the Sa-skya-pa order was also the one that established the most intense contacts with the imperial court of China, which might also have had an influence on the particular iconographic and stylistic evolution considered here, and which seems to have found its most systematic application in Gyantse. The role of the Yongle bronzes within such evolution does not appear altogether meaningless when considering the importance which the stole shows in the statuette of Mahākāla published by Karmay (1975, p. 90, fig. 60a, b). An indication of a specific Chinese influence might also be gathered from the small 15th century bronze of Acala in the Fournier donation (Béguin 1990, p. 84, No. 40), which Béguin regards as originating from eastern Tibet and influenced by contemporary production in Sichuan and Yunnan. The frequent appearance in the paintings at Gyantse of stoles decorated with multi-coloured embroideries echoing the Chinese materials of the early Ming period might be understood in the same way, even though the presence of white scarves decorated with embroidered flowers is already testified by a Vajravāraḥi coming from Khara-khoto (Rhie and Thurman 1991, pp. 248-260, No. 93).

The same type of asanas and of mudrās which belong to Vajrāhūṃkāra and to Trailokyavijaya are also shown by Vajrajvālānalārka, whose figure, painted on the south wall of chapel 3Na’, is reproduced in plate 44. This deity, which belongs to a group of krodhas posted to guard the gates of the outer circle of the mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana, is here placed at the centre of the mandala of wrathful deities drawn from the second section of the Durgatiparīśodhanatantra. The colour, posture, coronet with skulls, tiger skin on the loins and snake-cord, and above all the vajrāhūṃkāramudrā performed by the two central hands holding a vajra and a
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

ghanta, are features which this deity shares with Vajrahumkara, while the difference is given by the presence of six arms instead of four (the hands of the second pair bear a sara and a dhanu, those of the third pair hold a khadga and an aikusa). Other minor differences are the wealth of decorative motifs enriching the sides of the crown and the presence of a thin golden snake surrounding the top of the big tuft of flaming hair. As for Trailokyavijaya, the stole appears rigid and richly adorned with embroidered floral motifs on a whitish background. As in most of the cases previously examined, the god tramples on two figures which are possibly those of Visnu and Lakshmi.

With plates 45-47 we go on to consider another great protector, belonging to the Family of the Lotus. Plate 45 reproduces the image of Hayagriva painted on the smaller northern wall of chapel 2Wa, in accordance with Laksmikara’s system. The colour of this god is red, as befits the Padma Family, but otherwise he shows many points of contact with the representations of Vajrapani seen in the previous plates. The deity, in the pratyalidha posture, treads upon a tangle of therioanthromorphic naganajas, wears a tiger skin on his loins, a white (elephant?) skin on his shoulders, a snake as a sacred cord and a garland of severed heads. This particular manifestation of Hayagriva is endowed with three heads, six arms and six legs. Each of the three heads is crowned by a coronet with five skulls enclosing the god’s dishevelled and flaming hair, from which emerge the green neck and head of a neighing horse, the distinctive feature of this dharmapala. The mien of the faces is fierce, the mouth gaping with golden flames bursting out of both sides, the tongue rolling up inwards, the third eye in the middle of the forehead bloodshot like the other two, and the eyebrows shaggy and flaming. The fierce look of the deity is further stressed by the protruding canines and by the long claws with which the fingers and toes are provided. Of his six hands, the central left hand brings a kapala full of blood before the chest, while the others hold a long mace terminating with a vajra at each end, a khadga, a vajra, a pasha and an unidentified object (proceeding clockwise).

Hayagriva’s red figure stands out against a flaming halo formed by a series of swirls and spirals, painted red on a dark green background. This shift to the contrast between the colour of the tongues of flame (or of the vegetal scrolls) and the colour of the background, already found in plate 42, seems to be one of the features distinguishing the “Nepalizing” Sa-skya-pa style from the purely Newar tradition which instead normally resorts to different tones of the same colour. This feature, which is exemplified in the circle of flames and in the decoration of the quarters in the great mandalas of Ngor, appears to create an impression of relief and might reflect experiences which are different from those of Newar illumination and painting. It might be related perhaps to the execution of the great mandalas for the initiation ceremonies with coloured powders, or even to the possible production of engraved or carved mandalas reminiscent of the mandalas carved in stone which cover the vault of the gateway in the Great Wall north-west of Beijing. The latter work, constructed in the years 1343-1345 at the command of the last Mongol emperor, was planned by Nam-mkha’-seng-ge and consecrated by Kun-dga’-rgyal-mlshan, both prominent Sa-skya-pa monks at the the Yuan court (Karmay 1975, pp. 25-26, fig. 13). Such mandalas are very similar to those painted on the walls at Gyantse and on the scrolls executed in a Sa-skya-pa environment which Béguin classifies as “Nepalizing”. In fact, a substantial identity is found in the circles of flames, vajras and lotuses, in the gates of the mandala palace (vimana), in the minor figures placed at the corners within vegetal scrolls, and in the inner surfaces decorated with intertwined tendrils.

A figure of Hayagriva quite similar to the previous one, even though related to a different textual source, is that painted on the western wall of chapel 1Wb in accordance with sKya-rgang’s system, and reproduced in plate 46. Besides the neighing horse heads, the colour, posture, number of arms and heads, crown of skulls and garland of severed heads, tiger skin around the hips, white hide flung on the shoulders and snake-cord, are all features common to the two figures. The elements which distinguish this new image from that of plate 45 are the number of legs (two instead of six), the absence of the small figure of Amitabha on the head, the colour
of one of the three faces (green instead of blue), and some differences in the attributes: the central left hand, brought before the chest as in the previous case, does not hold a kapāla, but simply displays the tarjanimudrā, while the other five hands hold a vajra, a trisūla (trident), a khadga, a pāśa and a śūla (spear), in that order. The presence of the trisūla may be interesting for, though it is an eminently Śaivite symbol, it is also an essential feature in the iconography of some peaceful aspects of Avalokiteśvara, in particular of Śīvamānīda Lokeshvara.

In this representation of Hayagrīva, as in the previous one, we come across a new peculiarity: the lace-like flames making up the border of the flaming halo are no longer evenly red, but show in turn the five colours blue, white, yellow, red and green. The possible meaning and implications of this are not clear, but it appears to be a convention that, without being an exclusive feature of this god, is systematically adopted in his representations, independently of the particular cycle by which the painting is inspired. That is confirmed by the figure in plate 47 reproducing a detail of a different maṇḍala of Hayagrīva painted on the eastern wall of the same chapel 1Wb. From such detail, enclosing at its right end the border of flames of the central figure, one may ascertain the different criterion adopted for Hayagrīva and for the other wrathful deities within a same parivāra. At any rate, this is an iconographic feature to bear in mind in the analysis and dating of Tibetan paintings.

After dealing with the great dharmapālas represented by the wrathful aspects of Vajrapāṇi (and by the wrathful deities who may somehow be assimilated to Vajrapāṇi) and of Hayagrīva (who may be associated with Avalokiteśvara), we shall now consider the kindred wrathful manifestations of Maṇjuśrī, the third of the Great Bodhisattvas to whom Tibetan devoutness is chiefly directed. These three are the Bodhisattvas who, according to tradition, manifested themselves in the three Buddhist kings (Khri Srong-btsan-sgam-po, Khri Srong-dpal-brtse, and Khri Ral-pa-can), and towards whom popular devotion is revealed by the threefold stripes (red, white and blue) painted on the fronts of many Tibetan dwellings, as well as by the triplets of stūpas bearing the same colours. Plates 48 and 49 show details of the images of two wrathful manifestations of Maṇjuśrī in the two different aspects of Raktayamārī and of Mahāvajrabhairava, Yamāntaka’s most frightening form. The paintings which they reproduce appear on the inside walls of the lower storey of the harmikā.

The figure of Raktayamārī (plate 48), painted on the eastern face of the central core, is drawn from Virūpa’s Raktayamārisūdhanā and is related to the Śiraktayamāritantrarāja, belonging to the anuttarayogatantras, and more specifically to the group of the “father” tantras associated with Vairocana. That this aspect of Raktayamārī belongs to the anuttaratantras is made obvious by the fact that the god is portrayed embracing his svāhāprajñā.

Raktayamārī, red, has one head, crowned by a coronet of skulls, with a flaming mane surrounded by two snakes and topped by a small figure of Akṣobhya. He is in the pratvālidha posture and his raised right hand brandishes a staff terminating in a human head surmounted by a vajra, while the left holds a kapāla full of blood, which is brought against his chest in the gesture of embracing the prajñā. He wears a tiger skin held on his loins by a snake noose, is adorned with a garland of severed heads, and tramples a blue demon, probably Yama, beneath both feet. The prajñā, of the same colour, similar to him in her look and ornaments, and like him endowed with a third eye, holds the kapāla in her left hand and the katākrā (ritual chopper) in her right.

The painting, in a bad state of preservation, shows the usual aura of flames, whose red spirals stand out against a background of two green tones en camaieu. The representation of flames on a green background, which we have already come across in the case of Hayagrīva, thus seems to be a favoured contrivance when red is the colour of the actual deity and the play of different tones of red, needed to represent it against a halo of flames, risks becoming too complicated and barely perceptible. That we are dealing, however, with a stylistic choice and not with a solution that is somehow compulsory, is shown by the lower red figure in the detail of the maṇḍala of Mārići reproduced in plate 50 (northern wall of chapel 1Sa), where the criterion of red on red is retained and even pushed to extremes by painting red also the shawl on the shoulders of the deity. In this
exercise of virtuosity, reminiscent of Newar illumination, what is of interest is the way in which the separation between the figure and the background is obtained through resorting on the one hand to more emphasized contours, and on the other to a sort of "chiaroscuro" lending the image a certain bodily relief of its own.

The figure of Mahāvajrabhairava, painted on the southern wall of the central body of the harṣikī, is derived from the Śrīvajramahābhairavatantra according to Rwa Lo-ṭsā-ba' s system. This yi-dam, who later became the great protector of the dGe-lugs-pa order, is dark blue, with nine heads (of which the central one is a buffalo head), thirty-four arms and sixteen legs. He is represented in his ekavira form (that is without being embraced by his prajñā, iṣṭyphallic and in the pratylidha posture, while trampling on teams of beings from different worlds. He is adorned with a garland of severed heads, and wears a necklace, bracelets and earrings of silver filigree. With the two central hands he holds a kapāla and a karttāli before his chest, while with the outermost hands he holds a large white elephant skin behind his back, and with each of the other hands he bears a different attribute while displaying the tarjanimudrā. The large dimensions of this painting and the constricted space make a complete shot of the image virtually impossible (without special technical devices presently hard to realize), but it seemed essential to provide at least a partial documentation of it in plate 49.

The buffalo head obviously recalls the victory over the god of death and, in this mighty manifestation of Yamantaka as Vajrabhairava, it represents more generally the victory over samsāra, of which the succession of deaths and rebirths is but one aspect. The nine heads, all endowed with a third eye, are distributed in rows of three on three superimposed layers and all, except Maṇjuśrī's head which is placed at the centre of the topmost group, are characterized by a coronet of skulls and a fierce mien. It should be pointed out that most of the representations of Mahāvajrabhairava produced in later centuries show a different distribution of the heads: six placed at both sides and on the same level as the central head, one on the central head between the buffalo's horns, and the isolated head of Maṇjuśrī upon that. However, the images of two thang-ka in the Los Angeles County Museum (Pal 1983, pl. 17 and p. 146) and in the Fournier donation (Béguin 1990, No. 24 and p. 61), both datable to the 15th century, when the paintings of the sKu-'bum were executed, appear with the same layout as in the image in this plate.

Beyond the above choś-skyong deities, a host of other mgon-po gods, with a protective function and with a wrathful mien, is found in the Tibetan pantheon and is depicted on the walls of the sKu-'bum. The following plates are devoted to some of these deities, who are specifically put in charge of the various directions of space and belong to one of the various sets of krodhas mentioned in the texts. Plates 51 and 52 reproduce the image of two krodhas belonging to a set of ten in the raksacakra of the maṇḍalas found in some of the major tantric cycles, such as the maṇḍalas of Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara, Trailokyavijaya and Kālacakra.

The first of these images, painted on the eastern wall of vestibule 4V at the left of the entrance door, represents Uṣṇiṣacakravartin, the guardian of the zenith. Of a light colour, endowed with four heads and eight arms, he is in the ardhaparyarīka posture, with his loins girded with a tiger skin. His four heads, all provided with a third eye and characterized by a fierce mien, are respectively red, blue, rose-coloured (the central one) and yellow, and his eight hands hold a cakra, an aṅkuśa, a khudga, a śara, a dhanu, an aksamālā (rosary), a pāśa and a ghanta in a clockwise sequence. The aura of flames is realized with the usual motifs, red on red, whereas the flames of its border are drawn with red spirals on a black background.

The second image (plate 52) reproduces the figure of Yamantaka painted on the southern wall of the same vestibule. Yamantaka (here seen as one of the krodhas, the guardian of the east), is also in ardhaparyarika and girded with a tiger skin, but is blue and endowed with six heads and six arms. Five of his heads are placed on the same level: the three central ones are blue and the two side ones white, and they are surmounted in the middle by a sixth head, also blue. The first of the right hands displays the tarjanimudrā, while the other five hold
Wrathful Deities

Acala, the “unyielding one”, belongs to a different set of the ten Krodhas. A particular aspect of this deity, normally posted to keep watch over the north-eastern direction, is the Sitācala of plate 53, which reproduces the painting of the western wall of chapel 1Nb’ and may be related to the Āryācalanāmadhāraṇī. This rather infrequent manifestation of Acala, who is usually blue, but who can actually occur in five different colours (see, for example, the two small figures of other manifestations of his, black and yellow respectively, in the upper corners of the painting), is represented in his typical attitude: with his left knee leaning on the ground and the foot raised with the sole turned upwards, with his right hand brandishing a big sword, and with the left displaying the pāsatajanimudrā before the chest. The display of the gesture of threat with the forefinger alone seems to be a constant feature in the iconography of this deity, both when he is described in the above attitude and when he is depicted in pratyāliḍha (one of the sādhanaṇa even specifies that the pāśa is wound round the pointed forefinger).

The white colour of this form of Acala, who appears even brighter on the red and black background made up by the very jagged aura of flames, seems to soften the deity’s wrathful mien. The use of gold in painting the eyebrows, the beard and the “flames” coming out of the sides of his mouth, contributes to that effect, since this gold is visually assimilated to that of the precious necklace adorning the upper part of his chest. The violent character of the deity is essentially recalled by the gaping mouth with long and sharp canines, and by the three wide open and bloodshot eyes. Concerning the latter, the squint which textual references regard as a distinctive feature of Acala, but which is not actually found in most of his known images (Essen and Thingo 1989, 1, pp. 160-161, pls. 98-99; 2, pp. 138-139, Nos. 296-301), is completely absent. But the snake serving as a cord and the big tuft of tawny hair, here done in a quite tidy hairstyle topped by a tiny image of Āksobhya (the head of the Family to which Acala belongs), are consistent with the textual model. A peculiarity in this painting, which the use of gold greatly emphasizes, is the strongly stylized motif which appears at the root of the nose and which represents the wrinkling produced by wrath. Here the chromatic distinction makes that connotation particularly obvious, even though less immediately decipherable.

The four following plates, reproducing paintings executed on the eastern, northern and western walls of the foremost and wider section of temple 3N, are devoted to the figures of the guardians of the gates in the outer circle of the great maṇḍala of Sarvavid Vairocana drawn from the Durgatiparīṣodhanatantra.

At the centre of plate 54, there is Krodhatrailokyaloka, black-blue, surrounded by the other guardians of the eastern gate (Krodhāmṛtakunḍalin, Kālarakṣasi, Kālāṅkuṣi, all of the same colour as the first) and by Dḥṛtarāṣṭra, the Guardian King of the east. Plate 55 shows Krodhatrailokyadharsana, yellow, surrounded by Krodhakāladandandini, Kāladaṇḍini, Kālapāśi (guardians of the southern gate) and by Virūḍhaka. Krodhatrailokyabandhaka, red, occupies the centre of plate 56, surrounded by Krodhācala, Kālarātri, Kālasphoṭa (guardians of the western gate) and by Virūpākṣa. Krodhatrailokyansaya, green, surrounded by Krodhahayagriva, Kālayaksini, Kālaghaṇṭa (guardians of the northern gate) and by Vaiśravana, is shown at the centre of plate 57. All these guardians are provided with three heads and six arms, have their loins girded with tiger skins, are in the pratyāliḍha posture and trample upon corpses whose entrails they devour. All brandish a paraśu (axe) and a khaḍga in the first two right hands, while in the third hand which is raised up they hold different attributes: Trailokyāloka holds a five-pronged vajra, Trailokyadharsana a danda (staff), Trailokyabandhaka a yamadanda (a staff in the shape of a skeleton), Trailokyansaya a triśūla. In all instances, the first left hand supports a kapala full of blood before the chest, while of the other two (both displaying the tajanimudrā) one holds out a second kapala and the other pulls out the bowels of the trampled corpse.
These plates, of remarkable aesthetic value, illustrate very effectively the way in which many of the surfaces of theSKU-’bum are totally covered with the minor figures of the various mandalas, arranged in rows which are geometrically ordered according to a layout associated with the Newar tradition.

One must be reminded that the inclusion of Hindu deities in the outer circle of the mandala in itself implies the observance of iconographic rules of Indian and Newar origin. In this connection, the couples Brahmā-Sarasvati, Viṣṇu-Lakṣmi and Śiva-Pārvati, two of which are reproduced in larger dimensions in plates 58 and 59, prove particularly interesting. But large hosts of Hindu deities are found also in other temples of this third storey devoted to the yogatantras, significantly exemplified by plates 60-63.

Plates 60 and 61 reproduce part of the paintings which are found at the sides of the entrance door on the eastern wall of temple 3E and show the same formal features as those discussed above, with ordered rows of images resting upon lotus flowers and often mounting their specific vāhanas (vehicles). These paintings are devoted to the deities of the circle outside the belt of vajras surrounding the mahāmandala of the assembly of the Five Families, the fundamental mandala in the Vajraśekharatantra. In particular they reproduce some of the forty-six male and female deities of this circle, who are mentioned in the inscription on the wall (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 65). A list of these deities, derived from Bu-ston’s work, has been provided by Tucci (ibid, 1, pp. 279-282).

Plate 62 reproduces a detail of the painting found on the southern side of the western wall of temple 3W, and again shows a host of Hindu deities turned Buddhist, this time belonging to the outer circle of the Dharmaḥatvāṅgīśvaramandala, as drawn from the Mahāśrīnāmasamgiti. In this painting, one again finds the figures of Vajrabhairava, Vaiśravana and Mahālakṣmi, but of particular interest is its representation of some of the twenty-eight nakṣatras (lunar mansions of constellations), such as Pūrvāṅgāḥ, Uttarāṅgāḥ and Śrāvāṇa, shown in their peaceful aspect, with both hands joined in the aṇjali-mudrā above the head. Equally interesting are the representations of the female counterparts of the chief deities of the Hindu pantheon, Brahmāni, Rudrāni, Vaiṣṇavi and Kaumārī. All these figures have a pair of arms raised above their head in the aṇjali-mudrā, which reveals their subordination to the Buddhist dharma, and are characterized by the same animal vāhanas and attributes as the corresponding male deities.

Finally, plate 63 reproduces a detail of the painting partially illustrated in plate 57, devoted to the outer circle of the fundamental mandala of the Durgatipariśodhanatantra. This detail shows that different iconographic representations of the same deities are taken into account in this cycle (see, for example, the two aspects of Vāyu and of Kubera). It further shows how, besides the inclusion of Hindu deities, many supplementary deities occur in this cycle, not all derived from the Indian tradition, but often drawn from local traditions and beliefs. The introduction of these deities (the gods of the house, as well as the gods of trees, mountains and waters) is legitimated in the inscription on the wall by reference to the method set forth by Bu-ston and founded upon Atiśa’s tradition (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 58).

Coming now to consider the yi-dam who are at the centre of the most important cycles of the anuttarayogatantras, one must acknowledge the fundamental role played by the various aspects of Heruka, Aksobhya’s fierce manifestation. Some of these aspects are shown in plates 64-66.

The first plate reproduces the painting which is found on the northern side of the central body on the upper storey of the harmikā, and which is devoted to Cakrasaṃvara according to Lūipa’s system, namely the Śrīcakraśambarabhisamayātikā. The god, dark blue, is endowed with four heads and twelve arms and is portrayed in aliccha (the constant posture of this yi-dam), embracing the yum Vajravarāhi, who clasps his loins with both legs lifted from the ground. Vajravarāhi is red and endowed with the third eye in the middle of her forehead, but lacking the protuberance in the shape of a boar head which, according to current iconography, ought to come out from the side of her left ear, a peculiarity which does not actually appear to be prescribed by the sādhanas in the Niśpannayogāvalī and in the Sadhanamālā. Again, in accordance with those texts, but in contrast with the more widespread iconography, Vajravarāhi brandishes the vajra and not the karitrkā in her
raised right hand. It is perhaps the absence of a boar head in the 12th century thang-ka published by Pal (1984, pl. 12) which led him to believe that Samvara’s prajña was, in that case, Nairatmā rather than Vajravarāhī (ibid, p. 212), overlooking the fact that Nairatmā is always blue or black and generally accompanying Hevajra (Mallmann 1975, p. 272).

Like all these yi-dam figures, the figure of Cakrasamvara also appears slim and slender, in stark contrast to the stocky and stout shapes, often with big sagging bellies, characterizing the dharmapālas and most of the phyogs-skyong (guardians of the directions) with a wrathful mien. While most of the yi-dam are depicted in the tāṇḍava attitude, Cakrasamvara stands in the alidha posture, but the alidha itself appears here as the performing of a dance figure, rather than a threatening gesture or an ostentatious display of strength.

The heads of the god display the colours customary for the four quarters. The rear head, red, turned westwards, is here drawn as the second at the left of the main head, rather than at its right, as is more often the case. It is not clear whether this is the consequence of a ritual convention (circumambulation around some yi-dam of the anuttaratantras is performed in the opposite way to the normal pradaksīna), or is merely dictated by the painter’s intention to keep it separate and distinct from the prajña’s head, which is red too. A coronet of skulls crowns the heads of Samvara and of Vajravarāhī, and a garland of skulls adorns the prajña, whereas the garland of the god is made with freshly severed heads. Cakrasamvara wears a tiger skin on his waist, whereas Vajravarāhī appears naked, but for a vestment of carved human bones.

The god clasps his prajña in a mystic embrace with his central arms crossed in the prajñāśīlavāsana, holding a vajra and a ghantā, while his two outermost hands bear an elephant skin stretched behind his shoulders. The remaining right hands hold, from bottom to top, a triśūla, a karttykā, a paraśu and a damaru; the left ones, from top to bottom, a kapāla, a pāśa, the brahmaśiras (Brahma’s fourfold head severed) and a khaṭvāṅga. The khaṭvāṅga, terminating in a long five-pronged blue vajra, is in this case tightly held and does not merely rest upon the shoulder, held within the hollow of the left arm as it is more generally depicted. Samvara’s attributes in this painting are hence precisely those which are described in the Nispannayogāvalī and their order is also the same, except for the shifting of the khaṭvāṅga from the fifth to the second left hand. The halo of flames is drawn with elaborate spirals of an almost vegetal appearance, red upon a darker red background at the centre, and red upon black along the edge.

Plate 65 reproduces the painting which is found on the southern side of the same central body of the building, on the upper storey of the harmikā. The figure of Hevajra stands out against a halo of flames similar to the previous one at the centre of the manḍala of nine deities, derived from the Hevajratantrarāja according to the instructions provided by Dombipāda in his Śrīhevajrasadhanā.

This yi-dam is black, with eight heads, sixteen arms and four legs, embracing his prajña, who is dark blue with one head and two arms. With two of his four legs, Hevajra is in the alidha posture, stretching leftwards, while with the other two, both raised from the ground, he sketches a dance figure. He clasps Vajranairātmat close to his chest with his two central hands crossed in the prajñāśīlavāsana and holding two kapālas. Each of the other hands holds a kapāla too: the kapālas held by the right ones contain figures of animals, those held by the left ones contain figures of deities with different colours. The prajña’s visible arm holds up a karttykā with a vajra-shaped handle. As in the case of Samvara and Vajravarāhī, the two deities are wreathed with a garland of skulls and severed heads respectively.

Of Hevajra’s eight heads, three are placed on the right, three on the left and one in the middle, upon the central head. All are endowed with a third eye and have a moderately fierce mien, with mouths baring canines. Unlike Samvara, whose hair is gathered up in a conical hairstyle reminiscent of the usṇīṣa, Hevajra shows dishevelled and flaming hair on all his heads, including the isolated one at the top, and Nairatmā’s hair also has the same aspect.
The figure of Buddhaheruka (Mahâmâyâ) reproduced in plate 66 is painted on the eastern side of the southern peripheral wall on the upper level of the harmikâ, and is derived from the Mahâmâyâtantra. The god, black-blue, is poised in tândavârdhaparyântaka on his left foot, embracing Buddhadâkini, red, in yab-yum. Both deities are endowed with four three-eyed heads, of which the central ones have the same colour as the body, blue and red respectively, the right ones are yellow, the left ones green and the rear ones white (the right head of the prajñâ, who is seen in profile from the left, is not visible). Both possess four arms, provided with the same attributes. The god's central hands, in prajñâliṅgânâbhînayâ, hold a kaprila (the right) and a khâvvariga (the left), while the other two draw a bow with a nocked arrow. Buddhadâkini’s two visible arms hold a khaṭvânga and a bow which appears to be drawn by one of the two hands hidden behind her partner’s back. Both deities have tawny hair, curled at the tips and crowned by a coronet with five skulls, and both wear ceremonial bone vestments, but lack the garland of heads. Buddhaheruka wears a freshly-flayed human skin on his shoulders and bears a small figure of Aksobhya in bhûmisparśamudrâ at the top of his hair.

In this painting one should point out the presence of a stole which is golden and embroidered in the upper face and green in the reverse. It passes behind the head, falls from the shoulders along the loins of the deity and ends in wide fluttering loops at his sides. This detail (also present, with less emphasis, in plate 64) takes up the motif previously discussed for the dharmapâlas and the other protectors. This also seems to indicate that at Gyantse this iconographic detail was felt to be essential for the representation of wrathful deities.

Plate 67 reproduces the figure of Kâlacakra painted on the eastern wall of the central body, still on the upper storey of the harmikâ. This deity occupies the centre of an extremely complex maṇḍala described in the Vimalaprabha, the great commentary to the Śrîkâlacakraatantra. We have already seen that this anuttaratantra took on enormous significance in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

The figure of the god, in the aśīṭha posture, stretched out leftwards, is endowed with four heads and twenty-four arms and is locked in yab-yum with Viśvamâtâ, the universal mother, in turn endowed with four heads and eight arms. The colour of Kâlacakra is black-blue, but his arms are divided into three groups of four for each side, blue, red and white respectively, proceeding outwards from the central ones. His two central hands hold a vajra and a ghântâ while displaying the prajñâliṅgânâbhînayamudrâ. His prajñâ, whom the texts describe as golden and with the central head yellow, is here uniformly painted in an orange-pink colour.

Concerning Kâlacakra’s arms, the sâdhana in the Niṣpannayogavâli describes a rigidly branched pattern: the god is supposed to have six shoulders (three for each side, each of a different colour), twelve arms coming out in pairs from each shoulder, and twenty-four hands, with forearms originating in pairs from the bifurcation of each arm at the elbow (Mallmann 1975, p. 205). But in the painting reproduced here one can see twenty-four arms whose joints, fully visible only in the innermost blue ones, do not appear different from those in other tantric figures.

The colours of the two deities’ heads deserve a special mention. Kâlacakra’s central head is black (dark blue), the right one red, the rear one (here drawn as a second profile on the right) orange-coloured, and the left one white. Those colours, which are proper to Hindu iconography, are also the colours of the four quarters of the maṇḍala, and the same colours also occur in Viśvamâtâ’s heads, about which, however, two points must be made. Firstly, all four heads are visible in the painting, unlike the usual convention by which the face opposite the viewer is left unseen when the deity’s main face is set in profile. Secondly, the prajñâ’s heads show the same colours as those of Kâlacakra, but their sequence proves to be precisely inverted, as a result of the distribution of the colours dictated by the maṇḍala. Since Viśvamâtâ is facing Kâlacakra in the embrace, in order to correspond to the western quarter, the colour of her central face, and therefore also of her body, must be orange, as in this painting. The textual prescription of the unusual golden colour for Viśvamâtâ’s body which is found in the Niṣpannayogavâli may have provided a solution to the difficulty of matching the colour of the body with that of the central head, since from a chromatic viewpoint gold is multivalent.
On the eastern side of the northern peripheral wall of the harmikā, still on the upper storey, there is the Pañca-daśakamanḍala, derived from the Śrivaiḍakanaṇāmahātantrarāja. This maṇḍala is made up of five maṇḍalas, of which the central one is occupied by Vaiḍakā, with similar shape, colour, attitudes and attributes to those found in plate 65 for Hevajra Kapaladhara. Plate 68 reproduces the image of Ratnadaśa, Ratnasambhava’s wrathful manifestation, occupying the centre of the southern maṇḍala in that set. Like all the dākas in peripheral maṇḍalas, this one is similar to the central Vaiḍakā. Yellow, endowed with eight heads, sixteen arms and four legs, he is in ālīḍha with two of them, while he holds his other two feet raised with the legs bent in a dancing posture. His eight heads are placed three on the right, three on the left and one, smaller, upon the central one. His hair is tawny and dishevelled like that of the krodhas, encircled by a crown of skulls and surmounted by a flaming jewel. Each of his sixteen hands holds a kapāla: the right ones contain figures of birds, the left ones anthropomorphic figures (perhaps niḍgarajas). The two central hands, in the prajñālinganabhinaya, clasp Māmaki, the second of the great prajñās associated with the jinas, who has here taken on the third eye and fierce look of her partner and brandishes the karttrkri in her right hand raised up.

Last in this group of yi-dam, partially distinct from them because of the lack of macabre ornaments and of a truly threatening mien, but sharing with them the yab-yum embrace and dancing posture, is Avalokita-tapadmaśa, who is reproduced in plate 69. This figure is painted on the northern side of the eastern wall on the upper storey of the harmikā, at the centre of the maṇḍala derived from the Padmajalodbhavasādhana. The god is endowed with four three-eyed faces, with lips which, although raised at the corners in a kind of smile, bare the teeth with moderately protruding canines. He embraces his svabhāprajñā (similar to him in all respects and endowed with the same attributes) with two of his eight arms, bearing a big red lotus with the left hand and “making it bloom” with the right hand, which holds a vajra between the thumb and the forefinger.

VAIŚRAVANA: YAKṢA AND LOKAPĀLA

The complexity of the Kubera-Vaiśravana type, in which different and quite distant traditions met, has been masterfully illustrated by Tucci (Tucci 1949, pp. 571 ff.). Vaiśravana is the patronymic of Kubera, who is often found in the Brāhmaṇas and in ancient Indian epic poetry: already the Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa (the most extended and important of all the Brāhmaṇas, whose genesis and development cover the period from the 10th to the 7th century BC) shows him as a custodian of treasures and king of the yakṣas. The Mahābhārata indicates Alakā (Alakavati) as his residence, placing it upon the mythical Kailāsa mountain which Indian cosmology associates with the north and with Uttarakuru, the northern region of Jambudvipa (only later does Mt. Kailāsa tend to be confused with Mt. Meru, the axis of the world). From his seat on Mt. Kailāsa, Kubera rules over the yakṣas, over the guhyakas and over the nāgas, thus revealing his chthonic nature. But, also in the Mahābhārata, Brahma confers upon him the office of lokapāla, guardian of one of the directions in space, which on the contrary imbues him with a heavenly quality. From that time one can single out the main components of this figure of Indian mythology: on the one hand his function as custodian of treasures and bestower of wealth, and on the other hand his role as heavenly king associated with the north. From ancient times such a double role was expressed by his actual splitting into two figures, and the picture thus drawn in the Indian myth was handed on to the Buddhist world basically unchanged.

From an iconographic viewpoint, different features correspond to these two aspects. As Kubera (who at a certain moment assimilated Jambhala, another yakṣa with kindred features and functions), Vaiśravana is
represented half-naked and with the dwarf-like squat figure peculiar to the yakṣas, with a purse with coins or with a jewel-spitting mongoose (nakula), obvious symbols of his role as dispenser of wealth. But as a lokapala and a heavenly king he takes on all the devas’ and bodhisattvas’ characteristics. Our long acquaintance with the better known images of Vaśravana often makes us forget this aspect, but it is important to remember how Vaśravana and all the lokapalas are characterized in this manner in canonical literature. Such are the features of the images of Vaśravana from Gandhāra and, many centuries later, such are the images provided by works in post-Pāla style, basically inspired by Indian models. In this connection mention may be made of the xylograph KK II 0231b found by Stein at Khara-khoto (A. Stein 1928, pp. 481-482, pl. LXIII) and of the beautiful thang-ka discovered at Khara-khoto by Kozlov (Béguin 1977, p. 81, No. 23; Rhie and Thurman 1991, p. 337, No. 133), both predating 1227, and both reproduced by Karmay (1975, p. 36, fig. 17; p. 18, fig. 7) and carefully analysed by Amarendra Nath (1986, pp. 93 ff.). These exceptional documents provide a representation of the lokapalas sitting in virāsana or in lalitāsana with attitudes, garments and ornaments similar to those of the bodhisattvas in all respects. They display cone-shaped hair crowned by five-pointed tiaras, wear dhotis, have their heads surrounded by horseshoe-shaped haloes and can be distinguished from the bodhisattvas only by their attributes: Virūpākṣa bears a stūpa in his right hand and a snake in the left, Virāṭhaka holds a sword with the right while grazing its blade with the left, Dṛtarāṣṭra is playing a vina, and Vaśravana holds a dhvaja (banner of victory) and a nakula with the right and the left respectively.

The jump from this kind of representation of the Guardian Kings to their usual depiction as warriors armed with a cuirass and with a warlike attitude is a big one, and Tucci is right to doubt that their new warlike character may be explicable simply in terms of their transformation from followers and wardens of the Buddha to defenders of religion and champions of the dharma. Nor does Tucci consider that the transformation in the character of Vaśravana derives naturally from his old condition of king of the yakṣas. Rather he concludes that such evolution “is the consequence of new orientations, and perhaps of contacts with other mythical types” and believes that such encounters took place in Central Asia (Tucci 1949, pp. 571-578). It is perhaps significant that those texts of the Chinese Buddhist Canon which are devoted to Vaśravana in his wrathful aspect, as he who leads armies and protects the law, are not based upon the translation of Indian originals.

In some Central Asian environment two sets of thoughts concerning, on the one hand the lokapāla as the custodian of the northern direction, and on the other the King of the Horses, one of the four kings among whom the rule of the world is divided, must have merged. Many iconographic features confirm the placing of this event in Central Asia and such a hypothesis is reinforced and better defined when one considers that the kings of Khotan adopted Vaśravana as the founder of their dynasty. But what is the mythical structure with which the Indo-Buddhist pattern came into contact? And why should the kings of Khotan proceed to identify their progenitor god with the lokapāla of the north, who arrived at Khotan with Buddhism?

Buddhist tradition does not afford us much help in maintaining that the lokapalas were introduced into China by the Indian scholar Amoghavajra, who arrived there as late as 719. For we have seen that guardian deities are documented in the Khotan region from the 4th century, and to this one may add that the lokapāla type is certified at Dunhuang (cave 110) in the 5th century (Pelliot 1920-24, pl. CXC) and that in the years 559-560, a temple devoted to the Four Heavenly Kings was erected at Changan, the capital of the northern Zhou, in honour of the famous Buddhist missionary Jñānagupta (Soper 1959, pp. 234-235). It is therefore appropriate to go much further back to locate the roots of an ancient myth which, having affinities with the newly imported one, may have merged with it. The distinctive features of the early myth may have contributed to the evolution of the later form, in the sense considered above.

It seems very likely that the most ancient substratum on which the process may have been triggered should be located in the Chinese tradition. Already, during the Shang dynasty (1766-1122 BC), the gods of the four main directions were the object of worship, and they were granted the title of di (emperor) and attributed the rule of the respective quarters of space in the ritual of the Zhou dynasty (1122-221 BC). A name, a symbolic
animal and a colour (green for the east, red for the south, white for the west, black for the north) were assigned to each of them, and a god of the centre (yellow) was added to make up the set of the wudi (five emperors). During the same Zhou dynasty the great noble families began to associate their ancestral cults with the wudi and when the feudal lords broke from the Zhou empire in 771 BC, each of them prepared an altar for his own ancestral deity, who was associated with the god of the direction in which his fief was placed. Therefore a quite plausible hypothesis is that the kings of Khotan, having long before taken on the northern emperor (huangdi) of the Chinese tradition as their tutelary deity, and having afterwards welcomed Buddhism in their kingdom, may have identified the lokapāla Vaiśravaṇa with the northern emperor out of their zeal as neophytes and out of their attachment to tradition, encouraged by the policy of assimilation and conversion of local deities which was universally adopted by Buddhist missionaries. The kinship of the mythical and cosmological patterns in the two traditions would then have contributed in a decisive manner to the new definition of the Four Heavenly Kings.

It is conceivable that those components of the conception of royalty which the figure of Vaiśravaṇa derived from its Indian configuration as king of the yaksas and ruler of Alakavati may have found a place inside this kind of pattern, and that in this way some of the features characterizing the figure of Kubera in pre-Buddhist Indian tradition were partially transferred to the new conception of the Guardian Kings. Moreover, the very geographical location of Khotan favoured the assimilation of the well-known west Asian aspects which may be found in the iconography of these characters, who only in a subsequent period migrated eastwards, to Dunhuang, to China and to Japan.

The close and stormy relations between Khotan and Tibet probably allowed the new patterns and the new models thus generated to be transmitted to Tibetans long before the latter established their control upon Dunhuang: one need only consider that Chinese texts record a victory upon mGar bTsan-nyen-gung-ston, the “Tibetan governor of Khotan”, in the year 694 (Emmerick 1967, pp. 58-59; Beckwith 1987, pp. 56-57). Because of the compatibility of these models with pre-Buddhist epic poetry and in particular because of the affinities between the new type of Vaiśravaṇa and the mythical Tibetan hero, Ge-sar, the new type of Guardian King could be readily accepted in Tibet.

In the chapels of the sKu-'bum there is a great deal of evidence of the two versions, initial and final, of the Kubera/Vaiśravaṇa character, whereas all trace of the lokapāla type assimilated to the devas and to the bodhisattvas seems to be missing. In plate 70 one sees a peculiar image of Jambhala/Kubera which does not seem to have been pointed out elsewhere. This image is painted on the narrow eastern wall of chapel iNa at the centre of the maṇḍala of Vasudhāra with nine deities, which is derived from the Vasudhārāsādhānakrama, the collective title for a group of four sādhanas contained in the bsTan-'gyur. These sādhanas do not specify the attitude of the two deities, which is rendered here with Vasudhāra in virāsana and Jambhala sitting on her left thigh. This is a posture which is frequently found in many couples of the Hindu pantheon (compared to which, however, the roles and proportions appear to be inverted), but which is altogether unusual in Buddhist iconography, even though one may mention a thang-ka in the Musée Guimet, regarded as an ancient copy of an Indian work prior to the 12th century, in which Vajrasattva clasps the praṇāṇa sitting beside him with his left arm (Béguin 1977, No. 21 and p. 75).

The maṇḍala of Vasudhāra reproduced here is, in a way, symmetrical with the maṇḍala of Jambhala with nine deities, in which, however, the yaksā is the larger figure holding his svābhāparājñā tightly in yab-yum. In both maṇḍalas the eight couples of yaksas and yaksinis making up the parivāra exactly reproduce the postures and attitudes of the central couple.

In the painting of plate 70, Jambhala puts his right arm around Vasudhāra’s neck, the hand leaning gently over her shoulder, while with his left hand he holds the jewel-spitting mongoose in his lap. Both deities are golden yellow and both are bedecked with rich jewels. The conical headdress of Jambhala’s hair is wreathed
by a coronet of flowers, of which the central ones are topped by a jewel. Vasudhārā’s much more imposing five-pointed crown does not show similar symbols, but at the top of her horseshoe-shaped halo, a big flaming jewel appears perhaps to represent that the deity belongs to Ratnasambhava’s kula (family, lineage). Only the goddess’s head is surrounded by a halo whereas the nimbus encloses both deities together. Vasudhāra has a finely outlined face framed by hair which, coming out from underneath her golden coronet, delineates a sort of polylobate arch on her broad forehead. She keeps her right hand in varadāmudrā, while with the left arm she retains Jambhala tight against her side, holding between the thumb and the forefinger the stalk of a golden ear of rice which comes out from behind Jambhala’s shoulder. The latter, who has a prominent belly but is slight in build, shows the big round and wide open eyes which are typical of the yaksas and which, together with his turgid lips, lend him an almost childish aspect. The different dimensions of the two figures and the loving character of the embrace, create the impression of a mother and child rather than of a divine couple.

The eight minor couples, distributed in two columns of four at the two sides of the central figure, all rest upon the corollas of lotuses and are surrounded by red haloes standing out against the dark background of the painting, glazed with shoots in flower. Bowls with jewels and ivory tusks, vases with flowers and bejewelled trees are ranged below the big lotus flower supporting the central couple. At the top end there are the figures of two masters and the characteristic pattern of clouds in horizontal stripes.

Plate 71 reproduces the figure of Vaiśravaṇa as King of the Horses, appearing at the centre of the painting on the eastern wall of chapel 1Ea, which is entirely devoted to the Guardian King of the north. The figures of the Eight Lords of the Horses (rTa-bdag brgyad), minor manifestations of Vaiśravaṇa (two of whom are reproduced in the following plate 72), and many images of other deities and manifestations of Vaiśravaṇa unfold around him, distributed with a freedom far from the geometrical conception of the mandala which is peculiar to the Newar tradition. The inscription on the wall explicitly refers to the “Chinese style” of this painting (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 24), but it should be made clear that the painters are Tibetan (dPal ’Phel-ba and his brother, from gNas-rnying), the very same artists who executed a number of stylistically quite different figures of yi-dam in the harmikā, in forms which are typical of the Newar tradition.

The image of plate 71 retains the characteristic round eyes of the yaksas and the jewel-spitting mongoose of the Indian tradition, and shows the classic triratna at the top of the headdress. On the other hand, it shows a number of features of various origins which are worth discussing. Vaiśravaṇa, who holds the dhvaja (rgyal-mtshan), is sitting in lalitāsana on the back of a lion which is blue rather than white, as one normally finds in Tibetan paintings. This different colour seems to be a constant feature in his iconography as Lord of the Horses (even though so far its iconographic meaning does not seem to have been made clear), since the same blue lion appears in a thang-ka displayed at the 1977 exhibition in Paris (Béguin 1977, pp. 80 and 84, No. 31) and in another displayed at the 1991 exhibition in San Francisco (Rhie and Thurman 1991, pp. 160-161, No. 44). The former painting, coming from Khara-khoto, must predate 1227, the year of the destruction of Xixia, while the latter, which is the outcome of a vigorous restoration of a thang-ka previously published by Tucci (1949, pl. S), is regarded as a central Tibetan work belonging to the first half of the 15th century.

Both in the latter thang-ka and in the painting of plate 71 Vaiśravaṇa wears headgear whose shape may be traced back to the crown of Sassanid kings, in particular of Shapur I (second half of the 3rd century AD), as Sir Aurel Stein suggested (1921, p. 874). Around Vaiśravaṇa’s head is traced a sort of halo with quite an odd shape which, rather than being circular, oval or horseshoe-shaped, shows an irregularly wavy outline, as of a light cloth moved by the wind, a feature which is also shown by the Eight Lords of the Horses. That feature is not confined to this painting, or to this particular iconographic type, since it applies to all four heavenly kings and frequently appears in the very many images of them found among the minor figures in the mandalas painted on the walls of the Sku-bum. The contour of this “halo” is furthermore outlined by quivering tongues.
of fire which contribute to give the impression of a somehow moving and living frame. It seems possible that this peculiar iconographic feature is the result of a relatively late elaboration, intended to create a halo from what was originally something else. If we consider the catalogue of the Stein Collection at the British Museum, we find that in one of the finest paintings in cave 17 at Dunhuang, dating back to the 10th century and devoted to Vaiśravaṇa (Whitfield and Farrer 1990, p. 35, No. 9), the halo does not appear at all, but two big flames bursting out from the deity’s shoulders delimit an area which, in a sense, replaces it. That might be the origin of this curiously shaped halo as found in Tibetan iconography.

The need for a halo was obviously felt because of the bright nature of the heavenly kings, and that was already the case at Dunhuang, as is shown by the splendid fragment of a large painting devoted to Dхṛtarāṣṭra and dating back to the 9th century (ibid, p. 36, No. 10), in which it is possible to observe a fragment of the outline of a circular halo with a border of flames on the left shoulder. The same solution appears in a small painting of Virupākṣa, belonging to the same period and coming from the same cave 17 (ibid, p. 67, No. 42). However, the scarce vividness of the flames, so dutifully brought back to the regular outline of the halo, is apparent in the latter figure and one may understand the search for a happier solution which might have found its realization in the contorted and flaming halo of the Tibetan rGyal-chen sde-bzhis.

We are left to clarify the role of these flames, which cannot simply be accounted for as a general prerogative of Buddhist deities, since they seem to appear only in the case of the Guardian Kings. In this case too, we may hypothesize the presence of that same Western influence already seen as the basis of the garments of heavenly kings. Among the Sogdian paintings already mentioned with regard to the armour, there appears a character with leonine protomes decorating the shoulder plates and with all the attributes of a warlike god, who causes big tongues of fire to burst out of his shoulders (Belenitski and Marshak 1971, fig. 11). If one acknowledges that those flames are an essential attribute of this figure as a warlike deity, one understands how it may have seemed necessary to transfer them to the Guardian Kings together with the other warlike features.

Another element may have contributed to such a choice. We have seen that from the outset Vaiśravaṇa and his companions occupied a somewhat ambiguous position between the wrathful and peaceful manifestations of the divinity, between chthonic and heavenly deities. This ambiguous character is even evident in those representations in post-Pala style the aspects of which assimilate the lokapālas to the devas and bodhisattvas. Indeed, in a thang-ka from Khara-khoto (Rhee and Thurman 1991, No. 128, pp. 324 and 325) in which the figures of these lokapālas have a greater relief and size than in the previously mentioned thang-ka from the same site, their eyes are round, bulging out and with red rings, and at the root of the nose it is possible to notice that sort of elementary stylization of the frowning mien which we have seen to be so clearly marked in some wrathful deities, particularly in Acala, and which is altogether absent from the bodhisattvas' faces. The hybrid nature of the Guardian Kings tends to preclude both the serene brightness of a head-halo and the terrifying violence of a background of flames. The tormented and flaming frame which surrounds their head in Tibetan paintings apparently represents a suitable iconographic connotation, even though it does not achieve a really happy aesthetic result.

Finally, mention should be made of the suit of armour of this particular image in the sKu-'bum. This armour retains the typical articulated structure using parts held together and fastened to the body by belts and straps, but shows a few minor variations in comparison with other more widespread models. The lion heads from which the arms come out appear reduced to decorative elements of limited size and importance, without effectively evoking the awfulness of the armed hand emerging out of them, whereas the embroidered and fluttering sleeves take on a great importance. The two circular openings of the plastron over the pectoral muscles, which ensured the necessary freedom of movement and could be covered with leather or metal breastplates worked in relief, have disappeared and have been replaced by two decorative elements reproducing the traditional image of the kṛttimukha, from whose mouth descend festoons of pearls like those
recurring in the upper ornamental bands of many chapels. Also, the rosettes, festoons and cloud contours which decorate the plastron and body-belt are all motifs which are far from the early patterns and reveal Chinese influences much closer in time.

Plate 73 reproduces the central portion of the great painting which is found on the western wall of the same chapel 1Ea, a painting which, albeit reduced to wretched conditions, appears as one of the most beautiful and interesting in the sKu-'bum. This painting portrays the Yellow Vaiśravana, sitting in vāmārdhaparyāṅka (a posture symmetric with the ardha-paryāṅka one, with the left leg hanging down) on a snow lion, within a Chinese style pavilion, placed at the centre of his palace in the Alakavati paradise (ICang-lo-can) on Mt. Kailāśa, a motif basically inspired by the literature of the Pañcarākṣa. In this case too, the figure of Vaiśravana, holding a dhvaja and a nakula respectively in his right and left hands, combines the features of a yakṣa with the armour of a heavenly king. That armour appears further sinicized in its decorative features: the lion-like protomes on the shoulders are further reduced and the flutterings of the sleeves stressed, the breastplates are decorated with big peonies, the white gorget is embroidered with many-coloured flowers and pearls, the materials in the lower portion of the garment are richly damasked. Yet, we have here apparent ties with the world of the Indian literary tradition and of the Newar pictorial tradition. Though the niche enclosing the image of Vaiśravana terminates in a Chinese style roof whose upper portion is decorated with two big serpent-like dragons, it also displays a polylobate arch and a red backdrop of a clear Newar origin. The headgear evoking distant Sassanid origins is replaced by the usual five-pointed crown, the jaṭāmukuta culminates in a big flaming triratna and the halo has a perfectly circular shape.

As in the descriptions of many other Buddhist paradises, the basic mandalic structure of this painting takes on the aspect of an architectural transposition from the circles of the maṇḍala to a series of concentric corridors which correspond to the different storeys of the palace (or, if one prefers, reveals the nature of a plane projection of an architectural structure which is actually typical of every two-dimensional maṇḍala). In the three concentric corridors are regularly distributed the eight rTa-bdag, the twenty-eight sDe-dpon (rulers of the yakṣas), the thirty-two sTobs-chen (Mahābalas, Vaiśravana’s dharma-brothers in their capacity as armed warriors) and a number of other minor deities of the Buddhist and Hindu pantheons.

Typical of the maṇḍala is the symmetrical distribution of the pavilions and of the figures in the various circles. The subdivision into sections and the use of bright red and green tonalities in the backgrounds (plates 74 and 75) is typical of the Newar tradition. The roofs of those pavilions, however, are in a typical Chinese style, and the division of spaces into compartments neither prevents the horses and horsemen from passing over their borders nor hinders minor figures from entering them with a variety and naturalness of attitudes contradicting the symmetry of the spatial distribution. We are here facing a most obvious instance of the original and creative aspect which Tibetan painters were able to confer upon the syncretic iconographic material they dealt with. The successful contrast between the rTa-bdag, with their Central Asian costumes and with their horses reminiscent of the superb Chinese animalistic art, and the sDe-dpon, with their stocky and expressive yakṣa figures, provides certain proof of this. But the clearest evidence of this successful combination of different styles and forms is perhaps provided by the images in plate 76, where regal figures with shapes, garments and attitudes quite different from Indo-Nepalese conventions, stand out with a most beautiful effect against red, green and orange backgrounds worked in the most typical Newar manner.

Such stylistic considerations apart, plates 76 and 77 are also worthy of interpretation from an iconographic viewpoint. The female figure in plate 77, seated on a throne, dressed in sumptuous robes, surrounded by attendants and protected by a canopy, has her head wreathed by flowers and leaves and holds a vase with a flaming jewel. The male figure in plate 76 shows typical royal features: not only does he wear a crown with the same shape as the crown of the rTa-bdag in plate 72, but he sits on a throne bearing the symbols of kingship
carved in ivory, among which one may discern the war elephant (glang-po) and the best of horses (rita-mchog). Furthermore, he is followed by an attendant bearing a parasol or royal canopy and flanked by a second figure, a goddess or queen, holding a tray of jewels. The object which the king holds in his hand appears to be a ceremonial sceptre, and the attitude with which it is held, similar for instance to the one illustrated in the famous scroll by the court painter Yen Liben (Karmay 1977, pp. 64-67), seems to indicate the profession of a relationship of obedience and allegiance. On the whole the scene is evocative of a gesture of homage to Vaiśravaṇa by a king.

The figures of the above two plates, placed symmetrically at the right and left of the pavilion occupied by Vaiśravaṇa, seem to be a recurrent feature in the pictorial representations of Alakavatī. Two small figures in royal attire are found standing in the upper corners of Vaiśravaṇa’s pavilion in an ancient thang-ka published by Tucci (1949, pl. 141 and p. 575), who does not provide any explicit interpretation for them. Both appear to be of human nature and of regal aspect, and both show a respectful attitude, holding a ceremonial sceptre and offering a tray of jewels, respectively. Again, two figures of similar kind, but seated on a throne and surmounted by a canopy, are discernible at the sides of Vaiśravaṇa in a much later thang-ka published by Béguin (1989, pp. 102-103), who qualifies them as personnages princes: in that case, however, the female figure displays the varadamudrā and holds a flaming jewel with an attitude which seems to be more appropriate to a deity.

A significant difference in the mural of the sKu-'bum is the fact that the male figure at Vaiśravaṇa’s right has at its side a woman of noble aspect, wearing a tiara and holding a bowl full of jewels, ivory and corals. Another thang-ka in Tibetan Painted Scrolls (Tucci 1949, pl. 140 and p. 575; Rhie and Thurman 1991, pp. 44, pp. 160-161) shows a similar couple, which Tucci identifies as the king and queen of nāgas without providing any direct iconographic evidence for such an identification (Béguin 1989, p. 102), simply stating that, “that painting much resembles the one in the Thousand Buddhas... which bears an inscription saying that it represents Vaiśravaṇa ‘crossing the ocean’ in relation with the nāgas and nāginis’ submission”. But such a connection is really too indirect, since the scene in that famous painting from Dunhuang (A.Stein 1982, pl. 100; Whitfield and Farrer 1990, p. 9), which Stein describes as “Vaiśravaṇa, Regent of the north, moving with divine host across the ocean”, obviously precedes that submission, and no trace is found of an untimely presence of the nāga king among the pugnacious retinue which follows the Regent of the north.

That painting, however, may well provide useful clues. The female figure in rich draperies at the left of Vaiśravaṇa holds a tray full of flowers and fruits and displays in her attire many vegetal elements which characterize her as a goddess of vegetation and more precisely as Śrī Devi, the goddess of plenty and of good luck. As a matter of fact, Śrī Devi appears to be associated in many ways with Vaiśravaṇa/Kubera in Indian mythology. Her figure soon came to be confused with that of Lakṣmi, another pan-Indian goddess, who in Vaiśnava and Śaiva mythologies is conceived as a goddess of good luck, of wealth and of plenty, and as such is associated with Kubera.

When Viṣṇu incarnates as Rāmacandra and as Parasūrāma, Lakṣmi identifies herself with Sītā and with Dhārani (the earth), who are both closely connected with fertility. Moreover, according to the Rāmdāna, Lakṣmi rises from the waves during the churning of the milk ocean (samudramāthana), bringing with her the cintāmaṇi (the jewel fulfilling all wishes), a symbol which in itself embodies those signs of plenty, fertility and wealth which are otherwise expressed by the tray of fruits and vegetables (sasvapatra), the tray with jewels and valuables (ratnapatra), and the vase of ambrosia (aṃṛṭagṛha). Lakṣmi was adopted into the Buddhist pantheon, together with Jambhala and Kubera, in a role which is not unlike Vasudhārā’s. In this connection, one may recall that Vasudhārā is in Hinduism one of the names of the earth goddess (Bhūmi or Pṛthivi) closely associated with fertility and that, whereas the Buddhist Vasudhārā’s attribute is an ear of rice, in eastern Bengal the goddess Lakṣmi is represented by a basket full of unhusked rice. Finally, it is perhaps significant that
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

Tibetans used the same epithet dpal in naming the two deities (IHa-mo dPal and dPal-gyi IHa-mo). It therefore seems likely that the female figure in plate 77 is none other than the goddess Lakṣṭī holding out the vase of amṛta and the cintāmaṇī.

The same painting from Dunhuang also provides some suggestions for interpreting the royal figure in plate 76. Three different components may be singled out from the host following Vaiśravaṇa in that painting: a half-naked white-haired ascetic figure with a western physiognomy and a long white beard, a group of warlike characters with a devilish or feral aspect, and an unarmed human figure with a noble look, in an attitude of humble devotion.

The first figure seems to portray a ṛṣi that Whitfield and Farrer identify with Vasu, one of the saptarṣis of the Vedic tradition, better known by his other name of Bharadvāja. It is well known that these first great ṛṣis were conceived of as brahmaṛṣis (born from Brahmā’s mind), the primeval ancestors and agents of the creation, and it may be recalled here that it was Brahmā who made Vaiśravaṇa lord of the yakṣas and conferred upon him the office of lokapāla. The very name of Vaiśravana, however, is generally understood as a patronymic deriving from Viśravas, who is the son of Pulastya (or, according to a different tradition, a manifestation of Pulastya himself), another of the saptarṣis, from whom yakṣas, rakṣasas and vānaras originated. So the ṛṣi in that painting is more probably Pulastya conveying the host of his supernatural warriors to support his son (or grandson) Vaiśravaṇa in his struggle against the nāgas.

While this interpretation might well explain two of the three above members of Vaiśravaṇa’s retinue, the human figure in a devout attitude at the edge of the group invites different interpretations. Entirely lacking the nāga’s features which would be required by Tucci’s hypothesis, this figure has been tentatively identified as a donor or as one of Vaiśravaṇa’s sons (Whitfield and Farrer 1990, p. 34). However, since no convincing justification is given for the last assertion, and since it is unusual for donor figures to be so closely integrated into a composition, one is obliged to concede that it must have some other more specific meaning.

At this point one may hypothesize that the royal personage is intended to express the worship by the kings of Khotan of their ancestral deity. A specific hint of this can be recognized in the oriental features of his face and garments and, more particularly, in the four-pronged crown, to some extent reminiscent of the crown of the Uighur prince in a famous 9th century painting found at Turfan (Akiyama 1973, 1, pl. 104). Such a hypothesis may be reinforced by Xuanzang’s assertion that Vaiśravaṇa enjoyed a special cult in Khotan together with Śrī Devi (Tucci 1949, p. 572), who would thus very appropriately fit in this painting.

Returning to plate 76, we find in it a majestic king dressed in oriental garments, bearing a Central Asian crown and holding an oriental sceptre, but provided with a crooked nose and a long white beard, who seems to combine the features of both the protecting ṛṣi and the devout Khotanese king. This appears as a synthesis of previous elements, where the mythical pattern has been expressed through a more earthly model derived from the more complex original iconography, in which a queen has been introduced beside the king, carrying a bowl of jewels with a gesture of offering.

The fusion of these different elements might well justify the humble attitude of both figures which, according to Tucci, makes it impossible to consider them as Vaiśravaṇa’s parents. The original version is, however, confirmed by the servant bearing the canopy, whose monkey-face recalls the vānaras of Pulastya’s army. Also, the inscription on the wall describes the statue of rNam-thos-sras Ser-chen-zhi-ba-bde-byed (Yellow Vaiśravaṇa, peaceful and beatific), which is the ideal centre of this same chapel IEa, as being flanked by yab Drang-srong rNam-mang-thos-pa (father ṛṣi Viśravas) and by yum IHa-mo dPal-chen-mo (mother Śrī Mahādevi). In fact those two statues are not found at Vaiśravaṇa’s sides, but one cannot help relating those names to the figures painted in the great maṇḍala on the western wall.
FEMALE DEITIES

The appearance and assertion of female deities in Buddhism is closely associated with the appearance of tantras. There is no indication of goddesses reaching a high rank in Buddhism before the spread of tantric practices. Even in the tantras, however, female deities appeared mainly as relatively anonymous partners of male deities, and only gradually did they acquire an independent role, until they reached a bodhisattva rank, occupied the centre of the mandala and were allotted their own paradises. Tārā, the main female figure in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon, provides a typical example of this process.

Tārā does not appear in the first Mahāyāna sūtras devoted to the figure of Avalokiteśvara, such as the Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra and the Kāraṇḍavyūha. But she is mentioned as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara in the Mahāvairocana-sūtra and appears several times in the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa: in the second chapter of that tantra, which provides the instructions for constructing the mandala, Tārā is placed by Avalokiteśvara’s side together with Bhṛkuti (Macdonald 1962, p. 108). She appears again in the fourth chapter, which is devoted to the manufacture of the pata, where she is described as golden-coloured, adorned with all jewels, her right hand displaying the varadāmudrā and her left holding the blue lotus, surrounded by garlands of flames (Lalou 1930, pp. 37 and 38). In that text Āryatārā is defined as “Avalokiteśvara’s compassion” (Avalokiteśvarakarunā) and introduced as the goddess destroying all hindrances and removing all fears.

The first image of Tārā known to us dates back to the 6th century and depicts her as a member of a triad, on the right of Avalokiteśvara, who has Bhṛkuti at his left. Tārā, who according to legend was born from a tear of Avalokiteśvara, represents, as we have seen, his great compassion, whereas Bhṛkuti represents his divine wisdom. Since compassion was the main attribute of that Bodhisattva, Tārā soon became the most important of the two goddesses and ultimately acquired an independent role. The presence in the bKa’-gyur of a Tārāmūlakalpa, sharing with the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa virtually all the first fourteen chapters (Lalou 1936), provides confirmation of this.

It is interesting to see how, in the evolution of tantric Buddhism, Tārā, initially associated with Amitābha in the Padma Family, was subsequently associated with Amoghasiddhi and the Karma Family. The term karma has, amongst others, the meaning of “action”, and Śyamatārā (Green Tārā), whose colour indeed reveals her association with Amoghāśiddhi’s kula, appears as a dynamic manifestation of compassion and, as goddess of action, she promptly comes to the aid of those invoking her.

Her very name, which may also mean “star”, is generally interpreted to mean “saviouress” (sGro1-ma), relating it to the root tr (“cross over”, “pass through”, “escape”, but also “get to the end of”, “accomplish”). If the latter interpretation suggests spiritual connotations, indicative of this deity’s soteriological role in the crossing of the ocean of samsāra and the attainment of liberation, one must, however, recognize that her name has been generally interpreted in the narrower sense of saviouress from dangers which occur within the phenomenal world. From the 7th century she was in particular attributed with the performance of a very precise series of interventions aimed at averting the eight great dangers represented by lions, elephants, snakes, fire, water, robbers, prison and demons. Indeed the eight aspects of Green Tārā represent the embodiment of the specific forms of her miraculous activity as rescuer of human beings from those dangerous predicaments, whereas her semi-wrathful green manifestation is invoked to overcome obstacles.

Naturally the eight great dangers were subsequently given a more subtle interpretation as inner perils. For instance, in a poem composed in praise of Tārā, the 1st Dalai Lama dGe-dun-grub-pa lists them as follows: the lion of pride, the elephant of delusion, the fire of anger, the snake of envy, the thieves of wrong views, the chain of avarice, the flood of attachment, the demons of doubt (Willson 1986, pp. 301-306). But the first more substantial perils were surely those which have more often given cause for Tārā to be invoked, and it is to this more immediate relieving function of hers that one must attribute the quick success and expansion of her cult.
However, besides these reasons and quite probably even before them, it was the deep-rooted Indian mythic theme of the great Mother Goddess which determined her success and put her cult on a firm foundation. The introduction of the cult of Tārā may, therefore, be seen in terms of the systematic assimilation by Buddhism of widespread and heartfelt pre-existing myths: in this particular case it was a question of assimilating and reshaping the cult of Durgā, which at that time was already quite diffused and well-established. This last and more general reason also explains the introduction of a great number of other female deities, often drawn from tribal or local cults and often corresponding to chthonic deities.

Female deities were also introduced into the Buddhist pantheon by schools and masters through the personification of sacred texts, the most important instance being the figure of Prajñāpāramitā, the embodiment of the Mahāyāna literature bearing that name. But minor texts and individual mantras and dhāranis too were the object of a similar process and were hypostatized as female deities, as is the case of the Pañcarakṣā. A similar process also occurred in relation to the buddhas’ and bodhisattvas’ abstract or concrete attributes. Deities were thus created expressing the irradiation of the dharma, or the Buddha’s royalty, or the power of the Buddha’s urna or usnīsa, and embodying the bodhisattva virtues (the Ten Paramitas). In the chapels of the sKu-'bum one therefore comes across a number of female deities, figures with great evocative power, which variously represent the outcome of these two processes of assimilation and of creation, and are the object of a widespread and popular cult.

Plate 78 reproduces the figure of Śāḍbhujāśuklatārā (the six-armed White Tārā), which is painted on the northern wall of chapel 2Nb. This is an aspect of Sitatārā deriving from the Saḍbhujāśuklatārāsādhanā and inspired, like many of the paintings in this chapel, by the fundamental tantra devoted to this deity, the Sarvatathāgatamātratārāvivakarmabhavatantra.

The goddess’ three faces are all white, against the indication of the sādhanā which would have the right head yellow and the left one blue, with a five-pointed crown above. A third eye is visible on two of the heads and a crescent topped by a small figure of Amoghasiddhi, green with a red nimbus, rests upon her conical headdress. Tārā sits in ardhaparyānāka on a lunar disc, with her bosom bare, a light green shawl draped in soft folds on her shoulders and ornaments studded with jewels. The lower part of her body is wrapped in very rich materials and a thick loincloth interwoven with golden threads and ornated by a splendid band with embroideries of spirals and vegetal scrolls on a red background. Of her two central hands, the right one displays the varadamudrā, while the left holds the stalk of a brush-like green lotus in profile, which in Indian iconography is known as utpala. The other two right hands hold a rosary (the lower one) and an arrow (the upper one), whereas the corresponding left hands hold a pink lotus, full-blown and with the centre apparent (padma), and a bow respectively.

The upper band of the painting, touching the ceiling, has been executed with a motif en trompe l’œil, simulating a cloth festoon with regular vertical folds, in two colours, green and red. This motif, recurring in a number of chapels in the sKu-'bum, is also found in the paintings of the bsTan-'gyur-lha-khang at Zhwa-lu, reproducing the eight stūpas of the Indian tradition (Vitali 1991, p. 104, pl. 74), paintings which, incidentally, are so similar to those found at Gyantse that they can hardly date from the previous century.

Plate 79 reproduces the figure of Aṣṭabhujāśyāmatārā painted on the southern wall of the same chapel 2Nb, in accordance with Atiśa’s system, surrounded by the Tārās of the one hundred and eight names listed in the Āryatārābhadrānamāṭasatākta. In this instance also, the goddess sits in ardhaparyānāka on a lunar disc placed upon the double corolla of a lotus with multi-coloured petals and with elaborately indented edges, her right foot resting upon a small lotus branching off the main stalk. She has three heads, all green and three-eyed, with a five-pointed crown and with a motif at the top of the jaṭāmukūṭa which may once have contained a tiny figure of Amoghasiddhi, but is now abraded and indecipherable. The deity is covered only by a light-weight red
shawl with golden embroideries flung upon her shoulders and a necklace richly adorned with precious stones. The materials draping over the lower part of the figure vie in richness with those of the Tara of plate 78. The halo, which in the previous case was evenly green, is here embellished and brightened by a thick and very fine decoration with golden floral motifs on a red background. One cannot help admiring the mastery with which the artist played on the contrast of light and dark tones, outlining the white faces of Suklatara against a dark and dull background, and the green ones of this Syamatara against a bright and warm golden background.

The first three pairs of hands (from top to bottom) hold a malala and a dhvaja, a sara and a dhanu, a cakra and a kalaśa, in the right and in the left respectively. The two central hands are held in front of the breast with the palms turned forward, each one displaying what appears as a modified vitarkamudrā, with the ring-finger touching the thumb so as to form a closed figure called “triangular pose”, which is regarded as the mystic gesture of the Taras and of the Eight Bodhisattvas (Waddell 1974, p. 337; Getty 1978, p. 201). This gesture is similar to that known as kartari hasta in Indian iconography (Gupte 1972, pp. 3 and 7). The same variant of the vitarkamudrā is defined as kichijo-in (śrimudrā, the gesture of Śri, the goddess of good luck) in Japanese esoteric Buddhism (Saunders 1985, p. 71).

The vitarkamudrā is a gesture of argumentation or teaching and thus used particularly by the buddhas: in Japan it is attributed to Śākyamuni and to Amida, and the bringing together of the two hands in the kichijo-in is a mudrā specifically attributed to the Buddha of the west. A different form of this mudrā corresponds to each of the esoteric Amidas of the nine classes (Demièville 1924, p. 236) introduced from China in 847. In particular, the Amida of the so-called Middle Class (Lower Life) is represented with precisely the same gesture as the one performed by Tārā in plate 79 (Saunders 1985, p. 74). It is obvious from the above discussion that an iconographic heritage like the one afforded by the sKu-bum of Gyantses makes a more careful and detailed study of the universe of mudrās possible and necessary. In this case, as in that of the bodhyagrimudrā mentioned above, it seems that it may be useful to make a comparison with the parallel universe of mudrās in Japanese esoteric Buddhism.

There is no trace of the aspect of Tārā illustrated in plate 79 either in the Sādhanamālā or in the Niśpannayogāvali, so that no description of it is provided either in Mallmann’s text or in Bhattacharyya’s. But an image of her appears among the five hundred xylographs of the “Narthang Pantheon”, with the only difference that the two central hands are in the much more usual samputānjalimudrā.

On the northern wall of chapel 2Sb, a chapel at the centre of which is the statue of Khadiravanītārā flanked by Marici and by Bhṛkuṭi, there is the maṇḍala of Durgottarārātara, the Tārā releasing from rebirth in evil forms of existence, who is also derived from the Sarvatathāgatagarbhaśvetakarmahavattra. In this maṇḍala the central deity is surrounded by the twenty-one aspects of Tārā which originated as embodiments of the twenty-one stanzas of the hymn in praise of Tārā which is contained in that tantra.

The image of plate 80 reproduces one of the aspects of the goddess, namely that of Huṃsvaranādīnītārā, the Tārā proclaiming the sound of the sacred syllable huṃ (viz. making that mantra resound), yellow, sitting with her ankles crossed upon the white lunar seat placed on a double lotus. The goddess performs the śramanamudrā (gesture of ascetic renunciation) with her right hand and holds the stalk of a golden lotus in her left hand, displaying the same variant of vitarkamudrā which has been discussed in connection with the previous plate. It seemed fit to provide this example of the fineness and accuracy of the details with which the small figures of the parivāra are realized, while also considering the faithfulness with which iconographic prescriptions are observed even the minor characters in the maṇḍala. Indeed, this image is found in the series of the Twenty-one Taras of the “Narthang Pantheon”, illustrating with a good approximation the tradition of the school of Suryagupta, a 9th century Kashmiri paṇḍita, the author of as many as five commentaries devoted to Tārā included in the bsTan-'gyur.
Another aspect of Tārā is illustrated in plate 81, which shows the painting on the southern wall of the same chapel 2Sb, depicting Prasannatārā, a wrathful manifestation of that deity, as derived from the Sarvārthasādhanāyaprakāramatārāsādhana, surrounded by the Aṣṭamahābhayatārās, namely the Eight Tārās saving from the eight great dangers.

The goddess is yellow, endowed with eight heads and sixteen arms, and stretching sidewardly in vāṃliṣṭha. Three heads are at the right of the central one (respectively black, dark green and light green) and three at its left (white, red and light green), whereas another smaller and smoke-coloured head is placed upon the main one. All these heads, three-eyed and of moderately ferocious mien, with lips baring small sharp canines, are crowned by a coronet of skulls and have tawny and wavy hair. However, the central head appears almost serene, in a sense justifying the name Prasanna (propitious, favourably disposed), even though the peculiarly tormented line of the eyebrows is obviously meant to emphasize the deity’s angry attitude. In this case, the motif of her strikingly bloodshot eyes, an unequivocal trait of her nature as a wrathful deity, turns out to be an element which is decorative rather than expressive of fury and violence. Of her two central hands, the right one holds a sword, bringing the hilt towards the breast, while the left one displays the pāṣatarjanamudrā, with the arm reaching out and down. Proceeding from bottom to top, the other right hands hold a green lotus with a wide-open corolla, a śara, a vajra, an ankuśa, a dānḍa and a karttṛkā, while the last one is raised up with the palm turned outwards, in a gesture which can be understood as a modified abhayamudrā or as a vandanabhīnaya (gesture of homage). The left hands hold a kalaśa resting on a white lotus, a ratna, a śīra (severed head), a pāśa, a ḍhatvāṅga, a dhanu and a kapāla (from top to bottom).

Prasannatārā has a young-looking but stout body with strong limbs and a heavy belly, her hips are girded by a leopard skin, and she wears a snake as a sacred cord and a garland of severed heads. She tramples upon Indra with her right foot and upon Viṣṇu with her left one while, between the two, Rudra and Brahmā are prone on the solar disc, which is executed with a fine golden floral drawing against a red background. The halo of flames too, is accurately painted. In the upper portion of the painting one can see the figures of Atiśa and of his disciple ‘Brom-ston on either side of the deity.

The following two plates again refer to deities who may be at least partially related to a pre-Buddhist Indian substratum.

Plate 82 illustrates a rare figure of Kurukullā (whose name seems to indicate a mountain of north-western India as her likely origin) painted on the western wall of chapel 2Wb. This is the aspect known by the name of Māyājālakurukullā, yellow-white, with one head and six arms, sitting in vajrāsana and having a horned garuḍa as her vahana. Her only head, endowed with a third eye and with red and dishevelled hair, bears a crown whose five points seem to start from small roughly-shaped skulls. In the central part of the crown one can recognize the red figure of Aṃitābha.

The two central hands display the bhūtādāramudrā, a mudrā so far encountered only in the eponymous deity and regarded as peculiar to the latter. Apparently similar to the vajraḥūṃkāramudrā and performed likewise by crossing the wrists, it differs from it because the ring-fingers of the two hands, rather than the little fingers, are intertwined, so that the palms are slightly rotated sideways. Of the other two right hands, one displays the abhayamudrā and the other holds a rosary, while the two left hands hold a kunda (a white flower similar to jasmine) and a kamandalu.

The deity is placed inside a shrine in a clearly Newar style, with a trilobate arch resting upon columns, which a central band divides vertically into two sections having the typical aspect of club-shaped vegetal stems with stylized leaves and naturalistic flowers at the sides, and terminating in the classic corolla of a blue lotus supporting a small capital, again with a vegetal appearance. Two big flaming jewels, showing the usual vortex-like motif inside them, are placed on the side-ends of the upper frame, resting upon the capitals. The vases at the base of the two columns provide a curious detail in this structure, perhaps revealing an individual artist’s
solution, albeit within well-defined patterns. The rounded shape of these vases results from the figures of two standing snow-lions drawn back-to-back, in such a way that their heads outline the flaring above the neck of the vase while the hind paws make up the pedestal. It is not easy to establish if this is a purely pictorial solution, the outcome of a combinatory game which can be put into practice in the two-dimensional field, or rather the pictorial translation of an elaborate shape of imported china.

Plate 83 reproduces the image of Grahamatrkā Mahāvidyā painted on the southern wall of chapel sNa'. This is a figure which, by its very name, reveals on the one hand (as Grahamatrkā) its original root in the cruel ogresses seizing children (found in many forms in the pre-Buddhist tradition of India and systematically transformed through worship into deities protecting their very victims), and on the other hand (as Mahāvidyā) shows its own specific nature as an embodiment of mantras and dhāraṇīs capable of impetrating salvation and benefits.

This deity, to whom the Grahamatrkānāmadhāraṇī (a kriyā tantra associated with the Tathāgata Family) is devoted in the bKa'-gyur, is described in the Dharmakṛṣṇasamgraha. She is endowed with three heads and six arms and sits in vajrāsana on a lunar disc within a niche closely akin to that of plate 82. Her two central hands display the dhāraṇīcakrā mudrā, while the second pair holds two flowers of a pink lotus (kamala), the right one topped by a vajra. Finally, the outermost hands hold an arrow and a bow. Within the niche, at Mahāvidyā's right, on a distinct lotus throne, there is another female deity, red and with bodhisattva ornaments, holding a green twig between her hands in the aṅgulimudrā.

The following plates are devoted to female deities who predominantly derive from the personification of dhāraṇīs, of attributes of the Buddha, or of abstract qualities of the dharma.

Plate 84 reproduces the image of Parnaśābari which is painted on the eastern wall of chapel sWa, inspired by the Aryapaṇamañjasutra and deriving more directly from the Parnaśabarisadhanadvaya, according to the Sa-skya-pa tradition. This deity, rose-coloured, clad in leaves and endowed with three heads and six arms, is regarded as an emanation of Akṣobhya, a small white image of whom she wears at the top of her red and dishevelled hair. The deity's mien appears smiling in spite of the presence of all the features of wrathful deities, here justified by the fact that Parnaśābari is the representation of a hindrance-destroying dhāraṇī. Her typical position shows the left knee bent down to the ground, with the leg bent inwards and the sole of the foot turned upwards. The attributes held in her hands are a vajra, a parāśu, a śara, a pāśa, a dhanu and a parṇāpicchihā (a bunch of leaves, or a green twig), in a clockwise sequence.

The quite unnatural or even impracticable posture kept by this deity, is reminiscent of the milieu of yogīnīs and of yoginis, their female partners in tantric rituals. The name Śabarī in fact appears among those of the ḍākinis in the maṇḍala of Hevajra, together with Dombini (low-caste woman), Pukkasi (half-bred woman), Caṇḍali (woman born from a śūdra father and brahmani mother, hence a particularly despised outcaste) (Snellgrove 1980, 1, p. 127). The term śabarī more precisely designates a woman belonging to the wild tribe of the Śabaras, a mountain people of the Deccan, but śabara is a term which was subsequently adopted to designate all savages or barbarians in a general way. However, this was also the term specifically designating the son of a śūdra and of a bhili (woman of a wild race living in the forests of Malwa and of Mehar): therefore one is still dealing with the designation of an outcaste, at the lowest conceivable level in the paranoid Indian caste system. Names such as these, applied to ḍākinis found in the maṇḍalas of some of the most important tantric cycles in Vajrayāna Buddhism and probably endowed with Śaiva-Sākta connotations, mirror the climate peculiar to the Indian tantric tradition, in which yoginis who were chosen as mādvas (in the sense of sexual partners) from among the lowest strata of the population were elevated to the rank of deities, and their function in the initiation ceremony was sublimated into that of bearers of esoteric knowledge.

Lumbini
International Research Institute
With regard to the formal features of this painting, it seems possible to perceive the painter’s intention to somehow render the motility in the flames of the halo, which rarefy and diverge while proceeding from the centre towards the periphery, perhaps a first indication of an evolution in a naturalistic sense which the halo of fire will undergo in the following centuries.

Plates 85 and 86 reproduce two images of Sitatapatrā (the goddess with the white parasol) which are found in chapel 1Wa’ and which may be traced back to the tantras of the uṣṇiṣa, belonging to the kriyatantras of the Tathāgata Family. This deity provides an instance of the personification and deification of the Buddha’s attributes.

The parasol (ātapatra), from which her name derives, actually had a role of great importance in Buddhist iconography from the earliest times: the aniconic representation of the Buddha was indeed often realized by depicting his footprints before the throne sheltered by the parasol. All over Asia the parasol is the emblem of royalty, and its association with the image of the Buddha from the 2nd century BC reveals a transformation in the way of conceiving the person of the Buddha, seen by then as the ruler of the cosmos. A sign of temporal power had been translated into a symbol of spiritual authority and in the meantime, the Buddha had acquired the characteristics of a universal ruler (cakravartin). All the stūpas were covered with that symbol and it was regarded as a highly meritorious act to place a parasol at the summit of a stūpa, since it represented the recognition of the fact that the Buddha is the supreme monarch whose law governs the universe.

The abstract and symbolic character of the parasol, which eventually was in itself sufficient to suggest the idea of the supreme sovereignty of the Buddha, acquired increasing autonomy and importance, until it came to be identified with a deity, Sitatapatrā, the goddess with the white parasol, free from any stain and impurity, who benevolently shelters all living beings like the vault of heaven. The image of plate 85, painted on the eastern wall, depicts the goddess sitting in a relaxed attitude upon the corolla of a lotus blossoming from a big central stalk, with her left leg hanging down in aśīrāmāpyārīka. Behind her back there is a great pentalobate red nimbus which almost takes on the aspect of a shrine and is topped by the foliage of a tree in bloom. Sitatapatrā has three heads (the central one white and the right and left respectively blue and red) all endowed with a third eye, but all with a serene look, surmounted by a three-pointed crown revealing a tall conical headdress. The band at the base of the crown frames her forehead with an almost perfect half-circle, letting the edge of the hair come out from beneath to draw an outline with many small lobes and a pointed inflexion in the centre. Of her eight hands the two central ones hold a parasol and a banner of victory, while the other three pairs hold a vajra and a cakra, a śāra and a dhanu, an anikūsa and a pāśa.

The shape of the parasol which gives this deity her name requires some comment. In fact, whereas in India its iconographic type was still linked with the actual object, in Central Asia, Tibet, China and Japan, it was its symbolic and divine aspect which came to be more and more stressed, to the point of lending it a fantastic and unreal shape. Proceeding from the ceremonial parasol as reproduced in plate 85, with the shape of a small pavilion hanging on the handle of a long rod and decorated with festoons and pendants, one reaches a structure which is no longer conceived realistically, having no rod to support it, hovering in the air among clouds and flowers, conjuring up an all-celestial glory.

The shape of the parasol-canopy in this plate is recorded in a painting of cave 159 at Dunhuang, dating to between the end of the 8th and the middle of the 9th century and showing the Tibetan king with his retinue at the foot of the scene of the Vimalakirti debate (Karmay 1977, p. 73, pl. 8). This shape seems to be generally applied in the case of human characters in realistic environments, whereas the other type is adopted for the figures of gods and bodhisattvas as exemplified by other paintings from Dunhuang, still belonging to the 9th century (see for example Whitfield and Farrer 1990, pp. 60-61). Plates 76 and 77, which we have fully discussed above with regard to the identification of their figures, show somewhat intermediate shapes in which the
wealth of decorative elements and the sinuous unfolding of ribbons and festoons in the air partially contradict the realistic element of the supporting rod.

The image of plate 86 again represents Sitatapatra in her aspect with five heads and eight arms, sitting in lalitasana, with her left knee slightly raised and her foot just leaning out of the lotus seat. Four white heads, all with a third eye in the middle of the forehead and lips laying the teeth just bare, surmounted by a blue head with the same features at the centre, give the impression of a serene, though not altogether peaceful, attitude. The halo and nimbus, filled with a thick embroidery of green vegetal and floral motifs, stand out against an aura of red flames alternating with white and green flames on the border, the whole on a dark background studded with tiny corollas and with large shoots in flower running along the sides. The images of Sa-skya Pan-chen and of Phags-pa are painted in the corners above, while those of Vaiśravaṇa, Yellow Jambhala, Black Jambhala and Lakṣmī are found in the strip below. Surprisingly enough, in that aspect of Sitatapatra the very attribute from which the goddess takes her name is missing. As a matter of fact, her eight hands hold a vajra, a khadga, a musala (a small pestle flared at both ends and held in the middle), a cakra, a pāśa, a sūla, a paraśu and an ankuśa. The absence of the umbrella and the presence of five heads differentiate this figure from all the representations described in the Sadhananulaya and in the Nispannayogavāli, as well as from those illustrated in Lokesh Chandra’s Buddhist Iconography, and its identification might be doubted if there were not a precise inscription on the wall of the chapel (Tucci 1941, 2, p. 12). Tucci suggests the identification of this aspect of Sitatapatra with the central figure in the fourth mandala devoted to the deities of the usnīsa in Bu-ston’s treatise on the kriyātantras (Tucci 1941, 1, p. 184).

The three following plates are devoted to various forms of Mārici (ray of light) who, besides being the hypostasis of a dhāraṇi, shows some contact with the Aryan pre-Buddhist tradition of a bright deity “staying before the sun” who represents an embodiment of dawn. Some deities in her retinue are the hypostases not only of invocations found in the dhāraṇīs, but also of moments and positions in the daily course of the sun on the vault of heaven. That she belongs to the Family of Vairocana (the Resplendent One) and is constantly placed inside the stūpa reveal the transposition of the physical brightness of the sun to the spiritual radiation of the dharma, in particular in the form of radiance of the stūpa.

Plate 87 reproduces the aspect of Mārici, yellow, with three heads and six arms, which is painted on the southern wall of chapel iSa and which refers, like the other images in this chapel, to the Māricidhāraṇikalpaśaṅkha. The image of Mārici appears enclosed within a stūpa of typical Tibetan conception, with its central portion in the shape of an upside-down pot (bum-pa), with a golden surface resulting from a thick embroidery of floral motifs in gold which almost entirely cover the red of the background. The wide opening of the bum-pa, framing the goddess within an elegant pentalobate arch tapering downwards, is vaguely reminiscent of some iconographic conventions of the Indo-Nepalese pictorial tradition in the representation of temples, and this impression is reinforced by the foliage appearing in the upper portion of the painting. Mārici is sitting in a relaxed posture, with her right leg bent on the floor base of the bum-pa, and her left leg with the knee raised and the foot leaning out on the last steps of the throne of the stūpa.

The quality of the painting is very high and the figure of the deity is actually characterized by a warm brightness. The richness and the relief of the jewels are splendidly rendered by fine work in golden plaster. Three distinct and tall jatāmukūtas decorated with flowers rise from the crowns: the main one bears a small golden stūpa at the centre and the figure of Vairocana at the top. The left head is the black head of a wild boar, endowed with a third eye like the other two. The first of the goddess’s three right hands, resting loosely on the lap, holds an arrow, while the other two hold a vajra and a long needle respectively. The left hands, from bottom to top, bear a bow, a thread and the branch of an aśoka tree.
Plates 88 and 89 show two three-headed and eight-armed forms of Márici painted in the same chapel 1Sa, both related to the Máricisádhana parivarta.

The first figure, painted on the northern wall, has the colour of molten gold and sits in virāsana within a stūpa with a bell-shaped bum-pa, whose surface displays the same floral motif as in the previous plate, but is painted in silver-white rather than in gold. In this painting too, Márici is adorned with jewels realized in golden plaster. Her right head is red and the left one (of a wild boar) is dark blue: the central head wears a garland of aśoka flowers besides the usual crown and bears a stūpa and an image of Vairocana on the jatāmukuta. Small evenly distributed locks come out of the garland of flowers wreathing the deity's forehead. The drawing of the eyelids is particularly sinuous and the mouth seems to reveal a trace of sensuality in the upper lip, unusually prominent and rose-coloured in its lower part. These traits, partially shared by the Sītātapatrā of plate 85, and the rounded contour of the face, lend the deity a bright youthful look that seems to render faithfully the prescription of the sādhana, which describes her as sixteen-years old and moved by passion.

Of her two central hands, the right one holds a vajra before the chest between the thumb and the forefinger, while the left one holds the twig of an aśoka tree in bloom in her lap. The vajra and the aśoka flower are the two typical attributes of the one-headed and two-armed aspect of Márici known as Aśokakāntā. The other hands hold the same attributes as the previous figure plus an aṅkuśa, while the outermost left hand displays the tarjanimudrā.

The technique of golden plaster, the use of which may be found as early as the 11th century in the wall paintings of Ladakh, was applied with particular frequency in the 15th century paintings of central and southern Tibet, and it revealed all its potentialities in the wall paintings of the sKu-'bum, much more than in painted scrolls. In plate 88, the execution of the jewels, in moderate relief over the painted image, is extremely accurate and quite effectively reproduces the body and, one might say, the weight of such realistic jewelry. Here, as with the previous plate, one marvels at how the unknown artist was able to reproduce the three-dimensionality of armlets and bracelets, with a correct elliptic projection unexpectedly applied to an otherwise rigorously two-dimensional rendering of the figure. Even though these features were already found in the previous plate, in that case, the beauty of the golden jewelry was to some extent overshadowed by the set coloured gems, whereas here it is the brightness of metal gold which appears as a happy outcome of a specific aesthetic research and of extraordinary craftsmanship. Moreover, all the painting is of a high quality and the figure of the deity is magnificently emphasized by the nature of the materials used for its background, from the malachite of its halo and the azurite of its nimbus, to the dense and thick cinnabar of the hollow of the stūpa.

The second image (plate 89) is characterized by exactly the same attributes, but the hand displaying the tarjanimudrā also holds the pāśa, while the arrow is nocked in the drawn bow and turned leftwards. Márici, also yellow in this instance, has her central head wreathed by a garland of flowers and a series of little snakes surrounding her jatāmukuta which bears a small stūpa and an image of Vairocana. At the sides of her main head there are the dark blue heads of two wild boars. The goddess is placed within a stūpa, sitting in ardhaparyanka on a lunar disc and a large many-coloured lotus resting upon a polygonal throne, which appears to be drawn by seven wild boars, obviously recalling the seven steeds pulling the cart of the sun. The stūpa has a completely different shape from those encountered in the previous plates, being characterized by a very high octagonal plinth and a quite flattened bell-shaped bum-pa, whose concavity is reminiscent of the vaulted dome of a true temple. This impression is reinforced by the steps at the top of the plinth, whose outline conjures up the profile of a multistorey Indian temple, and is further enhanced by the crown of surrounding aśoka trees. In addition to this, a sort of monumental portal is defined by the club-shaped columns directly emerging from the inside of the great corolla of the lotus throne and supporting two big flaming jewels at the top.
PARADISES, SCENES, CHARACTERS

In some chapels of the sKu-'bum, particularly in the temples on the first storey, one comes across narrative paintings which illustrate scenes of real or imaginary places and moments, involving groups of different figures who are distributed in spaces other than the ideal space of the mandala. This happens especially in paintings describing the pure lands of buddhas and bodhisattvas, or illustrating stories of their previous lives.

Often the figures in these paintings are still placed around a deity by observing a hierarchy both in their relative dimensions and in their spatial distribution. But such arrangements and placings reflect a natural conception of importance and priority, rather than representing the geometrical translation of an outside and revealed structure of the cosmos. Deities appear within pavilions which humanize them by circumscribing their figures in architectural structures that are designed by men and open onto gardens to which men have access. Or they hover upon clouds which, however, glide towards an earth where men are the second compulsory and necessary elements of the representation. Alternatively, they sit hieratically upon altar-thrones which, however, men approach to listen to their word and to be enlightened by it. It is obvious that the basic difference between these paintings and mandalas originates from the introduction of human characters, which implies a radically new definition of the space in which the figures are placed and of the attitudes characterizing them individually. The relative positions of figures in this new space and the connections established between their individual attitudes are the elements defining the situation or the tale which the painting is called to depict.

The space of the mandala is a sacred space, since it is a superhuman space. As the rainbow, which in Byzantine basilicas separates the nave crowded with believers from the golden background of the vault, against which the Almighty stands out surrounded by archangels and cherubim without any observance of physical laws, so the protection circles of the mandala separate the profane space from the sacred space in which the dharma symbolically manifests the ineffable reality of the universe. Even when, as in the chapels of the sKu-'bum, the mandala does not appear with the accomplished perfection of a circle, its space remains unreal. The arrangement of figures around a central deity does not establish any relation between them: it merely states their presence and necessity. The flowers covering the empty spaces between the figures do not carry them into the world; they too, like the gold of basilicas, are the symbols of a total otherness. On the contrary, when a painting illustrates the blessed in a paradise, or the miracle performed by a bodhisattva on the earth, the space in which the figures are placed becomes an integral and essential part of the scene. This does not mean to say that it is a space with which we are familiar, nor does it imply that we must give a realistic description of it: the true change of perspective consists in the fact that such space is called to accomplish a functional role which places and qualifies the scene itself. It is obvious that in a human space, whether experienced or yearned for by man, a different freedom of figurative conception is achieved. The "landscape" which is thus introduced represents a ground on which the evolution of stylistic conceptions may manifest itself in a more lively manner, allowing fashions, customs and cultural trends to be recorded.

The attitudes of deities in a mandala are dictated by sadhanas. Postures, gestures and attributes are the reflection of precise ritual prescriptions, rigid supports to the effort of visualization in the practitioner's process of self-identification with the deity. Trends and fashions may affect the embroideries of garments or the pinchbacks of thrones, but a peaceful deity must show serenity and compassion, just as a wrathful deity must grind the teeth and roll the eyes. A painter is left with the possibility of increasing the truthfulness and effectiveness of those miens through his art, not of changing them. But the astonishment, veneration, humility and joy of a crowd of human beings approaching some manifestation of the divine, in one or another world, will not be bound to ritual, albeit significant, gestures. Instead, they will be able to translate themselves into facial expressions and bodily attitudes, and those expressions and attitudes will confer individuality upon
figures. However, as the situational function of a background does not imply the realism of a landscape, so the expressive function of an individual connotation does not imply the realism of a portrait. Yet, in both fields a new range of symbols is made available to the artist and that ground may give birth, if not to a portraiture in the Western sense of the term, certainly to a gallery of idealized portraits and types. The ascetic, the monk, the king, the officer, as well as the Indian, the Persian, the Tibetan, the Chinese, acquire traits which differentiate and which characterize them.

Since canonical texts do not supply descriptions and prescriptions for landscape and human types, other works become compulsory references for painters, just as was already the case for the purely decorative and ornamental motifs of the mandala. Travel, pilgrimages, works commissioned for different places, become opportunities to open one's eyes to other suggestions, to try new techniques and new manners. Jivarama’s famous sketch-book, which is so largely devoted on the one hand to scrutinizing physiognomies and expressions, and on the other to reproducing kinnaras, makaras and vegetal scrolls, provides an accurate record of a situation of that sort (Lowry 1977). Chinese influence in Jivarama’s sketches is great (the drawings which are clearly characterized by the Chinese style occupy over a quarter of the album). This might either indicate that his journey took him to eastern Tibet or even to China, or else merely reveal that the Newar artist was especially interested in motifs of Chinese origin with which he was less familiar, but which were quite current and perceptible in 15th century central and southern Tibet.

On the basis of the freer attitudes introduced by this different type of approach, new trends could develop and an autonomous painting school, Tibetan in the proper sense of the word, could be characterized. The paintings at Gyantse are important in this sense, because not only do they record the very high levels to which an essentially syncretic art may be brought, but they likewise reveal the embryonic presence of the elements necessary to its evolution as the original product of a specific environment and of a specific culture.

Plates 90 and 91 illustrate scenes from bDe-ba-can (Sukhavati, the western paradise) in temple 1W. The short version of the Sukhāvatīvyūha defines that paradise as a world in which neither physical pain (kāyaduhkha), nor mental suffering (cittaduhkha) exist, and in which countless sources of bliss exist instead (Max Müller 1990, 2, pp. 87-103). The very names of the hells, of animal worlds and of Yama’s kingdom are unknown in Sukhavati. According to the Amitāyurdhyānasūtra (ibid, 2, pp. 159-201), the earth there is of a golden colour and the soil is rich with iridescent gems; there are lakes adorned with the seven gems; the blue, yellow, red and white lotus flowers are as large as cart-wheels and every lotus bud sends forth bright rays from which buddha bodies emerge. The rivers produce a delightful sound, musical instruments resound and apsaras dance in the sky, while heavenly scents descend from the clouds. Amitābha sits on a lotus throne surrounded by crowds of listeners and emanates a light shining upon one hundred thousand niyutas (myriads) of kotis (ten millions) of buddha-worlds. The tree of enlightenment spreads above him, always full of leaves, flowers and fruits, among the branches of which precious jewels shine: whoever comes to see it, will never again be taken away from the condition of perfect knowledge. There the blessed come into being on one hundred thousand nīraya. In the conception of Sukhavati and in the cult of Amitābha one must recognize close affinities with Persian mythology: one must, in fact, recall that Ahura Mazda leads those who invoke his name to the paradise of boundless light, one of the four Avestic paradises.

Plate 90, relating to a detail in the painting which is found on the southern wall of the front section of temple 1W, reveals the naive spirit inspiring the popular representation of a paradise: the Buddha at the centre preaches the doctrine, as is shown by his hands displaying the dharmacakra mudrā, but perhaps it would be better to say that the dharma radiates spontaneously from him, as is indicated by the radiant aura surrounding him and eternally flowing onto the monks and devas forming a circle around him. The truths which are promulgated, and which here become accessible to minds no longer obscured by māyā, imbue the blessed who
are reborn in Sukhāvatī and sit in an ecstatic attitude on lotus flowers blooming from the same lake from which the great lotus of the Buddha emerges.

The details of the painting tend to wrap that essential bliss in a number of customary symbols, in the vain effort to render the different qualitative level of a pure land through redundance. Turgid and fleshy flowers, shady bejewelled trees, light and coloured small clouds, which must be understood as diffused scents, golden sands and small mincing figures of ducks and cranes, are the instruments of that attempt. Even the tiny corollas covering en tapiserie the black-blue background of the painting are enriched by kaleidoscopic motifs recalling the delicate crystalline structure of snowflakes.

Plate 91 too, reproduces groups of worshipping figures around Amitābha’s big throne, as painted on the southern side of the western wall in the same temple, to the left of the entrance door. Whereas the lower portion of the painting repeats the motifs that have just been described, with the addition of delightful small figures which are reminiscent of our medieval imagery of the Earthly Paradise, its centre, with choruses of bodhisattvas, of śravakas, and of devas, brings us back to the most classical representations of post-Pāla iconography. But even these figures are wrapped in vegetal and floral luxuriance, distancing them from the more aseptic Pāla models to plunge them into a much more sensual atmosphere of bliss.

A similar atmosphere is rendered in the painting of plate 92, reproducing a detail of the eastern side of the northern wall in temple 1N, left of the entrance door. The walls of this temple are chiefly devoted to the illustration of the Mañjuśrīvihāra: in fact Mañjuśrī too rules over a pure land, which popular imagination places in our world, identifying it with the magic paradise supposedly located on the Five Peaks (Wutai Shan) in the north-east of China. Here, the seductions of hearing are added to those of sight and smell, as shown by the three charming small figures of “musician angels”, while the exaltation of inebriating pleasure deriving from the colour and scent of flowers is brought to paroxysm by the huge flower-trees aligned at the base. An Indo-Nepalese origin is apparent in these flowers, as in the slender and supple silhouettes of the divine musicians, whereas in the vegetal elements one may perceive features which, in the following centuries, will be typical of some miniatures from the Himalayan slopes.

A different picture is offered by the figures painted on the portion of wall flanking eastwards the access to the highest and inner section of the same temple 1N, here reproduced in plate 93. In this plate one may discern two different planes, located respectively inside the pavilion where Maitreya sits, and within the fenced space giving access to it. In the former the figures of the Bodhisattva and of his retinue, however interesting for the plain and linear drawing of the draperies, do not depart from the traditional iconography of Indian derivation. In the latter one may observe different types and costumes whose Tibetan and Chinese origin would perhaps deserve analysis, just as would the shape of the vases and the novelty represented by the offering of a parrot (or of a kindred bird), elegantly supported by the folded arm of the character wearing a large white turban.

The three following plates (94-96) reproduce paintings drawn from temple 1E, which are devoted to Maitreya’s paradise (the Tusita heaven) and to Maitreya’s past lives. In the Indian tradition the tuṣṭitas were a group of deities of a subordinate rank who were already accepted by Theravāda Buddhism and assigned to one of the devālokas (worlds of the gods) belonging to the kāmadhātu (sphere of senses and desire) of Buddhist cosmology. The Tuṣita heaven became the seat where the mānuṣibuddhas (the buddhas who have assumed a human form to preach the dharma on the earth) spend their penultimate existence. The scenes painted on this wall reflect the descriptions provided by the Saddharmapuṇḍarikāmahāyānasūtra and by the Ārya-maitreyaparipṛcchānāmaḥmahāyānasūtra. The pictorial representation of Maitreya’s paradise is testified quite early in China, for example in cave 445 (8th century) at Dunhuang and in cave 25 (9th-10th century) at Wanfoxia, near Yulin (Brock 1988, pp. 230, fig. 9; p. 231, fig. 1). The paintings in this temple are perhaps those which more clearly move away from Newar taste and make use of the experience of Chinese painting in the
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

most original and creative manner. One finds in them a regular subdivision of the surface in horizontal strips which may recall the division of spaces into compartments which is typical of the Newar tradition. However, these elements of separation between the different strips are made up by long captions clarifying the contents of the painting and relating it to the textual source, hence playing a role which cannot be entirely reduced to a spatial delimitation. Moreover, the strips thus obtained are of remarkable width and generally house several different scenes, freely distributed in an open space, with the inclusion of architectural and landscape elements able to confer a certain degree of naturalism upon the scenes themselves. In the background clouds and trees and rocks are added to the abstract plane provided by the dark surfaces strewn with small corollas in the Newar manner.

The departure from the rigidly two-dimensional iconic style of the Indo-Newar tradition appears manifestly in the use of architectural structures which, with the zigzag planes of their fencings, bring about a certain perception of depth and allow the artist to place the figures in a more plausible perspective. In this painting the acquisition of that new dimension is also obtained through the adoption of an aerial viewpoint, allowing the viewer to read the arrangement of figures along the vertical axis as a measure of depth. Both those devices are obviously borrowed from Chinese painting, while the extraordinary knotty tree trunks appearing in plates 95 and 96 are even more directly inspired by Chinese models. These trunks, with their dry and tormented bark, very directly recall the contemporaneous series of thang-ka devoted to the arhats found at Shigatse and presently kept in the British Museum (Pal 1984, pl. 58; Rhie and Thurman 1991, pl. 14). Those scrolls, albeit executed in central-southern Tibet, surely prove a deep knowledge of Chinese painting in the late Yuan and early Ming period.

At any rate, it is obvious that in temple 1E we face the work of a painter trained at a school where the narratives from the holy scriptures were interpreted in the Chinese manner, a painter who coupled the knowledge of costumes and types of the Chinese and Central Asian courts with the knowledge of Tibetan costumes and Indo-Nepalese models. That painter was very good at placing the figures in a natural way and in realistic attitudes, and at giving each of them its own physiognomy and character. It seems that one may single out a unique Tibetan element in this very concern to depict the specificity of the characters and the truthfulness of their attitudes. Whereas, in fact, it is obvious that the supposedly “naturalistic” elements in the landscape are not directly gathered from a study of nature, but rather borrowed from the artistic and symbolic elaboration of such elements as produced by Chinese artists, the same cannot be said for many of the human figures crowding that landscape. Even the new stereotypes surfacing in some of them seem to reveal the intervention of an original elaboration.

The scenes of plate 97 are exemplary from the viewpoint of the confluence of different styles and traditions, sometimes integrating, but sometimes merely juxtaposing one another. Here we find the green, blue and brown rocks of early Ming painting, no longer retaining anything of the ancient Indian and Central Asian stylization, as well as a tree adding the conventional leaves and flowers of the Newar tradition to the Chinese crabbed outline of the trunk, but we also find an exceptionally vivid figure dressed in white, receiving the teachings of a monk. This character has a freshness, a truth, an expressiveness which reveal the painter’s direct emotional participation and which seem to be typical of Tibetan art. The paintings in temple 1E are not the only examples in which those elements appear, and the extraordinary figure of a dancer in plate 98, reproducing a small detail of the lower band of the mandala of Śākyā-seng-ge, suffices to prove it. The dynamism of the dance and the suppleness of the figure are rendered here with the same sobriety and sharpness of outline which had shown their persuasive effectiveness in expressing the absorption in meditation. Both figures are significant instances of a skilfully naturalistic style making its appearance in Tibetan art.

Of course even the naturalistic requirement of expressiveness and characterization can in many instances be transformed into a stereotyped manner: a manner which contrasts the pre-existent formalism with an
almost grotesque stress on certain physiognomic features, following a path that had already been paved by
the forms which the iconography of the arhats had been taking on.

From the time of early Buddhism the arhats were celebrated in India as ideal examples of liberation, but
a corresponding Indian tradition in visual arts does not seem to have existed. Arhats are found in China from
the Tang period, and they became particularly popular in the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1279-1368) periods.
Klu-mes 'Brom-chung, one of the ten monks associated with the reintroduction of Buddhism into central
and southern Tibet (dBus-gTsang-gi mi bcu), supposedly imported a set of thang-ka devoted to the arhats into Tibet.
He installed them in the temple which he founded in 1011 at Brag-ye-pa, near Lhasa, and Atiśa’s disciples
introduced a specific liturgy from India, apparently for that very series (Dagyab 1977, 1, pp. 60-63). Hence in
Tibet the liturgical tradition concerning the arhats is traced back to Atiśa, whereas the corresponding pictorial
style derives basically from Chinese sources.

The iconography of the arhats assumed a systematic character at the beginning of the 15th century and
their images were rendered in painting in accordance with two different traditions, either with ordinary,
serene and scarcely expressive figures, or with marked, sometimes grotesque, features derived from Chinese
examples. But in accepting the latter manner, which is of interest to us inasmuch as it contributed to the
evolution of Tibetan art in a naturalistic sense, Tibet manifested a trend towards a realistic toning down of its
most exaggerated aspects. Jivarama’s sketch-book includes two different series of drawings devoted to the
arhats (one with their faces alone and the other with their complete figures), corresponding to their list
according to Atiśa. From a stylistic point of view Jivarama’s arhats, whose figures were apparently taken from
wall paintings, can be placed halfway between the earlier Chinese version, marked by a much greater
emphasis on characterization, and the later more restrained Tibetan version. However, fluctuations between
those two types of representation are often found within one and the same series, and that also occurs in the
two sets of statues of the arhats which are present at Gyantse. The first of these is found in a special chapel (gNas-
brtan-lha-khang) within the main temple (Lo Bue and Ricca 1991, pp. 99 and 377-411), and the second inside the
bum-pa in the sKu-’bum, where it fully occupies the two side walls of the southern temple. The figures
reproduced in plates 99-102, drawn from the series in temple 5S, show the arhats inside rocky caves in
accordance with the Chinese tradition. They are a good instance of the way in which the Chinese model was
transformed by Tibetan artists in a naturalistic sense, though maintaining a marked characterization. Plate 96
also provides an instance of the risks of decay or of disastrous “restoration” to which these statues, like all
works in the sKu-’bum, are subject.

In any case the introduction of naturalism in the treatment of the human figure in Tibetan art must not
be understood in the literal sense of the direct assumption of actual specific models for portraiture, but rather
as the overall outcome of the observation of reality for the creation of “types”. The more or less differentiated
components of those types were fixed in ideal portraits which tradition undertook to transmit through the
following centuries. A considerable series of idealized portraits is found in the paintings covering the walls
on the fourth storey of the sKu-’bum, which is devoted to the masters of the various traditions of tantric
Buddhism. That process was still at an early stage at the time the sKu-’bum was erected, but its outcome was
important because of the influence it exerted upon the illustration of the lineages of the various Tibetan schools
in the two following centuries.

Plate 103 shows the image of rJe gNyā’-khri-btsan-po painted at the centre of the eastern wall of chapel
4N2, devoted to the Buddhist kings. King gNyā’-khri-btsan-po is, according to Tibetan tradition, the first of
the prehistorical kings of the Yar-klangs dynasty to which the historical kings of Tibet belong. The king was
regarded as a heavenly god (lha), or as a god’s son (lha-sras), descended upon earth to put an end to the strife
and weakness of the Tibetans who were oppressed by their enemies (Haarh 1969, passim). His divine nature
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

was witnessed by his possessing the faculty of climbing up again among the gods, which myth materialized in the image of a thread linking him with heaven (rim-thag).

The layout followed in the painting of plate 103 is similar in all respects to that normally adopted for deities: the frontal figure sits in a hieratic pose, the right hand holding a thread between the thumb and the forefinger (perhaps a naive representation of the rim-thag), in an almost identical attitude to the one with which deities hold the lotus stalk or display the vitarkamudrā. The difference lies in the garments, in the turban-like crown, with a shape like that generally adopted for Tibetan kings and dignitaries, and in the discreet note of realism conveyed by the light shading which marks the presence of the moustache and of a hardly perceptible hint of a beard on the contour of the face.

The figure of plate 104, which is painted in the same chapel 4N2 on the narrow portion of the northern wall to the left of the entrance, shares with the previous image the style of the clothes and the way of rendering the moustache and eyebrows by shadowings, but it quite clearly differs from it both in its attitude and mien. The underlying caption identifies it as a personage who is attributed a great role in Tibetan culture, namely, Thon-mi Samboṭa, who was sent to Kashmir by King Srong-brtsan-sgam-po to study Buddhist texts and who, according to a tradition currently challenged by modern scholarship, introduced the alphabet in 632 and created the first Tibetan grammar.

Plate 105, reproducing the figure of Buddhaguhya painted on the northern wall of chapel 4NE, provides an instance of the kind of "portrait" recurring in the illustration of the spiritual lineages associated with the transmission of various tantric cycles. Buddhaguhya (second half of the 8th century) was a great Indian master, a commentator of the Tattvasaṅgraha, of the Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatantra and of the Mahāvairocanatantra, and one of the greatest diffusers of the yogatāntras. In this portrait his face appears, to a Tibetan eye, as typically Indian, with a dark complexion, a lively look, thick and protruding eyebrows and a beard spreading over an appreciable portion of the face. Moreover, his pointed headdress qualifies him as a pandita, and his hands displaying the dharmacakramudrā confirm his role as a great diffusor of the doctrine. From his hands depart the stalks of two blue lotus flowers bearing a sword and a book on their corollas, apparently qualifying Buddhaguhya as an emanation of Mañjuśrī.

In this painting, in a sense, the general conception returns to that of the manḍala, since the figure of Buddhaguhya is flanked by a long series of minor figures and disciples, arranged in vertical columns at his two sides, though leaving the upper portion of the painting free at the centre. Furthermore, the pandita sits in vajrāsana on a lion throne, perhaps to indicate that his teaching and commentaries are the continuation of the Buddha’s preaching. The throne itself is quite interesting, with a polygonal base and a back of the type which has already been discussed in connection with plate 18, with an elaborate wooden framework, studded with gilded metal at the joints and enclosing cinnabar-red panels. The Chinese inspiration for this throne is made even more obvious by the fact that the upper wooden frame ends at the sides with two elegant phoenix heads. Moreover, the fabric lining the cushion leaning against the back shows a rich many-coloured embroidery with floral motifs and flights of phoenixes on a light background, an item of beautiful workmanship and clearly of Ming taste. A peculiar feature is the shape of the rather small halo which is placed around the head of the master. It is neither circular nor of the horseshoe shape previously met, as it tends to narrow much more definitely towards the bottom, showing signs of closing up behind the shoulders with a reduced bending radius.

Mention must be made of the extraordinary tree trunk rising at the pandita’s left and stretching out its crabbed and thorny branches to cover all the upper portion of the painting. The tormented drawing of the tree and its rough and wounded bark bring this painting close to the fine painted scrolls with arhats which we saw were produced in Shigatse in the same period. The non-geometric and rather free character of that motif does
not actually imply the asymmetry of the overall composition, since on the same wall Buddhaguhya is faced by the damaged figure of Sāntigarbha, another great Indian master and a disciple of Padmasambhava: the gaze of the two figures, sitting on similar thrones, meets at the centre, and also the motif of the tree is repeated on the opposite side. But this symmetry is not rigid and allows, for instance, autonomous solutions in the development of branches, foliage and different flowers, as well as the use of different colours and motifs in the decoration of the thrones and of the garments.

Plate 106 reproduces the image of Ka-ba dPal-brtsegs painted on the eastern wall of the same chapel 4NE, to the left of the entrance door. Ka-ba dPal-brtsegs was a Tibetan scholar contemporaneous with Buddhaguhya, a great translator of Sanskrit texts and one of the two chief contributors to the Mahāvyutpatti, the Sanskrit-Tibetan dictionary whose compilation presumably started during the reign of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan with the aim of standardizing the renderings of complex Buddhist terminology (Tucci 1958, 2, p. 48n). This painting shows a number of the formal features of the previous one, with the central image flanked by minor figures belonging to the same lineage arranged in columns, with the same kind of throne, the same motif of a tree rising at one side and stretching out its branches in flower, crowded with gaily-coloured birds. Furthermore, the lots-d-pa 's headdress is in the same style and his hands display the same dharmakramudrā while holding the stalks of two white lotus flowers, opening their corollas at the height of his shoulders and supporting a vajra and a ghanī. On the symbolic level more indirect differences are introduced by the different posture (virāsana instead of vajrasana) and by the absence of the motif of the roaring lions on the base of the throne. These symbolic elements seem to mark a difference of rank between the two figures in the spiritual hierarchy.

Other differences, which may be broadly regarded as realistic since they are traceable to concrete physical features, are those concerning the countenance and clothing. The face is, in fact, completely hairless and the arches of the eyebrows, which in the case of Buddhaguhya appear strongly marked and protruding above the eyes, are here barely outlined on the smooth forehead. The garment is the typical one of a Tibetan monk, whose distinctive feature is essentially represented by the stod-gos, a sort of waistcoat showing a deeply cut out semicircular opening for the arms (here quite visible at the right armpit), which is closed on the front with a V-shaped opening at the neck and is slipped into the sham-thabs, a skirt which is gathered in vertical folds around the waist and held by a belt. The stod-gos of the Tibetan translator appears to contrast with the bare chest of the Indian monk, while in both cases the shawl has the same shape and is similarly placed around the body.

Such elements, however, are realistic only in as much as they refer to concrete and permanent features which are inherent in the image (face, garment) and not because they faithfully reproduce actual features peculiar to individual characters. The dark and marked face of one and the hairless and smooth face of the other are obviously stereotypes, and the same may be said of the garment, for it is doubtful that, for example, the stod-gos, documented from the 11th century, was already in use in the 8th century. And it is plain that the folds of the sham-thabs at the waist may be found in Chinese sculpture, but not in the Indian costume.

With regard to "portraits" it would therefore be more appropriate to speak of two types of devices used for characterization: symbols and stereotypes. The combined use of these two means, with further differentiation which may be introduced into the stereotypes (colour of the skin, physiognomic features, hairstyle, style and colour of the garment and of the headdress), and with the variety of available symbols (asanas, mudrās and attributes), allows the artist to characterize conventionally the different figures. The choice of a stereotype may refer to an actual feature or to an image suggested by the iconographic tradition, according to the lapse of time intervening between the period in which the personage lived and the moment in which his portrait was realized. However, from the moment a stereotype is defined, the features of a portrait are fixed and the singling out of a given character is conventionally established. Like the so-called realism of landscapes, the supposed realism of portraits appears to be borrowed from earlier artistic elaborations.
Another instance of portraits of this sort is provided by plate 107, reproducing the image of Po-to-ba Rin-chen-gsal painted on the western wall of chapel 4St. Po-to-ba Rin-chen-gsal (1031-1106) was one of the most celebrated disciples of 'Brom-ston, Atiśa’s foremost disciple, and for a short period was the abbot of the monastery of Rwa-sgreng, which 'Brom-ston had founded in 1073. In this case the layout again becomes more rigidly symmetric. The garment is the typical one of a Tibetan monk, the symbols resting on blue lotus flowers are again a sword and the book of the Prajñāpāramitā. The distinctive physiognomic features are essentially aimed at characterizing the figure as a venerable old man, both through the conspicuous element of the snow-white hair, and through the subtler but effective element of the different lines marking the chin, the folds of the neck and the shoulder blades. The figure’s apparent squint describes a particular state of concentration in the practice of yoga.

Most valuable aesthetic results may, in any case, be achieved within these stereotypes, as in the example of plate 108. This plate reproduces a detail of the painting found on the northern wall of chapel 4NW, depicting Gling-ras-pa Padma-rdo-rje (1128-1188), a tantrika (lay practitioner) disciple of Phag-mo-gru-pa. These two masters, Mi-la-ras-pa’s spiritual descendants, occupy an important place in the tradition of the bKa’-brgyud-pa school, combining the siddhas’ tantric teachings with the monastic rules of the bKaf-gdams-pa order. The general layout of the painting is again similar to that of the three previous ones, and the assimilation to the mandalas of the lower storeys is further increased here by the presence of a proper floral torana above the throne, but the originality and skill of the artist in painting this face can hardly be denied. Unfortunately this painting too is seriously compromised by cracks in the structure and by devastating patchings. Such is the condition of many paintings and of many statues in the sKu-'bum, particularly on this fourth storey, which is more exposed to seepages of water and more directly subject to the tensions introduced by the high mass above. This situation is bound to rapidly deteriorate further because of the diminished care of the monument by a now small number of monks and because of the diminished sacred tension with which visitors approach it. One can only hope that an improvement in social and political conditions and a suitable intervention of appropriate international organizations may stop a process of irreversible decay which threatens to wipe out such a precious heritage of art, history and culture.
Bibliography


dByang-’zhu-yun 1991 “gNa’-grong rGyal-rtses bskyod-pa” in Mi-dmangs brNyam-par (China Pictorial), 10, pp. 20-21.


Jia Xiang Yun and He Zongying 1990 “By Whom and When was the Palkhor Chode Monastery Founded?” in Tibet Studies. Journal of the Tibetan Academy of Social Sciences, 2/2, pp. 161-166.


The Great Stupa of Gyantse

Mukhopadhyay S. P. 1985 Amitābha and His Family. Agam Kala Prakashan, Delhi.
Pal P. 1983 Art of Tibet. Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles.
Rinsen Book Co., Kyoto, 1984 repr.
Tucci G. 1949 Tibetan Painted Scrolls. La Biblioteca dello Stato, Roma.
Wylie Turrell V. 1962 The Geography of Tibet according to the Dzameling-rgyas-bshad. IsMEO, Roma.
gZhon-nu’-dpal’ (’Gos-lo) 1984 Deb-thar sgyon-po. Si-khrun Mi-rigs dPe’-skrun-khang, Chengdu (?).
Plates A & B The Great Stupa
Plate C  The Castle
Plates D & E Gyantse and the religious enclave from the castle.
(Frederick Spencer-Chapman 1937 above; 1990, below)
1. Vairocana (Temple 5E).
2. Vairocana (Chapel 3Ea').
3. Vairocana (Chapel 3Eb').
4. Mahāvairocana (Temple 3E).
5. Mahāvairocana (Temple 3W).
6. Ratnasambhava (Chapel 3Wb').
7. Amoghasiddhi (Chapel 3Wa').
8. Vajrasattva (Chapel 3Wa’).
9. Vairocana (Chapel 3Wa).
11. Lokesvara (Temple 35).
12. Vajrasattva (Temple 3S).
13. Detail of the mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana (Temple 3N).
15. Peaceful Vajrapañi (Chapel 3Nb').
17. Vajrasandhi (Temple 3S).
18. Gāganagaṇja (Temple 3S).
19. Lokeśvara (Chapel 3Sa).
20. Mahasukha / Vajrarāga (Chapel 3Na).
22. Statue of Vajrahetu (Temple 3S).
23. Statue of Vajrasattva (Temple 3E).
25. Statue of Vajrasattva (Temple 5W).
26. Maharaja Manjusri (Chapel 2Nbr').
27. Dharmadhātuvägiśvara Mañjuśrī (Chapel 2 Nb').
28. Statue of Samantabhadra (Chapel 2 Eb').
29. Cittavîrāmanava Avalokiteśvara (Chapel 2Eb').
30. Statue of Šaḍakṣāra Avalokiteśvara (Chapel 2Sa’).
31. Ekādaśamukha Avalokiteśvara (Chapel 2Sa').
32. Ekādaśamukha Avalokiteśvara according to the Padmajāla (Chapel 2Wb').
33. Avalokiteśvara Padmanarteśvara (Chapel 2Wb').
34. Amoghapāśa (Chapel 2Wb').
35. Mahāmuni (Chapel 2Na).
36. Śākyamuni in the Tuṣita heaven (Temple 1E).
37. Maitreya in the Tuṣita heaven (Temple 1E).
38. Vajrapāni (Chapel 2Ea’).
39. Nartakavara Vajrapaṇi (Chapel 1Sb).
40. Vajravidarana (Chapel 2Na').
41. Vajrāṃkāra (Chapel 3Nb').
42. Trailokyavijaya (Chapel 1Eb').
43. Detail of the mandala of Trailokyavijaya (Chapel 1Eb').
44. Vajrajñālānaśrīka (Chapel 3Na').
45. Hayagriva according to the dPal-mo system (Chapel 2Wa).
46. Hayagriva according to the sKya-rgang system (Chapel1Wb).
47. Detail of the maṇḍala of Hayagriva (Chapel 1Wb).
48. Raktayamāri (lower storey of the Harmikā).
49. Vajramahābhairava (lower storey of the Harmikā).
50. Detail of the mandala of Marici (Chapel 1Sa).
51. Usnisacakravartin (Vestibule 4V).
52. Yamantaka (Vestibule 4 V).
53. Sita Acala (Chapel 1Nb').
54. Krodhatrailokyāloka (Temple 3N).
55. Krodhatrailokyadharṣana (Temple 3N).
56. Krodhatrailokyabandhaka (Temple 3N).
57. Krodhatrailokyanasaya (Temple 3N).
58. Detail of the maṇḍala of Krodhatrailokyadharṣana (Temple 3N).
59. Detail of the maṇḍala of Krodhatrailokyabandhaka (Temple 3N).
60. Deities of the outer cycle of the Vajradhatumāṇḍala, western and northern quarter (Temple 3E).
61. Deities of the outer cycle of the Vajradhātumanḍala, eastern and southern quarter (Temple 3E).
62. Detail of the maṇḍala of Padmāntaka (Temple 3W).
63. Deities of the northern door of the mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana (Temple 3N).
64. Cakrasamvara (upper storey of the Harmika).
65. Hevajra Kapāladhara (upper storey of the Harmikā).
68. Ratnaḍāka (upper storey of the Harmikā).
69. Avalokitapadmajala (upper storey of the Harmika).
70. Vasudharā (Chapel 1Na).
71. Vaiśravaṇa as Lord of the Horses (Chapel 1Ea).
72. Two of the Eight Aśvapatis (Chapel 1Ea).
73. Vaiśravaṇa in the Alakavati (Chapel 1Ea).
74. Detail of Vaiśravaṇa's palace (Chapel 1Ea).
75. Detail of Vaiśravaṇa’s palace (Chapel 1Ea).
76. Detail of Vaiśravaṇa’s maṇḍala (Chapel 1Ea).
77. Detail of Vaiśravana’s maṇḍala (Chapel 1Ea).
78. Śaḍbhujaśuklatārā (Chapel 2 Nb).
79. Aṣṭabhujāyamātārā (Chapel 2Nb).
80. Durgottarini Tara (Chapel 2Sb).
81. Prasanna Tārā (Chapel 2Sb).
82. Mayājāla Kurukulla (Chapel 2Wb).
83. Grahamārākā Mahāvidyā (Chapel 1Na').
84. Paṇaśabari (Chapel 1Wa).
85. Sītāpatrā (Chapel 1Wa').
86. Aṣṭabhujasitāpatrā (Chapel 1 Wa').
87. Śaḍbhujamārīci (Chapel 1Sa).
88. Aṣṭabhuja-mārīcī (Chapel 15a).
89. Golden Marici (Chapel 1Sa).
90. Scene from the Sukhāvati (Temple 1W).
Scene from the Sukhāvati (Temple 1W).
92. Scene from the Mañjuśrīvihāra (Temple 1N).
93. Scene from the Mañjuśrivihāra (Temple 1N).
94. Scene from the Tuṣita heaven (Temple 1E).
95. Scene from the Tusita heaven (Temple 1E).
96. Scenes from Maitreya’s previous lives (Temple 1E).
97. Scenes from Maitreya’s previous lives (Temple 1E).
98. Detail of the maṇḍala of Śākyasimha (Temple 3N).
100. Arhat (Temple 5S).
102. Arhat (Temple 5S).
103. rJe gNyag-khir-btsan-po (Chapel 4N2).
104. Thon-mi Sambhoṭa (Chapel 4N2).
105. Buddhaguhya (Chapel 4NE).
106. Ka-ba dPal-brtsegs (Chapel 4NE).
Fig. A The First Storey
Appendix

Iconographic Survey

This Appendix contains detailed information about the chapels and temples in the sKu-'bum in the form of individual descriptions, each provided with a ground plan, the Tibetan name as given in the dkar-chag, and the name of the main deity to which it is devoted.

The dkar-chag to which reference is made is found in the rGyal-rtsa chos-rgyal-gyi rnam-par thar pa dad-pa'i lo-thog rgyas-byed dngos-grub-kyi char-'bebs, the history of princes of Gyantse which was written by the monk 'Jigs-med-grags-pa in the years 1479-1481.

The numbers within brackets before each heading, from 1 to 8, indicate the storey starting from the ground level, capital letters (S, W, N, E) giving the orientation, and small letters (a, a’, b, b’) giving the position in relation to the centre. The two central chapels of each side are marked a, a’ and the two side chapels b, b’, respectively for right and left. This criterion enables us to group the minor chapels around the temples according to the ideal structure of the mchod-rten and to observe the hierarchic principles which always underlie Tibetan plans. Here, as well as in the description of statues and paintings, right and left are conceived according to the Tibetan standpoint which identifies the observer with the central deity: the right of the deity, or of the temple, corresponds to the left of the observer placed in front of it. Small letters do not appear in the labels referring to the temples, since they are always at the centre of each side, nor in those referring to chapels on the fourth floor, where a different arrangement is found, with angular chapels labelled according to the intermediate directions (SW, NW, NE, SE) and with only two smaller chapels for each side, which are numbered 1 and 2 following the pradaksīna. Only the storey number is needed for the two levels in the harmikā (6 and 7) and for the temple within the spire (8). For each storey a detailed plan is given (Figs. A-H), showing where chapels and temples are placed.

The descriptions provide the plan of the corresponding rooms with a simplified diagram with linear dimensions in cm (with an approximation of ±5 cm, due to the irregularities in the walls). Each plan shows the place which is occupied by the statues, as well as the stairs and landings, when present. The paintings on the walls are marked with encircled figures and their subject is illustrated in the corresponding captions, while textual references are given at the foot of the page.

The texts from the bkA'-gyur are labelled Toh., followed by the figure corresponding to the numerical order in the Complete Catalogue of the Buddhist Canons published by the Tohoku Imperial University of Tokyo. The texts from the bsTan-'gyur are quoted according to the Catalogue du Fonds Tibétain de la Bibliothèque Nationale by Palmyr Cordier. Tibetan and Sanskrit titles are given in extenso for all of them.

Finally, each description is accompanied by a black-and-white photograph showing the group of statues which is the ideal centre of the chapel or of the temple. For the two floors in the harmikā and for those vestibules which are void of statues, the mural paintings or overall views are shown.
Temple devoted to bCom-lDan-'das Thub-pa-chen-po (Bhagavan Mahāmuni)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Shākyathtūb-pa (Śakyamuni), gilded, seated in bhadrāsana and displaying the dharmačakramudrā, flanked by Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. The statues are almost entirely covered by the scarves (mjal-dar) offered by the worshippers.

1a. Statue of Sangs-rgyas sMan-gyi-bla Bai-durya'i-od-kyi-rgyal-po (the Buddha of Medicine Bhaisajyaguru)

1a’. Statue of mTshan-legs-yongs-bsgrags-dpal-gyi-rgyal-po (Suparikirtitanāmaśrīrāja).

The paintings on the walls are almost completely defaced or covered by a thick layer of lamp-black and practically indecipherable.
(1 Sa) Chapel devoted to 'Od-zer-can-ma (Mārici)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of 'Od-zer-can-ma (Mārici), gilded, sitting in virāsana within a stūpa pulled by seven boars, displaying the varadamudrā and the vitarkamudrā with her right and left hand, respectively.

2. Mandala of Mārici, yellow, with three heads (one of which is a black boar’s head) and six arms, within a golden stūpa (Pl. 87).

3. Mandala of Mārici, yellow, with three heads (the two side ones being boar’s heads) and eight arms, within a golden stūpa, with a stūpa on the top of the crown, drawing a bow charged with an arrow (Pl. 89).

4. U-rgyan 'Od-zer-can-ma (Oddiyana Mārici), a wrathful form of this deity, red, with six faces (five on a horizontal plane, surmounted by a blue boar’s head) and twelve arms. The deity has a fierce mien, flaming hair, a crown of skulls, a garland of severed heads, and stands in the pratyālīḍha posture.

5. Mandala of Mārici, golden, with three heads (one boar’s head) and eight arms, sitting in virāsana within a white stūpa, displaying the vitarkamudrā with her central right hand (Pls. 50, 88).

Mārici is the central deity of the mandalas related to the 'Od-zer-can-gyi gzungs rtog-pa-dang bcas-pa (Māricidhāraṇīkalpasahita, Toh. 564-566), three kriyātantras belonging to the Yum-gyi rgyud (Tantras of the Mother) of the Tathāgata Family.

A number of sādhanas concerning that deity are collected in the Sādhanasamuccaya under the collective title 'Od-zer-can-gyi sgrub-thabs bskor (Māricisādhanaparivarta, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 218-233).
Chapel devoted to gTseg-tor-rnam-par-rgyal-ma (Uṣṇīṣavijayā)

sculptor: unknown
painter: gYal-mtshan-pa, from gNas-rying

1. Statue of gTseg-tor-rnam-par-rgyal-ma (Uṣṇīṣavijayā), gilded, with three heads and eight arms, sitting in vajrāsana on a double-lotus throne within a stūpa, displaying the dharmacakramudrā with her two central hands. The goddess is flanked by two bodhisattvas.

2. Maṇḍala of Uṣṇīṣavijayā with the thirty-three deities of the uṣṇīsa cycle, golden yellow, with three heads and eight arms, with posture and gestures as in the statue above, within a golden stūpa, flanked by Padmapāṇi and Vajrapāṇi.

3. sGrol-ma-sku-mdog-ser-mo (Pita Tārā), with four heads and eight arms, as described in the sGrub-thabs rgya-mtsho (Sādhanasāgara).

4. sGrol-ma-nor-sbyin-ma (Dhanada Tārā), green, as described in the Sādhanasāgara.

Uṣṇīṣavijayā is the central deity of the maṇḍalas drawn from a group of kriyātantras belonging to the gTseg-tor-gyi rgyud (Tantras of the Uṣṇīṣa) of the Tathāgata Family (Toh. 590-603), and in particular from the ‘Phags-pa ṇgan-gro thams-cad yongs-su sbryong-ba gTseg-tor-rnam-par-rgyal-ba zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Arya-sarvadurgatiparīśādhanvyuṣṇīṣavijayanāmadhāraṇī) and the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi gTseg-tor-rnam-rgyal-ma’i gzungs zhes bya-ba’i rtog-pa (Sarvatathāgatoṣṇīṣavijayanāmadhāraṇikalpa) (Toh. 597, 598).

Maṇḍala 4 on the southern wall is drawn from the sGrol-ma-nor-sbyin-ma’i sgrub-thabs (Dhanadatarā-sādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 196).
(1 Sb) Chapel devoted to Phyag-rdor 'Byung-po-dul-byed (Bhūtaḍāmara Vajrapāṇi)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Kun-dgal-ba, of the rGya family

1. Statue of 'Byung-po-'dul-byed (Bhūtaḍāmara), black, with four arms, in the pratyāliṣṭha posture, with fierce mien and flaming hair, performing his specific bhūtaḍāmaramudrā with his two central hands.

2. Mandala of Phyag-na-rdo-rje 'Byung-po-dul-byed (Bhūtaḍāmara Vajrapāṇi) with thirty-five deities. Black, with four arms, fierce mien, flaming hair, crown of skulls, in the same posture and with the same gesture and attributes as in the statue above.

3. Phyag-rdor U-tsā-rya (Ucārya Vajrapāṇi), black-blue, in the pratyāliṣṭha posture, raising the vajra with the right hand, while displaying the tarjanimudrā with the left against his chest.

4. Mandala of Phyag-rdor Gar-mkhan-mchog (Nartakavara Vajrapāṇi), blue, with eight heads and sixteen arms, dancing in ardhaparyanka, holding a kapāla against his chest with the central left hand (Pl. 39).

The manifestations of Vajrapāṇi which are encountered in this chapel are all related to the 'Byung-po-'dul-ba zhes bya-ba'i rgyud-kyi rgyal-po chen-po (Bhūtaḍāmaramahātantrarāja, Toh. 747) and the 'Phags-pa rDo-rje-sa-'og-gi rgyud-kyi rgyal-po (Āryavajrapāṭātanmātantrarāja, Toh. 744), two kriyātantras belonging to the bDag-po'i rgyud (Tantras of the Master) of the Vajra Family.

A few sādhanas concerning Bhūtaḍāmara are contained in the bsTan-'gyur, in particular the dPal 'Byung-po-'dul-byed-kyi sgrub-thabs mdor-bsdus-pa (Śrībhūtaḍāmaraśanśkṣiptasādhana) and the 'Byung-po-'dul-byed-kyi sgrub-thabs-kyi cho-ga (Bhūtaḍāmarasādhanopāyika), which are known under the collective name dPal 'Byung-po-'dul-byed-kyi sgrub-thabs gnyis (Bhūtaḍāmarasādhanadāvaya, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 337, 338).
1. Statue of Gur-mgon (Pañjara Mahākāla), black, with fierce mien, wearing the crown of skulls and the garland of severed heads, with bended knees, holding a karttrka and kapala and supporting a large gāndī. The god is surrounded by flames and flanked by Ral-gcig-ma (Ekajatā) and ‘Dod-khams-dbang-phyug-ma (Kāmeśvari).


3. Phyag-rdor ‘Byung-po-‘dul-byed (Bhūtaḍāmara Vajrapāṇi) and mGon-po-bram-ze’i-gzugs-can (Brāhmaṇarūpamahākāla).

Gur-mgon is a particular form of Mahākāla, a deity of the burial grounds, related to the dPal Nag-po-chen-po’i rgyud (Śrimahākālatantra, Toh. 667) and to the ‘Phags-pa dpal mGon-po-nag-po zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Āryaśrimahākālanāmadhāraṇī, Toh. 668), two kriyātantras belonging to the gNas-gtsang lha’i rgyud (Tantras of the Gods of the Pure Abode), of the Tathāgata Family.

Names and descriptions of the Eight Cemeteries are found in the bsTan-'gyur (Cordier: rGyud XX, 13, 14, 16).
(1 W) Temple devoted to Tshe-dpag-med (Amitāyus) and to the bDe-ba-can (Sukhāvati)

sculptor: unknown
painter: the master from Thar-pa, near lHa-rtse

1. Statue of Tshe-dpag-med (Amitāyus), red, sitting in the pralambapada posture, holding the kalaśa upon his hands, which display the samādhimudrā. Flanked by two standing bodhisattvas: sPyan-ras-gzigs (Avalokiteśvara), white, and mThu-chen-po-can (Mahāstamaprajñapti), dark yellow (priyānguṣyāma).

2a, 1a'. Unidentified bodhisattvas.

2. Buddhas of Confession, including rGyal-ba rNam-par-gnon-pa (Vikrantajina), Kun-nas-snang-ba (Samantāvabhāsa), Rin-chen-padma (Ratnapadma), rGyal-ba Ri-dbang-gi-rgyal-po (Śailendrarāja).

3, 6. Scenes from the bDe-ba-can paradise (Pl. 90).

4. 'Od-dpag-med (Amitābha), red, in monk’s attire, sitting in vajrasana on the peacock throne and holding the pindaṇapātra upon his hands, which perform the samādhimudrā. The Jina is surrounded by gods, bodhisattvas and śravakas (Pl. 91).

5. Amitābha preaching to gods, bodhisattvas and śravakas.

The figures of the Thirty-five Buddhas of Confession are drawn from the ‘Phags-pa phung-po gsum-pa zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i mdo (Āryatriskhandakānāmamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 284).

The scenes of the bDe-ba-can and those illustrating episodes of ‘Od-dpag-med’s previous lives are essentially drawn from the ‘Phags-pa bDe-ba-can-gyi bkod-pa zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i mdo (Āryasukhāvatītīrṇyūhanāmamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 115), one of the fundamental Mahāyāna texts together with the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka and the Lalitavistara.
(1 W a) Chapel devoted to Ri-khrod-lo-ma-gyon-ma (Parṇaśabari)

painter: unknown
sculptor: unknown

1. Statue of Ri-khrod-lo-ma-gyon-ma (Parṇaśabari), yellow and gilded, with three heads and six arms, with fierce mien and flaming hair, wearing an apron of leaves, with her left knee bent down to the ground, displaying the tarjanimudrā with her central hands.

2. Ri-khrod-lo-ma-gyon-ma-ser-mo (Pita Parṇaśabari), yellow, with three heads and six arms, with fierce mien and flaming hair, the loins encircled with a garland of leaves, standing in the pratyalidha posture, holding the vajra with her central right hand and performing the pāśatarjanimudrā with the left.

3. Ri-khrod-lo-ma-gyon-ma-ljang-gu (Śyāma Parṇaśabari), green, with three heads and six arms, her flaming hair decorated with the image of Amoghasiddhi. The goddess is standing in pratyalidha, clad in a tiger-skin, holding the vajra with the central right hand against her chest.

4. Parṇaśabari according to the Sa-skya-pa tradition, of light complexion, with three faces and six arms, her hair adorned with the image of a white Buddha (possibly a white form of Aksobhya), clad with leaves, her left knee bent down to the ground, her central hands holding the vajra and a sprouting branch (Pl. 84).

The various forms of the “savage” deity Parṇaśabari are related to the 'Phags-pa Par-ṇa-śa-ba-ri ’i mdo (Āryaparṇaśabarisātras, Toh. 735) and to the ‘Phags-pa Ri-khrod-lo-ma-gyon-ma zhes bya-bo'i gzungs (Āryaparṇaśabarīnāmadhāraṇī, Toh. 736), two kriyātantras belonging to the Khro-mo rgyud (Tantras of the Female Wrathful Deities) of the Padma Family.

Sādhanas referring to Parṇaśabari, in particular the Ri-khrod-ma-lo-ma-can-gyi sgrub-thabs gnyis (Parṇaśabarīsādhanadāvāya, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 234, 235) and the ‘Phags-ma Ri-khrod-ma-lo-ma-can-gyi gzungs (Āryaparṇaśabarīdāvāya, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 237), are contained in the sGrub-thabs rgya-mtsho.
(1 W a') Chapel devoted to gZhan-gyis-mi-thub-ma gDugs-dkar-mo-can
(Aparajita Sitāpatra)

sculptor: [.....] Ma-ta-sa-bzangs, from mKhar-kha
painters: dGe-slong Sangs-rgyas-bzang-po,
and the master from Thar-pa, near lHa-rtse

1. Statue of gDugs-dkar-mo (Sitāpatra),
gilded, with three heads and six arms, sitting
in lalitāsana on the lion throne, holding the
atapatra (parasol) with her central right hand.
The goddess is flanked by Aparajita,
Mahācaṇḍā, Mahājvalā and Mahākālā.

2. Maṇḍala of Sitāpatra, white, with three
heads and eight arms, sitting in
vāmārḍhaparyānka, holding the atapatra with her
central right hand (Pl. 85).

3. Sitāpatra, white, eight-armed, with four white faces on the same level and a fifth blue head above
them. She sits in vāmārḍhaparyānka, holding a vajra in front of her chest (Pl. 86).

4. Sitāpatra, white, with three heads and six arms, sitting in vajrāsana and holding the vajra in front of
her chest.

The maṇḍalas in this chapel are related to the ‘Phags-pa De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi gTseg-tor-nas
byung-ba gDugs-dkar-po-can zhes bya-ba’i gZhan-gyis-mi-thub-ma phyir bzlog-pa’i rig sngags-kyi rgyal-mo chen-
po (Āryasatāpataḥṣaṣṭisūkṣmāsātyātātmākāraśānti, Toh. 590) and to three more
kriyātantras (Toh. 591-593), all belonging to the gTseg-tor-gyi rgyud (Tantras of the Uṣṇīṣa), of the Tathāgata
Family.

Descriptions of Sitāpatra are given by various sādhanas in the bsTan-’gyur, in particular, by the
‘Phags-ma gZhan-gyis-mi-thub-ma gDugs-dkar-mo-can-gyi sgrub-thabs (Āryasitātapatrāparājītāsādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 277), which is contained in the sGrub-thabs rgya-mtsho.
(1 W b) Chapel devoted to rTa-mgrin (Hayagriva)

sculptor: Tshan-pa
painter: Shes-rab-dpal

1. Statue of rTa-mgrin (Hayagriva), red, with fierce mien and dishevelled smoky hair, with a crown of skulls surmounted by a horse’s green head, in the pratýālidha posture, his right hand brandishing a dānda, while his left displays the tarjanimudrā.

2. Mandala of Hayagriva according to the system of sKya-rgang, red, with three faces (each surmounted by a horse’s green head and adorned with a crown of skulls) and six arms. The god is shown in the pratýālidha posture, with his two central hands holding the vajra (right) and displaying the tarjanimudrā (left) (Pl. 46).

3. Hayagriva, red, with tufts of hair surmounted by a horse’s green head, is shown in the pratýālidha posture, brandishing the dānda with his right hand.

4. Hayagriva, red, with his usual features, holding a karttṛka and a kapāla.

5. rTa-mchog-ye-shes-rdo-rje (Paramāśvajñānavajra), red, six-armed, with three heads, each crowned with a coronet of skulls and surmounted by a horse’s head. The god sits in lalitäsana and holds a vajra in front of his chest.

6. Mandala of Hayagriva, red, with three heads and eight arms, as described in the tantras of the yogatantra class (Pl. 47).

The ‘Phags-pa sPyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug Ha-ya-gri-ba gzungs (Āryāvalokiteśvarahayagrivarāhārāṇī, Toh. 733) is the only kriyātantra in the bKa’-gyur devoted to that deity. It belongs to the Khro-bo’i rgyud (Tantras of the Wrathful Deities) of the Padma Family. The bsTan-‘gyur contains two sādhanas by Aṭiśa devoted to Hayagriva: the ‘Phags-pa rTa-mgrin-gyi s grub-thabs (Āryahayagrivasādhanā) and the dPal rTa-mgrin-gyi s grub-thabs (Ṣrīhayagrivasādhanā) (Cordier: rGyud LXIX, 118, 119). The sGrub-thabs-rgya-mtsho, to which the inscription relates the statue in this chapel, contains three sādhanas under the collective title lHa-so-so’i s grub-thabs rim-grangs-las rTa-mgrin-gyi s grub-thabs rim-pa (Devantarasādhanakramapade Hayagrivasādhanakrama, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 317-319).
(I W b') Chapel devoted to Khro-bo rMe-brtsegs (Krodha Bhurkumkūṭa)

sculptor: brTson-pa
painter: dGe-slong Shes-rab-dpal-bzang-po

1. Statue of Khro-bo rMe-brtsegs-dud-kha (Dhūmavarnakrodhabhurkumkūṭa) brown, with three heads and six arms, with a human skin on his shoulders, standing in manḍalapada. The god is flanked by mKhā'-'gro-ma rMe-brtsegs (Bhurkurkutidākini) and by Khro-mo rMe-brtsegs (Krodhabhurkumkūṭi).

2. Manḍala of rDo-ṛje-rnam-par-’joms-pa (Vajravidārana), green, sitting in lalitāśana, surrounded by a flaming halo, holding a ghāntā and a viśvavajra.

3. rDo-ṛje-rnam-par-’joms-pa-dkar-po (Sitavajravidārana), white, sitting in virāśana, holding a ghāntā and a viśvavajra.

4. gShin-ṛje-mthar-byed (Yamāntaka), blue, with three heads and six arms, in the pratyaḷidha posture.

5. bGegs-mthar-byed (Vighnantaka), blue-black, with four heads and eight arms, in the pratyaḷidha posture.

6. Manḍala of Khro-bo rMe-brtsegs-ljang-khu (Śyāmakrodhabhurkumkūṭa), green, with three heads and six arms, in the pratyaḷidha posture, with his central hands in the prajñāliṅganabhinaya attitude.

The central deity in this chapel is related to the Khro-bo'i rgyal-po sMe-brtsegs-la bstod-pa'i sngags-dang bcos (Krodhabhurkumkūṭarājaśārāttratramantra, Toh. 756), a kriyātantra belonging to the bDag-po'i rgyud (Tantras of the Master) of the Vajra Family. No commentaries devoted to that deity are found in the bsTan-'gyur, but several sādhanas are present both in the sGrub-thabs-kun-btus of the Sa-skya-pa tradition and in the Rinchen gter-mdzod of the rNying-ma-pa tradition. rDo-ṛje-rnam-par-’joms-pa is related to the rDo-ṛje-rnam-par-’joms-pa zhes bya-ba'i gzungs (Vajravidāraṇāmādhyānta, Toh. 750), which also belongs to the bDag-po'i rgyud of the Vajra Family. Several sādhanas related to him are collected in the bsTan-'gyur (e.g. Cordier: rGyud LXVIII, 219, 220, 225).
Temple devoted to Mar-me-mdzad (Dipaṅkara)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Mar-me-mdzad (Dipaṅkara), gilded, sitting in pralambapada, with his right hand in the abhayamudrā and his left resting on the knee, flanked by two standing bodhisattvas.

1a. Statue of Kun-tu-bzang-po (Samantabhadra) yellow, sitting in lalitāsana with his right hand in the attitude of holding the stem of a lotus (now missing), his left resting on the knee.

1a’. Statue of sGrib-pa-thams-cad-rnam-par-sel-ba (Sarvanivaranaviskambhin), green, sitting in lalitāsana, holding the jewel on the right palm.

2, 9. Cycles of bodhisattvas drawn from the Mañjuśrīmālākalpa and from the Mahāvairocanaūsambodhi.

3, 4, 7, 8. Scenes from the 'Phags-pa 'Jamy-dpal-gnas-pa (Mañjuśrīvihāra) (Pl. 93).

5, 6. The Buddha, sitting in vajrasana on the lion throne under the bodhi tree, displaying the dharmacakramudrā, preaches the law to gods, śravakas and bodhisattvas (Pl. 92).

The bodhisattva figures in paintings 2) and 9) are drawn from the 'Phags-pa 'Jamy-dpal-gyi rtsa-ba'i rgyud (Āryamañjuśrīmālātantra, Toh. 543), a kriyātantra belonging to the bDag-po rgyud (Tantras of the Master) of the Tathāgata Family. The scenes of preaching in the Mañjuśrīvihāra are related to the 'Phags-pa 'Jamy-dpal-gnas-pa zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po'i mdo (Āryamañjuśrīvihāranāmamahāyānāsūtra Toh. 196), a sūtra in the mDo section of the bKa'-gyur.
(1 N a) Chapel devoted to Nor-rgyün-ma (Vasudhārā)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Shes-rab-rgya-mtsho

1. Statue of Nor-rgyün-ma (Vasudhārā), gilded, sitting in vajrāsana, performing the varadamudrā and the abhayamudrā, with her right and her left hand, respectively. The goddess is surrounded by Śrīvasudhārā, Vasuśrī, Śrīvasumukhi and Vasumatiśrī.

2. Maṇḍala of Vasudhārā with nine deities according to the sGrub-thabs rgya-mtsho. The goddess, of a golden yellow colour, sits in vajrāsana displaying the varadamudrā with her right hand, while embracing a form of Jambhala-Kubera with the jewel-spitting mongoose with her left arm (Pl. 70).

3. Vasudhārā’s maṇḍala with nineteen deities, according to the Vasundharoddeśa in the Kriyasamuccaya. The goddess, of light complexion and six-armed, sits in vajrāsana, her central right hand displaying the varadamudrā and her central left holding a kalaśa with a sprouting branch.

Vasudhārā, as a deity of riches and treasures, is associated with Jambhala. Statues and maṇḍalas are related to the 'Phags-pa Nor-gyi-rgyün zhes bya-ba'i gzungs (Āryasvasudhārānāmadhāraṇi) and to the bCom-ldan-'das-ma Nor-rgyün-ma'i rtog-pa, two kriyātantras belonging to the gNas-gtsang lha'i rgyud (Tantras of the Gods of the Pure Abode) of the Tathāgata Family (Toh. 662, 663).

Four sādhanas devoted to Vasudhārā are contained in the sGrub-thabs rgya-mtsho under the collective title Nor-rgyün-ma'i sgrub-thabs rim-pa (Vasudhārāsādhanakrama, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 299-302)
(1 N a’) Chapel devoted to gZa’-yum Rig-pa-chen-mo (Grahamāṭkā Mahāvidyā)

sculptor: unknown
painters: Don-grub-bzang-po, from lhā-rtse, and bKra-shis-bzang-po

1. Statue of gZa’-yum Rig-pa-chen-mo (Grahamāṭkā Mahāvidyā), white, with three heads and six arms, sitting in vajrāsana on the lotus throne and displaying the dharmacakramudrā, flanked by Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya.

2. Maṇḍala of Mahāvidyā, white, with three heads and six arms, sitting in the same posture and displaying the same gesture as in the statue above, surrounded by the Eight Planets (Pl. 83).

3. Maṇḍala of gZhan-gyis-mi-thub-ma (wrathful form of Aparājīta) with seventeen deities. Belonging to the uṣṇīṣa cycle, black, sitting in vamardhaparyanya. She holds the vajra in the raised right hand and performs the tarjanimudrā with the left in front of her chest.

4. Another form of Mahāvidyā, yellow, with three heads and six arms, sitting in virāsana on a lotus.

The maṇḍalas of the great mother of planets are related to the gZa’-rnam-kyi yum zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Grahamāṭkānāmadhārāṇī, Toh. 661), a kriyatana belonging to the gNas-gtsang lha’i rgyud (Tantras of the Gods of the Pure Abode) of the Tathāgata Family.

In the bsTan-’gyur we cannot find any sādhana for that goddess, who is described in Amṛtānanda’s Dharmakośasaṃgraha.
(1 N b) Chapel devoted to mGon-po-stag-zhon (Vyāghravāhana Mahākāla)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of mGon-po-stag-zhon (Vyāghravāhana Mahākāla), black, with fierce mien and flaming hair, wearing the crown of skulls, standing in pratyalidha on the back of a tiger, holding two kapālas in his hands.

2. Myur-mdzad-ye-shes-kyi mGon-po-phyag-drug-pa (Śadbhujakāparajñānamahākāla), black, with six arms, fierce mien and flaming hair, in the pratyalidha posture on a tiger throne, holding a kapāla against his chest.

3. mGon-po-beng (Daṇḍadhara Mahākāla), mGon-po-legs-ldan-mched-gsum (Bhagavat Mahākālabhratṛtraya), and other deities of Mahākāla’s cycle.

The various manifestations of Mahākāla encountered in this chapel can essentially be traced to the dPal Nag-po-chen-po'i rgyud (Śrīmahākālātantra), the 'Phags-pa dpal mGon-po-nag-po zhes bya-ba gzungs (Āryāśrīmahākālātantra), and the 'Phags-pa Nag-po-chen-po'i gzungs rims-nad thams-cad-las thar-pa byed-pa, three kriyātantras belonging to the gNas-gtsang-lha'i rgyud (Tantras of the Gods of the Pure Abode), of the Tathāgata Family (Toh. 667-669).

Features and attributes are described in many sādhanas, including the dPal mGon-po'i nang-sgrub (Śrīmahākālātantrasaṅgha, Cordier: rGyud XXVI, 77), the Byin-gyis brlabs-pa'i Nag-po-chen-po'i gsang-ha'i sgrub-thabs (Adhiṣṭhāna-mahākālabhratṛtraya, Cordier: rGyud LXXXII, 96), and the Nag-po-chen-po'i 'phrin-las gsang-ha'i sgrub-thabs (Mahākālakarmaguhyasādha, Cordier: rGyud LXXXII, 71).
(1 N b’) Chapel devoted to Mi-g.yo-ba (Āryācala)

sculptor: bSod-nams-rgyal-mtshan, from lHa-rtses painters: the master from Don-ri, and the dGe-slong from lHa-rtses

1. Statue of Mi-g.yo-ba (Acala), black, with fierce mien and flaming hair, bending his left knee down to the ground and raising a flaming sword with his right hand, flanked by two other manifestations of the same deity.

2. Mandala of Acala with thirty-eight deities. The central deity is blue, with four arms, stretching in the pratyalidha posture, brandishing flaming swords in both his right hands and displaying the tarjanimudrā with the left ones.

3. Mi-g.yo-ba-dkar-po (Sita Acala), white, with fierce mien and flaming hair, in his typical posture with the left knee bent down to the ground, holding the sword in his right hand, while displaying the tarjanimudrā with the left brought in front of his chest (Pl. 53).

4. Acala, the centre of the mandala with seventeen deities, brandishing the sword with his right hand and displaying the pāṣatarjanimudrā with the left brought against his chest. He treads on Hindu deities with both his right foot and his left knee bent down to the ground.

The mandalas in this chapel are generally drawn from the ‘Phags-pa Mi-g.yo-ba zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Āryācalanāmadhāraṇī, Toh. 631), a kriyātantra belonging to the bKa’-nyan pho-mo rgyud (Tantras of the Male and Female Obedient Ones, auxiliary to the Messengers), of the Tathāgata Family. Mandala 2, on the largest wall, however, must be traced to the ‘Phags-pa Khro-bo’i rgyal-po chen-po Mi-g.yo-ba De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi stobs-dpag-tu med-pa rtul phod-pa ’dul-bar gsungs-pa zhes bya-ba’i rtog-pa (Āryācalamahā-krodhasya sarvatathāgatasya aparimātāramūlamātreṇa vinayabhūṣitāmāmakalpa Toh. 495), also belonging to the Tathāgata Family, but in the caryātantra class.

The group of statues derives from the Mi-g.yo-ba’i sgrub-thabs (Acalasādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 52).
(1 E) Temple devoted to Byams-pa (Maitreya)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Byams-pa (Maitreya), saffron-coloured, sitting in *pralambapada* and displaying the *vitarkamudrā* with his right hand, flanked by two standing bodhisattvas of the same colour, each holding a *kalaśa*.

1a. Statue of Sa-yi-snying-po (Kṣitigarbha), white, sitting in *lalitasana* and displaying the *vitarkamudrā*.

1a’. Statue of Phyag-na-rdo-rje (Vajrapāṇi) in his peaceful form, blue, sitting in *rajñilīśānasana* and holding the *vajra* in his right hand.

2. Maitreya in monk’s attire, sitting on a throne in the *ardhaparyāṅka* posture, holding the *piṇḍapātra*, surrounded by scenes from his previous lives (Pl. 96).

3. Maitreya’s *sambhogakāya*, with three heads and six arms, sitting in *vajrāsana* on the lion throne, surrounded by scenes from the Tuṣita heaven (Pl. 37, 94, 95).

4. Śākyamuni, sitting in *vajrāsana* on the lion throne under the *bodhi* tree and displaying the *dharma-cakramudrā*. He is flanked by two standing monks and surrounded by scenes from the Tuṣita heaven (Pl. 36).

5. Maitreya, with *bodhisattva* ornaments, surrounded by scenes from his previous lives, throned in a variety of *ardhaparyāṅka*, his left leg crossed over his right thigh, and displaying the *dharma-cakramudrā* (Pl. 97).

6. Scenes from Maitreya’s previous lives (the painting is seriously damaged).

Fundamental sources for these scenes are the ‘Phags-pa Byams-pas zhus-pa’i le’u zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i *mdo* (Āryamaitreyaparipṛcchāparivaartanānamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 85) and the ‘Phags-pa Byams-pas zhus-pa chos bryad-pa zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i *mdo* (Āryamaitreyaparipṛcchādharmaśṭanānamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 86), both contained in the *dKon-brtsegs* section of the *bk’ag*-'gyur. Others are the ‘Phags-pa Byams-pa’-jug-pa zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i *mdo* (Āryamaitreyapraṣṭhānamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 198) and the Dam-pa’i chos padma-dkar-po zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i *mdo* (Saddharma-puṇḍarikaṇāmamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 113) in the *mDo* section of the *bk’ag*-'gyur.
(1 E a) Chapel devoted to rNam-thos-sras (Vaiśravaṇa)

sculptor: unknown
painter: dPal 'Phel-ba

1. Statue of rGyal-chen rNam-thos-sras Zhi-ba-bde-byed (Vaiśravaṇa as one of the Four Great Kings, Peaceful and Beneficent), gilded, sitting in vāmārdhaparyāṇa on the snow-lion, holding the banner of victory and the jewel-spitting mongoose.

2. Mandala of Vaiśravaṇa as Lord of the Horses, with the rTa-bdag brgyad (the Eight Āśvapatis), yellow, sitting on a blue lion, with the same attitude and attributes as in the statue above (Pl. 71, 72).

3. rNam-sras-drag-byed (Raudra Vaiśravana), a terrifying aspect of the god, black, with flaming hair, stretching in pratyāliṣṭha, surrounded by flames.

4. Yellow Vaiśravaṇa, with a dhvaja and a nakula, sitting in vāmārdhaparyāṇa on a snow-lion in the lCang-lo-can (Alakavati), his palace on Mt. Kailāsa (Pls. 73-77).

Vaiśravaṇa is the prominent lokapāla in the Pañcarakṣa literature, especially in the sTong-chen-mo Rab-tu-'joms-pa zhes bya-ba mdo (Mahāsahasrapramardanasūtra) and in the Rig-sngags-kyi rgyal-mo rMa-bya-chen-mo (Mahāmāyūrīvīdayārājñī), two kriyātantras belonging to the Yum-gyi rgyud (Tantras of the Mother) of the Tathāgata Family (Toh. 558, 559).

Those tantras are the source of the rNam-thos-sras-kyi sgrub-pa'i thabs (Cordier: rGyud LXXII, 29) and of the rNam-thos-kyi bu'i sgrub-thabs (Cordier: rGyud LXXXVI, 47), both bearing the same Sanskrit title, Vaiśravaṇasādhana.
(1 E a') Chapel devoted to rGyal-mtshan-rtse-mo (Dhajagrā)

sculptor: dGe-bshes rGyal-she
painter: bKra-shis, from Shag-tshal, near lHa-rtse

1. Statue of rGyal-mtshan-rtse-mo (Dhajagrā), brown, with three heads and four arms, with fierce mien and flaming hair, wearing a crown of skulls. She is shown in the pratyāśīḍha posture, holding a sword, a pāśa, a cakra and a khaṭvāṅga, and is flanked by two minor deities.

2. Maṇḍala of lHa-mo Rał-gcig-ma (Ekajatādevi), blackish-blue, with eight arms, with flaming hair, in the pratyāśīḍha posture, holding a khaṭvāṅga.

3. rGyal-mtshan-rtse-mo'i-dpung-brgyan (Dhajagrakeyūrā), yellow, with four heads and four arms, in the pratyāśīḍha posture, holding a sword, a cakra, a pestle and a pāśa, with a khaṭvāṅga resting on her left shoulder.

4. Maṇḍala of Ekajātā, black, with four arms, in pratyāśīḍha, with a sword and kāpāla, holding an utpāla (blue lotus).

Dhajagrā is the personification of a dharani: 'Phags-pa rGyal-mtshan-gyi-rtse-mo'i-dpung-rgyan ces bya-ba'i gzungs (Āryadhajagrakeyūrānāmabhārāṇi, Toh. 612), a kriyātantra belonging to the Khro-mo'i rgyud (Tantras of the Female Wrathful Deities) of the Tathāgata Family. The maṇḍala is drawn from the rGyal-mtshan-rtse-mo'i dpung-rgyan-gyi sgrub-thabs (Dhajagrakeyūrasādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 288).

Ekajātā is a form of the Devi dealt with in the 'Phags-pa Don-yod-zhags-pa'i cho-ga zhib-mo'i rgyal-po (Āryāmoghapāśa-kalparāja, Toh. 686), a kriyātantra belonging to the bBag-po'i rgyud (Tantras of the Master) in the Padma Family. The maṇḍalas are related to the Ral-pa-gcig-ma'i sgrub-thabs rim-pa (Ekajātāsādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 210-214).
Chapel devoted to sTobs-po-che (Mahābala)

sculptor: lHa'i-rgyal-mtshan
painter: Don-grub-bzang-po, from Don-ri

1. Statue of sTobs-po-che (Mahābala), red, with four arms, with fierce mien and dishevelled smoky hair, in the *pratyāliḍhā* posture, holding a large *daṇḍa* raised in one of his right hands. The god is flanked by Padmapāni and Vajrapāni.

2. *Maṇḍala* of 'Jig-rten-gsum-las-rnam-par-rgyal-ba (Trailokyavijaya), black-blue, with four heads and eight arms, fierce mien and flaming hair, in the *pratyāliḍhā* posture, holding a *vajra* and a *ghaṇṭā* in his two central hands which display the *vajraḫumkāramudrā* (Pls. 42, 43).

3. Mahābala, brown, with three heads and six arms, fierce mien and flaming hair, in the *pratyāliḍhā* posture, holding a *vajra* and a *kapāla* in his two central hands.

4. Mahābala, red, with four arms and with his black hair falling over the shoulders, in the *pratyāliḍhā* posture, holding *padmānāda* and *vajrāndāṇa* in his right hands and displaying the *pāṣatarjani* and the *vandanaśubhinyā* with the left ones.

The statues and most of the paintings in this chapel can be traced to the 'Phags-pa sTobs-po-che zhes bya-ba theg-pa-chen-po'i mdo (Āryamahābalanāmamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 757), a *kriyātantra* belonging to the Tantras of the Messengers and Obedient Ones of the Vajra Family. The two painted forms of Mahābala are more specifically drawn from the *sTobs-po-che'i sgrub-thabs* (Mahābalasādhanā) and from the 'Phags-pa rDo-rje-khro-bo sTobs-po-che'i sgrub-thabs (Āryavajrakrodhamahābalasādhanā), both belonging to the Sudhanasāgara (Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 331, 332).

The *maṇḍala* of Trailokyavijaya is drawn from the 'Jig-rten-gsum-las rNam-par-rgyal-ba'i sgrub-thabs (Trailokyavijayasādhanā, Cordier: rGyud LXXI 320).
1. Statues of 'Phags-skyes-po (Virūḍhaka, the Guardian of the South), blue, brandishing the sword, and of Mig-mi-bzang (Virūpākṣa, the Guardian of the West), red, holding a white *mdrol-rten* (*caitya*).

2. Statues of rNam-thos-sras (Vaishravana, the Guardian of the North), yellow, holding the *rgyal-mdra-shan* (*dhvaja*) with his right hand and the jewel-spitting mongoose with the left, and of Yul-'khor-bsrung (Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the Guardian of the East), green, with a lute.

3. Khro-bo dByug-sngon-can (Krodhaniladanda), blue, with fierce mien and flaming hair, in the *pratyāliṣṭha* posture, holding the *danda* with his right hand, while displaying the *taṇḍanimudrā* with the left.

4. Khro-bo rTa-mgrin (Krodhahayagriva), red, with fierce mien and flaming hair surmounted by a horse's green head, stretching in the *ālijha* posture, brandishing the *danda* with his right hand and performing the *taṇḍanimudrā* with the left.

The features of the *Caturmahārājas* may be deduced from the literature of the *Pañcarakṣas* (Toh. 558-563). In particular they are described as attendants of Mahāmantrānusārini in the *gsang-sngags-kyi rjes-su 'brang-ba chen-po'i sgrub-thabs* (Mahāmantrānusāriniṇiśādhana, Cordier: *rGyud* LXX, 117).
Fig. B The Second Storey
(2 Sa) Chapel devoted to Tshe-dpag-med (Amitayas)

sculptor: Tsan-pa
painter: Nam-mkhah-'od-zer,
from bDe-chen, near lhA-'rtse

1. Array of five statues: in the centre,
   rNam-snang-tshe-dpag-med
   (Vairocanamitayus), flanked by rDo-rje-
   tshe-dpag-med (Vajramitayus), Nor-bu-
   tshe-dpag-med (Ratnámítayus), Padma-
   tshe-dpag-med (Padmámítayus) and Las-
   kyi-tshe-dpag-med (Karmámítayus), all
   red in colour, sitting in vajrásana and
   displaying the samādhisimūḍrā, while
   holding the vase of ambrosia with flowers
   in bloom.

2. Kun-gzigs-tshe-dpag-med (Samantadarṣyámítayus), flanked by spyan-ras-
gzigs and Phyag-na-rdo-rje.

3. Yon-tan-tshe-dpag-med (Guṇámítayus).


5. Mi-g.yo-tshe-dpag-med (Acalámítayus) flanked by spyan-ras-gzigs and mThu-chen-thob.

6. Maṇḍala of 'Od-dpag-med (Amitabha) according to Siddharājñi, also known as Jñānaḍākini.

The statues and the great paintings on the walls are drawn according to the system of Jetārī, as explained in the ‘Phags-pa Tshe-dang-ye-shes-dpag-tu-med-pa’i sgrub-thabs (Āryāparimitātyurjñānasādhaṇa) and in the Tshe-dang-ye-shes-dpag-tu-med-pa’i cho-ga (Aparimitātyurjñānavidhi) (Cordier: rGyud LXVIII, 7,8). The figures in the upper section of this chapel are related to the Tshe-dang-ye-shes-dpag-tu-med-pa’i dkyil-’khor-gyi cho-ga (Bhagavadaparimitātyurjñānamanḍalavidhi) and to other associated sādhana compiled by Siddharājñi (Cordier: rGyud XLIV, 48-50).

All these sādhana may be traced to the ‘Phags-pa Tshe-dang-ye-shes-dpag-tu-med-pa zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i mdo (Āryāparimitātyurjñānanāmamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 674, 675) and to the ‘Phags-pa Tshe-dang-ye-shes-dpag-tu-med-pa’i snying-po zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Āryāparimitātyurjñānahrdayanāmadhāraṇi, Toh. 676), all kriyātantras belonging to the gTso-bo’i rgyud (Tantras of the Lord) of the Padma Family.
(2 S a') Chapel devoted to spyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug-gro-dul-byed
(Avalokiteśvarajagannātha)

sculptor: lhā'i-rgyal-mtshan
painter: Thar-pa, from lhā-rtse

1. Triad of spyan-ras-gzigs-yi-ge-drug-pa (Śaḍakṣarāvalokita): in the centre, the statue of Thugs-rje-chen-po (Mahākārūṇīka), gilded, with four arms, flanked by Yi-ge-drug-ma (Śaḍakṣāri) and Nor-bu-dzin-pa (Manidhārīn) (Pl. 30).

2. Maṇḍala of spyan-ras-gzigs-bcu-gcig-zhal (Ekādaśamukhāvalokiteśvara) according to Nāgārjuna, white, with eleven heads and forty-two hands (Pl. 31).

3. spyan-ras-gzigs-don-yod-lcags-kyu (Avalokita Amoghāṅkūṣa), a wrathful form of Avalokiteśvara, white, with three heads and four arms.

4. spyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug-mkhal-spyod (Avalokiteśvara Khasarpaṇa), white, performing the varadāmudrā with his right hand and the vitarkāmudrā with the left, each hand holding the stem of a white lotus flower.

5. spyan-ras-gzigs-yid-bzhin-nor-bu (Avalokita Cintāmaṇi), yellow, with three heads and six arms, holding the jewel in his central left hand.

The maṇḍalas in this chapel are related to the 'Phags-pa spyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug-gi rtsa-ba'i rgyud-kyi rgyal-po padma-dr-a-ba (Āryāvalokiteśvarapadmajālamālatañtrarāja, Toh. 681) and the 'Phags-pa Don-yod-zhags-pa'i cho-γa zhib-mo'i rgyal-po (Āryāmoghāpāšakalparāja, Toh. 686), two kriyātantras belonging to the bDag-po'i rgyud (Tantras of the Master) of the Padma Family.

More specifically, maṇḍalas 2 and 4 are drawn from the 'Phags-pa spyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug-phyag-stong sgrub-thabs (Āryasahasrabhujāvalokiteśvarasādhanā, Cordier: rGyud LXVIII, 40) and from the 'Phags-pa mKha'-spyod-kyi sgrub-thabs (Āryakhasarpaṇasādhanā, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 107, 108).
(2 S b) Chapel devoted to Seng-ldeng-nags-kyi sGrol-ma (Khadiravānī Tārā)

sculptor: lHa’i-rgyal-mtshan
painter: dGe-ba, from bDe-chen, near lHa-rtse

1. Statue of Seng-ldeng-nags-kyi sGrol-ma (Khadiravānī), green, sitting in lalitasana, displaying the varadamudrā with her right hand and holding a blue lotus with the left, flanked by ’Od-zer-can-ma (Marici) and Khro-gnyer-can (Bhrkuti).

2. Don-thams-cad-grub-pa’i sGrol-ma (Prasanna Tārā), yellow, with eight heads and sixteen arms, in the ālīḍha posture, surrounded by the Aṣṭamahābhayatārās (Pl. 81).

3. mChog-sbyin sGrol-ma (Varada Tārā), green, sitting in lalitasana, performing the varadamudrā and the vitarkamudrā with her right and left hand respectively, flanked by Mārici and Ekajāṭā.

4. Ngan-song-las-sbyong-ba’i sGrol-ma (Durgottarī Tārā), green, with four arms, sitting in lalitasana and performing the varadamudrā and vitarkamudrā with the two central hands. Flanked by Mārici and Ekajāṭā, and surrounded by the Twenty-one Tārās (Pl. 80).

All the mandalas in this chapel are related to the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi yum sGrol-ma-las sna-tshogs ’byung-ba’i rgyud (Sarvatathāgatamārtarāvīśvakarmabhaśaṭantra), a kriyatantra belonging to the Yum-gyi rgyud (Tantras of the Mother) of the Padma Family (Toh. 726).

They are drawn from the ’Phags-ma Seng-ldeng-nags-kyi sGrol-ma’i sgrub-thabs (Āryakhadiravānī-tārāsādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 178), the Don thams-cad grub-par rab-tu sbyin-ma’i ’phags-ma sGrol-ma’i sgrub-thabs (Sarvatārthasadvāntāryphasannatārāsādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 202), the mChog-sbyin sGrol-ma’i sgrub-thabs (Varatārāsādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 180) and the Ngan-song-las sGrol-ma’i sgrub-thabs (Durgatyuttārīnīsādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 198).
(2 S b’) Chapel devoted to 'Jam-dbyangs-smra-ba’i-seng-ge (Vādisimha Mañjughoṣa)

sculptor: lHa’i-rgyal-mtshan
painters: dPal-byor-rin-chen, from gNas-rnying,
and dGe-bshes bSod-nams-dpal-byor

1. Statue of 'Jam-dbyangs-smra-ba’i-seng-ge (Vādisimha Mañjughoṣa), saffron-coloured, sitting in lalitāsana on the back of a lion, holding the stems of two lotuses with a sword and a book on the top, and surrounded by four assistants.

2. Shakya-thub-pa (Śākyamuni), sitting in vajrasana and performing the dharmacakramudrā, flanked by Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi.

3. Symbols and mudrās belonging to the mandala “of the four doors”, with ninety-eight deities and thirteen symbols.

4. bCom-lidan-’das Thub-pa-chen-po (Bhagavat Mahāmuni), sitting in vajrasana at the centre of the above mandala, holding the bowl in his left hand, while displaying the varadamudrā with the right.

The statues refer to the 'Jam-dbyangs-smra-ba’i-seng-ge'i sgrub-thubs (Vādisimhamañjughoṣasadāhwa, Cordier: rGyud LXXXII, 2).

The mandalas are drawn from the 'Phags-pa 'Jam-dpal-gyi rtsa-ba’i rgyud (Āryamañjuśrimūlatantra, Toh. 543), a kriyātantra belonging to the bDag-po rgyud (Tantras of the Master) of the Tathāgata Family.
(2 W a) Chapel devoted to rTa-mgrin-nag-po (Krṣṇahayagriva)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Shes-rab-dpal-bzangs-pa, from rGyal-khang

1. Statue of rTa-mgrin-nag-po (Krṣṇahayagriva), black, with the head surmounted by a horse’s green head, in the pratyāliḍhā posture, with a yamadanda in his right hand and a pāśa in the left.

2. rTa-mchog (Paramāśva), red, with three heads surmounted by horses’ heads, with eight arms, in the pratyāliḍhā posture, holding a viṣṇuvaṇḍa in front of his chest.

3. rTa-mgrin (Hayagriva) according to the system of dPal-mo, red, with eight arms and three heads surmounted by horses’ heads, stretching in the pratyāliḍhā posture and holding a kapāla against his chest with his two central hands (Pl. 45).

4. Manḍala of Hayagriva according to the sGrub-thabs rgya-mtsho. The god is red, with eight arms and three heads surmounted by horses’ heads, stretching in the pratyāliḍhā posture, and bringing the pāśa against his chest with the central left hand.

Only one kriyatnttra devoted to Hayagriva is included in the bKa’-’gyur: the ’Phags-pa s’Pyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug Hayagriva’i gzungs (Āryāvalokiteśvarahayagrivadhāraṇī, Toh. 733), belonging to the Khro-bo’i rgyud (Tantras of the Male Wrathful Deities) of the Padma Family.

The manḍalas are chiefly drawn from the lHa so-so’i sgrub-thabs rim-grangs-las rTa-mgrin-gyi sgrub-thabs rim-pa (Devāntarāṣāḍhanakramapāde Hayagrivasāḍhanakrama, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 317-319). In particular, the inscription quotes the rGyud thams-cad-kyi snying-po phyi-ma’i rTa-mgrin-gyi sgrub-thabs (Sarvatantrahṛdayot-tarahayagrivasādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 319).
Chapel devoted to spyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug-don-yod-zhags-pa
(Avalokiteśvara Amoghapāśa)

sculptor: lHa’i-rgyal-mtshan
painters: dKon-mchog-bzang-po, from Jo-nang,
and bsam-gtan-bzang-po, from lCags-thang

1. Statue of spyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug-don-yod-zhags-pa (Avalokiteśvara Amoghapāśa) with a recently repainted silvery body and a golden face. He sits in latitasana with his right foot supported by a lotus flower, displays the varadānudrā with his right hand and holds the stem of a red lotus with the left in vītarkānudrā. He is surrounded by Hayagrīva, Ekajāta, Bhṛkti and Śaḍākṣari Lokeśvara.

2. rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), yellow, sitting in vajrāsana and performing the samādhimudrā, at the centre of the sNyin-rje-chen-po-can-kyi dkyil-khor (Mahākarunāgarbhamandala), flanked by Padmapāṇi and Vajrapāṇi.

3. rDo-rje-dam-pa-sbyin-pa, saffron-coloured, sitting in vajrāsana on a lotus flower, displaying the varadānudrā with his right hand and holding a blue lotus surmounted by a vajra with the left hand brought in front of his chest.

4. Śākyamuni, of rosy-yellowish complexion, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and performing the dharmacakra-nudrā.

The statues are related to the ‘Phags-pa Don-yod-zhags-pa’i snying-po zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i mdo (Āryāmoghapāśarādayanāmamahāyānasūtra) and to the ‘Phags-pa Don-yod-zhags-pa’i snying-po zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Āryāmoghapāśaḥrādayanāmadiḥāraṇī), (Toh. 682, 683).

The Mahākarunāgarbhamandala is the first mandala described in the rNam-par-snang-mdzad-chen-po mgon-par rdzogs-par byang-chub-pa nam-par sprul-pa byin-gyis rlob-pa shin-tu rgyas-pa mdo-sde dbang-po’i rgyal-po zhes bya-ba’i chos-kyi rnam-grangs (Mahāvairocanaḥbhisaṁbodhivivottadhiṣṭhānaavipulyasūtratraṇa-rājanamadharma-paryaya), Toh. 494), the fundamental caryātantra text of the Tathāgata Family.
Chapel devoted to Rig-byed-ma (Kurukullā)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Shes-rab-dpal-bzangs-pa, from Nyug rGyal-khang

1. Statue of sGrol-ma-las-'byung-ba'i Ku-ru-kulle (Tārodbhava Kurukullā), red, with four arms, sitting in vajrāsana on a double-lotus throne, drawing the bow charged with an arrow while her central hands display the abhayamudrā and hold the stem of a lotus.

2. sGyu-'phrul-dra-ba Ku-ru-kulle (Māyājala Kurukullā), yellowish white, with six arms, sitting in vajrāsana, displaying the bhūtādṛṣṭāmudrā and holding a white lotus (Pl. 82).

3. rJe-btsun-ma Ku-ru-kulle-phyag-drug-ma (Śaḍbhujatārā Kurukullā), red, with six arms, sitting in vajrāsana, drawing the bow charged with an arrow, while performing the vajrahumāla mudrā above her head.

4. Jig-rten-gsum-dbang-du-byed-pa'i-lha-mo Rig-byed-ma (Hevajrakrama Kurukullā), red, with four arms, dancing in ardhaparyaṇa.

5. Maṇḍala of Rig-byed-ma-phyag-brgyad-ma (Aṣṭabhujakrama Kurukullā) according to King Indrabhūti, red, with eight arms, surrounded by twelve female deities.

The statue may be related to the sGrol-ma'i rtog-pa-las byung-ba'i Ku-ru-kulle'i sgrub-thabs (Kalpokatanvārodbhavakurukullāsādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 257) and to the sGrol-ma'i rtog-pa-las byung-ba'i tshig-lhug-pa'i Rig-byed-ma'i sgrub-thabs (Muktakena Tārākalpodbhavakurukullāsādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 258), both to be referred to the sGrol-ma'i rtsa-ba'i rtog-pa (Tārāmukalpa, Toh. 724), a kriyātantra belonging to the Yumgyi rgyud (Mother Tantras) of the Padma Family. The various forms of Kurukullā painted on the walls are drawn from the dPal.ldan sgyu-'phrul dra-ba rnal-'byor-gyi rgyud chen-mo stong-phrag-bcu-drug-pa-las byung-ba'i Ku-ru-kulle'i sgrub-thabs (Śriyantamāyājñalāmahāyogatantrāt śoḍaśasāhasrikād ākṛṣṭakurukullāsādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 272), assigned to the yogatantra class, from the rje-btsun-ma Ku-ru-kulle-phyag-drug-ma'i sgrub-thabs gnyis (Śaḍbhujakurukullābhavidhikāyaḥ sādhana sādhanavaya, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 266, 267), from the dPal Kye'i-rdo-rje'i rgyud-kyi rim-pa-las bdag byin-gyi brlab-pa Ku-ru-kulle'i sgrub-thabs (Śīhevajratantrākramena svādhīṣṭhānakurukullāsādhana, Cordier: rGyud XXII, 26) and from the Rigs-byed-ma-phyag-brgyad-ma'i sgrub-thabs gnyis (Aṣṭabhujakurukullāsādhanavaya, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 268, 269).
1. Statue of Seng-ge-sgra (Simhanāda), white, sitting on a snow-lion in the lalitasana posture, displaying the varadamudrā and holding the stem of a red lotus topped by a flaming sword, flanked by Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi.

2. The Buddha Śākyamuni, of light whitish-yellow complexion, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and performing the dharmacakramudrā, flanked by Amoghapāśa and Vajrapāṇi (Pl. 34).

3. spyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug Pad-ma-gar-gyi-dbang-phyug (Avalokiteśvara Padmanarteśvara), white, with eighteen arms, sitting in vajrasana and displaying the dharmacakramudrā with his two central hands (Pl. 33).

4. Pad-dra-bcu-gcig-zhal, i.e. spyan-ras-gzigs-bcu-gcig-zhal according to the Pad-ma-dra-ba (Ekādaśamukha Avalokiteśvara), white, with twelve arms and with ten heads of different colours on the same level, surmounted by an eleventh head, red. He sits in vajrāsana on the lion throne and displays the vitarkamudrā with both his central hands (Pl. 32).

The statue is related to the Seng-ge-sgra'i rgyud (Simhanādatantra, Toh. 702) and to the 'Phags-pa spyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug Seng-ge-sgra'i gzungs (Āryāvalokiteśvarasimhanādanāmadhārani, Toh. 703), while the maṇḍalas on the walls are principally related to the 'Phags-pa spyan-ras-gzigs-dbang-phyug-gi rtsa-ba'i rgyud-kyi rgyal-po padma-dra-ba (Āryāvalokiteśvarapadmajālamulatantrarāja, Toh. 681) and to the 'Phags-pa Don-yod-zhangs-pa'i cho-ga zhub-mo'i rgyal-po (Āryāmoghapāśakalparāja, Toh. 686). All these are kriyātantras belonging to the bDag-po'i rgyud (Tantras of the Master) of the Padma Family.

Some minor maṇḍalas may derive from the Padma-gar-gyi-dbang-phyug-gi sgrub-thabs (Padmanarteśvarasādhana, Cordier: rGyud LXXI,118, 119), belonging to the sGrub-thabs rgya-mtsho.
(2 N a) Chapel devoted to ‘Od-zer-gtsug-tor-dri-med (Vimaloṣṭiṣa)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Tsan-ne, from gNas-rnying

1. Statue of Thub-chen (Mahāmuni), an esoteric form of the Buddha Śākyamuni, yellow, with four heads, eight arms and four legs, sitting on a double-lotus throne, with his two central hands in dharmacakramudrā and all the other hands in vitarkamudrā, surrounded by four bodhisattvas.

2. Mahāmuni, with the same colour, posture and gesture as in the statue above.

3. rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), white, with four heads and eight arms, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and performing the bodhyagrimudrā with his two central hands, surrounded by the Four Cosmic Buddhas, at the centre of the gTsug-tor-med-gyi dkyil-khor.

4. Extended maṇḍala of Mahāmuni, of a rosy complexion, with four heads, eight arms and four legs, sitting in the virāsana posture on the lion throne and displaying the same gestures as in the previous images, surrounded by a number of minor deities and by the sixteen arhats (Pl. 35).

The statues and paintings are drawn from the Kun-nas sgor ‘jug-pa’i ‘Od-zer-gtsug-tor-dri-ma-med-par snang-ba De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi snying-po dang dam-ča-thig-la rnam-par lta-ba zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Samantamukhapraveśarasāsravimaloṣṭisaprabhāsasaratathūgatahrdayasamayavilokitanāmadhārani, Toh. 599), a kriyātantra belonging to the gTszg-tor-gyi rgyud (Tantras of the Uṣṇiṣa) of the Tathāgata Family.

Also related to that group of tantras is the gTszg-tor-dri-ma-med-pa’i gzungs-kyi cho-ga (Vimaloṣṭisadhāraṇīviddi, Cordier: rGyud LXIX, 137, 138), from which maṇḍala 3 is drawn.
(2 N a’) Chapel devoted to rNam-par’joms-pa (Vajravidāraṇa)

sculptor: sTag-sna-pa
painter: unknown

1. Statue of rNam-par’joms-pa (Vajravidāraṇa), black, holding a ghanṭā and a viśvavajra, in the alīḍha posture, flanked by dByangs-can-ma and rDo-rje-sgrrol-ma.

2. Manḍala of Vajravidāraṇa according to the lo-tsa-ba of Šol-po. Posture, colour and attributes are as in the statue above (Pl. 40).

3. Manḍala of Vajravidāraṇa according to the lo-tsa-ba of Ba-ri. The chief deity is green, sits in lāliṭāśana and holds a ghanṭā and a viśvavajra.

4. The ten Phyogs-skyong (Daśadiglokapāla).

5. Manḍala of Vajravidāraṇa according to the system of Mitra. The chief deity is black, sits in the pratyāliṣṭha posture, raises the viśvavajra in his right hand and holds the ghanṭā with the left.

Both statues and manḍalas are related to the rDo-rje-rnam-par’joms-pa zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Vajravidāraṇanāmadhāraṇi) and to the ‘Phags-pa rDo-rje-ri-rab-chen-po’i rtse-mo’i khang-pa brtsegs-pa’i gzungs (Āryamahāvajrameruṣikharakūṭagāradhāraṇi), two kriyātantras belonging to the bDog-po’i rgyud (Tantras of the Master) of the Vajra Family (Toh. 750, 751).
(2 N b) Chapel devoted to sGrol-ma-dkar-mo (Sitātārā)

sculptor: the master from rGyung-mkhār,
near lHa-rtsen
painter: Shes-rab-rgya-mtsho, from bZang-idan

1. Statue of sGrol-ma-dkar-mo (Sitātārā),
gilded, sitting in vacasana, displaying the varadā-mudrā with her right hand and holding a blue lotus with the left, surrounded by Khrognyer-can (Bṛṇkūṭi), 'Od-zer-can (Mārici) and two forms of Dug-sel-ma (Jāṅguli).

2. sGrol-dkar-phyag-drug-ma
(Saḍbhujāśuklatārā), white, with three heads and six arms, sitting in lalītāsana, with her two central hands as in the statue above (Pl. 78).

3. sGrol-ma-dkar-mo (Sitātārā), white, with four arms, flanked by 'Od-zer-can (Mārici) and rMa-byā-chen-mo (Mahāmāyūri).

4. Phyag-brgyad sGrol-ljang (Aṣṭabhujāśyāmatārā) according to the system of Atiśa, green, with three heads and eight arms, sitting in lalītāsana, with her right foot supported by a lotus (Pl. 79).

The above forms of Tārā are all related to kriyā-tantras belonging to the Yum-ghi rgyud (Tantras of the Mother) of the Padma Family. In particular, they are related to the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thugs-cad-kyi yum sGrol-ma-las sna-tshogs 'byung-ba zhes bya-ba'i rgyud (Sarvatathāgatamārtārvīśvakarmabhaivatantra), from the rje-btsun-ma 'phags-pa sGrol-ma'i mtsan brgya-rtsa-brgyad-pa (Āryatārābhadranāmāśṭātata) and from the lHa-mo sGrol-ma'i mtsan brgya-rtsa-brgyad-pa (Ṭārādevināmāśṭātata) (Toh. 726-728).

Most maṇḍalas are drawn from the sGrol-ma-dkar-mo'i sgrub-thabs (Sitatārāsādhanā) and the sGrol-ma-dkar-mo-phyag-drug-ma'i sgrub-thabs (Saḍbhujāśuklatārāsādhanā) (Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 193, 194), as well as from the lHa-mo sGrol-ma'i sgrub-thabs brgya-rtsa-brgyad-pa (Ṭārādevyāśṭātatasādhanā, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 362).
(2 N b’) Chapel devoted to 'Jam-dbyangs (Mañjughoṣa)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Ban-chen sKyabs-pa, from bZang-ri,
in sNye-mo


2. Manḍala of 'Jam-dpal-ye-shes-sems-dpa’ (Jñānasattvaśākaranamaṇjuṣṭri), saffron-coloured, with four arms, according to the mTshan-yang dag-par brjod-pa (Nāmasamgiti). His two central hands hold the flaming sword (right) and the stem of a lotus with a book on the top (left), while the external hands hold a bow and arrow.

3. Sems-can-thams-cad-dbang-du-byed-pa’i 'Jam-dbyangs (Sarvasattvavāśikaranamaṇjuṣṭri), white with pink shading, with four heads and eight arms, the two central ones holding a bow and arrow (Pl. 26).

4. 'Jam-dpal Chos-dbyings-gsung-gi-dbang-phyug (Maṇjuṣṭri Dharmadhātuvaḍḍhīṣṭvara), white, with four heads and eight arms, the two central ones displaying the dharmacakramudrā (Pl. 27).

The statue is modelled according to the 'Jam-dpal-rgyal-po-chen-po-rol-pa’i sgrub-thabs (MahārājaJalilamaṇjuṣṭrisadāhana, Cordier: rGyud LXII, 158).

The manḍalas painted on the walls are related to the 'Phags-pa 'Jam-dpal-ye-shes-sems-dpa’i de-kho-na-nyid ces bya-ba’i sgrub-thabs (Āryajñānasattvavāśikaranamaṇjuṣṭrisadāhana, Cordier: rGyud LXI, 12), to the Sems-can-thams-cad dbang-du byed-pa’i ting-nge’-dzin (Sarvasattvavāśikaranasamādhī, Cordier: rGyud LXII, 152), and to the 'Jam-dpal-chos-dbyings-gsung-dbang-gi dkyil-’khor cho-ga (Dharmadhātuvaḍḍhīṣṭvaramaṇjuṣṭirimanḍalavidhī, Cordier: rGyud LX, 50).
(2 E a) Chapel devoted to Mi-'khrugs-pa (Akṣobhya)

sculptor: unknown
painter: bTsan, from g.Yag-sde, in sNye-mo

1. Statue of Mi-'khrugs-pa (Akṣobhya) according to Atiśa’s system, blue, sitting in vajrāsana and performing the bhūmisparsāmudrā. Surrounded by lHa-mo Padma-can, gDong-can-ma, rNam-rgyal-ma and mDangs-l丹-ma.

2. Akṣobhya, blue, sitting in vajrāsana and holding the vajra in his right hand, which displays the bhūmisparsāmudrā.

3. Scenes from the mNgon-par-dga’-ba (Abhirati paradise).

4. Akṣobhya in the glory of the mNgon-par-dga’-ba.

The root-tantra for this chapel is the ’Phags-pa las-kyi sgrīb-pa thams-cad rnam-par sbyong-ba zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Āryasara-karṇavaṇaṇaviśodhanināmadhāraṇī, Toh. 743), a kriyātantra belonging to the gTso-bo rgyud (Tantras of the Lord) of the Vajra Family.

The maṇḍalas are based on the Mi-'khrugs-pa'i sgrub-thabs (Akṣobhyaśādhanā) and the bCom-l丹’-das Mi-'khrugs-pa'i sgrub-thabs (Bhagavadakṣobhyaśādhanā) (Cordier: rGyud LXIII, 26, 27).
(2 E a') Chapel devoted to Phyaṅga-na-rdo-rje (Vajrapani)

sculptor: Nam-mkha’-(bstan-po), from lhais-rtse
painters: Tsan-ne and Nam-mkha’-dpal

1. Statue of Phyaṅga-na-rdo-rje-’gro-bzang
(-kyi-lugs) (Vajrapani according to the system
of ’Gro-bzang-snying-po, Sugatigarbha), black,
in the pratyālīḍha posture, holding a vajra and a
ghanṭā, flanked by two other manifestations of
the same deity.

2. Mandala of Phyaṅga-na-rdo-rje-’gro-bzang
with seventeen deities, as taught by Mitra,
black-blue, with fierce mien and flaming hair,
in the same attitude and with the same attrib-
utes as in the statue above, with a blue garuda
in front of him.

3. Mandala of Vajrapani with nine deities,
according to Nāgarjuna’s system. The chief deity has the same colour, attitude and attributes as in the
preceding image, but wears a lion skin on the shoulders (Pl. 38).

4. rGyal-chen rNam-thos-sras (the Great King Vaisravana), yellow, sitting on a snow-lion, holding the
victory banner and the jewel-spitting mongoose.

5. Mandala of Pyag-na-rdo-rje-lcags-sbugs with thirteen deities, as taught by Mitra. The chief deity is
blue, with three heads and four arms.

The statues and paintings are related to the ‘Phags-pa rDo-rje-sa’og-gi rgyud-kyi rgyal-po (Āryavajrapaṭtānaṁatantrarāja, Toh. 744) and to the ‘Phags-pa Lag-na-rdo-rje-gos-sngon-po-can-gyi cho-ga zhes bya-ba’i gzungs (Āryaṁlāmbaraḥravajrapāṇikaṇḍapāṇḍhāraṁ, Toh. 748), two kriyātantras belonging to the bDag-po
rgyud (Tantras of the Master) of the Vajra Family.

They are also related to the bCom-ldan’-das Phyg-na-rdo-rje-gos-sngon-po-can-gyi rgyud (Bhavajnapaṇṭānaṁbaradharavajrapāṇitaṇtra,Toh. 498) and to the ‘Phags-pa Lag-na-rdo-rje-gos-sngon-po-can rdo-rje-sa’og ces bya-ba’i rgyud (ĀryavajrapāṇīnīlāmbaradharavajrapāṇīnīṬaṇṭarāṇtra, Toh. 499), both belonging to the Vajra
Family in the caryātantra class.

The various forms of Vajrapani are in particular related to a group of sādhanaṇas compiled by ’Gro-
bzang-snying-po (Sugatigarbha) and taught by Mitra (Cordier: rGyud LXVIII, 198, 202-206).
(2 E b') Chapel devoted to Kun-tu-bzang-po (Samantabhadra)

sculptor: Tsan-pa
painters: bTsan-ne, from gNas-myung, Ban-chen
        sKyabs, from bZang-ri, in sNye-mo,
        and Bla-ma-mgon

1. Statue of the Bodhisattva Kun-tu-bzang-po (Samantabhadra), yellow, sitting in lalitāsana on the back of an elephant, flanked by Maitreya and Padmapāni (Pl. 28).

2. Mandala of 'Jam-pa'i-dbyangs (Mañjughoṣa), saffron-coloured, sitting in vajrāsana, holding two lotuses with a sword and a book above.

3. Phyag-na-rdo-rje (Vajrapāṇi) in his peaceful form, blue, with four heads, sitting in virāsana, holding a vajra and a ghānṭā.

4. Mandala of spyan-ras-gzigs-sems-nyid-ngal-bso (Cittāvīśramana Avalokiteśvara), white, sitting in lalitāsana and surrounded by the Sixteen Bodhisattvas (Pl. 29).

The statue may be related to the Phags-pa Kun-tu-bzang-po'i mtshan brgya-rtsa-brgyad-pa gzungs sngags-dang bcas (Āryasamantabhadraśottarāśatakanāmadhāraṇīmantrasahita, Toh. 637).

The paintings may also be related to the same group of kriyātantras devoted to the bodhisattvas of the Tathāgata Family (Toh. 634-644), but the maṇḍalas of Mañjughoṣa and Avalokiteśvara should be more specifically connected with the rNam-par-snang-mdzad-chen-po mngon-par rdzogs-par byang-chub-pa rnam-par sprul-pa byin-γyis rlob-pa shin-tu rgyas-pa indo-sde dbang-po'i rgyal-po zhes bya-ba'i chos-kyi rnam-grangs (Mahāvairocanaḥbhisaṃbodhivikrūtādhiṣṭhāna vaipulyasutendra rājanāmadharmaparyāya, Toh. 494), the root-tantra of the caryātantra class, belonging to the Tathāgata Family.
(2 V) Vestibule devoted to the bSrng-ma-lnga (Pañcarakṣā), giving access to the third storey

no statues are present in this vestibule painter: unknown

1. So-sor-'brang-ma (Mahāpratisara), of fair complexion, with four heads and eight arms.

2. sTong-chen-mo (Mahāsahasrapramardani), blue, four-headed and eight-armed, with a fierce mien and flaming hair.

3. rMa-bya-chen-mo (Mahāmāyūri), pinkish-white, with three heads and eight arms.

4. gSang-sngags-chen-mo (Mahāmantrāṇusārī), red, with three heads and twelve arms.

5. bSil-ba'i-tshal-chen-mo (Mahāśātavati), green, with three heads and six arms.

The mandala of the five protectresses personifying the great dhāranis is related to a group of six tantras in the bKa'-gyur: sTong-chen-mo rab-tu 'joms-pa zhes bya-ba'i mdo (Mahāsahasrapramardananāmasūtra), Rigs-sngags-kyi-rgyal-mo rMa-bya-chen-mo (Mahāmāyūrijārājī), 'Phags-pa Rigs-sngags-kyi-rgyal-mo rMa-bya'i-yang-snying (Āryamāyūrijārājīgarbha), 'Phags-pa Rigs-pa'i-rgyal-mo So-sor-'brang-chen-mo (Āryamāhāpratisara-vidyārājī), bSil-ba'i-tshal-chen-po'i mdo (Mahāśātavanāsūtra), gSang-sngags-chen-po rjes-su 'dzin-pa'i mdo (Mahāmantrāṇudhārīsūtra) (Toh. 558-563). All six are kriyātantras belonging to the Yum-gyi rgyud (Tantras of the Mother) of the Tathāgata Family.

In the bsTan-gyur there are a number of sādhanas devoted to the Pañcarakṣā. Many of them are collected in the sGrub-thabs rgya-mtsho under the collective title So-sor-'brang-ba-sogs lHa-mo gral lnga'i sgrub-thabs rim-grangs (Pratisarādipañcadvatāvalisādhana-krama-pāda, Cordier: rGyud LXXI, 278-286).
Fig. C The Third Storey
(3 S) Temple devoted to Tshe-dpag-med (Amitāyus)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Tshe-dpag-med (Amitāyus), red, in vajrāsana, with a vase containing flowers in his hands displaying the samādhimudrā. He is flanked by rDo-rje-chos (Vajradharma) and rDo-rje-rgyu (Vajrahetu), with rDo-rje-mon-po (Vajratikṣṇa) and rDo-rje-gsang-ba (Vajrabhāsa) in the upper corners (Pls. 21, 22).

2. Maṇḍala of 'Jig-rten-dbang-phyug (Lokesvara), pinkish white, sitting in vajrāsana, holding a red lotus at the height of his chest (Pl. 11).


4. Maṇḍala of rDo-rje-gnod-sbyin (Vajrayakṣa) with nine deities and eight symbols. The deity is black, with fierce mien and flaming hair, sitting in virāsana, holding two fangs terminating in vajras.

5. Maṇḍala of rDo-rje-khu-tshur (Vajrasandhi/Vajramūrti), yellow, sitting in virāsana and holding two vajras against his breast (Pl. 17).

6. Maṇḍala of Nam-mkhal-mdzod (Gaganagañja), multi-coloured, sitting in virāsana, holding a ghanta and a viśvavajra (Pl. 18).

7. Maṇḍala of rDo-rje-hūṃ-mdzad (Vajrahūṃkāra) black-blue, with fierce mien and flaming hair, stretching in the pratyrūḍha posture, holding a vajra and a ghanta, displaying the vajraḥūṃkāramudrā which is peculiar to him.

8. Maṇḍala of Nam-mkha'-snying-po (Gaganagarbha/Ākāśagarbha), green, sitting in virāsana, holding a string of jewels.

9. Maṇḍala of rDo-rje-sems-dpa' (Vajrasattva), white, sitting in vajrā-sana, holding a red vajra and a ghanta (Pl. 12).
The statues are related to the first section of the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi de-kho-na nyid bsdus-pa zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i mdo (Sarvatathāgatatattvasamgrahānāmamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 479), usually abbreviated as De-nyid-bs dus (Tattvasamgraha), the rtsa-rgyud (root tantra) of the yogatantra class. The first section is principally devoted to the rDo-rje-dbyings-kyi dkhyil-khor (Vajradhātumandalā).

The manḍalas painted in this chapel are drawn from the first section of the dPal-mchog dang-po zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i rtog-pa’i rgyal-po (Śrīparamādyanāmamahāyānakalparāja, Toh. 487), usually abbreviated as dPal-mchog (Paramādi), a bshad-rgyud (explanatory tantra) to the De-nyid-bs dus (Tattvasamgraha). The dPal-mchog is closely associated with another yogatantra: the dPal-mchog-dang-po’i sngags-kyi rtog-pa’i dum-bu (Śrīparamādyantralakpakhamdā, Toh. 488). Important commentaries to the dPal-mchog are found in the bsTan-’gyur: the dPal-mchog-dang-po’i ’grel-pa (Śrīparamādiörttī, Cordier: rGyud LIV, 1) and the dPal-mchog-dang-po’i rgya-cher bshad-pa (Śrīparamādiṭikā, Cor-dier: rGyud LIV, 2; LV; LVI, 1), both compiled by Anandagarbha.
3 a) Chapel devoted to rDo-rje-sems-dpa’ (Vajrasattva)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of rDo-rje-sems-dpa’ (Vajrasattva), white, sitting in virāsana and holding a vajra and a ghanṭā, flanked by ’Jig-rten-dbang-phyug (Lokeśvara) and Nam-mkha’i-snying-po (Ākāśagarbha).


3. rDo-rje-‘khor-lo (Vajrahetu), yellowish-pink, sitting in virāsana, turning a cakra in front of his chest, at the centre of the maṇḍala which introduces the Rigs thams-cad-kyi dkyil-’khor.

4. ’Jig-rten-dbang-phyug (Lokeśvara), white, sitting in virāsana at the centre of the ’Gro-’dul-ba’i dkyil-’khor, holding a red lotus (Pl. 19).

All the maṇḍalas in this chapel are related to the dPal-mchog (Śrīparamādyatantra, Toh. 487), a yogatantra explanatory of the Tatvaśaṅgraha.

The paintings on the walls are drawn from the first section, chiefly concerned with the prajñāpāramitā. The statues are the centre of an esoteric maṇḍala from the rTog-pa thams-cad bsdus-pa (Sarvakalpasamuccaya), in the second section of the dPal-mchog, which is chiefly devoted to mantras.
(3 S a’) Chapel devoted to rDo-rje-sems-dpa’ (Vajrasattva)

sculptor: Nam-mkha’-bzang-po, from lHa-rtse
painter: the master from Thar-pa

1. Statue of rDo-rje-sems-dpa’ (Vajrasattva), white, as the central deity of the esoteric maṇḍala of all the Families assembled together (Rigs bsdus-pa’i dkyil-'khor). He sits in virāsana, holding a vajra and a ghanta, flanked by two female deities.

2. Vajrasattva, white, sitting in virāsana, holding the ghanta and a red vajra, at the centre of the rDo-rje-sems-dpa’ dbugs-dbyung-ba’i dkyil-'khor.

3. rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), yellow, sitting in vajrāsana and performing the bodhyagrimudrā, at the centre of the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa dbugs-dbyung-ba’i dkyil-'khor.

4. rDo-rje-hum-mdzad (Vajrahumkara), black, with fierce mien and flaming hair, in the pratyālīḍha posture, holding a vajra and a ghanta with his characteristic vajrahumkaramudrā, at the centre of the Khams-gsum-rnam-rgyal-kyi dkyil-'khor (Trailokyavijayamanḍala).

All the maṇḍalas in this chapel are drawn from the first section of the dPal-mchog (Śripamādyatantra, Toh. 487, 488), a yogatantra explanatory of the Tattvasamgraha. (For a discussion of the term dbugs-dbyung-ba as applied to two of the above maṇḍalas see Lo Bue and Ricca 1990, pp. 233-236).
(3 S b) Chapel devoted to Me-ltar-'bar-ba (Jvālānala)

sculptor: dPal [...], from mTsho-po, near lHa-rtse
painter: dPal-chen of rDzong-shos, near lHa-rtse

1. Statue of Khro-bo Me-ltar-'bar-ba (Krodha-jvālānala), black, with fierce mien and flaming hair, sitting in virāsana with a vajra and a ghanṭā, flanked by Ki-li-ki-la'i gZugs-can-'dzin-ma and 'Dod-pa'i Me-'bar-ma.

2. Nam-mkha'-mdzod (Gaganagañja), multi-coloured, holding a ghanṭā and a viśvavajra, sitting in virāsana at the centre of the Nam-mkha' snying-po dkyil-'khor.

3. rGyal-bar-byed-pa, white, mounted on a lion, holding a kapāla in his right hand, and a bow and an arrow in the left, flanked by sBrang-rtsir-byed-pa and Don-thams-cad-sgrub-par-byed-pa, at the centre of the Ming-po gsum-gyi dkyil-'khor.

4. 'Jam-dpal (Mañjughoṣa), blue, sitting in virāsana at the centre of the Sher-phyin gtso-bor gyur 'Jam-dpal-gyi dkyil-'khor.

5. Nam-mkha'-snying-po (Ākāśagarbha), green, sitting in virāsana at the centre of the maṇḍala of rDo-rje-rin-chen.

All the maṇḍalas in this chapel are related to the dpal-mchog (Śrīparamādyatantra, Toh. 487), a yoga-tantra explanatory of the Tattvasamgraha.

The paintings on the walls are drawn from its first section, chiefly concerning the prajñāpāramitā. The statues are the centre of an esoteric maṇḍala from the second section of the Sarvakalpasamuccaya, chiefly devoted to mantras.
(3 S b') Chapel devoted to rDo-rje Me-ltar-rab-tu-bar-ba (Vajrajvalanalarka)

sculptor: Nam-mkha'-bzang-po, from lHa-rtses painter: Legs-pa, from bSa'-lung, near lHa-rtses

1. Statue of Me-ltar-'bar-ba (Jvalanala), black, with fierce mien and flaming hair, sitting in virāsana and holding a vajra and a ghanī, flanked by gDung-chen-'dzin-ma and rDo-rje-mtshon-cha-'dzin.

2. Maṇḍala of rDo-rje Me-ltar-rab-tu-bar-ba (Vajrajvalanalarka), with the central deity as in the statue above.


4. dBang-phyug-chen-po (Mahēśvara), black, with four heads and eight arms, in the ardha-paryanka posture, surrounded by his parivāra (upper section). Nag-po-chen-po (Mahākāla), black, with ten arms, in the ardha-paryanka posture, surrounded by the group of the Ma-mo (lower section).

5. Maṇḍala of rDo-rje-gnod-sbyin (Vajrayakṣa), black, sitting in virāsana, holding two fangs terminated by vajra heads.

The maṇḍalas in this chapel are related to the Paramādyatantra (Toh. 487), an explanatory tantra of the Tattvasaṃgraha.

The statue and the painting of Me-ltar-'bar-ba are drawn from the rTog-pa thams-cad bsdus-pa rtsa-ba'i rgyud in the second section of the dPal-mchog. All the other maṇḍalas are drawn from the first section of the same yogatantra.
Temple devoted to Rin-chen-'byung-ldan (Ratnasambhava)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Rin-chen-'byung-ldan (Ratnasambhava), gilded, sitting in *vajrāsana*, with the flaming jewel on the palm of his right hand, which displays the *varadamudrā*. The Jina is surrounded by four *vajrabodhisattvas*.

2. Nam-par-snang-mdzad-chen-po (Mahavairocana), white, with four heads, sitting in *vajrāsana* on the lion throne and displaying the *bodhyagrimudrā*. In the centre of his chest is the figure of the Adibuddha, who in turn shows the figure of a *jnānasattva* on his chest (Pl. 5).

3. Tshe-la-dbang (Āyurvaśīta), whitish, sitting in *virāsana*, holding the stems of two red lotuses, with an image of Amitābha on the left one.

4. spyan-ras-gzigs (Avalokiteśvara), white, sitting in *virāsana*, displaying the *varadamudrā* with his right hand and the *vitarkamudrā* with the left, each hand holding the stem of a white lotus. The chief image is surrounded by the Sixteen Bodhisattvas (Pl. 16).

5. Padma-mthar-byed (Padmāntaka), red, in the *pratyāliḍha* posture, with the Twenty-eight Nakṣatras (Pl. 62).

6. gShin-rje-mthar-byed (Yambtaka), black, in the *pratyāliḍha* attitude, surrounded by *nāgas*, *asuras* and Hindu deities.

7. Kun-tu-bzang-po (Samantabhadra), reddish-yellow, sitting in *virāsana*, performing the *varadamudrā* and holding the jewel on a blue lotus.

8. Mos-pa-spyod-kyi-sa (Adhimukticaryā), the central figure in the cycle of the twelve *bhūmis*, sitting in *virāsana*, holding the vajra and a red lotus.

9. *Mandala* of Chos-kyi-dbyings-gsung-gi-dbang-phyug (Dharmadhātuvaṃśīvara) according to Jam-dpal-grags-pa ‘s great commentary on the *Nāmasaṃgiti*. The god is white, with four heads and eight arms, sits in *vajrāsana* on the lion throne and displays the *dharmačakramudrā* (Pl. 10).
The statues are related to the first section of the De-nyid-bsdus (Tattvasamgraha Toh. 479), principally devoted to the Vajradhatumandala.

The paintings on the walls are all devoted to the Dharmadhātuvaṃśa-varamandala, as drawn from the 'jam-dpal-ye-shes-sems-dpa'i mtshan yang-dag-par brjod-pa (Mañjuśrījñānasattvasya paramārthananāmasamgiti, Toh. 360), which is normally placed among the anuttarayogatantras, but is here considered as an explanatory tantra of the first section of the Tattvasamgraha, the root text of the yogatantras.

Most of the mandalas are painted according to the 'jam-dpal-chos-dbyings-gsung-dbang-gi dkyil cho-ga (Dharmadhātuvaṃśavaramañjuśrimandalavidhi, Cordier: rGyud LX, 50), Mañjuśrīkirti’s great commentary, also known as Nam-mkha’ dri-med che-ba’i dkyil cho-ga (Mahākāśavimalamandalavidhi). The Vajradhātumanḍala, with Mañjuśrī-Mahāvairocana in the centre, is drawn from the 'Phags-pa mtshan yang-dag-par brjod-pa’i rgya-cher ’grel-pa mtshan gsang-sngags-kyi don-du nam-par ltu-ba (Āryanāmasamgitiṭīkānāmantrarāthavālokini, Cordier: rGyud LVIII, 2), a commentary on the Nāmasamgiti by Lilāvajra, also known as Nam-mkha’ dri-med ’grel-pa bar-ma.
(3 W a) Chapel devoted to 'Jam-dpal-ye-shes-sems-dpa' (Jñānasattva Mañjuśrī)

sculptor: unknown  
painter: dKon-mchog-bzang-po, from Jo-nang

1. Statue of 'Jam-dpal-ye-shes-sems-dpa' (Jñānasattva Mañjuśrī), white, with six heads (the central one blue), sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and displaying the samādhīmudrā, flanked by Vajrasūrya and Vajrasattva.

2. Manḍala of rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), white, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne, with the figure of the Ādibuddha at the centre of his chest, and performing the bodhyagrimudrā (Pl. 9).

3. 'Od-dpag-med (Amitābha), red, sitting in vajrāsana on the peacock throne, with the figure of the Ādibuddha on his chest, and displaying the dhyanimudrā.

4. Manḍala of all the Five Families assembled together, according to the system of Avadhūtipa, the master from Udḍīyāna.

All the manḍalas in this chapel are related to the 'Jam-dpal-ye-shes-sems-dpa' i mtsan yang-dag-par brjod-pa, (Mañjuśrījñānasattvasya paramārthanāmasamgiti, Toh. 360), considered to be a cha-mthun rgyud (explanatory tantra concerning single sections of the root-tantra) which is referred to the first section of the Tattvasaṅgraha (Toh. 479), the root-text of the yogatantras.

The paintings are drawn from the 'Jam-dpal sgyu-'phrul dra-ba (Mañjuśrīmāyājāla) section of the Nāmasamgiti, according to the 'Phags-pa 'jam-dpal-gyi mtsan yang-dag-par brjod-pa'i 'grel-ba (Āryamañjuśrināmasamgitiyṛti, Cordier: rGyud LX, 2) and the 'Jam-dpal-ye-shes-sems-dpa' Dang-po'i-sangs-rgyas zhes bya-ba'i sgrub-thabs (Jñānasattvamañjuśri Ādibuddhanāmasadāhana, Cordier: rGyud LXI, 14).
(3 W a’) Chapel devoted to rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), white, with four heads, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and displaying the bodhyagrimudrā, flanked by Vajrasattva and Vajrarāga.

2. Vairocana, white, with four heads, showing the figure of the Adibuddha at the centre of his chest, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and displaying the bodhyagrimudrā.

3. Don-yod-grub-pa (Amoghasiddhi), green, with the figure of the Adibuddha on his chest, sitting in vajrāsana on the garuda throne and holding the viśvavajra on the palm of his right hand, which displays the abhayamudra (Pl. 7).

4. Byang-sems-rdo-rje (Vajrasattva), white, with the figure of the Adibuddha on his chest, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne, holding a red vajra and a ghanta ending in a red half-vajra (Pl. 8).

The statues are drawn from the Nam-mkha’ dri-med chung-ba’i dkyil-khor by Mañjuśrimitra. All the maṇḍalas painted in this chapel are drawn from Mañjuśrimitra’s mTshan yang-dag-par brjod-pa’i ’grel-ba (Nāmasamgitiṭṭiti, Cordier: rGyud LVIII, 1), a commentary which considers the Nāmasamgiti as a cha-mthun rgyud (explanatory tantra) of the first section of the Tattvasamgraha and is also known as the Nam-mkha’ dri-med ’grel-ba chung-ba.
Chapel devoted to Byang-chub-sems-dpa’-rdo-rje (Vajrasattva)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Byang-chub-sems-dpa’-rdo-rje (Vajrasattva) according to Lilavajra’s system, white, sitting in virāsana, holding a vajra and a ghāntā, flanked by rDo-rje-chos and rDo-rje-ma.

2. rNām-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana) according to the rDo-rje-snying-po, white, with only one head, sitting in vajrāsana, with his hands performing the samādhīmudrā (Pl. 14).

3. The Seven Jewels of the Cakravartin and the Eight Auspicious Symbols.

4. rNām-par-snang-mdzad-chen-po (Mahāvairocana), white, with four heads, showing the figure of the Ādibuddha on his chest, performing the bodhyagrimudrā, sitting at the centre of the maṇḍala of the Five Families assembled together, according to Lilavajra’s system.

The statues and the great maṇḍala 4 on the main wall are related to the Nāmasaṃgiti through Lilavajra’s commentary, ’Phags-pa mtshan yang-dag-par brjod-pa’i rgya-cher ’grel-pa mtshan gsang-sngags-kyi don-du rnam-par lta-ba (Āryanāmasaṃgitiḥānāmanamantrābhāvalokini, Cordier: rGyud LVIII, 2).

Maṇḍala 2, on the opposite wall, is related to the dPal rDo-rje-snying-po-rgyan ces bya-ba’i rgyud kyi rgyal-po chen-po (Śrīvajramaṇḍalalāṃkāranāmanamahātantrarāja, Toh. 490), an explanatory yogatantra.
(3 W b') Chapel devoted to Yum-chen-mo (Prajñāpāramitā)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Khro-rgyal-dbang-phyug, from Khab-gsar, near Ha rtse

1. Statue of Yum-chen-mo (Prajñāpāramitā), gilded, with four arms, sitting in vajrāsana on the lotus throne, flanked by two female deities.

2. Maṇḍala of rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), white, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne with an upright vajra upon his hands in samādhīmudrā.

3. Maṇḍala of Mi-bskyod-pa.

4. Maṇḍala of Rin-chen-'byung-lidan (Ratnasambhava), yellow, showing the figure of the Ādibuddha on his chest, sitting in vajrāsana on the horse throne and holding the jewel on the palm of his right hand, which displays the varadāmudrā (Pl. 6).

The statues are the centre of a maṇḍala drawn from the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi sku-gsung-thugs gsang-ba rgyan bkod-pa (Sarvatathāgatakāyavākṣittaguhālāṃkāravṛtya, Toh. 492), an explanatory yogatantra.

The maṇḍala of Vairocana is drawn from the dPal rdo-rje-snying-po rgyan ces bya-ba'i rgyud-kyi rgyal-po chen-po (Śrīvajramaṇḍalālaṃkāranāmamahātantrarāja, Toh. 490), again an explanatory yogatantra.

The maṇḍalas of Aksobhya and Ratnasambhava are related to the great commentaries on the Nāmasaṃgiti (Cordier: rGyud LVIII, 1, 2).
(3 N) Temple devoted to Don-yod-grub-pa (Amoghasiddhi)

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Don-yod-grub-pa (Amoghasiddhi), dark green, with a viṣṇu-vajra on the palm of his right hand, displaying the abhayamudrā, flanked by rDo-rje-las and rDo-rje-khutsur, with rDo-rje-bsrung-ba and rDo-rje-gnod-sbyin in the upper corners.

2. Shakya-seng-ge (Śākyasimha), an aspect of Mahāvairocana according to the Durgatipariśodhana, pink, sitting in vajrāsana and displaying the dharmacakramudrā (Pl. 98).

3. Shakya-thub-pa (Śākyamuni), yellow, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and displaying the dharmacakramudrā.

4. Khro-bo ‘Jig-rten-gsum-’ching (Krodhatrailokyabandhaka), red, with three heads and six arms, in the pratyalidha posture, surrounded by the deities of the western door of the Kun-rig dkyil-khor (Pls. 56, 59)

5. Khro-bo ‘Jig-rten-gsum-’jig (Krodhatrailokyanāsaya), green, with three heads and six arms, surrounded by the deities of the northern door of the Kun-rig dkyil-khor (Pl. 57, 63).

6. Khro-bo ‘Jig-rten-gsum-snang-ba (Krodhatrailokyāloka), black, with three heads and six arms, surrounded by the deities of the eastern door of the Kun-rig dkyil-khor (Pl. 54).

7. Khro-bo ‘Jig-rten-gsum-’dul (Krodhatrailokyarṣana), yellow, with three heads and six arms, surrounded by the deities of the southern door of the Kun-rig dkyil-khor (Pls. 55, 58).

8. rDo-rje-sems-dpa’ (Vajrasattva), white, sitting in virāsana, holding a vajra and a ghaṇṭā, with the Sixteen Bodhisattvas, the Sixteen Śravakas and the Twelve Pratyekabuddhas.

9. Kun-rig-nam-par-snang-mdzad (Sarvavidvairocana), white, with four heads, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and displaying the samādhimudrā (Pl. 13).
The statues are related to the first section of the *De-nyid-bsdus* (*Tattvasamgraha*, Toh. 479), which is principally devoted to the *Vajradhātumandala*.

All the *mandalas* painted on the walls of this temple are related to the first section (*rtsa-ba'i rgyud*) and to the basic *mandala* of the *De-bzhin-gshegs-pa dgra-bcom-pa yang-dag-par rdzogs-pa'i sangs-rgyas ngan-song thams-cad yongs-su sbyong-ba gzi-brjid-kyi rgyal-po'i brtag-pa phyogs gcig-pa* (*Sarvadurgatipariśodhanatejorasya tathāgatasya arhataḥ samyaksambuddhasya kalpaikadeśa*, Toh. 483, 485), abbreviated to *Ngan-song thams-cad yongs-su sbyong-ba* (*Sarvadurgatipariśodhana*), a cha-mthun rgyud (explanatory tantra) of the *Tattvasamgraha*.

Paintings 2, 3, 8 and 9 are drawn according to Ānandagarbha’s *sādhanas* and commentaries (Cordier: *rGyud* LXIII, 3, 4). The other paintings are drawn in accordance with the *Sa-skya-pa* tradition and are based on Atiśa’s system as followed by Bu-ston in his *Kun-rig dkyil-khor bkod-pa*. 
(3 N a) Chapel devoted to rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Shes-rab-dpal-bzangs-pa, from rGyal-khang, in Nyug

1. Statue of rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), silvery, with four heads, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and displaying the samādhimudrā, flanked by rDo-rje-sems-dpa' (Vajrasattva) and rDo-rje-chos (Vajradhāma).

2. Phyag-na-rdo-rje (Vajrapāṇi), white, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne, holding a red vajra and a ghanṭā ending in a red half-vajra.

3. Tshe-dpag-med (Amitāyus), red, sitting in vajrāsana on the peacock throne, holding a bum-pa with flowers in his hands, which display the samādhimudrā.

4. rDo-rje-sems-dpa' (Vajrasattva), white, flanked by Kun-tu-bzang-po (Samantabhadra) and bDe-ba-chen-po (Mahāsukha), at the centre of the 'Khor-las-bṣgyur-ba bzi'i dkyil-khor (mandala of the Four Cakravartins) (Pl. 20).

The statue of rNam-par-snang-mdzad is related to the basic manḍala in the first section (rtsa-ba'i rgyud) of the Sarvadurgatiparīṣodhanatantra (Toh. 483, 485).

The manḍalas of Vajrapāṇi and Amitāyus are drawn from the second section of that tantra (rgyud phyi-ma). The manḍala of the Four Cakravartins is drawn from its second section (rgyud phyi-ma).
(3 N a’) Chapel devoted to Me-ltar-’bar-ba (Jvālānālārka)

sculptor: unknown
painter: the master from Don-ri

1. Statue of Shākyya-seng-ge (Śākyasimha), saffron-coloured, sitting in vajrāsana on a double-lotus throne, displaying the varadamudrā and the abhayamudrā with his right and left hand, respectively. Flanked by two bodhisattvas: Vajrasattva on his right and Samantabhadra on his left.

2. Maṇḍala of rDo-rje Me-ltar-’bar-ba (Vajrajvālānālārka), blue, with six arms, fierce mien and flaming hair, in the pratylīdhā posture. His two central hands display the vajrāṇāṃkāramudrā, while holding a vajra and a ghanṭā (Pl. 44).

3. Maṇḍala of Khro-mo (a wrathful form of Yum-chen-mo), red, with four heads and four arms, with a fierce mien and flaming hair, in the pratylīdhā posture, the two central hands holding a karttiṅka and a kapāla.

4. Yum-chen-mo (Prajñāpāramitā), yellow, with four heads and four arms, sitting in vajrāsana at the centre of the Ye-shes dkyil-khor.

The statues in this chapel are related to the first section (rDSA-ba’i rgyud) of the Durgatipariṣodhana-tantra (Toh. 483, 485).

The maṇḍala of Me-ltar-’bar-ba is drawn from the maṇḍala of the fierce deities in the second section of the same tantra (phyi-ma rgyud).
(3 Nb) Chapel devoted to Tshe-dpag-med (Amitāyus)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Shes-rab-dpal-bzang-po,
from rGyal-khang, in Nyug

1. Statue of Tshe-dpag-med (Amitāyus) red, sitting in vajrāsana on a double-lotus throne, with a bum-pa with flowers placed on his hands, which perform the samādhi mudrā. The Jina is flanked by rDo-rje-sems-dpa’ (Vajrasattva) and rDo-rje-chos (Vajradharma).

2. Khro-bo ’Jig-rten-gsum-las-nam-par-rgyal-ba (Krodha Trailokyavijaya), blue, with four arms, fierce mien and a crown of skulls, holding a vajra and a ghantā with his central hands, which display the vajraḥūṃkāramudrā. The deity is stretching in the pratyāliḍhā posture and is surrounded by the Eight Bhairavas.

3. Phyag-na-rdo-rje (Vajrapāṇi) in his peaceful form, white, sitting in vajrāsana on a lotus throne, holding a vajra and a ghantā in the usual way, surrounded by the Eight Nāgas.

4. rDo-rje-hūṃ-mdzad (Vajrahūṃkāra), blue, with fierce mien and flaming hair, in the pratyāliḍhā posture, displaying his specific mudrā with a vajra and a ghantā, surrounded by the Eight Grahas and the Twenty-eight Nakṣatras.

All the above manḍalas are drawn from the second section (rgyud phyi-ma) of the Durgatipariśodhātantra (Toh. 483, 485), explanatory of the De-myid-bsdus (Tattvasamgraha, Toh. 479), the root-text of the yogatantra class.
Chapel devoted to Phyag-na-rdo-rje (Vajrapani)

sculptor: unknown
painter: Ban-chen sKyabs, from bZang-ri, in sNye-mo

1. Statue of Phyag-na-rdo-rje (Vajrapani) in his peaceful form, silvery, sitting in vajrasana on the double-lotus throne and holding a vajra and a ghanṭā, flanked by two bodhisattvas.

2. rDo-rje-hūm-mdzad (Vajrahūm-kāra), blue, four-armed, with a fierce mien, flaming hair and a crown of skulls, in the pratyalidha posture. His central hands display the vajraḥūm-kāramudrā with a vajra and a ghanṭā (Pl. 41).

3. Vajrapani in his peaceful form, white, showing the same posture and gesture as in the statue above, surrounded by the rGyal-chen bzhi (the Four Great Kings).

4. Vajrapani, yellowish-white, with the same posture and gesture as in the preceding mandala, surrounded by the ten Phyogs-skjong (Guardians of the Ten Directions) (Pl. 15).

All the mandalas in this chapel are drawn from the Durgatipariśodhanatntra (Toh. 483, 485). rDo-rje-hūm-mdzad (Vajrahūm-kāra), also called Khro-bo 'Jig-rten-gsum-rgyal-ba (Krodha Trailokyavijaya), is the central deity of the mandala of the eight lHa-chen (Mahādevas) as described in the second section (rgyud phyi-ma) of that tantra.
(3 E) Temple devoted to Mi-bskyod-pa (Aksobhya)

sculptor: unknown  
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Mi-bskyod-pa (Aksobhya), blue, sitting in vajrāsana on the elephant throne, displaying the bhūmisparsamudrā, flanked by rDo-rje-sems-dpa’ (Vajrasattva) and rDo-rje-legs (Vajrasadhu), with rDo-rje-rgyal-po (Vajrarāja) and rDo-rje-chags-pa (Vajra-rāga) in the upper corners (Pl. 23).

2. Western maṇḍala (Padma Family) of the Vajradhātu mahāmanḍala: Sangs-rgyas-sna-tshogs-gzugs-can, red, sitting in vajrāsana on a throne with peacocks and lions, displaying the dhamacakramudrā, flanked by two bodhisattvas.

3. rDo-rje-hūm-mdzad (Vajrahumkāra), blue, with four heads and eight arms, with a fierce mien and flaming hair, in the pratyalidhā posture, with his central arms displaying the vajrahumkāramudrā while holding a vajra and a ghanta, surrounded by the Sixteen Bodhisattvas in their wrathful form.

4. Northern maṇḍala (Karma Family) of the Vajradhātu mahāmanḍala: Sangs-rgyas-chos-'dzin-rgyal-po, green, sitting in vajrāsana on the garūḍa throne, holding the viśvavajra on the palm of his right hand, which displays the abhayamudrā.

5. Deities of the outer cycle (northern and western quarter), together with eight of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the bhadrakalpa (Pl. 60).

6. Deities of the outer cycle (southern and eastern quarter), together with eight of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the bhadrakalpa (Pl. 61).

7. Southern maṇḍala (Ratna Family) of the Vajradhātu mahāmanḍala: Sangs-rgyas-nyi-ma, yellow, sitting in vajrāsana on the horse throne, with his hands holding a set of teeth at the height of his chest.

8. Eastern maṇḍala (Vajra Family) of the Vajradhātu mahāmanḍala: rDo-rje-nam-snang, blue, sitting in vajrāsana on the elephant throne, holding a vajra with both his hands.

9. Central maṇḍala (Tathāgata Family) of the Vajradhātu mahāmanḍala: rNam-par-snang-mdzad-chen-po (Mahāvairocana), white, with four heads, sitting in vajrāsana on a throne with elephants and lions, displaying the bodhyagrimudrā, flanked by rDo-rje-sems-dpa’ (Vajrasattva) and rDo-rje-chos (Vajradharma) (Pl. 4).
The statues are related to the first section of the De-nyid-bsdus (Tattvasamgraha, Toh. 479), which is principally devoted to the Vajradhātumandala.

All the paintings in this temple are drawn from the rTog-pa thams-cad byung-ba rigs-bsdus-pa'i dkyil-'khor, the great mandala which is a synthesis of all the Families. That is the chief mandala of the gSang-ba rnal-'byor chen-po'i rgyud rdo-rje rtse-mo (Vajraśikharamahāgūhyayogatantra, Toh. 480), usually abbreviated rDo-rje-rtse-mo (Vajraśekhara), a bshad-rgyud (explanatory tantra) of the Tattvasamgraha.
(3 E a) Chapel devoted to Sangs-rgyas-nyi-ma (Buddhasūrya)

sculptor: Nam-mkha'-bzung-po,
   from bDe-chen, near lHa-rtse
painter: bKra-shis-bzung-po,
   from bShag-tshal, near lHa-rtse

1. Statue of Sangs-rgyas-nyi-ma, white, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne, with a radiating halo. He holds a set of teeth with both hands in front of his chest and is flanked by two standing bodhisattvas.

2. rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), white, with four heads, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne, with a radiating halo and performing the bodhyagrimudrā, surrounded by the deities of the dhāraṇīmaṇḍala, which is based on the cittasamayamudrā.

3. Vairocana, white, with four heads, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and displaying a special form of the samādhi-mudrā, with the tips of the thumbs touching each other and a vajra standing upon them. He is surrounded by the deities of the dhāraṇīmaṇḍala, which is based on the dharmamudrā as related to the verbal plane.

4. rNam-par-snang-mdzad-chen-po (Mahāvairocana), white, with four heads, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and performing the bodhyagrimudrā, surrounded by the deities of the mahāmaṇḍala which is based on the mahākāyamudrā.

The statues are the centre of the southern maṇḍala (Ratna Family) of the mahāmaṇḍala of the Five Families assembled together, as drawn from the rDo-rje-rtse-mo (Vajraśekhara, Toh. 486).

All the paintings in this chapel are related to the maṇḍalas of the Tathāgata Family, as drawn from the section of the Vajraśekhara devoted to the Rigs so-so dkyil-'khor (maṇḍalas of the individual Families).
(3 E a’) Chapel devoted to
Sangs-rgyas-sna-tshogs-gzugs-can
(Buddhaviśvarūpa)

sculptor: Nam-mkha’-bzang-po, from bDe-chen,
    near lHa-rtse
painter: Chos-skyong-bkra-shis, from bShag-tshal

1. Statue of Sangs-rgyas-sna-tshogs, red, sitting in
   vajrāsana on the lion throne and displaying the
dharmacakramudrā, flanked by two bodhisattvas.

2. rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), white, with
   four heads, sitting in vajrāsana and displaying the
bodhyagrimudrā, surrounded by the symbols of the other
four Jinas, as described in the fundamental maṇḍala of the
Khams-gsum-rnam-rgyal-kyi dkyil-khor (Pl. 2).

3. Vairocana, white, with four heads, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne, with a radiating halo and
displaying the bodhyagrimudrā, surrounded by the deities of the dhāraṇīmaṇḍala.

4. Vairocana, white, with four heads, sitting in vajrāsana and displaying the bodhyagrimudrā, surrounded
by the four Jinas, as described in the karmamāṇḍala.

The statues are the centre of the western maṇḍala (Padma Family) in the mahāmaṇḍala of the Five
Families assembled together, as drawn from the rDo-rje-rtse-mo (Vajraśekhara, Toh. 480).

All the paintings on the walls of this chapel are drawn from the Trailokyavijayamaṇḍala in the second
section of the Vajraśekhara, which is devoted to each of the individual Families. Maṇḍalas 2 and 3 belong to
the Vajra Family, while maṇḍala 4 belongs to the Tathāgata Family.
(3 E b’) Chapel devoted to
Sangs-rgyas-chos-’dzin-rgyal-po
(Buddhadharmadhararaja)

sculptor: Nam-mkha’-bzang-po, from bDe-chen, near lHa-rtse
painter: the master from Don-ri, near lHa-rtse

1. Statue of Sangs-rgyas-chos-’dzin-rgyal-po, green,
sitting in vajrasana on a double-lotus throne, with his right
hand performing the abhayamudrā, flanked by two
bodhisattvas.

2. rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana), white, with four
heads, sitting in vajrasana on the lion throne and displaying
a special form of the samāḍhimudrā, with the thumbs touch-
ing each other and the other fingers enmeshed. He is sur-
rounded by the wrathful deities of the dharmamāṇḍala.

3. Vairocana, white, with four heads, sitting in vajrasana
on the lion throne and displaying the bodhyagrimudrā, surrounded by jinas and bodhisattvas as drawn from
the karmamāṇḍala (Pl. 3).

4. Vairocana, yellowish-white, with four heads, sitting in vajrasana on the lion throne and displaying
the bodhyagrimudrā, surrounded by the symbols of jinas and bodhisattvas, as drawn from the dhāraṇīmāṇḍala,
which is based on the cittasamayamudrā.

The statues are the centre of the southern manḍala (Karma Family) in the mahāmaṇḍala of the Five
Families assembled together, as drawn from the rDo-rje-rtse-mo (Vajraśekhara, Toh. 480).

All the paintings on the walls of this chapel are drawn from the second section of the Vajraśekhara
which is devoted to each of the individual Families (rigs so-so) and in particular, from the group of
manḍalas which belong to the Vajra Family.
(3 V) Vestibule devoted to the mChod-rten-brgyad (Aṣṭamahācaityya), giving access to the fourth storey.

no statues are present in this vestibule
painter: unknown

1. Mya-ngan-'das mChod-rtен, the Stūpa of the Parinirvāna.
2. Cho-'phrul mChod-rtен, the Stūpa of the Great Miracle.
3. Byang-chub-chen mChod-rtен, the Stūpa of the Great Enlightenment.
4. rNam-rgyal mChod-rtен, the Stūpa of the Victory.
5. Pad-spungs mChod-rtен, the Stūpa of the Heap of Lotuses.
6. ‘Od-zer-can mChod rtен, the Resplendent Stūpa.
7. bKra-shis-sgo-mang mChod-rten, the Auspicious Stūpa with Many Doors.
8. Sum-cu-rtsa-gsum mChod-rtен, the Stūpa of the Thirty-three Gods.

References to the Eight Great Stūpas are found in the bsTan-'gyur, for example, in the 'Phags-pa kun-nas sgor 'jug-pa'i 'od-zer gtsug-tor dri-ma med-par snang-ba'i gzungs bklag-cing mchod-rten brgya-rtsa-brgyad dam mchod-rten luga gdab-pa'i cho-ja mdo-sde-las btus-pa (Āryasamantamukhapravēśasārmīvaloṣpiṇaprabhāsa-dhāraṇīvacana sātrantarodhāṣṭottaraśatācaityāntarapatiṣacaitynirvapiṣavadihi, Cordier: rGyud LXIX, 129), and in the mChod-rten-gi cha rnam-par dbye-ba (Caityavibhaṅga, Cordier: rGyud LXIX, 139).
Fig. D The Fourth Storey
Chapel devoted to Atiśa and to the bKa’-gdams-pa school

sculptor: mThu-bri, from mKhar-kha
painter: the dGe-bsnyen from lHa-rtsa

1. Statue of Jo-bo Atiśa, the great Bengali master who was one of the chief authors of the 11th century Buddhist renaissance in Tibet.

1. Statue of ‘Brom-ston-pa rGyal-ba’i-byung-gnas, Atiśa’s favourite disciple, the founder of the bKa’-gdams-pa school.

1a’. Statue of Nag-tsho Lo-tsà-ba Tshul-khrims-rgyal-ba, one of the two Tibetan monks who went to India to invite Atiśa.

2. sPyan-snga-ba Tshul-khrims-bar, one of the chief disciples of ‘Brom-ston.

3. dGe-bshes Po-to-ba Rin-chen-gsal, abbot of Rwa-sgreng, the monastery founded by ‘Brom-ston (Pl. 107).
(4 S 2) Chapel devoted to Bu-ston, “the supreme knower”

sculptor: unknown
painter: Rin-chen-dpal-'byor,
from gNas-rnying

1. Statue of Kun-mkhyen Bu-ston Rin-chchen-grub (1290-1364), who systematized the Tibetan canonical literature and standardized the symbolic representations of the deities described therein. Author of the first Chos-'byung (history of Buddhism).

1a Statue of sGra-tshad-pa Rin-chen-nam-rgyal-dpal-bzang (Rin-chen-nam-rgyal-ba), the spiritual son of Bu-ston and author of the Bu-ston rnam-thar (biography of Bu-ston).

1a’. Statue of the sku-zhang chos-rje, possibly Nam-mkha'-mchog-sgrub-dpal-bzang-po, the son of the sku-zhang of Zhwa-lu, Ye-shes-kun-dga’.

2. The mahāsiddha Grub-chen Rin-po-che (U-rgyan-pa), belonging to the bKa’-brgyud-pa tradition, surrounded by the masters of the lineages of Saṃvara and Kālacakra.

3. 'Jam-pa'i-dbyangs Rin-chen-rgyal-mtshan, the abbot of gNas-rnying who performed consecration ceremonies in the gTsug-lag-khang of Gyantse, surrounded by siddhas and masters of the Guhyasamāja tradition.
Chapel devoted to the masters of the Sa-skya-pa tradition

sculptor: unknown
painter: Don-grub-skyabs, from mKhar-kha

1. Statue of the mahāsiddha Virūpa (Bir-wa-pa), lord of the yogins and founder of the Lam-'bras lineage.

1a. Statue of Chos-rje Sa-chen Kun-dga'-snying-po (1092-1156), son of dKon-mchog-rgyal-po (the founder of the Sa-skya-pa order) and 3rd abbot of Sa-skya.

1a'. Statue of rJe-btsun bSod-nams-rtse-mo (1147-1182), Sa-chen's eldest son, a great siddha and the very founder of the Sa-skya-pa esoteric tradition, 4th abbot of Sa-skya.

1b. Statue of Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga'-rgyal-mtshan (1181-1251), nephew of bSod-nams-rtse-mo, 6th abbot of Sa-skya and the greatest scholar of the Sa-skya-pa school.

1b'. Statue of 'Gro-mgon Chos-rgyal 'Phags-pa (1235-1280), nephew of Sa-skya Paṇḍita, 7th abbot of Sa-skya, guru of the Chinese emperor Qubilai Khan and first ecclesiastical ruler of Tibet.


3. rJe-btsun-chen-po Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1147-1217), 5th abbot of Sa-skya.

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of rGyal-ba'i-sras-po Thogs-med-bzang-po-dpal, namely Bu-ston’s disciple, rGyal-sras Thogs-med (1295-1369), a teacher especially of masters belonging to the bKa’-gdoms-pa tradition.

1a. Statue of Kun-spangs Semsp-dpa’-chen-po Chos-kyi-rin-chen, possibly the same as Chos-kyi-rin-chen, an abbot of the monastery of gNas-rnying.

1a’. Statue of Gangs-can-mkhas-pa’i-dbang-po Kun-dga’-dpal, a mahāpāṇḍita especially versed in the Prajñāpāramitā literature and a propagator of Asaṅga’s Abhidharmasamuccaya in Tibet.

2. The ācārya Haribhadra, a great master in the Prajñāpāramitā system, the author of the Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā, which is included in the bsTan-‘gyur (Cordier: mDo III-V).

3. Asaṅga (4th-5th century), the founder of the Yogācāra school, a theoretician of the trikāya system, and the author of a relevant portion of the mDo section in the bsTan-‘gyur.
1. Statue of Dam-pa-sangs-rgyas (Pha-dam-pa) (?-1117), the Indian master who introduced the teachings of gCod (Pha-rol-tu phyin-pa bdud-kyi gcod-yul) and Zhi-byed (sDug-bsngal zhi-byed) into Tibet.

1a. Statue of ‘Gro-ba’i-mgon-po Dam-pa-kun-dga’ (1062-1124), one of Dam-pa-sangs-rgyas’s most important pupils, also known as Bodhisattva Kun-dga’.

1a’. Statue of Ma-gcig Labs-sgron-ma, a female disciple of Pha-dam-pa, who spread the practice of gCod in Tibet.

2. dPyal Lo-tsá-ba Chos-kyi-bzang-po (dPyal Chos-bzang), the founder of the monastery of Thar-pa-gling.

3. sGrol-ljang (Śyāma Tārā).

4. An unidentified master, perhaps dPyal Kun-dga’rdo-rje, or else dPyal Thags-rgyal-ba, the guru of the founder of the Gyantse dynasty.
(4 NW) Chapel devoted to the masters of the bKa’-brgyud-pa tradition

sculptor: Nam-mkha’-bzang-po, from lHa-rtse
painter: Thar-pa-ba, from lHa-rtse

1. Statue of Tilopa (988-1069), a Bengali mahāsiddha born in a brahman family, the originator of the bKa’-brgyud-pa tradition.

1a. Statue of Nāropa (1016-1100), a mahāsiddha born in the family of a Bengali rāja, abbot of the Buddhist university of Nālandā, then chief disciple of Tilopa, from whom he obtained the complete oral transmission.

1a’. Statue of Mar-pa (1012-1097), a Tibetan mahāsiddha who travelled to Nepal and India and became one of the chief disciples of Nāropa, whose teachings he introduced into Tibet.

1b. Statue of Mi-la-ras-pa (1052-1135), the famous Tibetan ascetic and poet, disciple of Mar-pa, from whom he obtained the secret teachings of Nāropa.

1b’. Statue of Dwags-po Rin-po-che sGam-po-zla-od-gzhon-nu (sGam-po-pa) (1079-1153), a disciple of Mi-la-ras-pa and a great teacher of the Mahāmudrā tradition, the true founder of the bKa’-brgyud-pa religious order.


Chapel devoted to the masters of the Kalacakra

sculptor: Nam-mkha'-btsang-po
painters: Blo-gros-rab-gsal and dGe-ba,
from bDe-chen, near lHa-rtses


1a. Statue of mKhas-grub-chen-po Bo-dong Phyogs-las-rnam-rgyal (1306-1386), the main disciple of Dol-po-pa and diffuser of the Kalacakra system in Tibet.

1a'. Statue of mKhas-mchog Nya-dbon Kun-dga'-dpal, also known as Gangs-can-mkhas-pa'i-dbang-po Kun-dga'-dpal. A disciple of Dol-po-pa and diffuser of Asaṅga's Abhidharmasamuccaya, who spread the Saḍānakayogā in central and southern Tibet.

1b. Statue of the donor of this chapel, Chos-rje dPal-ldan-legs-pa, probably a disciple of Bo-dong Phyogs-las-rnam-rgyal.

1b'. Statue of 'Jam-dbyangs-dkon-mchog-btsang-po, the master who consecrated the sKu-'bum.


3. Kun-spangs Thugs-rje-brtson-'grus (1243 - ?), a master of the Kalacakra in the lineage of 'Bro Lo-tsa-ba

4. Bla-ma Rong-pa rDo-rje-rgyal-mtshan (1283-1325), a master of the Kalacakra in the lineage of Rwa Lo-tsa-ba.
(4 N 2) Chapel devoted to the Great Buddhist Kings of Tibet

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Khri Srong-brtsan-sgam-po (reg 629?-649), who established the basis of the Tibetan empire and is considered an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara.

1a. Statue of Khri Srong-lde-brtsan (reg 755-797), considered to be an incarnation of Mañjuśrī.

1a'. Statue of Khri gTsug-lde-brtsan (Ral-pa-chen; reg 815-838), considered to be an incarnation of Vajrapāṇi.

1b. Statue of the princess Bhṛkuṭi Devi, Srông-brtsan-sgam-po’s Newar consort (Bal-bza’).

1b'. Statue of the princess lHa-gcig Wun-shing Kong-jo, Srông-brtsan-sgam-po’s Chinese consort (rGya-bza’).

1c. mThon-myi ‘Bring-po-rgyal-btsan-nu (Thon-mi Sambhoṭa), minister of Srông-brtsan-sgam-po, regarded as the creator of Tibetan writing.

1c’. mGar sTong-rtsan (? - 667), minister of Srông-brtsan-sgam-po, responsible for the Tibetan expansion in Central Asia.

2. Pho-brang Zhi-ba-’od, the royal monk, surrounded by the kings of Western Tibet.

3. The caption under the painting reads Khri bTsan-po. This rather defaced painting may portray either Srông-brtsan-sgam-po or some other important Tibetan ruler.

4. Thon-mi Sambhoṭa and mGar sTong-rtsan (Pl. 104).

5. rJe gNyā’-khri-btsan-po, the first Tibetan king, surrounded by the kings of the Yar-klungs dynasty (Pl. 103)
(4 NE) Chapel devoted to
the Indian paññitas and
Tibetan translators

sculptor: Nam-mkha'-bzung-po
painter: Don-grub-skyabs

1. Statue of Śantaraksita (mKhan-po Bodhisattva) (?-797), the great Indian master
who founded the first Buddhist monastery
in Tibet at bSam-yas. He is the author of the
famous Tattvasamgrahakārikā (Cordier: mDo
CXIII, 1).

1a. Statue of Ācārya Padma (Padmasambhava), to whom the rNying-ma-pa school traces its tradition,
viewing him as a second Buddha.

1a'. Statue of Kamalaśīla, the disciple of Śantaraksita, who represented the Indian Buddhist school in the
so-called “Lhasa Council”. He is the author of the great commentary to the Tattvasamgrahakārikā (Cordier: mDo CXIII, 2; CXIV) and of the three Bhāvanākramas (Cordier: mDo XXX 7-9).

1b. Statue of Rin-chen-bzung-po (958-1055), the great translator and promoter of the second diffusion of
Buddhism into Tibet.

1b'. Statue of rNgog Lo-tsa-ba Blo-ldan-shes-rab (1059-1109), master of logic, great translator and diffuser
of Buddhism in Tibet, and the abbot of the monastery of gSang-phu Ne'u-thogs.

2. Śāntigarbha, Padmasambhava’s disciple and a great master in the rDzogs-chen tradition.

3. Buddhaguhya, one of the main diffusers of the yogatantras in Tibet (Pl. 105).

4. Lo-tsa-ba Ka-ba dPal-brtsegs, the translator of the Mahāvairocanaḥbhisamboḥdhitāntra and one of the
compilers of the Mahāvyutpatti (Pl. 106).
(4 E 1) Chapel devoted to the Vidhyādhāras who originated the bKa’-brgyad tradition

sculptor: unknown
painter: unknown

1. Statue of Gu-ru Rin-po-che (Padmasambhava), with his characteristic hat, holding the vajra in his right hand and the kapāla in the left, with the khaṭvāṅga leaning on his left shoulder.

1a. Statue of Ye-shes-mtsho-rgyal, the mkha’-gro-ma (dakini) who was the principal Tibetan tantric partner of Padmasambhava.

1a’. Statue of the princess Mandarava, the Indian tantric partner of Padmasambhava.

2. sPyan-ras-gzigs-phyag-bzhi-pa (Caturbhuja Avalokiteśvara), surrounded by a crown of masters of the bKa’-brgyad tradition.

3. rGyal-ba Shākya-thub-pa (the jina Śākyamuni), sitting in vajrāsana and displaying the bhūmisparśamudrā, flanked by Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana and surrounded by śravakas and masters of the bKa’-brgyad tradition.
(4 E 2) Chapel devoted to the masters of the “second diffusion”

sculptor: Nam-mkha’-bzang-po, from lHa-rtse
painter: Don-grub-skyabs, from mKhar-kha

1. Statue of Kha-che Pañ-chen Śākyaśribhadra (1127-1225), the last abbot of Vikramaśila, whose teachings were the source of the Tshogs-pa sDe-bzhi-pa (Four Congregations). During his stay at Sa-skya, he had Sa-skya Pañ-chen as a student and ordained him.

1a. Statue of mKhan-chen Byang-chub-dpal-bzang-po, one of the two chief Tibetan disciples of Kha-che Pañ-chen.

1a’. Statue of ‘Jam-dbyangs-rin-chen-rgyal-mtshan, who celebrated the first consecration ceremonies in the gTsug-lag-khang of Gyantse.

2. Śākyamuni in bhūmisparśamudrā, surrounded by a crown of masters.

3. mKhan-chen rDo-rje-dpal-bzang-po, the other main Tibetan disciple of Kha-che Pañ-chen.
(4 V) Vestibule devoted to the Krodhas of the ten directions, giving access to the bum-pa on the fifth storey.

No statues are present in this vestibule

1. gTsug-tor-'khor-los-sgyur-ba
   (Uṣṇisacakravartin), the protector of the zenith, of light complexion, in the ardhaparyanka posture (Pl. 51).

2. gShin-rje-mthar-byed (Yamantaka),
   the protector of the east, dark blue, with six heads and six arms, in the ardhaparyanka posture (Pl. 52).

3. ’Dod-pa’i-rgyal-po (Takkiraja/Vajrañālanārka), the protector of the south-east, black-blue, in the pratyalidha posture.

4. Shes-rab-mthar-byed (Prajñāntaka), the protector of the south, of a reddish-yellow colour, in the ardhaparyanka posture.

5. He-ru-ka-rdo-rje (Herukavajra), the protector of the south-west, dark blue, in the pratyalidha posture.

6. Padma-mthar-byed (Padmāntaka), the protector of the west, red, in the ardhaparyanka posture.

7. rTa-mchog (Paramāśva), the protector of the north-west, green, with his four heads surmounted by a small horse’s head, in the pratyalidha posture.

8. gNod-mdzes-rgyal-po (Śumbharaja), the protector of the nadir, black, in the pratyalidha posture.

9. bGegs-mthar-byed (Vighnāntaka), the protector of the north, blue-black, in the pratyalidha posture.

10. Khams-gsum-rnarn-rgyal (Trailokavijaya), the protector of the north-east, blue, in pratyalidha posture.

The Ten Krodhas are painted according to Mañjuśrīkirti’s Nam-mkha’dri-med che-ba dkyil-khor and are all provided with four heads and eight arms, except for Yamantaka.
Temple devoted to the rDo-rje-gdan (Vajrāsana, the Diamond Throne of Bodhgaya)

sculptor: lHa’i-rgyal-mtshan
painter: Don-grub-skyabs-pa, from ‘Khar-dga’

1. Statue of Śākyamuni based on that in the Mahābodhi Temple at Bodhgaya, gilded, sitting in vajrāsana on a double lotus throne and displaying the bhūmisparśamudrā.

1a. Statue of Maitreya, copper-coloured and with a golden face, in the tribhāṅga pose, displaying the abhayamudrā with his right hand while holding a lotus with a cakra on the top, and holding a kalāsa with the left (Pl. 24).

1a’. Statue of Padmapāṇi, white with a golden face, in the tribhāṅga pose, displaying the varadāmudrā with his right hand and holding a padma with the left.

1b. Statues of the Buddhas of the Ten Directions in the upper section, the lower and intermediate sections being occupied by the statues of the arhats in rocky caves, in accordance with Chinese iconography (Pls. 99, 101).

1b’. The same as in 1b (Pls. 100, 102).

2a. Prajñāpāramitājñānamañḍalā.
2b) Kamadhūtīśvarimañḍalā
3. Kāyavākṣittivahālāṃkāravāyūha- maṇḍalā
4a. Prajñāpāramitāsādhanamañḍalā.
4b) Prajñāpāramitāpauṣṭikamanḍalā

The maṇḍalas in this temple are drawn from the Shes rab pa rol tu phyin pa tshul brgya lnga-bcu (Prajñāpāramitānāyatapāñcaśātikā, Toh. 489) and from the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi sku-dang gsung-dang thugs-kyi gsang-ba rgyan-gyi bkod-pa zhes bya-ba rgyud-kyi rgyal-po (Sarvatāthagatākāyavākṣittivahālāṃkāravāyūha- vīhantrarāja, Toh. 492), a cha-mthun rgyud explanatory of the Prajñāpāramitā section in the dPal-mchog dang-po zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i rtog-pa’i rgyal-po (Śriparamādyānaḥmāhāyānakaḥpārāja, Toh. 487), which is an explanatory tantra (bshad rgyud) of the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi de-ko-na-nyid bsdus-pa zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i mdo (Sarvatāthagatataṭvasaṃgrahānāmamahāyānasūtra, Toh. 479), the fundamental text of the yogatantra class, usually known as the Tattvasaṃgraha.
(5 W) Temple devoted to Shākyamuni

sculptor: unknown
painter: dGe-bshes Bsdod-nams-dpal-'byor-ba, from gNas-nying

1. Statue of Shākyamuni (Sākyamunī), red, with a bodhisattva’s crown, sitting in vajrāsana on the lion throne and displaying the dharmacakramudrā.

1a. Statue of Vajrasattva, white, in the classic tribhanga posture, holding a ghanṭā with his left hand and a vajra (now missing) at the top of the middle finger of the right hand, which displays the tripatākamudrā (Pl. 25).

1a’. Statue of Ratnasattva, yellow, in the tribhanga pose, displaying the dharmacakramudrā.

2a. Jagadvinnayacaturmudrāmanḍala. 2b) Jagadvinnayaikamudrāmanḍala. 2c) Sarvatathāgatamudrāmanḍala.

3. Jagadvinnayamahāmanḍala, the fundamental manḍala of the third section of the Tattvasaṃgraha, surrounded by the caturmudrāmanḍalas of the Four Families.

4b) Jagadvinnayadharmamanḍala

5. Jagadvinnayakarmamanḍala

6a. Vajrapāñimanḍala.
6b) Trilokacakramanḍala

7. Unidentified manḍalas.

8a. Trailokyavijayamanaḍala.
8b) Akāśagarbhamaṇḍala.
8c) Vajradhātumanḍala

Manḍalas 2a, 2b, 3, 4a, 4b, and 5, are drawn from the third section of the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi de-ko-na-nyid bsdus-pa zhes bya-ba theg-pa chen-po’i mdo (Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgrahānamamāhāyānasūtra, Toh. 479).

Manḍalas 2c, 6a, 6b, and 8b, are drawn from the ‘jig-rten-gsum-las rnam-par-rgyal-ba rtog-pa’i rgyal-po chen-po (Trailokavyājyamatākālparāja, Toh. 482), a tantra explanatory (cha-mthun rgyud) of the second section of the Tattvasaṃgraha. Manḍala 8a is drawn from the gSang-ba nor-bu thig-le zhes bya-ba’i mdo (Guhyamāṇītīlakānāmasūtra, Toh. 493), an explanatory tantra (bshad rgyud) of the Tattvasaṃgraha. Manḍala 8c is drawn from the Thams-cad gSang-ba zhes bya-ba rgyud-kyi rgyal-po (Sarvarahayanāmatantrarāja, Toh. 481), a cha-mthun rgyud explanatory of the first section of the Tattvasaṃgraha.
(5 N) Temple devoted to Yum-chen-mo (Prajñāpāramitā)

sculptor: unknown
painter: dPal Phel-ba, from gNas-nying

1. Statue of Yum-chen-mo (Prajñāpāramitā, the Great Mother of all the tathāgatas), gilded, with four arms. The deity sits in vajrasana, flanked by two standing manusibuddhas. Her two central hands display the dharmacakramudrā, while of the other two hands the right one holds the vajra and the left supports the pustaka.

2a. Sarvārthasiddhicaturmudrāmandala
2b. Sarvārthasiddhyekamudrāmandala
2c. Vajrakarmamanaḍāla

3. Sarvārthasiddhimāṁṣaṁs aprīya-maṇḍala, the fundamental maṇḍala from the fourth section of the Tattvasamgraha, surrounded by the caturmudrāmaṇḍalas of the Four Families.

4a. Sarvārthasiddhāraṇiḥmaṇḍala.
4b. Sarvārthasiddhārmanamaṇḍala

5. Sarvārthasiddhikarmaṇaḍala

6a. Mahāyānābhisaṃsya maṇḍala
6b. Vajraharṣaya maṇḍala

7. Sarvatathāgataḥasya maṇḍala, the fundamental maṇḍala of the Vajraḥdaya-laṃkāra, surrounded by the Sarvatathāgatasamatābhiṣekamaṇḍala, the Maheśvaramaṇḍala, the Jagadvinaya-maṇḍala and the Vajraratnamanaḍala.

8a. Trai-lokyaviṣayamaṇḍala.
8b. He-rūkṣamaṇḍala.
8c. Yamaṅṭakamaṇḍala

Maṇḍalas 2a, 2b, 3, 4a, 4b and 5, are drawn from the fourth section of the Tattvasamgraha. The remaining eleven maṇḍalas are drawn from the dPal rDo-rje-snying-po-rgyan ces bya-ba'i rgyud-kyi rgyal po chen-po (Śrīvajramanaḍalalāṃkāranāmamahātantrarāja, Toh. 490), shortened to rDo-rje-snying-po-rgyan (Vajramanḍalā-laṃkāra), which is explanatory of the Tattvasamgraha chiefly from the shes-rab (prajñā) standpoint.
Temple devoted to rNam-par-snang-mdzad (Vairocana)

sculptor: unknown
painters: the dGe-bsnyen from lHa-rtsé, and dKon-mchog-bzang-po, from Jo-nang

1. Gilded copper statue of Vairocana, sitting in vajrásana and displaying the samādhi-mudrā (Pl. 1).

2a. Vajradhatucaturmudrāmandala
2b. Vajrakulamūlamāndala
2c. Vajrakuladhāraṇimāndala

3. Vajradhātumahāmaṇḍala, the fundamental maṇḍala in the first section of the Tattvasamgraha, surrounded by the caturmudrāmaṇḍalas of the Four Families.

4a. Vajradhatudhāraṇimāndala
4b. Vajradhatudharmamāṇḍala
5. Vajradhātukarmamāṇḍala.

6a. Trailokyavijayadhāraṇimāndala
6b. Trailokyavijayadharmamāṇḍala

7. Trailokyavijayamahāmaṇḍala, the fundamental maṇḍala in the second section of the Tattvasamgraha, surmounted by the Vairocanacaturmudrāmaṇḍala and the Vajrāhūmkāracaturmudrāmaṇḍala from the same section.

8a. Vajradhatvekamudrāmaṇḍala
8b. Vajrakulakarmamāṇḍala
8c. Vajrakuladharmamāṇḍala

All the maṇḍalas in this temple are drawn from the first and second section of the Tattvasamgraha, according to the explanations given by Bu-ston.
Fig. F The Lower Storey of the Harmikā

Fig. G The Upper Storey of the Harmikā
Fig. H The Top Chapel
Lower storey of the harmikā devoted to the Father Tantras of the anuttarayoga class

painters: dKon-mchog-bzang-po, from Jo-nang, Sangs-rin-pa, from 'Khar-dga', and the master from Thar-pa, near lHa-rtse

1. **Mandala** of Khro-bo Phyang-na-rdo-rje 'Khor-lo-chen-po (Mahācakravajrapani), black-blue, with three heads and six arms, with fierce mien and flaming hair, in the *pratyāliḍha* posture, trampling on Uma and Maheśvara and embracing his *prajñā*.

2. **Mandala** of 'Jig-rten-dbang-phyug (Lokeśvara), red, with three heads and six arms, sitting in *vajraśana* and embracing his *prajñā*.

3. **Mandala** of gShin-rje-gshed 'Jam-dpa'ri-rdo-rje (Yamāntaka Mañjuvajra), peach-coloured, with three faces and six arms, in the *pratyāliḍha* posture holding a *vajra* and a *ghanṭā* with his two central hands at the height of his chest.

4. **Mandala** of 'Jam-dpal gShin-rje-gshed (Mañjuśrī Yamāntaka), black, with six heads and six arms, in the *pratyāliḍha* posture, trampling on a black buffalo and embracing his *prajñā*.

5. **Mandala** of 'Jam-dpal gShin-rje-gshed-dmar-po (Raktayamāri), red, in the *pratyāliḍha* posture, embracing his *prajñā*.

6. gShin-rje-gshed-dgra-nag (Krṣṇayamāri), black, with three heads and six arms, in the *pratyāliḍha* posture, embracing his *prajñā* with his central arms while holding a *kartiṭkā* and a *kapāla*.

7. **Mandala** of gShin-rje-gshed-dmar-po (Raktayamāri) according to Virūpa’s system. The central deity of this mandala is the same as in 5 (Pl. 48).

8. **Mandala** of rDo-rje-’jigs-byed-chen-po (Vajramahābhairava) according to the system of Rwa Lo-tsā-ba. The god is black-blue, with nine heads (the central one being a buffalo’s head) and thirty-four arms, in the *pratyāliḍha* posture, with an elephant skin covering his shoulders (Pl. 49).

9. **Mandala** of gSang-ba-’dus-pa Mi-bskyod-pa (Guhyasamāja Aksobhya), blue, with three heads and six arms, sitting in *vajraśana*, holding a *vajra* and *ghanṭā* in his two central hands, with which he embraces his *prajñā*.

10. **Mandala** of dPal gSang-ba-’dus-pa ‘Jam-pa’i-rdo-rje (Guhyasamāja Mañjuvajra) according to the system of Ye-shes-zhabs.
All the *mandalas* painted on the walls of the lower floor of the *harmikā* are related to Father *Tantras* of the anuttarayoga class.

*Mandala 1* is drawn from the 'Phags-pa *Lag-na-rdo-rje-gos-sngon-po-can drag-po gsum-'dul-ba zhes bya-ba'i rgyud* (Āryanilambaradharavajrapānirudratrīvinayatantra, Toh. 454). *Mandalas 2, 9, and 10*, are drawn from the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi sku-gsung-thugs-kyi gsang-chen gsang-ba-'dus-pa zhes bya-ba brtag-pa'i rgyal-po chen-po (Sarvatathāgatākāyavākcittarhasyagyahysamūjanāmamahākālparāja, Toh. 442). Both these *tantras* belong to the Aksobhya group of the Father *Tantras*.

*Mandalas 3, 4, and 6*, are drawn from the De-bzhin-gshegs-pa thams-cad-kyi sku-gsung-thugs gShin-rje-gshed-nag-po zhes bya-ba'i rgyud (Sarvatathāgatākāyavākcittakṣṇayamārināmatantra, Toh. 467). *Mandalas 5 and 7* are related to the dPal gShin-rje-gshed-dmar-po zhes bya-ba'i rgyud-kyi rgyal-po (Śrīraktagambhīrantarāja, Toh. 474, 475) and are more specifically drawn in accordance with the Raktayamārisādhana and Raktayamāntaka-sādhana (Cordier: rGyud XLIII, 96, 97). *Mandala 8* is related to the dPal rDo-rje-'jigs-byed-chen-po'i rgyud (Śrīvajramahābhairavanāmatantra, Toh. 468) and to the dPal rDo-rje-'jigs-byed-kyi rtog-pa'i rgyud-kyi rgyal-po (Śrīvajrabhairavākalkalparāja, Toh. 470). All these *tantras* belong to the Vairocana group of the Father *Tantras*.
(7) Upper storey of the harmikā devoted to the Mother Tantras of the anuttarayoga class, below the topmost Chapel

painter: dPal 'Phel-ba, from gNas-nying

1. **Manḍala** of He-ru-ka-mchog (Cakrasaṃvara), black, with three heads and six arms, in the **ālidha** posture, embracing his **prajñā** with his two central arms, while holding a **vajra** and a **ghañṭā**.

2. **Manḍala** of Sangs-rgyas He-ru-ka (Buddhaheruka), black-blue, with four heads and four arms, in the **ardhaparyayānka** dancing posture. He clasps his **prajñā** in **yab-yum** with his central arms, while drawing a bow and arrow with the external ones (Pl. 66).

3. Sarvabuddhaḍākini, red, in the **pratyālidha** posture, holding a **kartiṭka** with her right hand while bringing a **kapāla** to her mouth with the left one. A **khaṭvaṅga** rests on her left shoulder.

4. **Manḍala** of Sangs-rgyas-thod-pa (Buddhakapala), black, with four arms, in the **ālidha** posture. He embraces his **prajñā** with his two central arms and holds a **damaru** and **khaṭvaṅga** in his outer hands.

5. **Manḍala** of bDe-chen-rang-gcig, black, with three heads and six arms, in the **ālidha** posture, clasping his **prajñā** with his central arms, while holding a **kartiṭka** and a **kapāla**.

6. rDo-rje-mkha’-gro (Vajradāka), the central deity of the **Pañcaḍākamanḍala**, black, with eight heads and sixteen arms, in the **ālidha** posture, embracing his **prajñā** with his two central arms (Pl. 68).

7. **Manḍala** of sPyan-ras-gzigs-padma-dra-ba, of light complexion, with four heads and eight arms, in the **ardhaparyayānka** dancing posture, embracing his **prajñā** (Pl. 69).

8. **Manḍala** of Dus-kyi’-khor-lo (Kālacakra) with nine deities, multi-coloured, with four heads and twenty-four arms, embracing his **prajñā** in the **ālidha** posture (Pl. 67).

9. **Manḍala** of Kye’i-rdo-rje (Hevajra) with nine deities, according to Dombi’s system. The chief deity is black, with eight heads and sixteen arms, in the **ālidha** posture, embracing his **prajñā** (Pl. 65).

10. **Manḍala** of ‘Khor-lo-sdom-pa (Cakrasaṃvara) with his partner in **yab-yum**, according to Kṛṣṇācārya’s system.

11. **Manḍala** of dPal’-khor (Cakrasaṃvara) according to Lūipa’s system, with four heads and twelve arms, in the **ālidha** posture, in **yab-yum** with his **prajñā** (Pl. 64).
Mandala 8 is related to the mChog-gi Dang-po’i-sangs-rgyas-las byung-ba rgyud-kyi rgyal-po dpal Dus-kyi-khor-lo (Paramādibuddhodhūrtaśrīkālacakra-tantrarāja, Toh. 362), an anuttarayogatantra which belongs neither to the Father Tantras nor to the Mother Tantras. All the other mandalas in the upper floor of the harmika are related to the Mother Tantras.

Mandala 6 is drawn from the rGyud-kyi rgyal-po dpal rDo-rje mkha’-gro (Śrivajradhākanāmamahātantrarāja, Toh. 370). Mandalas 1, 10, and 11, are related to the rGyud-kyi rgyal-po dpal bDe-mchog-nyung- ngu (Tantrarājaśrīlāhāsaṁvara, Toh. 368) and to a number of associated tantras in the same class. Mandala 9 is drawn from the Kye’i-rdo-rje zhes bya-ba rgyud-kyi rgyal-po (Hevajratantrarāja, Toh. 417, 418). Mandala 4 is drawn from the dPal Sangs-rgyas-thod-pa zhes bya-ba rnal’-byor-ma’i rgyud-kyi rgyal-po (Śrībuddhakālaśrīmā- yogīnitantrarāja, Toh. 424) and mandala 2 from the sGyu-phrul-chen-mo’i rgyud (Mahāmāya-tantra, Toh. 425). All the tantras in this group belong to the Heruka (Ākṣobhya) Family.

Mandala 7 is drawn from the Padmājālodbhavasādhana, which belongs to the anuttara section of the bsTan-gyur and is assigned to the group of the Mother Tantras.
(8) Chapel devoted to rDo-rje-’chang (Vajradhara) and to the masters of the Kālacakra

sculptor: dKon-mchog-bkra-shis
painter: unknown

Two series of figures are painted on two horizontal rows, upper (a) and lower (b). In the upper row, the mythical kings of Śambhala are represented in the same succession as laid down in Bu-ston’s *Dus-’khor chos-’byung rgyud-sde’i zhab-don sgo-bo rin-chen gces-pa’i lde-mig* (gSung-’bum, vol. nga).

Some figures are missing, others are badly defaced or covered by recent repainting.

A. Gilded copper statue of rDo-rje-’chang (Ādibuddha Vajradhara) sitting in vajrasana, holding a vajra and a *ghanța* in his hands crossed in front of his chest, flanked by two bodhisattvas.


2a. lHa-dbang-gzi-brjod-can, Zla-sbyin, lHa’i-dbang-phyug, sNa-tshogs-bsang-sa.

3a. bZang-po, rNam-rgyal, bShes-gnyen-bsang-po, Phyag-dmar-ba.


5a. sNa-tshogs-gzugs, Zla-ba’i-od, mTha’-yas, Sa-skyong.

7a. Kalacakrapāda, Mañjukirti, Samantaśri, Rwa Chos-rab (the Indian masters and Tibetan translators in the *Kālacakra* lineage, according to the Rwa tradition).

2b. Byang-sems-rgyal-ba-ye-shes, Bo-dong Rin-po-che rTse-mo, sTag-bde-ba Seng-ge-rgyal-rtshan and Shong Lo-tsa-ba rDo-rje-rgyal-rtshan (masters of the 13th century, belonging to the *Kālacakra* lineage according to the tradition of ‘Bro Lo-tsa-ba).

3b. Unidentified master (Anupamarakṣita ?), dPal-’dzin-dga’-ba (Śridharanandana), ’Od-byed-lha (Bhāskaradeva), Chos-’byung-zhi-ba (Dharmakaraśānti), Nyi-ma-dpal-ye-shes (Sūryaśrījñāna) and Rin-chen-mchog (Ratnarākṣita) (masters belonging to the lineage of the *Sadaṇīgāyoga*, the practice derived from the *Kālacakra* cycle and developing through six successive degrees, in accordance with Anupamarakṣita’s system).

4b. sGom-pa dKon-mchog-bsrungs, sGro-ston gNam-la-brtsegs and four unidentified masters (Tibetan masters of the 11th century who received the *Kālacakra tantra* and the *Vimalaprabha* from the Kashmiri pandita Somanātha, according to the lineage of the ‘Bro tradition).

5b. Thar-lo Nyi-ma-mtshan-dpal, Chos-rje Bu-ston Thams-cad-mkhyen-pa, lHa-rje dPal-gyi-rgyal-rtshan, two unidentified masters and Rab-tu-bzang-po (Bu-ston is present here as a member of the *Sadaṇīgāyoga* lineage as transmitted by ‘Phags-’od and Thar-lo).
6b. Manydzu-shri-gnyis-pa ('Jam-dbyangs gsar-ma ?), Bla-ma 'Phags-'od,Blo'i Lo-tsā-ba Shes-rab-rin-chen and Bla-ma Shes-rab-seng-ge (masters who, in some way, both had part in the 'Bro and in the Rwa tradition).

TIBETAN

Ka-ba dpal-brtsegs 109, 221, 297
Karma-pa 13, 21
Khi-ki-l'i gCigs-can-'dzin-ma 268
Ku-ru-kule phyag-drug ma 253
Kun-dga' 293
Kun-dga-'bka-shis, Kun-dga'-'bka-shis-rgyal-mtshan (tshog-chen-choi-rgyal-po) 15, 16, 19, 23, 24, 46, 59, 261
Kun-dga'-'rgyal-mtshoe 18
Kun-dga'-'rgyal-mtshan (Sa-skya Pandita) see Sa-skya Pandita; (Kun-dga'-'rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang-po) 80
Kun-dga'-'don-grub 12
Kun-dga'-'rdZo-rje 293
Kun-dga'-'dpal see Kun-dga'-bka-shis-rgyal-mtshan, Kun-dga'-'blo-gros-mtshan and Gangs-can-mkhas-pa'i-dbang-po Kun-dga'-'Phags-pa 17, 18, 22, 235, 280
Kun-dga'-'ba 229
Kun-dga'-'blo-gros (gchen) 16, 26, (bla-ma) 31
Kun-dga'-'blo-gros-mtshan-mtshan (gchen) 14, 16, (nya-dpon) 16
Kun-dga'-'snying po 291
Kun-dga'-'dzong-bzang po 24
Kun-tu-bzang po 67, 236, 261, 270, 278
Kun-nas-snang-ba 231
Kun-spangs Thugs-rje-brtson-grus 295
Kun-spangs-Sems-dpa'-chen-po Cho-skyi-rin-chen 292
Kun-gzigs-bshe-dpa-mad 247
Kun-rig-mam-par-snang-mdzad 276, 278
Kong-po 296
Kye'i-rdo-rje 310
Khar-brgyud 294
Kho-mdzog-bshungs 312
Kla-'bgrug-pa 50, 110, 290, 294
Kla-'gdam-pa 15, 79, 109, 289, 292, 293
Kla-'kri sgrub 243
Kla-'shis-don-grub 17
Kla-'shis-Phags-pa 18, 27, 28, 29, 30
Kla-'shis-bzang-po 238, 284
Kla-'shis-rab-brt-sphan 287, 28, 30
ksu-zhogs-cho rje 290
Klu-ril-thog 14
Kya-rgyan 80, 234
Kya-skabs, Kya-skabs-pa 21, 258, 261, 281
Kyi-chu 39
Kha-che Pan-chen 299
Khang-gsar (Sa-skya) 16, (Sama) 28
Khab-gsar 275

Kham-sgam-mam-rgyal 300; see 'Jig-men-gsum-rgyal-brtan mKhar-kha 296
Khyung see Nor-bu-khyung-rtses Khi gTsug-lde-brtstan, Khi Ra-la-pa can 14, 81, 296; se Ra-la-pa can
Khi bTsan-po 296
Khi Srong-lde-brtstan 22, 57, 81, 109, 296
Khi Srong-brtstan-sgam-po 22, 81, 296; see Srong-brtstan-sgam-po
Kho-rgyal dbang-phyu 275
Kho-gnyer-can 249, 257
Kho-rbu 39
Kho-mo 279
Kho-mo rMe-brtsegs 235
Kho-lo Tshul-khrims-shes-rab 39
mKhan-po Bodhissatva 297
mKha'i g'ru ma rMe-brtsegs 235
mKha'i kha 143, 289, 291, 299; see 'Khar-dga'
mKhas grub-chen-po Bo-dong Phyo-gyas-las-mam-rgyal 295
mKhas grub-chos-rje, mKhas grub-rje, mKhas grub Thams-cad mkhyen-pa dGe-legs dpal-bzang po 20, 22, 25, 48, 49, 50, 51
mKhas grub dbYangs-can-dga'-ba 25
mKhas grub Rin-po-che 25
mKhas grub lHa'i-dbang-po 16
mKhas-mchog Nya dbon Kun-dga'-'kha 206; see Gangs-can-mkhas-pa'i-dbang-po Kun-dga'-'dpal 'Khar-dga' 12, 302, 308; see mKhar-kha 'Kho'n 11, 12, 13, 16
'Kho'lo-sdom-pa 310
Gangs-bzang-gang-bzang 14
Gangs-can-mkhas-pa'i-dbang-po Kun-dga'-'dpal 292, 295
Gang-po 12, 28
Gu-ru-rin-po che 298
Gu-shri-ba 16
Gur-mgon 230
Gar-sar 89
Gong-dkar 26
Grwa-thang 56
Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (sksb-zhang) 55; (mkhas-chen) 15, 16; (gong-ma) 18, 19; (rje-bsun-chen-po) 291; (Lo-tsa-bal) 38
Grub-bzang-po 290
Gling-ras-pa Padma-rdo-rje 25, 110, 223, 294
dGe-bsnyen from lHa-ts'e 254, 289, 305
dGe-'dun-rgyal-mtshan 11
dGe-'dun-grab-pa 95
dGe-ba 249, 295
dGe-lugs pa 15, 16, 20, 22, 23, 51, 82
dGe-legs dpal-bzang-po see mKhas grub-chos-rje dga-'bo-cmgon 25
bGems-mtha-byan 235, 300
mGar sTsong-rtsan 296
mGar bTsan-nyen-gung-ston 89
mGon-po-stag-zhon 239; mGon-po-phyag-drug pa 239; mGon-
The Great Stupa of Gyantse

The Great Stupa of Gyantse, also known as the Great Stupa of Tsultrim Khangsar, is located in the town of Gyantse, in the region of Shigatse, in the autonomous region of Tibet, China. It is one of the largest and most important stupas in Tibet, and is considered a masterpiece of Tibetan architecture.

The stupa was built in 1476 by the famous 14th century Tibetan king, Trisong Detsen, as a symbol of his devotion to Buddhism. It is said to have been built to house a relic of the Buddha, a bone from the left shoulder of the Buddha, which was brought to Tibet by the famous Indian Buddhist monk, Padma Sambhava.

The stupa is a large, square-shaped structure, covered in gold and silver, and decorated with intricate carvings and paintings. It is surrounded by a series of smaller stupas, each with its own unique design and purpose.

The stupa is a popular pilgrimage site, and is visited by thousands of Buddhist pilgrims each year. It is also a popular tourist attraction, and is known for its stunning views of the surrounding landscape.

The stupa is an important symbol of Tibetan Buddhist culture, and is considered a sacred site by Buddhists throughout the world.
THE AUTHORS

Franco Ricca is Professor of Theoretical Chemistry at the University of Turin. In 1985 he obtained a doctorate in Indology at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Turin, and in 1987 he was appointed by CESMEO (Centre of Studies on the Middle and Far East) to carry out an exploratory mission to Gyantse, together with Dr. Lo Bue, returning there to complete a full survey of the Great Stupa in 1990.

Erberto Lo Bue obtained his Ph.D. in Tibetan Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 1981. Since 1972 he has carried out extensive fieldwork in India, Nepal and Tibet, and organised several exhibitions of Tibetan and Himalayan art in Europe. He teaches Tibetan language, literature, and art history at the Universities of Turin, Milan and Bologna.
The great stupa of Gyantse, about 100 miles southwest of Lhasa, may well be accounted the chief wonder of the Tibetan Buddhist world in that it records iconographically within its 75 chapels and temples practically the whole pantheon of Indo-Tibetan religion up to the time of its construction during the first half of the 15th century. Built by the princes of Gyantse, it is the most important surviving Tibetan monument to predate the establishment of the Dalai Lamas’ theocracy in Lhasa and the construction of the Potala Palace. Its wall paintings and its images, although relatively fragile, have withstood remarkably well the wear and tear of five centuries, and it is a further wonder that they should have survived at all the destruction of the vast majority of Tibet’s temples and monasteries during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

In 1937 the famous Italian archaeologist and Tibetologist Guiseppe Tucci undertook the first systematic record of the stupa. Fifty years later, under the difficult conditions of Chinese-occupied Tibet, two other Italian scholars – Prof. Franco Ricca and Dr. Erberto Lo Bue – decided to complete Tucci’s work with an accurate and exhaustive historical, structural, iconographic and stylistic study resulting from their fieldwork in 1987 and 1990.

Like all stupas, that of Gyantse represents the dharmakaya, the essence of all Buddhas, the body of their teachings. As the pilgrim ascends through the monument, he or she experiences higher and higher revelations, from the simplest Buddhist teachings represented in the iconography located on the lower storeys to the secret and ever more subtle teachings of the esoteric doctrines symbolized on its upper levels. In its religious intention it serves the same purpose of that other great Buddhist monument such as Borobudur.

Three chapters deal respectively with the building and artistic activity promoted by the Princes of Gyantse during the second half of the 14th century; with the physical and conceptual structure of the stupa; and with the iconography and style of the paintings and statues found therein.

An appendix presents a thorough survey of the 75 chapels and temples, together with a plan and an illustration of each principal deity. The plan provides the dimensions of the chapel and is keyed to a full list and the locality of all the deities (Sanskrit and Tibetan names are provided) and their relevant textual reference from the Tibetan Buddhist canon.