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# **The spiritual career of Buddha Śākyamuni on the portal of Khorchag (Khojarnath). Towards a reconstruction of the whole narrative cycle on a Royal Western Tibetan temple (early 11th c.)**

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Fig. 1

The late 10th c. was a flourishing period of Buddhism in Western Tibet, as religious teachings became then intertwined with state ideology. Buddhism was given an important role as protector of the state that was ruled by the grandsons of Kyide Nyimagön (*sKyid Ide Nyi ma mgon*), Khorre (*'Khor re*, r.c. 988-996) and Yeshe-Ö (*Ye shes 'od*; 947–1019/24), descendants of the Central Tibetan Yarlung dynasty, who consolidated a kingdom in Purang and Guge (*Gu ge*). Many temples and cave sanctuaries were founded in the 10th c. centred around the royal places of power in Purang and Guge (Fig. 1). Tholing (*mTho gling*, etc.) served as the foremost Buddhist centre of the kingdom, and perhaps also as a centre of a *'political formation'* (Jahoda and Kalantari 2016). The mandala belongs to one of the main iconographic topics in this religious-artistic phase. The Tibetan name is *dkyil 'khor*, which means centre

and surrounding. This signifies a landscape of a Buddha realm featuring a central figure, and his surrounding environment, a hierarchy of gods, in circular arrangement around it. This idea is expressed in texts and is visually realized in geometric configurations, but it is also communicated in other media such as sacred spaces in temples and in the socio-political landscape.

At Khorchag (*'Khor chags*, [1] Figs. 2, 2a, 40), the mandala as perfect divine structure is manifested not only in the medium of wall painting for the first time in historical Western Tibet (see below), but a complete mandalic programme is also represented on a monumental wooden doorway. The iconographic programme on this doorway represents the earliest known example in this region. [2]



Fig. 2



Fig. 2a



Fig. 2b

Khorchag Monastery with the Jokhang (*Jo khang*) und the Lhakang Chenmo (*IHa khang chen mo*) temples in

its main sacred building was founded in 996 by Khorre, ruler of the kingdom of Purang, [3] who—together with his brother Yeshe-Ö—transformed the region into a Buddhist kingdom (Figs. 1, 3). It is situated to the south of Mount Kailash (*Gangs Ti se*) and the sacred pilgrimage lake Manasarovar (*Ma pham g. Yu mtsho*). Surrounded by the village on three sides and located close to the bank of the Peacock river (Mapcha Tsangpo / rMa bya gtsang po), Khorchag monastery lies at 3,800 metres above the sea level (Jahoda 2015a). Today the sacred compound is surrounded by a wall, which separates it from the village; as a sign of veneration the monastery is circumambulated along this wall by the villagers. The Jokhang houses the Jobo Silver Brothers (*jo bo ngul sku mched gsum*), that is, the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and Vajrapāṇi. These sculptures are the cultic focus of the monastery, and they were celebrated from very early on as one of the most famous sculptural groups in Tibetan history (Fig. 2b; Heller 2003).



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

The Lhakang Chenmo (also known as Kyerab Gyatsa [*sKye rabs brgya rtsa lha khang*], the Temple of the One Hundred Episodes of the Buddha's Former Lives) [4] was consecrated by Rinchen Zangpo (*Rin chen bzang po*, 958-1055) as stated in his so-called middle-length biography (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1980, 92). The Royal Lineages of Western Tibet (*mNga' ris rgyal rabs*; Vitali 1996) also mentions a statue of Champa (*Byams pa*) (Maitreya) that reached the ceiling as the focus of the cult in the Lhakang Chenmo (Kalantari 2015, 148); it may have been the forerunner of the present statue in the sanctuary (Figs. 4, 5). It is generally supposed that the portal of the temple—first analysed in Neumann and Neumann 2008—dates to the period of its foundation at the end of the tenth century (Luczanits 1996a) which is confirmed by stylistic analysis (see below).

### The architectural context of the Lhakang Chenmo's doorframe

The Lhakang Chenmo presents itself as a longitudinal building today, which has been modified and enlarged over the centuries. The relatively simple, cubic space is constructed according to Tibetan building traditions of rammed earth, adobe bricks, rubble stone and timber. In Tibet architectural decoration—reflecting religious-cultural ideas associated with the function and meaning of the building—traditionally focus on the façade and the portal in particular (Figs. 5, 6). The doorway is on the east front of the temple; it measures 3.6 x 3.5 m (h/w, including the lateral wooden panels). Today an antechamber obscures the original context. The material of the portal seems to be deodar wood, obtained from forests in the bordering regions of Nepal and Himachal Pradesh.



Fig. 6

Originally the doorframe and the carved side panels may have been the façade of a much smaller building or shrine (Fig. 4; see also Feiglstorfer 2017). This links the Khorchag temple with Hindu and Buddhist temple layouts from neighbouring regions in North India, which predate the Western Tibetan temples. A good example is the small wooden Mirkulā Devī temple in Udaipur (Lahoul, H.P./India), dateable on stylistic grounds to the 10th c. It shows an inner shrine with an intricate wooden façade, covered with exquisite carvings and with a circumambulation path around it. During the daily ceremony the priest performs his ritual (*puja*) inside the shrine while the community of practitioners is positioned *outside*, in front of the portal, with direct view on the religious programme of the portal, which can be perceived and ‘read’ also during ritual circumambulation. In stylistic terms Udaipur and the early Buddhist Translator’s Temple (*Lo tsa ba lha khang*) at Ribba in Central Kinnaur are also related. [5]

### The overall programme: the Lhakang Chenmo portal as mandalic configuration [6]

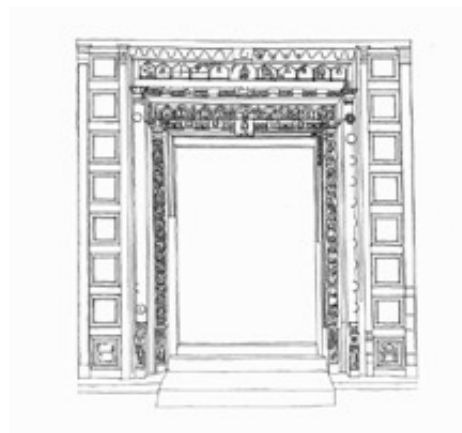


Fig. 7

Portals (*torāṇa*, gateway) are key elements of monastic complexes in Western Tibet. In particular, richly decorated portals of wood are visually dominant and sensitive borders and interfaces between the public, outer, worldly sphere and the sacred space, the assembly of gods of the mandala dwelling inside the temple. The portal of Khorchag signals the highest royal prestige within the kingdom due to its size and the complexity of its iconographic programme. [7]

The carvings of the monumental frame or façade portal illustrate an extensive iconographic programme, with two mandala cycles on the innermost sections. (Fig. 7). [8] These mandalas are protected by



a *vajra* string bordering the three sides of the inner frame; in addition a chain of small beading adorns the opening.

1. On the lowest section of the lintel—which is closest to the opening—are carvings of the main divinities of a Vajradhātu mandala (Figs. 8, 9; cf. the detailed description in Neumann and Neumann 2008, 66). The five Jinas with Vairocana in the centre are depicted on brackets, between festoons of pearls. To Vairocana's proper right is Ratnasambhava representing the southern quarter of the mandala, followed by Akṣobhya/east while to his left is Amitābha/west and Amoghasiddhi/north.

The sixteen subordinate deities of this mandala are carved on the vertical supporting jambs; they are set in roundels formed by lotus tendrils from which emerge lotus seats for the deities (Fig. 10). This assembly of gods is also oriented according to the respective directions of space; the right and left side of the portal each represent two of the four quarters of the mandala, with the central Vairocana on the lintel representing the fifth direction. The left side show the eastern and southern cycles, and the right the western and northern ones.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

The arrangement of the gods on the two sides of the doorframe is—from top to bottom—as follows: left and right side on each of them two Vajra deities of the Vairocana circle (Fig. 10), on the left side four Vajra deities of the Ratnasambhava circle, on the right side Vajra deities of the Amitābha circle; left and right, on each side two female divinities of the intermediate directions and door guardians, on the left side four Vajra deities of the Akṣobhya circle, on the right side four Vajra deities of the Amoghasiddhi circle; on the left and right side two female deities of the outer intermediate sections and guardians.

2. On the lintel situated above the divinities of a Vajradhātu mandala is shown a row of figures representing the core divinities of a Durgatipariśodana mandala (Figs. 8-9), each enthroned in complex aedicule with pent roof structures, which are reminiscent of architectural ornament in Kashmir such as on the Avantivāmin temple. Eight male deities on the side, the eight *uṣṇīṣa*, allow identification as this mandala. The standing female deities are the four goddesses paying homage through dance and music (Neumann and Neumann 2008, 68). While the 'essence' of a geometric mandala is depicted in the centre, in the case of the portal it is shown in the middle of the horizontal beam representing Vairocana.

3. A story from the Rāmāyaṇa, the popular Hindu epic, [9] is shown above on the horizontal members of the grid system, between the side panels with the Buddha's life; in addition, the rarely depicted legend of Jīmūtavāhana (Neumann und Neumann 2008, 73) is represented on the vertical elements of these frames. [10] This older Indic treasure of ideas and myths and moral tales characteristic of this pluralistic religious landscape in this early period is juxtaposed with the representation of the complete biography of the Buddha. The iconography of the latter is the richest and most complex example of this genre in Western Tibet.

4. The Buddha's life is carved into the uppermost lintel and into the lateral sections of the door consisting single rectangular planks organized in a grid-like frame (Fig. 8).

5. On the topmost lintel a single Vairocana presides over the whole assembly of gods (Fig. 11), flanked by a row of protecting *kīrtimukha* masks which seem to be modelled after Kashmiri examples such as those found at the 9th c. Avantivāmin temple. Vairocana is shown in the form of the Hindu solar deity Sūrya the origin of all life as described in Indian and Iranian epics, and the emblem of victory of good (light) over evil (darkness). This alludes to Vairocana's aspect as 'resplendent light.' Sūrya/Vairocana holds a characteristic full-blown lotus and an animal-headed mace, and is clad in royal garments with high, pearl-studded boots. He thus combines divine and worldly authority; this dual symbolism may have been a central concern for the royal elite.

[11]



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

6. The vulnerable internal and external faces of portals are the zones where the local protector deities dwell together with the 'lower' gods from the pan-Indian pantheon, subordinated to the Buddha in their function to protect the Sage and the treasures of the temple. On the Khorchag portal two *dvārapāla* (or doorkeepers) are shown at the bottom of the inner jambs. They protect the Vajradhātu mandala divinities depicted above (Fig. 12); in the mandala they would correspond to the guardians of the doors to the palace. [12] In India often the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā perform this apotropaic function; here they are shown in the lowest zone, on the second following pilaster. [13] From there luscious lotus scrolls with large lotus rosettes—the foremost flowers in Buddhism—emerge, covering one pair of the vertical jambs (Fig. 13).

The third pair of jambs is decorated on the bottom with a succession of animals, followed by strings of snail horns and overflowing vases on which are placed the *aṣṭamaṅgala* (Eight Auspicious Symbols) on the right and offering deities and dancers (holding garlands and vessels) on the left (Fig. 13). These *aṣṭamaṅgala* not only allude to the riches of nature and the treasures of the 'worldly god' Kubera (which he bestows and protects), but also connote a mandalic relationship of the overall programme.[14]

This programme was in many aspects a precursor of the iconographic 'accoutrement' of the *tsuglagkhang* (*gtsug lag khang*) of Tabo (ca. 1042); the assembly hall there is designed as a three-dimensional Vajradhātu mandala, with the central Buddha (Vairocana) as freestanding sculpture in clay. While circumambulating the hall in clockwise direction, the devotee also moves through the mandala, 'reading' at the same time the moral tale of the miraculous pilgrimage of Sudhana (Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra) that is depicted in the lower register of the southern half of the assembly hall, and the Buddha vita depicted on the northern half of the hall, while the story of Sadāprarudita in search of the Perfection of Wisdom, is depicted in the ambulatory

running around the sanctum of the Tabo *tsuglagkhang* [15]. The Khorchag doorframe communicates the new Buddhist doctrine and the path towards Enlightenment in condensed form arranged around the portal.

### **Towards a reconstruction of the complete Buddha vita at Khorchag**

Narratives of the Buddha vita occupy a prominent position in all Indian traditions from early on, and are also among the most popular topics in Western Tibetan art. Those of Khorchag highlight the formative phase of the representation of the Buddha's life in Western Tibet; they also allow insight into the transformation in later periods of this artistic phase, in particular in Spiti and Ladakh (11th-13th centuries).

In Khorchag once a visual biography with twentyseven scenes existed, but most lateral panels are now lost, except the lowest ones on each side. When Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984) visited Khorchag in 1935 these panels were still in place, and he documented together with Eugenio Ghersi (1904-1977) three of them. From the scenes on the lintel and on these remaining panels we can deduce that a complete life cycle was once depicted; this becomes tradition in Western Tibet later on. The sequence is in clockwise direction, beginning on the lowest panel on the left, which shows events in the Tuṣita heaven, from where the Bodhisattva is said to have descended and entered the womb of his mother, Queen Māyā. The life story ends on the lowest panel on the right, which shows the cremation of his worldly body.

In Tibet, the life story of the Buddha was frequently depicted as a continuous narrative. Apparently it was a didactic necessity to present his spiritual career as an example, as one could not assume that the biography of the Buddha was as well known to the laity as in the late period of Buddhism in India. There the life of the Buddha was merely hinted at in the form of the Eight Main episodes (*aṣṭamahāpratihārya*), and not narrated in detail (Allinger 1999, 2010).

The most frequently used textual source in Tibet was the Lalitavistara (*rGya cher rol pa*), which narrates the Buddha's life story from his decision to descend to the earth in the Tuṣita heaven until the First Sermon. For subsequent events—the Four Miracles (Taming of the Elephant Nālāgiri in Rājagṛha, the Wonder of Multiplication in Śrāvastī, the Gift of Honey in Vaiśālī, and the Descent from the Trayastriṃśa heaven in Sāṃkāśya) and scenes of conversion, preaching and assemblies—texts such as the Dhammapadāṭhakaṭhā or the Catuspariṣatsūtra were used, and certainly also pictorial representations, especially for the miracle scenes. For the last section—*parinirvāṇa*, Cremation and Distribution of the relics—the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra served as textual source (Ebert 1985), and again pictorial representations.

### **The Buddha vita on the left jamb**



**1. The first (bottom) panel** on the left depicts a scene in the **Tuṣita heaven** (Figs. 14, 14a). The scene is divided in two levels and can perhaps be read as the Buddha-to-be seated on the throne where he preached to the assembly of *devas*, and where the gods asked him to descend to the human realm (Neumann and Neumann 2008, 66). The Bodhisattva is shown seated in an animated posture, perhaps discussing, surrounded by various smaller figures; one of them is kneeling in devotion on the right side. The section below is populated by figures in dynamic postures, some of them recalling caryatids which hold aloft the ground on which the Bodhisattva is enthroned; this lower part is strongly reminiscent of the base sections of Kashmiri bronzes (cf. Pal 1975, fig. 21a for an example).



Fig. 14



Fig. 14a



Fig. 15

**4. The birth scene**, which is the fourth from the bottom, was documented by Tucci. It is also divided in two levels and shows two scenes (Fig. 15). The lower scene may represent the birth of the Bodhisattva, but the depictions are hardly discernible in the photograph. The upper level shows the newly-born Bodhisattva, standing in the centre and smaller than the flanking figures the *nāga* kings (serpent spirits) Nanda and Upananda, bathing the Bodhisattva by pouring two streams of water, one hot and the other cold from vases (*Nanda et Oupananda, tous les deux rois des Nâgas, se montrant à micorps dans l'étendue du ciel, ayant fait apparaître deux courants d'eau froide et chaude, baignèrent le Bôdhisattva.* Foucaux 1884, 78). They are flanked by other gods described in the *Lalitavistara*, among them Śakra and Brahmā, who had also come to venerate the newborn Bodhisattva.

**Panels 2-3 and 5-8** are now missing; they would have depicted scenes around the birth and from the youth of the Bodhisattva. From comparisons with the approximately contemporaneous Buddha's life on the portal of the

Serkhang (*gSer khang*) in Tholing (late 10th c.) [16] and the somewhat later painted life cycle in Tabo (mid 11th c.) it can be assumed that panels 2 and 3 showed the Conception (Dream of Queen Māyā), Māyā's conversation with Śuddhodana, and the journey to Lumbini.

**5-8. The remaining four panels** presented presumably scenes from the period between the First Bath and the Great Departure. On the Tholing portal, events from this period were displayed in about six panels, but the scenes there cannot be identified in the existing photographs. In Tabo only the seven steps of the newborn Bodhisattva can be recognized for this part of the life story; hardly anything is preserved from the following scenes.

### The Buddha vita on the right jamb

**Panels 1-7 are** missing today; among these **nos. 6 and 7** are known from a photograph by Gherzi (Fig. 16). We thus can only propose a hypothetic reconstruction of the five missing panels. As the last scene on the lintel shows the miracle of Śrāvastī, three more miracle scenes might have followed in the vertical panels.

**Panel 6** shows the **Gift of Honey** (Fig. 16, upper section). On the photograph it is visible that four phases of the story during the Buddha's retreat in the forest near Vaiśālī are shown in one image: in the upper left corner the monkey collects the honey; then he offers a bowl with honey to the Buddha who sits on the left side in *pralambapādāsana* on a lotus seat. Then the same monkey on the right side climbs up a tree in joy and falls down into the well depicted as a rectangular vessel in the right corner. However, he was immediately reborn in the Trayastriṃśa heaven as a result of his generosity. In the lower section an architectural device of two arches flanking a middle pilaster supports the main scene.



Fig. 16

Since five fields existed between the Miracle at Śrāvastī and the Gift of Honey, it seems that the miracle scenes—even if the other two miracles (Taming of the Elephant and Descent from the Trayastriṃśa heaven) were depicted here—were not inserted as a closed group. For comparison: on the lintel in Tholing in the left half—after Enlightenment—can be seen two preaching scenes (presumably the First Sermon and the Miracle at Śrāvastī), two more miracles (Gift of Honey and Taming of the Elephant) and an assembly scene. At Tabo after the First Sermon are shown four Assembly scenes (Klimburg-Salter 2007) and the Four Miracles, each as a unified group. Comparison with Tholing show that these topics were formulated in different forms and suggest that the Miracles and / or Assembly scenes were shown in Khorchag in the five missing fields.

7. The Gift of Honey miracle scene is followed by the *parinirvāṇa*, (Fig. 16, lower section), the passing away of the physical body of the Buddha in a forest near Kuśīnagara. He is shown lying on a bed with his right elbow resting on the pillow. The figures behind, one can assume, are the Malla princes. The mourning monks are below his bed; one with an arm thrown up in despair, the other with crooked back lost in grief. In a register below, there are again figures in shocked states, perhaps illustrating the moment when the Buddha attained *parinirvāṇa* and a great earthquake occurred. This form of the base section, in which are represented additional scenes—perhaps figures in mourning—again recalls comparable metal objects from Kashmir.

8. **The cremation** (Figs. 17, 17a) is the last event, again shown on two levels: in the lower zone are carved figures with arms held up in despair; they also function as caryatids and together with the side pilasters framing the space they form a base for the central scene above, the burning coffin. The coffin rests on curved legs and it is flanked by two grieving figures; the left figure raises his arm in grief.

### The Buddha's life on the lintel

In this study, we shall suggest that in Western Tibetan narratives of the Buddha's spiritual career shown on doorways, the lintel takes a special position in terms of formal characteristics and content. That of the Khorchag doorway shows eleven scenes, arranged from left to right. They are set into typical pentagonal frames and multi-lobed arches representing a well-known artistic convention found in Kashmir-style artefacts and in architectural decoration on temples in Kashmir and historically related regions of Himachal Pradesh.



Fig. 17



Fig. 17a



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

1. **The Great departure** of Prince Siddhartha from the palace of Kapilavastu (Figs. 18, 19). The interior of the



palace is indicated and framed by slim pilasters on which rests a five-lobed arch (hung with pearl garlands [17]), recalling architectural decorations of the portal of the Serkhang at Tholing. In the centre the Bodhisattva rides his excellent, well-ornamented horse, whose hooves are upheld by the four Grand Kings (Mahārājas) of the four quarters of heaven, attired in mail coats, to prevent any noise from awakening the palace inhabitants. A figure holds a decorated umbrella above him indicating his princely status and alluding to the divine nymphs who praised him, roaming in the sky when the Bodhisattva departed (Foucaux 1884, 191-192). Śakra, king of the *devas*, leads the group and shows the way. In the lower left corner kneels Chandaka, after he was told by the Bodhisattva that the moment has arrived that he may rescue the world: *‘Ce qui a été demandé avec instance, il y a bien longtemps, par moi qui faisais des recherches en vue de protéger les êtres, (et disant:)’* *Après avoir obtenu la dignité de l’Intelligence exempte de vieillesse et de mort, puissé-je délivrer le monde!’* *l’heure de ceci est venue’* (LV ch.15; Foucaux 1884, 192).



Fig. 20

**2. The fasting Bodhisattva** (Fig. 20). The episode is narrated on two temporal levels which are placed in two superimposed sections of the composition. The chronological succession starts on the bottom left, where the Bodhisattva's horse Kaṅṭhaka returns to the palace with the groom Chandaka, as requested by the Bodhisattva. On the back of the horse is represented the crown of the prince which he discarded and has sent back. In the centre a person sits kneeling on the ground, perhaps Chandaka, with one arm raised up in despair. [18] On the right the prince, after having got off his noble horse, cuts his hair with his sword and throws it in the sky because he thought his noble outfit does not go with an itinerant ascetic (*‘après être devenu religieux errant’*; LV ch. 15; Foucaux 1884, 197). The Lalitavistara (ibid.) informs us that a *caitya* was built on the spot where Chandaka turned back; this stupa is shown in the right corner.

The fasting Buddha-to-be is depicted in the upper section in the pose of meditation in a horseshoe-shaped space recalling a cave. The large central figure shows a haunting illustration of the determination of the Bodhisattva to master and tame his body with the help of his mind. The Bodhisattva is harassed by two herder boys; they touch him on the head and spread mud on him, because they thought his dry, emaciated body to be a dust goblin. [19] The scene here corresponds closely to the description in chapter 17 of the Lalitavistara (Foucaux 1884, 222).



**3. The story of Sujātā** describes the first meal after the Bodhisattva's austerity, offered by a pious village girl (Fig. 21). Some maidens of the Nandika village had seen the Bodhisattva practising austerities and came to praise and worship him. One of them, Sujātā, who every day distributed food to hundreds of Brahmins, knew of his severe austerities and felt: '*Puisse le Bôdhisattva après avoir reçu de moi des aliments, se revêtir de la qualité parfaite et accomplie de l'Intelligence, et devenir Bouddha!*' (LV ch. 18; Foucaux 1884, 228).



Fig. 21

The bottom zone shows a synoptic composition with several phases of the story in one spatial unit: on the left Sujātā is milking a cow (note the genre details such as the bells on the cow's body), then she prepares the food in a large vessel which perhaps stands on an open fire, holding a stirring spoon with both hands.

According to the text the cream of the milk was boiled with rice and honey: '*Soudjâtâ, la fille du chef de village Nandika, ayant entendu les paroles de ces divinités promptement, prit le lait de mille vaches, en retira sept fois la crème la plus pure (...) et l'ayant mis sur un foyer neuf, elle prépara ce mets*' (Foucaux 1884, 230). In the food prepared by her auspicious signs were seen, and it was foretold that—due to her pious actions—she would obtain the nectar of immortality and was thus brought closer to salvation.

In the upper zone the Bodhisattva sits on a stool or throne which has been brought by a *nāga* maiden who lived in the river and came out from the underground (Foucaux 1884, 232). There he receives Sujātā's offering, the honeyed *payasa* (milk rice) in a golden vessel: '*Alors, Religieux, Soudjâtâ, la fille du chef de village offrit au Bodhasattva le vase d'or rempli de la soupe de lait au miel*' (Foucaux 1884: 231). [20] This restored his body and set him on the final path towards omniscience (attaining Bodhi). The scene is flanked by two female *chowry* bearers in sensuous poses. A closely related composition can be found in a Kashmir ivory now in the Cleveland Museum (Fig. 36; see also below).



Fig. 22

**4. Encounter with the *nāga* king Kālīka.** In the next scene the Bodhisattva approaches the Bodhi tree, the seat of Enlightenment (*bodhimaṇḍa*); (Fig. 22). The panel is heavily damaged in the upper part and therefore difficult to interpret. The most prominent event, after the Bodhisattva restored his body and commenced his path to the Bodhi tree, is the description of the gods clearing the path of the Bodhisattva, and in particular the encounter with the *nāga* king Kālīka. The Lalitavistara describes that the body of the Bodhisattva shined and Kālīka with his wife stood in this light. Kālīka described the Bodhisattva's accomplishments and his own delight and joy in this moment in this *gāthā*: *Puisqu'une lumière brillante a été vue,*

*comme celle qui fut vue en Krakoutch'anda, et aussi en Kanakāhvaya, pareilles aux lumières sans tache qui furent vues en Kāçyapa, le Mouni roi de la Loi, sans aucun doute, un être secourable doué des meilleurs signes est né, qui a la lumière de la science, par lequel cette demeure à moi est illuminée et embellie par une brillante lumière dorée.* (LV, ch. 19; Foucaux 1884, 242). Then Kālīka proclaimed with joint hands that the Bodhisattva will destroy the army of Māra today: *'Il est doux de te voir, ô guide, les plus grand (être) du monde, au visage pareil à la pleine lune. Le signe des Rīchis d'autrefois, tel qu'il a été vu, nous le voyons en toi aussi. Aujourd'hui, plein de force, après avoir vaincu le démon, tu obtiendras le rang désiré.'* (Foucaux 1884, 242).

One sees the Bodhisattva walking with his palms opened upwards. On the opposite a slightly smaller figure can be recognized, but it is too heavily damaged to be identified as Kālīka. [21] Above him seems to be the leave of a tree or shrub, highlighting the interaction and bowing down. Flanking the central scene are two females bearing *chowries* and holding up offerings, recalling the *nāga* maidens which Kālīka called upon to worship the Sage as described in the text. [22]

The lower section features the *yakṣa* spirits which were asked by the *nāga* king to worship the Bodhisattva; they throw flowers and show him the path to the *bodhimaṇḍa*. On the left are two musicians in dancing poses with the auspicious instruments *bheri* and *mṛdraṅga*. To the right—divided by a flower in full bloom [23]—are two mythic animals, a *haṃsa* appearing to smell the fragrance of the flower, and a *kinnara*. This joyous celestial menagerie and musicians performing divine music is described at length in chapter 19 of the Lalitavistara (Foucaux 1884, 242).

5. The next panel narrates the **story of the grass cutter Svastika** who provided bundles of *kuśa* grass for the Bodhisattva to sit on in the culmination of his quest for Enlightenment (Fig. 23). The story starts in the lower register when the Bodhisattva deviated from the path to the grass cutter, as he realizes that the former Tathāgatas sat on a grass mat during the Enlightenment. On the left is the standing Bodhisattva asking for grass. The Bodhisattva holds a sounding staff, the *khakkhara*, [24] with his right hand, and with the other hand he grasps the grass in the centre of the scene. To the right is the grass cutter Svastika shown at work, his right hand outstretched towards the Buddha-to-be. Behind the latter is a person standing up and holding the bundles of grass to be offered. It is perhaps again Svastika who is addressed by the Bodhisattva.



Fig. 23

In the upper section the Bodhisattva—protected by an umbrella held by an airborne divinity—receives the bundles of grass from the kneeling Svastika. The Lalitavistara informs that Svastika joyously took a handful of grass and stood before the Bodhisattva and he was told by him to come and listen: *‘Quand l’intelligence sera obtenu par moi, tu sauras que je distribue l’immortalité. Après être venu, écoute celui qui possède la loi, et tu seras exempt de passion’* (Foucaux 1884, 246). He is told by the Bodhisattva that he will acquire endless virtuous power when he gives him this grass today, but also the difficulties to accumulate wisdom.

The right corner is filled by a full-blown lotus growing from the bare ground. This might refer to the passage in this chapter of the text in which nature expresses sentiments in view of the Bodhisattva walking to the seat of Enlightenment, and the analogy drawn there is between the Bodhisattva and the pureness of a lotus growing out of the ground: *‘Puisque la route par laquelle tu t’avances a été purifiée aussi par les dieux, par laquelle et venue le bienheureux Bhagavat Krakoutch’anda et (...); puisque des lotus parfaits, purs, sans tache et beaux, perçant la terre, sont apparus là où tu portes tes pas, plein d’une force extraordinaire, tu seras aujourd’hui en possession de l’état d’Arhat.’* (Foucaux 1884, 243). In addition a leaf of a shrub depicted above the central scene appears to protect and emphasize the moment of the presentation of the grass, recalling several descriptions of nature guiding the Buddha-to-be on his path. [25]

In this scene the depiction of the path, further emphasized by the walking stick, as the approach to the seat of enlightenment is central. In general we find a focus on the encounter with beings, gods and humans, who, recognizing the future Buddha, escorted and helped him through offerings to attain final enlightenment. It

appears that these tales in which beings developed moral virtues and show pious acts of charity, for which they are rewarded, have been designed to serve as a model for the devotee to start practicing and to follow the Buddha's teaching as called for in the text.



Fig. 24

**6. The Temptation of the Buddha and the Enlightenment** (Fig. 24). In the centre of the panel the Buddha-to-be sits on his throne under the Bodhi tree which is strewn with flowers and bows to the throne. The central large figure is surrounded by the army of Māra. Māra is shown in four phases of the story: in the left upper part (with crown) he appears and he escapes on the right side (hearing the roaring of the earth in the moment the Buddha-to-be touched it). In the left lower part Māra stands shooting with a bow, and he sits on the right side in a thoughtful pose. The crowded scene includes all beings which carry out Māra's attack, supported by his sons, to destroy the Bodhisattva: the bodies of these warriors are transformed to animals and

demons with all kinds of blazing weapons and large stones who try to harass him, drastically described in chapter 21 of the *Lalitavistara* (Foucaux 1884, 260f). Also the seductively dancing daughters of Māra which are depicted in the lower part in lascivious poses cannot tempt him as he sees them as hags, realized as remorseful old women next to the dancers, which leave the scene. The Bodhisattva withstands all this without affection. Just before his Enlightenment he calls the earth Goddess Bhūdevī as witness for his former merits with the *bhūmisparśa* gesture, depicted below him.

This kind of vivid scene of harassing the Bodhisattva with all kind of weapons, full of drastic details, is shown in the *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript at Pooh, including an illustration which perhaps depicts a drummer with loud instruments above the Bodhisattva, trying to torment him with noise (Allinger and Kalantari 2012). But the seat of enlightenment was not harmed; not a single leaf of the Bodhi tree stirred and the Radiant One seeing all these terrible signs was firm like Meru (LV chapter 21, Foucaux 1884, 263). The elevated throne based on rocks and the cave-like aureole [26] alludes to the Bodhisattva's solidity and his nonviolent power which leads to the defeat of Māra's army.



7. During the fifth week after Enlightenment the Buddha sojourned in the abode of the *nāga* king **Mucalinda** (Fig. 25). The *nāga* king emerges from the ground and encircles the Buddha seven times with his snake body in order to protect him from wind and rain. The Buddha is shown enthroned in the centre and framed by the coils of the snakes, with the hoods of the snakes visible in the apex; the Buddha is flanked by two of the other *nāga* kings which came from all directions to protect him. Their entwined lower bodies rise from the ground and with bowed heads and folded hands they worship the Buddha. The text (LV, ch. 24) states that they had never experienced before such a pleasure as when they were in the proximity of the Tathāgata's body for seven days and nights (Foucaux 1884, 316). The outdoor scene is indicated by two trees which bow their trunks in veneration and in protection from the weather; this kind of soulfulness of nature and plants is a significant feature in the relevant texts again and which is also visualized in the carvings.



Fig. 25

8. During the seventh week (LV, ch. 24) the Buddha sojourns under the Tārāyana tree when the **merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika** pass by with a caravan (Fig. 26). The text stated that they offered the Buddha bowls with honey and sugar and bowed before his feet in adoration.



Fig. 26

The scene shows the Buddha with hands in his lap. Under his throne, the two merchants kneel with raised offerings bowls. They bow down and worship his feet as a sign of respect as they see the Tathāgata with the signs of a great man and radiant with majesty and they offer honeyed paste and peeled sugarcane (Foucaux 1884, 322). In the right lower corner a person approaches the scene; he has a tub on his back and is thus identifiable as belonging to the merchants. On the side of the Buddha, the four Mahārājas are represented, recognizable by their crowns. One of them is kneeling on the cart of the merchants, which sank into the ground. They prepare four bowls of a precious material, which—as the Buddha recognizes—are

not suitable for him and so they offer four stone vessels (Foucaux 1884, 320). The Buddha magically unifies the four vessels into one vessel out of compassion for each of the Mahārājas and to treat them in the same way; the hand gesture of the Buddha suggests that the vessel was once depicted in his lap.

We find interesting genre details in this scene; in the right corner a man with a precisely carved tub, in the left a cart with cargo piled up high and covered with a patterned textile. This interest in material culture and localized setting becomes more and more important in the later development of narrative art in the region.

9. This panel shows the **Encounter with the five learned men** as described in chapter 26, depicting three phases of the story in a unified composition. After the Bodhisattva had destroyed Māra and was looking at the world with his Buddha vision, the gods requested from the Buddha the exposition of the Dharma (Fig. 27). As the Buddha approached Sārnāth coming from Bodhgayā, he recalled those five learned men of high class inclined to the path of salvation and thus worthy of instruction, who served him during his practice of austerity. He states that they shall be the first to recognize the new law (Foucaux 1884, 337). But first he traversed the country of Kaśi to reach Vārāṇasī where he intended to beg for alms. He had to cross the river Ganges, depicted on the left. As he had no money for the ferryman he crossed the river in the sky. The ferryman is depicted below in the boat, which is shown as a 'bridge' connecting the river and the ground where the walking Buddha stands after his miraculous crossing (Foucaux 1884, 339).



Fig. 27



Fig. 28

There the Buddha meets the five men of good class who initially are determined not to greet him or receive him, being convinced that in the earlier days he gave up austerity because he had lacked the necessary perseverance in asceticism (Foucaux 1884, 339). However, on seeing the Tathāgata in his radiance and majesty, they recognized their wrong attitude and wished to rise from their seats in respect (Foucaux 1884, 340). Two of them are shown in the lower left part, seated next to a folded chair illustrating the moment when they become aware of him and got up to offer the chair to the Buddha. When they hear the Buddha expounding his Buddhahood the five break into all kinds of rituals and show their affection. This subsequent moment is

shown in the lower right and upper part of the panel with five men grouped around the Buddha. The text informs that whatever signs of hereticism there were, all these suddenly disappeared, religious robes appeared, hair was cut off, and asceticism and whatever was the habit of monkhood became manifest. 'Et

*quand il eut parlé ainsi, pour ceux-ci (les cinq de bonne caste), o Religieux, toute marque, tout symbole des Tirthikas, quel qu'il fut, disparu à l'instant même; le triple vêtement religieux apparut, ainsi que les vases aux aumônes et le chevelures furent rasées; la conduite honorable de celui qui est Religieux depuis cent ans devint la leur, ce fut la même vocation de Religieux errant e la même perfection'. (Foucaux 1884, 341). In the carving the five men (some of them in monk's garment as described in the text) are shown falling down and bowing before his feet in worship, confessing their transgression. They bring a seat and a footstool to the Buddha; there is also perhaps the precious jewel-studded wheel (shown in side-view) which has been offered later in the text (cf. Foucaux 1884, 345). In the centre of the panel the Buddha with his radiant body, illuminating the world, as stated in the text, discusses with one of them, explaining that he will instruct him in the Dharma.*

**10. The First Sermon** in the deer park at Sārnāth is the next episode (Fig. 28). The Buddha is depicted in the centre on a lotus throne, with his hands in *dharmacakramudrā*. He is flanked by eight persons on each side. Contrary to the text, which speaks of gods and men which came from all directions praying for the turning of the wheel, [27] the assembly on the portal comprises only men, mostly in monks' robes made of patchwork cloth; it appears that visual traditions are models here, which can be traced back to early representations of this topic. On the base two gazelles flank the wheel of law with eight spokes like a lotus and adorned in the centre with jewels marking the scene, as described in the text (Foucaux 1884, 345). There the Buddha turns the excellent wheel of Dharma to the assembly of beings.

**11. In Śrāvastī** the Buddha performed three miracles (Fig. 29): He made a mango tree grow to full size overnight, produced streams of water and flames from his feet and hands, and eventually multiplied himself to discuss with his effigies. From this group of Miracles, only the Multiplication is shown in the late period in India: three Buddha figures sit side by side, the middle one shown en face, the other two facing outward. In Khorchag there are three Buddha figures in the upper part of the picture, but they are seriously damaged and it cannot be discerned any more whether the two outer ones were turned outwards. They are sitting on lotus thrones supported by tendrils. Below, two figures can be seen on the left and right, the one on the left with its head above the water, and on the right a corpse with a lifeless right arm and its head under the water; around the base there are four more crouching figures. These seem to be the heretics and Purāṇa Kaśyapa, who had challenged the Buddha but realized already after the miracle of the mango tree that he had lost, and



Fig. 29



perished by drowning himself.

## The Khorchag portal in context

### *The Buddha vita on Western Tibetan portals*

Predating the well-known spatial iconography of the assembly hall at Tabo, the Khorchag portal is the first known example where a continuous narrative of the Buddha vita together with a specific mandalic programme is designed in a detailed and coherent form. As in most early Western Tibetan temples, the iconography is centred on the Vajradhātumandala, which has the Buddha Vairocana as its central image. [28] While at Tabo (Figs. 30, 31a-c) this religious programme may be 'read' by the practitioner in its architectural setting while circumambulating the assembly hall, in Khorchag this complex arrangement of themes is shown on the portal and can be perceived by following the scenes in clockwise direction.

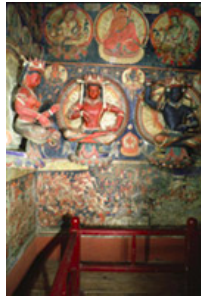


Fig. 30



Fig. 31a



Fig. 31b



Fig. 31c

Extensive narratives are an important feature in the overall programmes of early Western Tibetan Buddhist temples. Narratives are central to the communication of didactic and moral values of Buddhism in these temples. They are shown as coherent tales filled with life and emotion, rich in genre details and representing a variety of individual artistic formulations; those of Khorchag and the now lost Tholing are prototypes and models of this important genre in Western Tibetan religious art.





Fig. 32

On the Khorchag portal the life of the Buddha is shown in a continuous narrative based on the Lalitavistara, beginning at the bottom left in the side panels and continuing on the lintel to the penultimate field with the First Sermon. In the last field on the lintel and in the eight side panels on the right miracle and assembly scenes were shown, followed by the *mahāparinirvāṇa* and the Cremation. In this early phase the depiction of detailed and coherent continuous narratives serving as models for the religious community and the laity seem to be of central importance.

As far as this can be discerned on the available photographs, in Tholing (Figs. 32, 33) a continuous life story was shown on the two side posts of the portal as well, starting from bottom right upwards and continuing from top left downwards. Like at Khorchag, the narrative unfolds consistently along the door opening, but here it unrolls around the portal in counterclockwise direction.

Comparing the Khorchag lintel with that of Tholing a contrasting feature at Tholing is that there are no clear separations of the complex multi-figured scenes on the lintel, and they are to be read from right to left. In the centre is shown again the image of Enlightenment. The right side shows scenes associated with the human life of the Buddha (starting with the Great Departure), as narrated in the Lalitavistara, while on the left follow episodes after the Enlightenment: the First Sermon, two Miracles and at least one preaching/ assembly scene, which is of central importance in this period. Both lintels accentuate a specific set of episodes from the Buddha vita, namely that after the departure from the palace, showing an exalted state of wisdom and his progress to Enlightenment that eventually lead to the explanation of the Dharma to all beings and the establishment of Buddhist communities.

On the portal of the Dukhang at Alchi (ca. early 13th c.), there is no continuous flow of scenes running around the three parts of the doorframe. Comparable to Tholing, the story starts on the right side; but then it jumps over to the left side continuing and ending on the lintel. The singling out of the lintel from the overall narrative sequence is also handled differently at Alchi. There the Enlightenment is again placed in the centre of the horizontal wooden beam above the door opening and the scenes focus on stories after the Departure: the lintel starts with the story of Sujātā on the left and ends with the *mahāparinirvāṇa* on the right. However, a new feature is that the Miracle scenes are symmetrically arranged in between. Thus, in contrast with the portals in Khorchag and Tholing, in Alchi the compilation of scenes on the lintel does not correspond to a coherent chronological sequence, and other additional values and principles were integrated into the programme in this later phase. In comparison with Tholing and



Fig. 33

Khorchag the single scenes at Alchi are shown in a very reduced, almost vernacular form, integrated into an ornamental surface pattern. [29]

At Nako (first half of the 12th c.; Kinnaur, H.P., India)—in contrast to the examples from Khorchag, Tholing and Alchi—no symmetrical, centralized arrangement can be found on the lintel, and the selection of scenes is limited to the early life of the Buddha, shown as a coherent continuous narrative. From comparisons with the above mentioned temples it seems that the panel at Nako was re-used and arbitrarily re-assembled; this seems also to have been the case at Lhachuse in Ladakh (Poell 2014).

In general it seems that in the early period no uniform picture canon had been established, so that individual solutions and formulations were possible, reflecting the intentions of the patrons and the individual preferences of the artists.

A specific feature at Khorchag is the interest in the dynamic aspect of the life story, the movement to specific places appears to play an important role rather than just the central moment of the particular event. It emphasizes the movement towards the *bodhimaṇḍa*—the seat of Enlightenment—and the processes of spiritual progress on the path to Enlightenment which can provide a model for the practitioner.

We find also an emphasis on the encounters of the Bodhisattva with common people on the path, which show acts of charity and compassion such as the offerings by the girl Sujātā and the grass cutter Svastika. These tales present the ways in which humans develop moral virtues which eventually lead to the accumulation of merit and spiritual benefit. The scenes after the Enlightenment focus on the transformation to Buddhahood in which the Buddha is worshipped by various gods and humans: Mucalinda and the two merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika. These scenes of pious devotion are followed by the Encounter with the five learned men. The latter can perhaps be understood as exemplary of the explanation of the teaching and disputation with communities of other religious traditions and their inclusion and conversion (including the refutation of extreme practices). This singular scene, not to be found in later phases of this artistic tradition in Western Tibet, appears to be intended for the education of lay people in the early phase of propagation of Buddhism in the region. The gathering of adherents and the foundation of Buddhist communities culminates in the First Sermon, followed by the Miracle of Śrāvastī, which contains a scene showing the perishing of a heretic; the latter can be seen as the exclusion of opposing groups, shown as the last scene of the lintel.

A new element in the life story at Khorchag compared to contemporary Indian examples is found in the assembly or teaching scenes which become even more important later on. This is hinted at for the first time in Tholing, and was probably also the case in Khorchag. These scenes show the explaining of the Dharma (the

teachings and practices that lead to Enlightenment) to the newly established congregation and to the laity. This is rare in depictions of the Buddha's life in India at that time. Buddha assemblies are shown in detail in the murals in Tabo (van Ham 2014, fig. 126). They were apparently important to the composer of the programme and the royal patrons, and aimed to emphasize aspects of the establishment of the Buddhist monastic community, and the introduction of a tradition, which is a major concern in Tibet. It also expresses a claim to a social cohesion between all parts of society.

In general, we find detailed narratives and not only the central moment of the particular life event, and a delight in the depiction of genre details (such as in the encounter with the merchants Trapuṣa and Bhallika): a focus on the human aspects of the life story of the Buddha appears to be a distinctive feature of Western Tibetan art.

The depiction of local material culture is already observable in the Khorchag representations, but it becomes dominant in specific scenes in the Buddha vita at Tabo, in preaching scenes after the Enlightenment, signalling the establishment of stable local Buddhist communities (van Ham 2014, fig. 126). This portrayal of Tibetan material culture simulates a local setting, providing identification points for the practitioners. It signals that the new Buddhist concept is valid in the here and now, and the devotee can connect these events from a distant past with their present environment. [30]

Summarizing, it can be said that the importance of the Khorchag portal lies in the fact that it is one of the earliest and most complex wooden portals from the foundation period of the Purang Guge kingdom, giving impetus and providing models for later temples in Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh. The overall layout and the extensive, highly sophisticated pictorial programme aims at representing a 'completeness' of all spheres of existence and a graduated path of spiritual progress from the outer parts of the portal (life of the Buddha/ representing the path) to the inner elements (mandalas/ representing esoteric teaching and the result). All this suggests that the portal was originally the façade of a shrine with a cult statue, serving as a clearly visible marker in the public space. The doorframe is not only used to project Buddhist ideas of that time but also seeks to legitimize the religious-political authority of their patrons, confirming their piety and power in their aim to found a stable Buddhist community.

### ***Iconography of the Buddha vita***

While narrative depictions of the Buddha's life became increasingly rare in the Indian heartlands in the later period of Buddhism, it seems that in geographically peripheral areas where Buddhism was relatively new and the requirements and conditions were different there was a manifest need for such depictions. Even in Ajañṭā, the life of the Buddha and numerous pre-Birth stories were still shown in much detail, but soon thereafter

representations of the Buddha's life were (with very few exceptions) limited to the eight major events, which were also identified with eight pilgrimage sites. And these events were no longer told as stories, but merely hinted at in a standardized formula.

The situation was very different in the Buddhist countries outside of India. There new ways were sought to teach the exemplary life of the Buddha to the people, on the basis of Buddhist texts and with different results. For this purpose, the eight main events were enriched with additional figures, and entire passages from the life of the Buddha—especially from the time between Birth and Enlightenment—were newly designed.

In the discussion of the situation in Tibet and in particular of the portal in Khorchag, comparisons with Nepalese book covers are suggested. Although these covers can only be dated according to stylistic criteria and are certainly all later than the portal in Khorchag, there nevertheless seems to be a common basis in the intention to narrate the life of the Buddha in detail and not just through a few short hints.



Fig. 34

On a pair of book covers from Nepal (Fig. 34; ca. 12th c., LACMA, Los Angeles) the eight main events are shown in scenes with numerous figures and much detail, together with a depiction of the first steps of the Bodhisattva and his protection by Mucalinda after Enlightenment. The Miracle of Śrāvastī shows the death of the heretics and of Purāṇa Kaśyapa, just like in

Khorchag. On another pair of book covers (Fig. 35; ca. 12th c., private collection) four more scenes are added to the eight main events: Austerity after the Great Departure, Mucalinda, Sujātā and a teaching scene. In the scene of the miracle at Śrāvastī the death of the heretics is depicted on the lower border.

For the events between Birth and Enlightenment comparisons with stone stelae from East Bengal are also instructive. These works are also later than the Khorchag portal, precluding any direct influence, but here again the same task has led to similar results. Bautze-Picron (1992) describes three stelae that are today in Betagi (District Barguna, Bangladesh), in the Kamalapuri Monastery in Dacca, and in the Indian Museum in Calcutta (Inv A22349), that show on their bases similar depictions of the life of the Buddha, comprising Birth,



Visit of Asita, Great Departure, Renunciation, Austerities, and Mucalinda.

A group of ivory carvings from Kashmir can be cited as additional comparison material especially in the complexity of the composition and the richness in figures. These carvings survived in Tibetan monasteries, from where they have entered various Indian and Western collections since the 1950s (Czuma 1989, 57). These reliefs were inserted in portable wooden shrines (examples are in the Kanoria collection/ Patna and in the British Museum/ London, Brooke Sewell Fund, Asia OA 1968.5-21.1).



Fig. 35

Usually the Buddha is depicted in the central section, either in meditation posture surrounded by four Lokapālas or Mahārājas, or showing the *bhūmisparśamudrā* surrounded by demons. These are many-figured representations, but there is no narrative.

An exception is a relief in the Cleveland-Museum of Art (Fig. 36). It shows the emaciated Bodhisattva three times—in the centre in meditation posture, on the left swooning in utter exhaustion, and on the right in *pralambhapādāsana* receiving the milk rice from Sujātā. The area under the Bodhisattva's seat shows Sujātā preparing the milk rice for the Bodhisattva. The relation to Khorchag is obvious here.

These reliefs are usually dated to the 8th c. (Czuma 1989). A related work in bone (Lerner 1985, 73-76) is slightly later (9th / 10th c.) and shows the Birth, Enlightenment, and the crowned Buddha preaching.

### ***Stylistic context***

As first postulated by Tucci, Kashmir was a major source of inspiration for early Western Tibetan art; this can be substantiated on various levels. A comparison between the Khorchag Vairocana / Sūrya (Fig. 11) and a Kashmir-style Bodhisattva Padmapani from Western Tibet (ca. 10th/11th c.; brass inlaid with silver and gold, 26,2 cm, Cleveland museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund, 1976.70; Luczanits 2014, 108; fig. 2.31) is instructive: the latter shows a rather stiff body, rendered in a schematic way, and also the complexity and detailing of large pieces of ornaments and jewellery is comparable with the figural and ornamental style of Khorchag. The figures are also similar in terms of facial features, such as the rather large-sized head crowned

with a wreath of twisted hair, the small and pronounced mouth and chin, and the large almond shaped eyes.



Fig. 36

Concerning principles of composition, at Khorchag the narrative scenes are depicted as complex multi-layered fields reminiscent for example of the ivory carving in Kashmir-style now in the Cleveland Museum (Fig. 36). Around the ascetic Buddha are thirty-three tiny images full of emotional facial expressions and in a variety of gestures. However, in stylistic terms there are also significant differences: the figures at Khorchag (with their relatively large heads) are heavier and more massive, rigid, and formulaic. Of course its relative softness and fine texture make ivory an ideal material for sculpture with highly detailed carvings (Linrothe 2014, 72); accordingly the Cleveland ivory is much more intricate and delicate; more closely in terms of style are the images of single gods in the mandala at Khorchag. As these ivory carvings can be easily transported over long distances, they might have been instrumental in the transmission of themes and stylistic elements from Kashmir to Western Tibet. [31]

Reminiscent of the Cleveland ivory and Kashmiri metal sculptures are the structure and the narrative mode of many panels at Khorchag, featuring a complex division in two temporal sequences in one picture, which is unique in early Western Tibetan woodcarvings. It blends precisely described details of the life story with rather hieratic, timeless images of the Buddha that are shown proportionally larger. This applies to scenes of the enthroned Bodhisattva/Buddha in which his exalted spiritual state is further emphasized by a centralized composition (such as in the First Sermon; Fig. 28). A comparable principle can be found in the base zone of Kashmir-style bronzes, where mainly lions, caryatids and donors are represented which may have inspired the compositions at Khorchag. Relevant in this context is also a painted wooden shrine in the British Museum with an ivory of Siddhartha supported by five musicians. [32]

Reminiscent of Kashmir are again the architectural frames or aedicule mimicking shrines, which define the spaces of the deities; this device is also used in the Buddha vita (Fig. 37).



Fig. 37



Fig. 38



Fig. 38a



Fig. 39

In its overall structure the Khorchag portal is an example of an independent Western Tibetan religious-artistic creation upon layers of the past of older Indian temple traditions (Kalantari 2016; Poell, in print 2018) which can be found at Ribba and Udaipur (Figs. 38, 38a). A commonality is the overall design of the Khorchag portal that is the complex, stepped (or multi-frame) portal. The ornamental features and lotus tendrils winding up and framing the single scenes on the jambs of the portal (Fig. 10) are not found in the temple architecture of Kashmir, but can be seen for example on a *prabhā* with Vishnu avatars from the 10th c. in the Pratap Singh Museum, Srinagar (Fig. 39; Pal 1975, fig. 11)

Already in earlier studies (Kalantari 2015 and 2017) we have looked at the artistic milieu of the creations at the royal foundation of Khorchag and described it as a scene of multi-faceted cultural and religious interactions from the end of the 10th c. onwards. Most significant in this respect are several Newar-style murals at Khorchag from the foundation period (around 1000 CE) which we re-discovered in the Jokhang ambulatory behind the present sanctum. In the centre of a geometric mandala configuration is depicted a Buddha surrounded by eight Bodhisattvas. This assembly is organised in a rosette-shaped space protected by a *vajra* ring and inscribed within a square. The inspiration for these murals can be traced to painting schools in Nepal, as shown by illuminations in a Newari manuscript in the Library of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta (Inv. no. A15) which is dated to 1075 (Kalantari 2017).

The ancestry of the Khorchag portal, embracing various traditions, is revealed not only on the level of the overall design of the portal, but is also reflected in the iconography of the images as has been shown through the comparison with Newari book covers.

A further clue can be found in the Khorchag register reporting that the Jobo Silver Brothers of the Jokhang were made by two master craftsmen from Nepal and from Kashmir on the initiative of Lhade, the son of King Khorre, in the 11th c. (Jahoda 2015b, 50; Heller 2003). Thus although Buddhist art in the Western Tibetan kingdoms from the late 10th to the 13th centuries was primarily inspired by Kashmiri art, mobility and cross-regional routes connected the different borderland principalities in the Western Himalayas with other artistic centres and traditions, including the thriving Buddhist religious and artistic centres of Nepal. This cosmopolitan artistic milieu, and the support of ambitious Western Tibetans sponsors, triggered the creation of splendid temples and their decorations which served as a major strategy of the rulers of Purang Guge to establish a Buddhist kingdom.

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## Footnotes

1. Khorchag is the customary Tibetan name of the village; the Indianised form 'Kojarnath' or 'Khojarnath' was introduced by Tucci (1937) and has been adopted in some of the later literature.
2. Initial research on this topic was presented at the IALS conference (International Association of Ladakh Studies, Bedlewo/ Poland) in May 2017. The present article is part of a two-part study; the second article is currently in preparation for the proceedings of the IALS conference (editors: Quentin Devers, Heinrich Pöll).
3. Purang is located in the West of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR, China), in a border area in the south of Ngari (*mNga' ris*) Prefecture. To the south is the kingdom of Nepal, while to the southwest it borders the Indian state of Uttarakhand.
4. The temple is also known as the Yishi Lhüngyi Drupa *tsuglagkhang* (*Yid bzhin lhun gyis grub pa'i gtsug lag khang*), the 'Wish-fulfilling Spontaneously Self-Perfected Temple.'
5. The temple in Ribba can be dated to the beginning of the 10th c. according to Luczanits 1996a, who was the first to bring this important site to scholarly attention.
6. The doorway was first documented by G. Tucci in 1935 (Tucci 1937); when he visited the site all side panels were still in place. Luczanits 1996a placed the portal into the cultural-artistic context of Western Tibetan wood art, but he had only a limited documentation available.
7. Up to the present day, Buddhist hierarchs take part in major religious festivals in front of the temple's portal (now veiled by later additions), while the community and tax-paying families are situated around the monastery in a strict hierarchy.
8. Cf. also the drawing and sections of the portal in Wang Hui and Pengcuolangjie / Wang Hu'e and Phun tshogs nam rgyal 2002, 156.
9. The Rāmāyaṇa narrates the heroic story of prince Rāma from the kingdom of Kosala who was sent by his father into exile and who later vanquishes the demon king Ravaṇa in Laṅkā in order to rescue his wife Sitā. Versions of the epic in Tibetan have been found at Dunhuang.

10. This religious-artistic pluralism is characteristic of this region surrounded by different religious communities when Buddhism was perhaps mainly a non-excluding religion. In depictions of assemblies of gods in this region from early on Hindu deities are depicted subjugated to the Buddha, and accordingly their position is in the outer sphere of the mandala. Only later some of those were conceived as demons of Māra (Bautze-Picron 2014, 182).

11. A second Vairocana/Sūrya is depicted above a mandala with Vairocana in the centre at Lalung (Luczanits, 2004, fig. 229). For the different forms of Vairocana and his iconography see Luczanits 2004, 207ff.

12. In the Tabo *tsuglagkhang dvārapālas* are prominently represented in the form of clay sculptures, positioned on the border between the entry hall (in which the lower protector gods of Indic origin dwell) and the assembly hall with the mandala deities.

13. The popular fertility goddesses, and the associated ideas of water and wealth, hint at traditions of temples in North India: this symbolism is also represented at the early Buddhist temple of Gumrang (*Gung rang*), a small village in the lower Bhaga valley in Lahoul; local lore ascribes its foundation to Rinchen Zangpo (Luczanits 1994).

14. Comparable are *aṣṭamaṅgala* depicted above the sanctum at Tabo in their function of indicators of the mandalic configuration; they stem from a period around 1000 CE. Conches allude both to riches associated with water as well as to the music instruments of the gods; which is—together with auspicious vases—frequently mentioned as offerings to the Buddha and as sign of blossoming of nature in face of the transformation to Buddhahood in the Lalitavistara.

15. The third narrative, the story of Sadāprarudita, is taken from the last chapters of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā (Luczanits 2010). In general narrative depictions of the morality of sacrifice, in order to obtain Buddhahood, such as the latter, are popular themes at Buddhist temples of this tradition.

16. The portal has now disappeared, and there are only photographs by Giuseppe Tucci and E. Ghersi from the years 1933 and 1935 (Tucci 1973, fig. 136, Klimburg-Salter 1988, figs. 1-3). The door is flanked on each side by two pillars; the two inner ones show scenes from the Buddha life, starting at the bottom right and continuing from bottom left. Additional scenes are shown on the connecting lintel above the door opening.

The lowest room of the three-storied Serkhang temple has been restored (Luczanits 1996b). Cf. also a reconstruction of the ground plan of the whole complex published by Wang Hui and Pengcuolangjie / Wang Hu'e and Phun tshogs rnam rgyal 2002, 13-14 & no. 25).

17. The text describes in chapter 15 how the Bodhisattva's father Suddhodana made the servants stay awake to guard and prevent his son from leaving, and commanded to light the lamps and to place bright gems, jewels and garlands in the palace for this purpose: '*Allumez les lampes pures; au sommet des étendards placez tous les précieux joyaux; suspendez des guirlandes de perles; faites partout, dans ce séjour, resplendir la lumière (...) gardez avec soin le jeune homme de sorte qu'il ne puisse s'éloigner sans être aperçu.*' But the gods put all in the great city asleep and silenced all sounds (Foucaux 1884, 177-178).

18. It could also refer to the scene when the Bodhisattva took off his fine robes from Benares and he took red attire suited for dwelling in the forest instead (LV ch. 15; Foucaux 1884, 197), but this is difficult to finally decide on the basis of the image of the damaged carving.

19. However, the boys here are not poking sticks in the Bodhisattva's ears, which is frequently shown in later depictions of the scene.

20. Milk rice with honey is still today used as a sacrificial meal in rituals in India.

21. Representations of the Bodhisattva's encounter with the serpent king Kālīka are rare in Buddhist art. Joanna Williams (1975, 179) has identified Kālīka in a Sārnāth stele from the 5th c. CE (National-Museum New Delhi, C a 2).

22. The images appear to allude to an outburst of beauty and vegetation as the Bodhisattva walks towards the seat of Enlightenment. As in other religious traditions, charismatic founders also mark their environment. This joy of nature in the coming of the Bodhisattva is illustrated by trees bowing with their leaves, flowers and fruits bowing down and greeting the Bodhi tree, joyous nymphs uttering sweet music, and swans and cranes roaming playfully in the sky: '*Puisque les arbres avec leurs feuilles, leurs fleurs et leurs fruits saluent l'arbre de l'Intelligence; puisque mille urnes pleines d'eau font un Pradakchiṇa, puisque les troupes d'Apsaras très joyeuses font entendre leur chant gracieux; puisque les cygnes et les troupes de cigognes qui s'en vont dans le ciel en se livrant à leurs ébats.*' (Foucaux 1884, 243).

23. The flower appears to swing in rhythm with the drums. The text describes that Kālīka arranges to take fragrant and auspicious clothes, the most excellent incense powder, make music and strew flowers, scent and unguents. (Foucaux 1884, 242).

24. This staff consists of a wooden stick on which are attached metal rings, which ring when they are moved. It can be found in Indian and Nepalese book illustrations from the 12th c. as attributes of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. A comparison with a wall-painting in the Thousand Buddha cave in Zhag (Kalantari and

Gyalpo, forthcoming 2018) illustrates the popularity of the walking Buddha with pilgrimage staff in Western Tibet.

25. Nature plays a big role in these descriptions. As indicated here, the whole creation seems to rejoice when the Bodhisattva walks to the Bodhi tree, or plants show him the way. In the Lalitavistara this becomes most explicit in the passage after the birth of the Bodhisattva (Foucaux 1884, 76 ff).

26. The text states that the highest mountains bow before the *bodhimaṇḍa*: ' *Puisque le Mèrou, les Tschakravâlas, le soleil, la lune, Indra, Brahmâ et les arbres, ainsi que les plus hautes montagnes, s'inclinent tous devant Mahimaṇḍa*' (Foucaux 1884, 270).

27. The text reports the presence of Devaputras led by Maheśvara, of Bodhisattvas led by Maitreya, of gods, men, Asuras and Gandharvas, etc.; they all rejoice in the words of the Buddha: "*Les fils des dieux précédés de Mahêçvara, les fils des dieux Çouddhâvâsakayikas précédés de Mâîtrêya, tous les Bôdhisattras Mahâsattvas précédés de Mahâ Kâçyapa, tous les grands Çrâvakas ainsi que les dieux, les hommes, les Asouras, les Gandharbas et les mondes se réjouirent des paroles de Bhagavat.*" (Foucaux 1884, 374).

28. Vairocana is the central image in the iconographic programme in particular in the monuments attributed to the great translator Rinchen Zangpo. The lintel of the elaborate door at Ribba shows the five Jinas, enshrined in frames crowned by an *âmalaka* (Luczanits 1996a, 27 and fig. 10).

29. For a detailed analysis see Heinrich Poell (forthcoming 2018).

30. At Alchi the Buddha vita in the Dukhang (entrance wall) has been transposed into a purely Tibetan environment and image culture (cf. Kalantari 2018 in press).

31. The provenance of this object is not known, but indirect evidence exist that Western Tibetans were fond of ivory. Rinchen Zangpo's biography states the great translator brought an ivory statue with him from Kashmir, and it is known that Tucci purchased one ivory from Mangnang.

32. 8th c., British Museum, Brooke Sewell Fund, Asia OA 1968.5-21.1; Linrothe 2014, 72 and fig. 1.41