

# Lamaistic Graphic Works From Nepal

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**Printing:** When in 1889, Sir Aurel Stein discovered an assembly of rock Buddhist temples dated from the period between IV-XIV century A. D. (nearby Tunhuang in North-West China), he did not think that among many glorious objects of sacral art he and his followers will also find some other valuable documents of a highly developed culture.

In those caves of thousand Buddhas (partly dated from XI cen.) in 1907 they discovered a huge library containing fifteen thousand Chinese manuscripts, hidden within a walled receptacle in one of the caves. Among them there was the world's oldest example of printed book, dated from 868 A. D. It was woodprint made by very famous printer, Wang Chi. Today this book is preserve in the collection of the British Museum in London.

Some scholars believe that the very first printed book was made in Korea sometime between 704-751 A. D. The technique in this case was based on xylography. Anyhow, it is not so important to argue which one of those books was older, The technique of printing was undoubtedly invented in China and probably much earlier than the both mentioned books.

The idea of printing originated from the technique of impressing words and signs on products of armourers and goldsmiths

and basically was just an improvement of that technique. The use of wooden blocks enabled production of large numbers of sacred bands. Paper appeared the best material for that purpose as it easily absorbed the paint, so imprinted songs and letters did not get blurred. Incised on the wooden blocks images and texts used to be printed only on one side of a paper and then stuck together along the edges of the other sides and folded in harmonica fashion. In such a way a larger number of single plates made a wood-printed book called also xylographic book.

First, wood-printing technique was mainly used for applying designs on fabrics, and only around 7th century it became popular technique for adorning books. In the next centuries this technique spread throughout the whole world and reached also the territory of Nepal.

During the process of imprinting the paint was spread onto the woodblock and then the paper was laid on the top and pressure was applied with the hands through a cloth pad. It had to be done with great care to ensure that the surface of the paper did not slip over the block. The quality of a print depended upon the preparation of the ink and upon the fineness of the paper. Sometimes the paper might have been slightly dampened to achieve better result.

**The Paper:** Today we know about some 600 kinds of paper. The invention of this material also have to be connected with China.

The discovery of it is being linked with Chinese dignitary, Cai Lun (I-II century A. D.)

Who run goldsmith manufacture which produced armours and swords. According to the legend he came to an idea of soaking and boiling phlegm of mulberry tree together with stems of bamboo trees and silk rugs. Then the substance was smashed with hand beaters. The pulp obtained in that way was additionally mixed with water and poured into a vessel with a bamboo sieve. The pulp settled on the sieve creating a layer of even thickness of intermingled fibres. After drying it changed into sheets of paper.

The first Chinese paper was very thick. Especially prized was the paper made of mulberry tree fibres, thin, fine and soft, and bleached. This paper did not get yellowish when older, and was considered the best of all kinds.

During T'ang dynasty period the paper was produced of hemp, rose-wood, grey willow and bamboo. It was coloured with different shades of which the most valuable was considered golden-yellowish colour. Sometimes the paper was rinsed with perfume oil etc.

Chinese invention of paper was greatly enriched in other Asian countries, where quite different kinds of it were introduced. The Chinese called it either "barbarian paper for making notes" (white paper with the pattern of "spawn") or "the paper with slanting veins" (originated in countries of Sout-East Asia). In Japan there was a paper

made of bark of pine trees and other kinds with white silk threads melted in it.

Today, in Asia, variety of hand-made papers is just uncountable. We do not know nothing about when the paper and all printing techniques were introduced in Nepal. We may only guess that Kathmandu Valley, localized on the cross-roads of the major trade routes from India to Tibet, was the place of various contacts between those countries, and became the cultural center, where Chinese inventions might have appeared relatively early.

At present, the usual material for producing hand-made papers in Nepal is tree bark or creepers of local origin.

**Printing Paint:** A suitable paint or rather ink used for printing in Nepal and Tibet was prepared from soot, burned rice or barley grains. Sometimes Chinese block ink was also used (made of burned kerosene, glue and rape-oil). In Nepal soot was usually mixed with some adhesive made of animal glue, resin or pulp prepared from grained seeds. Modern woodblock prints are now more often printed with litho ink diluted slightly with kerosene.

### Some historical notes

During many centuries of Nepal all ethnic groups living within the present territories of the country were greatly influenced by neighbouring India. Those influences were particularly evident in religion. Throughout the whole territory of Nepal there are many sanctuaries of pilgrims, many temples and shrines of great importance for all Buddhists and Hinduists.

According to Hindu mythology even the god Shiva himself resides on the top of one of the Himalayan peaks, the Kaylasa Mountain, Janakpura is the supposed birth-

place of Sita, the wife of Rama, the greatest hero of India. According to preserved tradition, just here in Nepal Watsjajana wrote his oldest handbook on art of love "Kamasutra". Also here, in the village of Lumbini (near the border with India) Prince Siddhartha, a future Buddha, the teacher of a new religion was born. In the year 247 B. C., the king Ashoka came to Lumbini to build up a monument with an inscription glorifying this place where Buddha was born. Biography of Wasubandhu, one of the greatest Buddhist teachers, is also partly linked with Nepal. All of this makes the country a holy place for every Buddhist. Throughout approximately fifteen hundred years the lower regions of Nepalese territories were the area where various religious trends which originated in neighbouring countries coexisted and mutually influenced each other. Such circumstances caused syncretic character of Nepalese believes. It also caused occurrence of very confused and eclectic pantheons of both dominating religions.

In the 7th century on the political scene appeared the king of Nepal energetic propogator of Buddhism in his own and neighbouring countries. His daughter, Bhrikuti, married the first of great, 'kings of religion' of Tibet, Srong bean-squam-po, and according to the legend became one of the worshipped members of lamaist patheon on gods, as the goddess Tara. From this time onward until the end of XII century all numerous monasteries of Nepal, concentrated mainly in Patan and Kathmandu, maintained strong links with religious centers of central India.

In the VIII and IX centuries Nepal established strong friendly religious and cultural contacts with Tibet. Later on when the Moslems got to Bihar and Bengal, Indian Buddhist monks found a refuge for them-

selves in Nepal. They brought a great number of old manuscripts preventing them from being destroyed. Some other manuscripts came in the similar way to Tibet.

**LAMAISM :** Tibetan Buddhism is commonly called Lamaism. This name was given to this religious system by the Europeans according to the special role which the clergy or lamas played in it.

It is supposed that the creator of Lamaism was the great leader and reformator of religious life in Tibet, Cang-K'a-Pa (1347-1419 A. D.)

In fact the process of melting together Chinese (Chinese influences were also very strong there) and Indian Buddhism took much longer time. The reform of Cng-K'a-Pa only, formally strengthened those changes which took place. The reformer established a complicated system of church heirarchy, worked out canonical laws for lamaist monasteries, introduced celibacy and allowed the monks to keep a limited private property. Through such practices lamaist monks acquired strong ascendancy over profane folk. Higher clergy became feudal rulers, and lower lamas just obedient tools in their hands.

An important step that Cang-K'a-Pa made was adding to classical formula of faith a rule, according to which every believer of a newly modified religion should not only worship Buddha, but also regularly contact lama, that is, chose certain lama as his confidant and teacher.

Lamaism does not differ from Buddhism according to major principles of creed, it only possesses more elaborate rituals. The major principle of laimaistic ethics is individual responsibility of man for all deeds done in his

previous incarnations. All of them are closely connected with belief that each step of man depends on cosmic powers. Lamas take the task of calming down the anger of gods and various spirits towards the man.

### Collection of Lamaistic Graphic Works

Woodcuts presented in our exhibition are only a part of various graphic works collection from Nepal that consists of more than 100 pieces. It was collected by Mr. Andrej Wawrzyniak during his stay in this country (1977-1981), and donated to the Asia and Pacific Museum in Warsaw. The works are contemporary imprints executed in old technique on hand-made papers.

Nowadays in Nepal woodcuts and other graphic works became a common article of a trade. Relatively low prices and great social demand, especially among foreign tourists, causes that they are produced in large series. Manufactures specializing in that production and shops which sell graphic works offer quite a big choice of themes.

There are not only lamaistic works from different periods. Among other we can see some Hinduistic stories or orthodox Buddhist images and sometimes even reprints of Chinese motives (such as dragons, and some mythological characters). Quite numerous are also Tibetan themes (mainly mandalas and offering prints).

Although we have got in our collection works representative for all above mentioned groups, we decided to show in our exhibition only those of lamaist origin, as we believe that they are the most authentic and more interesting of all.

**Canon of proportions:** The basis criteria that every designer of lamaistic picture (including woodcutter) had to accept, was a spiritual purity of himself,

technical skill, and the way he was going to use certain implements and materials, knowledge of theoretical works that stated necessary principles of intended work and finally the canon of proportions. All India and Tibetan treatises concerned with painting of gods image, precisely state how it should look. The main principle of art according to lamaistic doctrine is to teach people kindness and wisdom, and through this the art should be in service of the nation and popularize certain ideology. The true, fine and sacred were considered only those works of art which respected all rules of harmony of the form, emotion, idea, and the purpose. All those rules were shortly called "measures", meaning "size", "kind", "quantity", "proportion" and also "proportionality", "rule", "pattern" etc. Not all proprieties of beauty or form were thought to be equal - some of them were normative and structural canons, others were just decorative or attributive elements. To the normative group belong the following features: sizes of all parts of the body (length, width and volume), shape of face and eyes - as the visualization of the emotional state, position of the body and limbs. Another group of characteristic features is created by such details as clothing, hairdress, decorative elements, cult attributes, sort of nimbus that surrounds the image etc. Numerological systems of proportions and geometrical structure of basic variants upon which the images of gods and other cult figures were created, had a great impact on final visual perfection. The artist actually could add only a little from himself. The beauty must have been true, i. e. in accordance with religious view of life, traditional morality and opinions of real order in society and nature. The measure of esthetic canon was precisely connected with ontological, socio-ethical, biological or

epistemological comprehension of the whole Universe, or in other words with the philosophy of life, characteristic for each particular period. To a typical set of lamaistic iconographical features undoubtedly belongs emotional characteristics of figures. This was achieved through stereotyped and canonical positions of hands (mudra), legs and torso (asana), heads, faces and eyes.

Each group of gods has its compositional schema-symmetrical or dissymmetrical. The figure of sitting or standing Buddha is built up according to the rule of a so-called "mirror-symmetry" which creates an illusion of statistics, dignity, stability and harmonious tranquility. Such composition was perfectly suited for embodiment of Buddhist wisdom: withdrawal from life, approachment of nirvana, feeling of endless serenity, liberation of mind from all earthly worries.

**Magic Prints :** The invisible and sacred framework of lamaistic theology in practice was limited to superstitious believe in powerful charms, which according to the doctrine are able to change human fate. This in turn caused strong demand for all sorts of talismans, protecting and offering prints, pictographical signs, trigrams, hexagrams and diagrams connected with certain tutelary deities.

Today graphical production became more commercial and for that we can even talk of abandoning rules of making prints in lamaistic monasteries.

Traditionally prints were made by the lama or his pupil. Only production of so-called "banners of good luck" or "praying banners" might have been also prepared by profane people. Woodcuts of amulet charms were made due to existing needs. It was popular to add in such cases some

hand-written sacred syllables and invocations suitable for certain occasions. Each print was dried and then read softly by the lama as an act of empowerment. Certain types were consecrated by throwing a few grains of barley, coloured rice or a few drops of saffron water upon the print surface, which was quickly folded and bound with colour threads. Sometimes there were other accompanying ceremonies, such as burning butter lamps and incense etc. Such works like all sorts of mandalas, "geometrico-magical calendars", "wind-horse banners", "wheel of life" etc. can also be included in the group of "magical prints" although their meaning might have been different due to different circumstances.

**Pantheon of gods:** The main trait of lamaism that differentiate it from orthodox buddhism is its strong belief in demons. Thus, apart from soft figures of various Buddhas and Boddhisattvas in lamaistic iconography we come across many effigies of so-called "faith defenders"— who are the gods of demoniacal character. There is also very popular cult of all kinds of spirits, such as spirits of mountains, lakes, rivers, passes etc. which are personified in specific way. All lamaistic deities are meant to be major stimulators in approachment of "liberation" and "salvation". According to lamaistic doctrine all divine charactes are divided into eight main groups.

**Teachers :** 1. To this group belong all lamas themselves, great fathers] of the church, theologians, heads of famous monasteries, and all leaving embodiment of Bhuddhas and Boddhisattvas. It is not merely an accident that lamas were one of the most important persons in the cult and found their place in the pantheon. Actually, lamas were only these canonized by the church, "teachers of higher grade". Among

them there are eighteen closest pupils of Buddha Shakyamuni. Ordinary clergy, according to dogma were not considered lamas, only the people respectfully used to call them by this title.

**Tutelary deities :** 2. This group consists of divine beings which act as the protectors against all evil forces. The most important among them is Adibuddha—eternal, primary Buddha, the oldest elements of the world, and “the guardian of all mysteries” in the form of Vajradhara who with might of all his wisdom and concentration emanates five so-called “meditative Buddhas” (Dhyānibuddhas), and also Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha and Amoghasiddha. These gods are usually portrayed separately or in groups with their shaktis,

**Kindly Buddhas :** 3. This group is formed by so-called “kindly Buddhas” which are supposed to be all earlier incarnations of Buddha Shakyamuni and Buddha himself. Their names are as follows: Krakuchhanda, Kanakamuni, Kashyapa. To this group we can also include Charitable Buddhas, Buddhas of Medicine and Buddhas of Certain Wishes.

**Bodhisattvas :** 4. In this group are gathered all Bodhisattvas, or all divine beings who deliver direct help to all living creatures. In the early Buddhism by the name “Bodhisattvas” were called all those persons who according to their virtues became potential Buddhas. Sometimes the term was also used replacingly with “arhat” for description of man, who acquired higher level of holiness. There are eight major Bodhisattvas and they use the name of “sons of Buddha”. Some of them are the most popular deities in lamaistic pantheon, namely these are : Manjushri, Vajrapani,

Avalokiteshvara and Maitreya. Along with a masculine Bodhisattvas there are also their feminine counterparts. Among them the most popular is goddess Tara, as the mystic wife of Avalokiteshvara, “born out of his tears”. She has two different forms, may appear as the Green or White Tara, and 21 different iconographical canons

**Goddesses :** 5. Here we have so-called goddesses or feminine deities of shivaistic origins. Some of those “air-travellers” have human faces, other have heads of lions, tigers, bears and three-eyed demons. They may be used as vehicles of demonic goddess Lhamo. The members of this group have abilities of deterring, all evil spirits, and therefore they are protectresses of women.

**Defenders of faith :** 6. This group consists of defenders of the doctrine; also called “defenders of faith”. Their major task is to fight all enemies of religion. Heads of these deities are always adorned with tiaras of human skulls. They usually have three eyes, opened muzzles showing protruding fangs etc. Their bodies are covered with animal hide or outskinned human skin. The majority of them have multiplied hands, legs and heads. Sometimes they are accompanied by their shaktis. All of those demoniacal beings used to be gods of different religions, but somehow converted to Buddhism and thus became propagators and defenders of new ideas. Among those gods we have to mention above all Vajrabhadrava—demoniacal form of Manjushri, Hayagriva—emanation of Akshobhya Yama—the god with a bull head, Mahakala—lamaistic modification of Shiva, which is also one of 75 fearsome forms of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. To the same group we can also include goddess Lhamo—protectors of Lhasa, the god of trea-

ssury-Kubera (Vayshravana), god of war-Djamsaran and even god Brahma himself.

**Local deities : 7.** Here we have various deities of local character, who are accompanying other members of pantheon. This group consists mainly of local shamaistic deities, and partly some Hindu gods.

**Earthly rulers : 8.** In the last group there are local spirits of mountains, rivers, springs, towns, quarters of the globe etc.

**Mandala :** Ritual lamaistic practices gene-

rally based on Indian tradition have their own and very interesting artistic expression of ezoteric thought in the form of mandala. The term "mandala" (deriving from sanscrit) means "circle", "nimbus", "disc" etc. It also applies to certain drawings of magical circles filled with some figures and writings. These magical circles were drawn everywhere : on the temple floors, on the altars, walls etc. They have been used for sacrificial purposes, expressing through its complicated symbolic composition metaphysical structure of the universe.†

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† This article is taken from:-

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