

SMAN-GYI-BLA

—SIEGBERT HUMMEL

A Swiss private collection contains a bronze of sMan-gyi-bla (short: sMan-bla), the so-called Medicine Buddha.¹ This figure is remarkable, because sMan-bla is not represented here in the usual form of a Buddha or, as in Lamaist paintings, in the canonical garb of a Bodhisattva with a crown, but with a bLama cap instead. What, however, proves that the seated figure is sMan-bla, is the medicinal fruit (Tib.: A-ru-ra = terminalia chebula) in his right hand, the alms-bowl in his left, and the eight accompanying figures at the foot of the lotus-pedestal which, according to ancient texts, are to be regarded as manifestations of sMan-bla's healing power, originally represented by a group of only six, later on seven Medicine Buddhas.²

sMan-bla is often found on Lamaist pictures (Tib. : Thang-ka), together with the Tibetan King Khri-srong-lde-btsan (755-797) and the great scholar Shantarakshita (Tib.: Zhi-ba-'tsho; Thams-cad-mkhyen-pa-zhi-ba-'tsho), who had been invited to Tibet by the King and who, together with Padmasambhava, was mainly responsible for the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet. The worship of the Medicine Buddha seems to be specially connected with Shantarakshita, and according to the La-dvags-rgyal-rabs, this cult was later on especially favoured by the King 'Od-srung in West-Tibet.³ In the Manjusrimulakalpa already Bhaishajyaguru appears as Bhaishajyavaiduryaraja in the rank of a Buddha. According to Przyluski, this work seems to have received its final form in the 8th [-10th] century; according to B. Bhattacharyya, however its first chapters go back to the second or third century A.D., and it is probable that it was translated into Tibetan already in the 8th century.⁴

The Chinese and through it, the Japanese tradition, which contains the most ancient Chinese material, is of special importance for the history of Lamaist iconography.⁵ The famous bronzes of the Medicine Buddha in Japanese temples belong to the 7th century. Indian Sutras dealing with the cult of Bhaishajyaguru have been translated into Chinese already in the period from the 5th to the 7th century and were used in Japan in the 7th and 8th century. Among the early translations, the one made by Hsuan-Tsang was a favourite of the Emperor K'ang-Hsi. The Indian missionaries Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra, who came to China in the 8th century and were colleagues of Padmasambhava, played a considerable role in the cult of the Medicine Buddha in China.

In the 9th century the Yakushi cult in Japan reaches its full bloom. The oldest Japanese iconography shows Yakushi standing or sitting, with Abhaya-mudra of the right hand and Varada-mudra or Dhayana-mudra of the left, which latter often holds a medicine-vessel. The Lamaist iconography prefers the Myrobalan (Tib: A-ru-ra; cfr. our statue) or a flowering twig in the right hand (varada-mudra) and the alms-bowl in the left. The bowl may contain pomegranate or a plant, generally a peach. The symbolical meaning of the peach or the pomegranate is prosperity and fertility.⁶

In the scripture on sMan-bla, which was printed on the order of the Chinese Emperor, the Medicine Buddha forms a popular trinity with Shakyamuni (Tib.: bsTan-pai-bdag-po-shakya-rgyal-po) and the so-called Dhyani-buddha Amitabha (Jap.: Amida). Besides these there are trinities in which Vairocana takes the place of Amitabha or into which Dipankara, one of the predecessors of Gautama Buddha has been accepted, and sometimes even Kubera, the God of Wealth.⁷

Here one notices Amitabha's Vairocana's and Dipankara's relationship to the concept of light, characteristic also of sMan-bla himself who, like Vairocana, if the latter does not occupy the centre of the cosmic Mandala, dominates the east and a paradise of light, similar to that of Amitabha. In this realm his closest associates, Suryaprabhadeva (Tib.: Nyi-ma-lha, Jap.: Nikko) and Chandraprabhadeva (Tib.: Zla-ba-lha, Jap.: Gwakko), have special functions as sun-and moon light.

In this connection we have to recall the original number of six Medicine Buddhas, forming the retinue of sMan-bla and originally representing his manifestations. This has its parallel in the Six Ameshas Spentas, the companions and hypostasies of Mazda in the Zarathustrian religion.⁸ But also the light-character of Amitabha and the 35 Buddhas of Forgiveness who help to open the entrance to the paradise of Amitabha, belong into this context. As to the Five Dhyani-buddhas, it may be said that they are similar to the five Light-Kings, associated with Mani, and the relations of the Dhyani-buddhas to their Bodhisattvas are similar to the doctrine of the Fravashis who are a kind of doubles of the human beings on earth.⁹ These Iranian parallels to the ideas connected with sMan-bla and his retinue, as well as the fact that the number of Dhyani-buddhas is five, may perhaps point to the origin of sMan-bla and to the regions which were the former centre of Mahayana teachings and their symbiosis with Western traditions.¹⁰

Round about this centre we may have to seek the homeland of Padmasambhava (Swat) among whose followers the worship of Amitabha was so popular that he himself was regarded as the Nirmanakaya of Amitabha. In the circles around Padmasambhava one can also observe a special partiality for the Medicine Buddha, and this all the more, if we remember Amoghavajra and Vajrabodhi with their influence upon the cult connected with Yakushi in Japan by way of China, or if we think of Shantarakshita, whose sister is believed to have been married to Padmasambhava.¹¹ The origin and the propagation of the worship of sMan-bla seems to have been closely connected with the origin and propagation of Amitabha.

At the time when sMan-bla still lived as a Bodhisattva, who in honour of the Buddha allowed himself to be sacrificed as a burnt offering, he is said to have made twelve vows, in which he promised to bring light into the spiritual darkness of living beings and to lead those, who were driven hither and thither by their illusions, upon the way of the Buddha, so that they might find peace in the Mahayana. But he also wanted to look after the physical welfare of men, by healing the sick and the weak, freeing the prisoners, feeding the hungry, quenching the thirst of the thirsty, clothing the poor and providing them with the means of a life without want¹² His help also includes the cosmic relations of man, by protecting them from the dangers that threaten them from the influence of the stars or from the vicissitudes of the climate. For this reason the twelve great Generals of the Yakshas (Skt.: Mahayakshasena-pati) have offered their help to sMan-bla. With their armies they guard the treasures and forces of the earth as well as the cosmic powers of space. In this way the Yakshas become personifications of the means employed by physicians.

Thus it is logical if the Mandala of sMan-bla, which is shown in its eight separate parts by eight pictures¹³ in the Chinese book mentioned by us, we find that on the outermost circle, besides Suryaprabha and Chandraprabha, appear the twelve Yaksha Generals and the ten Lokapalas associated with them as representatives of the cosmic principles of order, the directive forces of the universe. In another context the Yaksha Generals are regarded to be the protectors of the zodiac.¹⁴ In a Mandala of the Medicine Buddha in the Uigur-Central-Asiatic art, the Generals carry the symbols of the representatives of the zodiac in their hair. Altogether it seems that there are relations between the twelve Yaksha Generals and the twelve signs of the zodiac,

At the beginning of this article we drew the attention of the reader upon the rare and remarkable iconography of sMan-bla, as demonstrated in the above-mentioned statue of a swiss private collection. There is no difficulty to understand the Bodhisattva-attire and its ornaments, since in Lamaism sMan bla is sometimes represented as a Bodhisattva, and since Bhaishajyaguru and Bhaishajaraja have not yet, as in Japan (de Visser, l.c.) and as Pelliot (l.c.) remarks developed into two different entities, of which the first has the rank of a Buddha, the second (as distinct from the Manjusrimulakalpa l.c.) the rank of a Bodhisattva. Remarkable, however, is the Lama-cap, which must not be confused with the strange headgear of some Lamaist deities, reminiscent of the cap which was worn by the French Jacobines.¹⁵

In Japan, Binzuru¹⁶ (Binzuru-Saina) a favourite popular deity of healing, is always shown with a cap. This Binzuru is regarded by some people as a manifestation of Yakushi. J. J. Rein gives a description of this cult¹⁷ in which the devotees bring the sick parts of their body in touch with the corresponding parts of the image. The same practice was followed in connection with the famous statue of sMan-bla on the ICags-po-ri near Lhasa, which was used to be invoked on the occasion of medical operations, during the preparation of medicines and during the collection of medical herbs.

But since Binzuru is meant to be one of the 16 (18) Sthaviras, namely Pindolabharadvaja, it would hardly be admissible to use his headgear as an explanation for the cap of sMan-bla. It is easier and simpler to seek the explanation in the fact that sMan-bla, being an abbreviation for sMan-gyi-bla-ma, perfectly corresponds to Yao-Shi (Skt. : Bhaishajya-Guru), which is to be translated with teacher or master and spiritual guide in the art of healing. Moreover, it is the special meaning of bla-ma in Lamaism which accounts for the prominence of the Bhaishajyaguru, even in outer appearance, in contradistinction to the iconography of Indian, Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. This becomes evident in such passages as : "Bla-ma-med-pai-gong-rol-na sangs-rgyas-bya-ba'i-ming-yang-med" (Before the Lama there exists not even the name of the Buddha) and "sKal-pa-stong-gi-sangs-rgyas-kyang-bla-ma-dag-la-rten-nas-dug" (The Buddhas of thousand world-cycles lean upon the Lama).

The Ven. Lama Anagarika Govinda has drawn my attention upon the fact that the image of sMan-bla, discussed in this article, has his robe wrapped around his body in the wrong direction, i.e., from right to

left (cf. A. Grunwedel, *Mythologie des Buddhismus*, Leipzig 1900, Fig. 34 Padmasambhava). The cap is reminiscent of the Pad-zhva of Padmasambhava and of the sGrungs-zhva of the minstrels of the Ge-sar epic. Both of them, as also the similar headgear of some Lamaist deities (resembling the cap which was worn by the French Jacobins), go back upon non-Buddhistic traditions of the Eurasiatic region. The peaked central part of the cap points at connections with the concepts of the holy mountain in a similar way as the towerskull of the White Old Man and some Chinese fertility gods (cfr. S. Hummel, "Der Weisse Alte," in: *Sinologica* VI, 1960). We have already mentioned the origins of the ideas centering around sMan-bla in the country of Padmasambhava's birth. It does not seem likely that the image is a fake, since the back of the pedestal (in Sino-Tibetan style) shows traces of a Tibetan inscription (. . . . ming . . . 1ebskal tsh . . .) almost rubbed out by use, which indicates that the image was frequently handled. The image may belong to the Red Cap sect.¹⁸

NOTES

1. Also sMan-bla-rgyal-po and sMan-gyi-bla Beturya'i-'od-kyi-rgyal po; Skt : Bhaishajyaguru Vaiduryaprabhasa Tathagata, Bhaishajyaguru, Bhaishajaraja, Bhaishajyavaiduryaraja; Mongol : Otaci; Chinese : Yao-Shi-Liu-Li-Kuang-Ju-Lai, short : Yao-Shi-Fo; Japanese : Yaku-shi-nyorai.
2. M.W. de Visser, *Ancient Buddhism in Japan*, Leiden 1935, p.5, 18ff., 427, especially p. 542. The names and the iconographical colours of the retinue of sMan-bla in S. Hummel, *Der Medizin-Buddha und seine Begleiter* (in: *Sinologica*, II, 2, p. 81ff.), with special reference to 'sMan-bla'i-cho-ga'i-bsham-bkod kyi-lag-len-zur-du-bkol-ba'', a print published in Peking 1744 on the orders of the Chinese Emperor. The iconography of sMan-bla differs here from that given in *Bibliotheca-Buddhica*, Vol. V' only in regard to mTsan-legs-dpal, and from the version given by W. E. Clark, *Two Lamaist Pantheons*, Cambridge (M) 1937, B.137, only with regard to Chos-sgrags-rgya-mtsho'i-dbyangs. Concerning further works on the Medicine Buddha, translated in the 18th century into Chinese or Mongolian from Sanskrit or Tibetan, cfr. W. Heissig, *Die Pekingische lamaistischen Blockdrucke*, Wiesbaden 1954, p. 75 & 83; e.g. a work of the Pan-chen-Blo-bzang-chos-kyi-rgyal-mtshan.
3. *La-dvags-rgyal-rabs*, ed. A. H. Francke (in: *Journal & proc. of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, VI, 1, Calcutta 1910).
4. A. Macdonald, *Le Manjusrimulakalpa*. Paris 1958, p.4 (Reviewed by S Hummel in: *Tribus* 12, p. 232 f)-B. Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 2nd, ed., Calcutta 1953, p. 14f. M. Lalou, *Iconographie des Etoffes Peintes (Pata) dans le Manjusrimulakalpa*, Paris 1930, p. 7, 35, table I.
5. P. Pelliot' Le Bhaishajyaguru (in: *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient*, III, (1903, p. 33ff). M. W. de Visser, l.c. P. 5, 18ff., 427.
6. S Hummel, Mi-la-ras-pa und die bKa'-rgyud-pa Schule (in: *Kairos* V, 4, p. 305).
7. Further Chinese and Japanese representations in M. W. de Visser l. c. S. Hummel, *Der Medizinbuddha*, l.c.
8. On account of Central Asiatic concepts, according to which sMan-bla is also the Lord of the zodiac, G. Tucci (*Indo-Tibetica* Vol, III, Part I, Romæ 1935, p. 169) suspects that the number seven, consisting of sMan-bla and his six attendants, points towards planetary

- connections. Even if this were the case, it would be a later development, derived from quite different trends of thought. We shall revert to this subject in connection with the Yaksha Generals.
9. In connection with this and with regard to further parallels (for inst. the creation of Avalokitesvara through a ray of light emanating from Amitabha; cfr. a similar procedure concerning the Light-King of Mani) S. Hummel *Die lamaistischen Kultplastiken im Linden-Museum* (in : *Tribus* 11.).
 10. Cfr. G. Tucci, Preliminary Report on an Archaeological Survey in Swat (in : *East and West*, IX, 4); *Travels of Tibetan Pilgrims in the Swat Valley*. Calcutta 1940; The Tibetan White-Sun-Moon and Cognate Deities (in : *East and West*, XIV, 3-4). According to this, Padmasambhava propagated the worship of dKar-mo-nyi-zla in Tibet. This figure with the attributes of sun and moon is obviously a variation of a deity known in Central Asia and probably a product of Iranian Civilisation; cfr. in connection with this, Buddha with sun and moon a statue in Rotterdam (*Tentoonstelling Chinesche en Tibetansche Kunst*, Rotterdam 1938-1939, Table XXIII).
 11. Concerning Amitabha (Amitayus) in China and Amoghavajra, cfr. M. W. de Visser, l. c. p. 320. As to the origin of the cult of Amitabha, cfr. D. L. Snellgrove, *Buddhist Himalaya*, Oxford 1957, P. 186f.
 12. M. W. de Visser, l. c. p. 534.
 13. Cfr. the reconstruction of the Mandala in S. Hummel, *Der Medizinbuddha*, l. c. : 24 helpers on the outermost circle (3 in each of the eight pictures). Concerning the meaning of the well-known Bodhisattvas, who also accompany the sMan-bla cfr. R.F.G. Muller, *Die Krankheits und Heilgottheiten des Lamaismus* (in : *Anthropos*, 22, p. 956ff.)
 14. E. Waldschmidt, *Gandhara Kutscha Tarfan*, Leipzig 1925. p. 87f and Table 50; cfr. also S. Hummel, *Kosmische Strukturplane der Tibeter* (in : *Geographia Helvetica* 1964, 1, p.34 ff.)
 15. S. Hummel *Die Jakobinermutze in der Umgebung des Yama* (in preparation).
 16. An illustration is published by Basil Hall Chamberlain & W. B. Mason in *A Handbook for Travellers in Japan* (Murray's Handbook), London 1899, p. 46
 17. J. J. Rein, *Japan: Travels and Researches*, London 1884, p. 458.

18. Bl. Chr. Olschak, Auf den Spuren uralten Heilwissens in Tibet (in : Ciba Symposium, Vol. XII, 3, p. 132) identify a resembling copper image with Padmasambhava. The complete inscription runs : sNyigs-mai-'gro la-thugs-rje-yis/ 'jug-pa-yal-mang sman-gyi-blas / nad-gdon-dus-min-'chi-pa-sogs/ming-bral-bskal-thsoi-dbang-skur-shog / Concerning the translation (Olschak, 1, c.) snyigs-mai-'gro : degenerated beings of our Yuga, not sick men, dus-min-'chi : premature death, not death. sMan-bla is believed to have great power in liberating all beings from sickness, evil demons and untimely death.