


The Upper Temple of Dangkhar Monastery Iconographical Capharnaüm or Political Manœuvre?¹

Lobsang Nyima LAURENT

To E. & C. Bérard

1. Introduction [Fig.1]

 The monastery of Dangkhar (Tib. *Brag mkhar*) is located within the Spiti Valley (Tib. *sPi ti /sPyi ti*) in Himachal Pradesh, India, a region inhabited by a Tibetan-speaking population for more than a thousand years.² The ancient monastic complex and the early village of Dangkhar were established along the edges of a steep rock cliff made of bimrock materials. Erosion, slope instability, and seismic activity have had a serious impact on the morphology of the whole site.³ Late 19th century etchings and photographs indicate the locations of prior structures and buildings, which have since then collapsed or simply vanished.

This research focuses on a small religious edifice overlooking the main monastic complex and located below khartö (Tib. *mkhar stod*), the old village of Dangkhar. It addresses the multifaceted aspects of its iconographical programme and attempts to establish the religious and political context of its construction and patronage. The thematic composition of the wall-paintings and the narratives at work would seem to coincide with the emergence of Dangkhar as a political centre

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² In 2006, the monastery of Dangkhar was recognised by the World Monument Fund as one of the most endangered sites in the world. In 2010, the Save Dangkhar project was initiated by Mr Markus Weisskopf under the supervision of Prof. Holger Neuwirth from the Institute of Architectural Theory, Art History and Cultural Studies, Graz University of Technology, in order to generate an accurate and detailed record of the ancient monastic complex in view of its renovation; see Neuwirth (2013)

³ For the geologic setting of Dangkhar and seismic activity in the western Himalayas; see Kieffer & Steinbauer (2012).

under foreign influence. In this process, dynastic legitimacy appears to rest on the aesthetic use of religious and cultural elements which connect the Kingdom of Ladakh and the polity of Spiti to the former Kingdom of Guge.

1.1 The Upper Temple: physical description⁴ [Fig.2a-b]

Overlooking the main building of Dangkhar Monastery is a small chapel locally known as “*sna kha tshang*”, and which will hereafter be referred to as the upper temple (Tib. *lha khang gong ma*).⁵ The edifice is a square in plan, measuring approximately 5.20 x 5.20 x 3.09m. The interior of the upper temple is unfurnished except for a small altar-like table leaning against the south-western wall. A pair of wooden pillars (Tib. *ka ba*) and capitals (Tib. *ka mgo / ka gzu*) bear two central beams (Tib. *ka gzu gdung*) and support a ceiling made of lateral beams (Tib. *gdung ma*) and joists (Tib. *lcam shing*). A skylight (Tib. *gnam khung*) was adjusted in the middle of the roof and provides a dim source of light for the room. In order to prevent water infiltration, a corrugated iron roof was recently added on top of the traditional roofing. Facing the entrance to the north-east is a two room building which is in very poor condition. These rooms are no longer in use and their initial functions can only be inferred as having been some kind of maintenance or storage rooms.

1.2 The Murals of the Upper Temple: general description

Inside the chapel, richly ornamented murals were executed on the surface of the walls with the exception of a 0.46m wide area above

⁴ Views of the interior of the room can be seen in Neten Chokling's film *Milarepa* (2006); footage timing 1:11:48–1:16:38.

⁵ On the 15th July 1933, when Tucci's expedition arrived at Dangkhar, Ghersi registered the name of *nang ga tshang* for the upper temple. He also noted the presence of many bronzes and wooden statues crowded inside the room; see Tucci (1935 : 51-52). During our fieldwork in 2010 and 2011, the exact Tibetan spelling could not be asserted by the monks from Dangkhar. Thus said, they were confident that the oral designation refers to the extreme variety of iconographical themes depicted inside the chapel. We have hence adopted the following spelling *sna kha tshang* as, the place (Tib. *tshang*) housing a great variety (Tib. *sna kha*) of images, although this term does not appear in classical Tibetan lexicography. This unusual toponym does not only underline the unclear relation of that edifice *vis-à-vis* the rest of the monastery but also suggests that people from Dangkhar, both lay and monastic, had long forgotten its primary function. These days, a single butter lamp is offered daily by a monk or a lay person at dusk.

the floor. Decorative elements were also included in the process. Right below the ceiling, a wall-painted hanging frieze (Tib. *sham bu*) with lion faces (Skt. *siṃhamukha*) runs on the four sides of the room [No.1], and corners are decorated with painted hanging banners (Tib. *ka 'phan*) creating an overall impression of a ceremonial room.

The lower register of the murals is delimited by a minutely depicted frieze on the south-eastern, south-western, and north-western walls. Later in time, the frieze was bordered with a tricoloured band underneath (i.e. white, yellow, and red) and a single red band above, which singles out the frieze noticeably from the rest of the composition. As for the upper register of these murals, it is dominated by thirteen figures of almost life-size dimensions. They are surrounded by a multitude of smaller iconographical figures and integrated into a background of luxuriant foliage.

The murals were executed *a secco* on a ground made of white gypsum using animal glue as a binder.⁶ Large areas have flaked off over time resulting in important loss of paint. In addition, the structural deficiencies of the building and mechanical stress have facilitated the formation of cracks, voids, rising dampness at ground level, and water infiltration from the roof; particularly under the load-bearing beams of the ceiling.

The extent of damage on the wall-paintings must have been significant as restoration work was conducted sometime during the 20th century.⁷ Entire figures were then painted over with very rudimentary skills and crude materials (e.g. the representation of Buddha Śākyamuni on the south-western wall [No.10a]). These restoration attempts were likely carried out by local residents who must have had little training and almost no artistic understanding of the iconographical themes depicted in front of them. A careful observation of these restored areas shows that the people involved did not recognise minimal formal units (i.e. hand attributes, gestures, colour, etc.) within a specific scheme and consequently were not able to restore the missing elements of a particular theme.⁸

⁶ For painting technology and analysis; see Gruber & Schmidt (2011).

⁷ Based on the presence of chrome yellow (PbCrO₄) and barite (BaSO₄) found among the pigments applied; see Gruber & Schmidt (2011).

⁸ On the north-western wall, three figures from a group of eight [No.4a-h] were repainted as dGe lugs pa scholars [No.4b, 4c] headed by Tsong kha pa [No.4d] while they should have been identified as the Indian paṇḍita Āryadeva, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu, who belong to a well-known group called the six ornaments and the two excellent ones (Tib. *rgyan drug mchog gnyis*), as the presence of Nāgārjuna [No.4a], the expounding-debating postures and the traditional red hats of the remaining figures clearly establish. Also, the right side of the north-eastern wall shows a devastating attempt to repaint a representation of Śrīmatī Pārvatī Rājñī with her attendants [No.23]. While Śrī Devī is flanked to her left by

Despite the present state of preservation of these murals, more than 85% of the 232 iconographical types depicted on the walls of the upper temple were satisfactorily identified.⁹ They consist of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, meditational, mundane and supra-mundane deities, historical figures, and symbolic representations. The profusion of iconographical themes and their seemingly chaotic organisation within the chapel raises the issue not only of its artistic programme but also the questions of its functionality and patronage.

2. Pictorial Organisation

The following presentation is therefore based on the premise that the iconographical programme of the upper temple represents a whole, which is coherent in its intention and organised around pre-established themes. The singularity of its composition must however comply with general characteristics specific to Tibetan temples (Tib. *lha khang*); namely the main recipients of worship are represented on the wall facing the entrance while the protectors and guardians are depicted on both sides of the door. It is worth noting that a figure, or iconographical type, is never repeated although various aspects of the same deity can occasionally be found. They always correspond to different manifestations (Tib. *sprul pa*) and therefore express different meanings or intentions.¹⁰

Furthermore, the pictorial organisation of a single wall tends to follow specific spatial patterns which often involve a certain degree of symmetry or mirroring; even though figures represented on the same wall may be grouped under different, yet sometimes overlapping, categories. We shall first review each wall separately and highlight its general organisation. A detailed inventory of all the figures and their Sanskrit and Tibetan equivalents is given as an appendix to this article.

two of the goddesses of the four seasons (Tib. *dus bzhi'i lha mo*) [No.24] and Simhamukhī [No.25b], a large area to her right was filled with an unrealistic landscape and a deep blue sky. It seems reasonable to suggest that the poorly restored area was once occupied by the two missing season goddesses (i.e. the spring and summer goddesses) and Makaramukhī holding the reins of the queen's mule, according to a well-known iconographical scheme.

⁹ The figures represented within the narrative scenes were not taken into account.

¹⁰ For these reasons, the figure of Vajrapāni [No.21], which was recently repainted on the north-eastern wall, is an interpretation error from the side of the restorers as it already appears as part of the initial programme on the north-western wall [No.15]. Besides, it occupies the area where the spring and summer goddesses were most certainly portrayed.

2.1 The South-Eastern Wall [Fig.3a-b]

The south-eastern wall provides a good example of pictorial spatial organisation as well as problems encountered by the painters. It is located to the left of the entrance and it gives the traditional reading orientation of the room based on the principle of Buddhist circumambulation. The lower part of the wall-painting is occupied by a narrative frieze, or more accurately perhaps, a graphic narration of the twelve deeds of Buddha Śākyamuni (Tib. *sangs rgyas mchog gi sprul pa'i skus 'jig rten du mdzad pa bcu gnyis*) which shows the first six episodes of his life [No.12a-f]; the remaining six deeds are depicted within the frieze of the north-western wall.¹¹

The organisation of the rest of the wall-paintings is centred around four of the eight life-sized Medicine Buddhas (Tib. *sman bla de gshegs brgyad*) [No.4a-d]; the last four being depicted, together with the remaining episodes of Śākyamuni's life, on the opposite wall. The spacing and the gap between them create lower and upper registers. The upper register is devoted entirely to the thirty-five confession Buddhas (Tib. *ltung bshags kyi sangs rgyas so lnga*) [No.2] who are lined up and syntagmatically grouped around the Conquerors of the five families (Tib. *rgyal ba rigs lnga*) [No.2a-2d].¹² The figures of the

¹¹ These scenes will not be subject to a detailed description and stylistic analysis in this paper. Suffice to observe that they display consummate skills. Additional scenes occasionally complete the topical version of the Buddha narrative; similarly, up to thirty-three different episodes of Śākyamuni's life were represented on the thirteen century murals of a cave located the Aqin Valley in West Tibet; see Zhang (2008 : 377-398).

¹² The iconographical theme of the thirty-five confession Buddhas is the artistic representation of an early sūtra known as *Phung po gsum pa'i mdo* in Tibetan (Skt. *Triskhandadharmasūtra*). Different systems of depiction are reported in Tibetan and Himalayan art based on commentarial treatises composed by Tibetan scholars such as Sa skya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) or Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) to name only the two most influential commentators. The iconographical differences between these systems of depiction rest essentially on the opposition between hand gestures (Tib. *phyag rgya*) and hand attributes (Tib. *phyag mtshan*). The iconographical scheme chosen for the upper temple seems to conform to Sa skya Paṇḍita's text in which he describes the thirty-five Buddhas being divided into five groups of seven each. Each group is associated with a Jina and displays the same colour and hand gesture. The presence of the five conquerors' consorts is however not attested in Kun dga' rgyal mtshan's short commentary and does constitute an artistic innovation; see *Sa skya bka' 'bum, Phung po gsum pa'i mdo 'don thabs bzhugs*, vol.12, fols. 450-452. Since the iconographical programme of the chapel is overtly dGe lugs pa in essence, it is therefore surprising that the scheme adopted does not follow Tsong kha pa's system of depiction (i.e. with hand attributes). It seems unlikely that this choice can be attributed to the patron, as we shall see, and must consequently reflect the painters' artistic affiliation. Finally, and from a technical point of view, we can observe a small discrepancy

latter group, slightly bigger in size, are located on either side of the Medicine Buddhas' mandorlas and their consorts are represented right below them, with the exception of Amoghasiddhi's consort [No.3a] who was intentionally placed in the lower register due to lack of space between the mandorla and the left corner of the wall.

As for the lower register, it presents three pairs of figures inserted in the gaps between the Medicine Buddhas; namely Padmasambhava and consorts [No.6a-c], and a Buddha making the gesture of fearlessness above [No.5], four-armed Avalokiteśvara [No.9] and Amitābha [No.8], and finally Amitāyus [No.11] and a Buddha making the gesture of generosity [No.10]. This pattern composed of three pairs, which associates a figure with a Buddha above it, is however interrupted by a single Ekadaśamukha Avalokiteśvara situated between the second and third Medicine Buddha [No.7]. The eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara was subject to an unsuccessful restoration and it is now difficult to establish whether it was part of the initial composition based on the photographic documentation. The syntagmatic relationship between these figures is therefore compromised and no theme could be confidently established for this lower register.

2.2 The South-Western Wall [Fig.4a-b]

The south-western wall, facing the entrance, is the devotional focus of the room, and the understanding of its pictorial organisation does not pose any difficulty. A frieze delimits the lower part and is divided into three sections. The left section shows the seven precious possessions of a universal monarch (Tib. *rgyal srid rin chen san bdun*) [No.19a-g]. The middle section is devoted to the eight close sons, or great Bodhisattvas (Tib. *nye ba'i sras chen brgyad*) [No.20a-h], and the last section to the right depicts a narrative image which is the iconographical corner stone of the upper temple [No.21].

The upper part of these murals takes the form of a triptych. The central panel is organised around the life-sized figure of Sākyamuni [No.10a] flanked by his two main disciples, with Śāriputra standing to his right [No.10b] and Maudgalyāyana to his left [No.10c]. The ensemble is enclosed by the sixteen arhats (Tib. *gnas brtan bcu drug*) [No.11a-p], and the two attendants Hwa shang and Dharmatrāta [No.12a & 12b].

between the colours employed for the Jinas and those applied to the groups of six Buddhas related to them (e.g. Ratnasambhava and entourage [No.2c and 2c1-5]).

The composition of the left panel is identical in all aspects to the spatial organisation of the right panel with a similar total of eight figures. Both side panels reflect to some extent the composition of the central panel with a life-sized historical figure—although slightly smaller than Buddha Śākyamuni—flanked by two disciples. Thus the left panel is centred around the well-known father and sons (Tib. *yab sras gsum*) group depicting Tsong kha pa (1357–1419) in the middle and his two spiritual heirs, rGyal tshab rje (1364–1432) and mKhas grub rje (1385–1438) on either sides [No.6a-c]. The group is crowned by three meditational deities (i.e. Vajrabhairava [No.2], Guhyasamāja [No.3], and Hayagrīva [No.4]) and a pair of unidentified dGe lugs pa scholars [No.5a-b].

Following the exact same pattern, the left panel shows the Indian paṇḍita Atiśa Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna (980–1054) flanked by his disciples 'Brom ston pa (1005–1064) to his right and rNgog Legs pa'i shes rab (1059–1109) to his left [No.18a-c].¹³ A triad of meditational deities with consorts form the top of the register (i.e. Kālacakra [No.13], Hevajra [No.14], and Cakrasaṃvara [No.15]) while a singular pair composed by mahāsiddha Nāropa [No.16] and sTag tshang ras pa (1574–1651) [No.17] closes the composition.

2.3 The North-Western Wall [Fig.5a-b]

Although it bears some similarities with the opposite wall, the pictorial organisation of the north-western murals is more intricate. The lower part of the wall-paintings is still delineated by a frieze which depicts the last six deeds of Buddha Śākyamuni [No.20g-I]; some of them being no longer visible. The upper part is punctuated by the four remaining Medicine Buddhas [No.16e-h] but does not seem to create two areas as it was the case with the south-eastern wall.

Thus said, the upper register is equally completed by a series of twenty-four figures perfectly aligned. This series can be divided into three groups. From the left, the first group of seven figures, which belongs to a larger ensemble of seventeen Buddhas, is tentatively identified as the seven universal Buddhas (Tib. *sangs rgyas rab bdun*) [No.2a-g], while the ten other Buddhas situated below them must then be interpreted as the Buddhas of the ten directions and three times (Tib. *phyog bcu dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas*) [No.2h-q]. The seven universal Buddhas are then followed by a group of eight Indian scholars commonly designated as the six ornaments and the two

¹³ Or alternatively Nag tsho the translator (1011-1064) for 18c.

excellent ones (Tib. *rgyan drug mchog gnyis*) [No.4a-h]. The series is finally concluded by nine figures representing the main forefathers of the bKa' brgyud pa lineage [No.5a-i].

From the middle of the wall to the right end corner the arrangement of the remaining figures tends to follow some kind of symmetry. These figures are of various sizes and are located above the halos of the last two Medicine Buddhas and within the gap created between them. Unlike the opposite wall, the overall spatial organisation of the north-western murals does not conform to the same degree of structural similarities and, as we shall see, reflect a greater variety of iconographical themes.

2.4 The North-Eastern Wall [Fig.6a-b]

The pictorial organisation of the wall-paintings on the north-eastern wall can be divided into three panels. Each panel displays a number of dharma protectors (Tib. *chos skyong*) and guardians (Tib. *srung ma*). The first panel, to the left of the entrance door, is devoted to the life-sized figure of six-armed Mahākāla [No.10] along with his retinue and lieutenants in the lower register [No.13a-f]. Other aspects of Mahākāla are grouped around, such as Pañjara Mahākāla [No.6], Caturbhujā Mahākāla [No.7], and Brāhmaṇarūpa Mahākāla [No.9]. An equally important figure is the representation of Yama Dharmarāja with his consort Cāmuṅḍā depicted to the left of the main deity. A series of five figures closes the upper register [No.2, 3, 4 & 5].

Above the door, the central panel is dominated by a large representation of Mahāpitā Vaiśravaṇa [No.14]. He is surrounded by other wealth deities [No. 14a-d & 14f] and guarded by the great kings of the four directions (Tib. *phyogs skyong rgyal po bzhi* or *rGyal chen sde bzhi*) [No.15a-d]. To this group was also added the three Dharma kings of the Tibetan empire (Tib. *chos rgyal mes dbon rnam gsum*) [No.16a-c] and the eighth century Buddhist master Śāntarakṣita [No.17]. Right above the door lintel, an equestrian scene depicting three male and three female riders on various animal mounts raises interpretational difficulties and shall be addressed later [No.19a-f].

Finally, the general organisation of the right panel mirrors the composition of the left panel. An almost life-sized Śrī Devī [No.23] is surrounded by an entourage which includes the goddesses of the four seasons (Tib. *dus bzhi'i lha mo*) [No.24a-d], Siṃhamukhī [No.25b], and the five sisters of longevity (Tib. *tshē ring mched lnga*) in the lower register [No.26a-e]; two of them are no longer visible. A Cintāmaṇi Sita Mahākāla [No.22] is depicted to the left of the main

figures' blazing halo. In the upper register, a series of five dGe lugs pa teachers concludes the whole composition and their identification shall be instrumental in dating these murals [No.20a-e].

The pictorial organisation of these murals shows indisputable artistic skills in their spatial planning. The iconographical composition of a wall generally corresponds to the composition of the opposite wall. Taken individually, each wall also follows its own logic involving symmetries, groups of figures of different sizes, and series. Occasionally, the arrangement of certain iconographical types gives form to a particular theme, and a number of themes can eventually be grouped under a special category.

3. Iconographical Analysis

The following analysis tries to reorganise the figures of these murals thematically, using a reading grid that highlights the broad guidelines of its programme and eventually brings to light its religious and socio-political implications for the history of Dangkhar.

As briefly shown in the previous section, the composition of these murals is first and foremost centred on thirteen figures of almost life-size dimensions, to which the representation of Mahāpitā Vaiśravaṇa located above the door can be added. In more than one respect, these figures summarise the driving forces of the iconographical programme which we detail hereafter.

3.1 The Health & Longevity Programme

Many iconographical figures or themes can be grouped under the rubric of health and longevity. This category is headed by the eight Medicine Buddhas which dominate the side walls of the room. If Bhaiṣajyaguru can be confidently identified on the south-eastern wall [No.4d], the seven other Buddhas who constitute his retinue do not conform to well-established iconographical norms. Their individual naming remains tentative but does not contradict the identity of the theme.¹⁴

¹⁴ Based on murals dating from the 15th century onwards, Vitali concludes that Bhaiṣajyaguru (Tib. *sMan bla*) was a deity popular in West Tibet as the result of the dGe lugs pa diffusion; see VITALI (1996:140). It is worth remarking that the iconographical theme of the eight Medicine Buddhas (Tib. *sMan bla de gshogs brgyad*) is already found on the wall-paintings of the Wa chen cave (Tib. *Wa chen phug pa*) in Ngari Prefecture. The cave is believed to have belonged to the bKa' brgyud pa lineage and was probably built during the 14th century according to

From the point of view of medical praxis, Tibetan medicine does not only include the treatment of diseases and pharmacology but also incorporates religious views and rituals, and was transmitted almost exclusively in monasteries as part of the worldly sciences until the 17th century. Tibetan medical literature was eventually led by a treasure text known as the *Four Medical Tantras* (Tib. *rGyud bzhi*) which, as a traditional pathological classification, includes a wide range of rituals and practices involving numerous deities. It is not surprising therefore that long-life deities are associated with the Medicine Buddhas represented on the side walls of the chapel. They include Buddha Amitāyus on the south-eastern wall [No.11], White Tārā [No.17] and Uṣnīṣavijayā [No.8], which often form a triad of longevity (Tib. *tshe lha rnam gsum*), and the representation of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā still on the north-western wall [No.6].¹⁵

The four hundred and four diseases (Tib. *nad bzhi brgya rtsa bzhi*), which are expounded by Bhaiṣajyaguru in the *Four Medical Tantras*, do not solely deal with physiological disorders, the treatment of diseases, and the maintenance of health, but also address the purification of negative karma. It hence explains the thematic representation of the thirty-five confession Buddhas of the south-eastern wall. In the *Sūtra of the Three Heaps* (Tib. *Phung po gsum pa'i mdo*), the invocation of each Buddha corresponds to the purification of a particular negative action, and their litany addresses more specifically the downfall of the Bodhisattva ethic.¹⁶

Based on close-knit Buddhist narratives and doctrinal tenets, it may seem possible to justify *a posteriori* the iconographical relationship of almost all incongruous figures put together. In this regard, the depiction of Guru Padmasambhava, with his consorts Mandāravā and Ye shes mtsho rgyal, on the same wall as the thirty-five confession Buddhas, the Medicine Buddhas, and Amitāyus, demands to be addressed even if very briefly. As noted, the

Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po who documented the site; see Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po (2011: 17-19). The popularity and development of the Medicine Buddhas and the thirty-five confessions Buddhas on murals of West Tibet has recently been discussed by Neumann and Heller; see Neumann(2012) and Heller (2013).

¹⁵ The iconographical representation of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā (Tib. *Yum chen mo* or *Sher phyin ma*) often occupies the centre of Bhaiṣajyaguru's maṇḍala but can also be associated with the depiction of the eight Medicine Buddhas as it is the case here; for an earlier example see the south wall of the Wa chen cave in Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po (2011: 89). It is interesting to note that on the wall-paintings of the upper temple she is also located right below Nāgārjuna who is credited with the development of Prajñāpāramitā literature. This would imply that a figure may be part of more than one iconographical scheme and therefore convey multiple ideas.

¹⁶ See Beresford (2002).

syntagmatic relation of figures No.6, 7, 9 and 11 on the south-eastern wall could not be established. Nevertheless, we would like to suggest that the presence of Padmasambhava could possibly be understood in relation to the production of the *Four Medical Tantras*. Tibetan historical tradition attributes the translation of the *rGyud bzhi* into Tibetan to the translator Be ro tsa na of the sPa gor clan who was a disciple of Padmasambhava.¹⁷ Upon his return from Kashmir, where he had learned the *Four Medical Tantras*, Be ro tsa na offered his translation work to king Khri srong lde btsan. Yet, Padmasambhava decided to postpone its diffusion and dissimulated the text inside the temple of Samye (Tib. *bSam yas*) where it was eventually discovered by Grwa pa mNgon shes in 1038. As a treasure text, the *rGyud bzhi* obtained *de facto* a new status and its popularity within all the Tibetan schools may well justify the presence of Padmasambhava as part of the health and longevity programme of the upper temple.

Finally, and from the vajrayāna point of view, the purification of moral and ethical faults is operated by Vajrasattva and Vajravīdāraṇa who are represented on the north-eastern wall [No.2 & 3]. These two deities belong to the vajra family and are pictorially connected to Akṣobhya whose principal field of activity is the pacification of mental perturbations, sufferings, illness, and frustrations [No.4].

3.2 Apotropaic & Protective Deities

In Tibetan Buddhism, the state of well-being also depends on the removal of internal and external obstacles. Among the eight Medicine Buddhas, Suvarṇabhadravimala is said to prevent incurable diseases and fatalities while Aśokottama protects human beings against demons and rebirths in hell, to cite only a few examples. Other deities are often invoked to ward off evil spirits and dispel dangers. They constitute a group of apotropaic figures mainly depicted on the wall-paintings of the north-western wall.

While White Tārā clearly belongs to a group of long-life deities, Green Tārā is most commonly viewed as the saviouress who protects sentient beings from the eight kinds of fear or dangers (Tib. *'phags ma sgrol ma 'jigs pa brgyad las skyob pa*), which have both inner and outer characteristics (i.e. water/attachment, lion/pride, fire/anger *etc.*) [No.18]. Another aspect of Tārā assuming a protective function is the goddess Sitāpatrā who is here depicted with one face and curiously

¹⁷ The existence of an eighth century Sanskrit medical text which would have served for the Tibetan translation has nevertheless been questioned; see Fenner (1996).

holds the parasol in her right hand [No.10]. In Mahāyāna literature, the undefeatable goddess (Skt. *aparajita*) is known to turn aside enemies, malignant forces, and dangers.

Two other female deities empowered with apotropaic abilities are the tribal and forest goddesses Jāṅguli and Parṇāśabarī [No.12 & 19]. Their assimilation into the Buddhist pantheon was made possible through the appropriation of magical and soteriological praxis by Indian siddhas.¹⁸ Davidson recalls that associated with Buddhist tantras are rituals invoking these two female deities in order to cure poison from snake bites and to magically cross over water.¹⁹ The jungle goddess Jāṅguli, whose name was rendered as the “Remover of poison” (Tib. *Dug sel ma*) by Tibetan translators, is here depicted with a snake in her lower left hand. As for the leaf clad Parṇāśabarī, whose natural garment betrays her tribal and forest origin, she is also famous for healing contagious diseases. Finally, a wrathful Vajrapāṇi completes this group [No.15]. He is represented blue in colour with one face and two hands and appears in the form of a rakṣa—literally “one who guards and keeps watch”—stampeding a nest of snakes. He symbolises the power of all the Buddhas and further articulates the apotropaic programme to the protective deities represented on the adjacent wall.

The principal protectors (Tib. *chos skyong*) and guardians (Tib. *srung ma*) painted on the north-eastern wall are six-armed Mahākāla, Yama Dharmarāja and consort, and Śrī Devī. They are considered to be wisdom deities (Tib. *ye shes kyi lha*) and thus belong to a category of protective beings known as supra-mundane guardians (Tib. *jigs rten las 'das pa'i srung ma*). As emanations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas they embody the activity of enlightenment which is twofold; to avert obstacles (i.e. inner, outer, and secret) and to create favourable circumstances for the practitioner. Their presence on each side of the entrance door confirms them in their role of wisdom

¹⁸ It is therefore not fortuitous that these two goddesses are also pictorially connected to the forefathers of the bKa' brgyud pa lineage and 'Brug pa masters depicted in the upper register. The Indian siddha derivation of their tradition has been highlighted in artistic representations from the 12th century onwards. Furthermore, btsun ma Ngag dbang sbying pa, a 'Brug pa nun and researcher of French nationality, was kind enough to inform us that *Dug sel ma* is commonly venerated as an emanation of dPal ldan lha mo and is always represented next to Mahākāla inside 'Brug pa temples. This may also explain the presence of the fierce Nīla Siṃhavaktrā [No.14], who, with Jāṅguli, are located on either side of a pair of 'Brug pa teachers [No.13]. Although traditionally of rNying ma origin, Nīla Siṃhavaktrā is often found represented inside 'Brug pa monasteries in Ladakh. We are again indebted to btsun ma Ngag dbang sbyin pa for these clarifications.

¹⁹ See Davidson (2002: 231).

deities although they may also be venerated as meditational deities (Tib. *yi dam*). With the additional figure of Mahāpita Vaiśravaṇa [No.14], which is depicted above the door, these figures represent the principal dharmapālas propitiated by the dGe lugs pa tradition and the special protectors of its founder Tsong kha pa (i.e. Śaṅbhuja Mahākāla, Yama Dharmarāja, and Vaiśravaṇa riding a lion).

Other guardians represented inside the chapel include mundane deities (Tib. *'jig rten gyi lha*) such as the four great kings (Tib. *rgyal chen sde bzhi*) [15a-d]. These fierce warriors devoted to the protection of the four cardinal points are traditionally represented on the exterior walls of temples. As part of the iconographical programme, they are depicted above the entrance door of the upper temple and border the wealth and prosperity deities, which explains why the figure of Vaiśravaṇa appears in multiple forms; as a dharmapāla on the one hand, and as wealth deity on the other.

Furthermore, the most remarkable group of figures painted on the north-eastern wall is undoubtedly the six riders represented on either side of an overflowing dish containing seven kinds of jewels (Tib. *nor bu cha bdun*). The male riders, with their distinctive white complexion, turbans, and weapons (i.e. quivers of arrows, bows, swords, and whips), can be identified as the autochthonous deities (Tib. *yul lha*) of West Tibet [No.19b-d]. They traditionally ride ashen horses (Tib. *rta ngang dkar*) and, as Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po notes, are not to be found anywhere else in Tibet.²⁰ These local warrior deities are called Mes ba'u in Guge, a Tibetan designation that would seem to suggest a strong patrilineal origin (Tib. *mes po*, "ancestor"). The first male deity rides a horse and holds a whip while performing the gesture of protection and fearlessness with his left hand (Skt. *abhaya mudrā* Tib. *mi 'jigs pa'i phyag rgya*) [No.19b]. The next warrior to the right rides his horse at gallop, cracking a whip from the right hand and granting protection and refuge with his left hand (Skt. *śaraṇagamana mudrā* Tib. *skyabs sbyin gyi phyag rgya*) [No.19c]. The last male figure rides a ram and departs slightly from the two other local deities both in size and depiction [No.19d]. He wears a white turban-like hat, holds a whip in his right hand and performs the gesture of threatening and subjugation (Skt. *kāraṇa mudrā* Tib. *sdig mdzub kyi phyag rgya*).

The presence of three female human riders dressed in typical garments of West Tibet and richly adorned with jewellery and headdresses complete this intriguing equestrian scene. Two of them

²⁰ About the representation of the autochthonous warrior deities of Guge depicted inside the monastery of sNub bkra shis shos gling in Ngari and their diffusion in West Tibet; see Gu ge (2006 : 250).

ride a horse and carry a bowl-like vessel containing offering substances while performing a hand gesture with their other hand [No.19a & 19f]. The last woman rides a goat and stands to the right of what appears to be the main local warrior deity. Quite significantly she carries a male child in her arms, who is dressed in white and wears a white turban [No.19e]. As far as the iconographical composition is concerned, the representation of the three autochthonous warrior deities of West Tibet may well be justified as part of the protective deities painted on the north-eastern wall. Thus said, there is more to this narrative scene than meets the eye and we shall soon return to its interpretation when we discuss the political implications and patronage of these murals.

Finally, the absence of the female protective deity rDo rje chen mo from the wall-paintings of the upper temple must be reported. Although she might have disappeared from the right panel of the north-eastern wall due to the heavy restoration work, the relationship between rDo rje chen mo and the polity of Dangkhar should be investigated further as her long time association with the royal families of both West Tibet and Ladakh makes her a pivotal religious figure for the understanding of the history of the Spiti Valley.²¹

3.3 The Wealth & Prosperity Programme

The wealth and prosperity programme is organised around the figure of Mahāpitā Vaiśravaṇa also known as the master of wealth (Tib. *nor gyi bdag po*) [No.14]. He is surrounded by deities of abundance including his own consort Vasudhārā [No.14d], who is celebrated as Śiskar Apa in Spiti and Lahaul, and who is easily recognisable for she holds a sheaf of corn symbolising a fruitful harvest. The goddess manifests herself under the forms of six-armed Vasudhārā and Vasudhārā from the dhāraṇi [No.14a & 14b]. The group also includes Jambhala and Kṛṣṇa Jambhala, two different manifestations of Vaiśravaṇa [No.14c & 14f]. These deities do not only provide wealth and prosperity for the householder who propitiates them but also preside over harvests and the abundant

²¹ Jahoda remarks that the “relationships between rDo rje chen mo, the royal family and *lo chen* Rin chen bzang po are of ancient origin [...] the case of the royal dispute between the king of Ladakh and the king of Purig, amongst other things concerning Spiti, and its mediation by Rig ’dzin Tshe dbang nor bu presents an example for the importance of this deity also in later historical periods. For instance in the text of the Wamle Treaty, rDo rje chen mo appears among the deities witnessing the treaty and punishing those not adhering to the agreement”, Jahoda (2009 : 54).

supply of goods for the community. Their worship therefore brings wealth, good fortune, and stability, and is viewed as essential for the sustainability and longevity of any polity.

The wealth and prosperity programme is eventually completed by the imperial triumvirate depicting the three forefather Dharma kings of Tibet (i.e. Sron btsan sgam po, Khri srong lde btsan, and Khri ral pa can). Their presence among these deities demonstrates the perennial relationship between wealth, power, and Buddhism, and underlines the dynastic legitimacy narrative at work inside the upper temple.

3.4 Religious affiliation & lineages

The religious programme of the upper temple is overtly of bKa' gdams pa and dGe lugs pa origin as attested by the iconographical composition of the south-western wall with its religious figures and meditational deities. It betrays strong historical and regional trends and is of little surprise since the Spiti Valley and its people were directly concerned with the later diffusion of Buddhism (Tib. *bstan pa phyi dar*).

The prominent position of Atiśa amidst the main recipients of worship on the south-western wall clearly emphasises the Indian tradition with regard to the revitalisation of Buddhism in West Tibet during the late 10th and 11th century. The depiction of the Indian paṇḍita, flanked by his two most famous Tibetan disciples, acts as guarantor of the religious continuity and orthodoxy of Tibetan Buddhism; particularly with respect to the bKa' gdams pa lineage characterized by the representation of its founder 'Brom ston pa. The spiritual legitimacy narrative is evidently supported by the central position assumed by the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni, but also by the representation of his twelve deeds on the side walls of the room. The Indian origin of the Buddhist teaching is complemented by the presence of the six ornaments and the two excellent ones on the north-western wall. The Indian scholars and philosophers led by Nāgārjuna convey an indisputable degree of doctrinal orthodoxy and scholasticism which eventually became the religious brand of the dGe lugs pa school.

The latter is manifest with the presence of its founder and most articulate exponent represented next to Śākyamuni and Atiśa on the south-western wall. The life-size depiction of Tsong kha pa accompanied by his two spiritual heirs attests to the dGe lugs pa penetration into Western Tibet during the 15th century. The quick assimilation of the reformed school was rendered possible due to the

old bKa' gdams pa foundations in the area and the support of the Guge dynasty. Natives of Ngari, who had pursued their scholastic training in Central Tibet, were instrumental in the establishment of Tsong kha pa's tradition. Disciples such as gSang phu ba lHa dbang blo gros, who is credited with the foundation of various temples, and Ngag dbang grags pa, who was appointed abbot of Tholing (Tib. *mTho gling*), were particularly active in the regions of Ngari and Spiti. One must therefore consider the possibility of their pictorial representations among the unidentified dGe lugs pa figures depicted on the murals of the upper temple, such as the two seated masters on either side of Tsong kha pa.

Another group of dGe lugs pa teachers is situated on the right panel of the north-eastern wall and is of significant importance for the study of the upper temple and its wall-paintings [No.20a-e]. Three of them were subject to unfortunate restoration but their general appearance seems to conform to the last two figures painted on the right. They occupy the upper register of the wall and are part of a composition including the glorious queen, Śrī Devī, and her entourage. Their identification is highly conjectural and rests on stylistic comparisons with a scroll painting belonging to the Shelly and Donald Rubin's collection.²²

Although of a completely different facture, the painting bears similarities with the right panel of the north-eastern wall in its overall composition. As the main deity, it represents the glorious goddess Śrī Devī on her mule (Tib. *dPal ldan dmag zor rgyal mo*). The lower register of the painting is occupied by the five sisters of longevity (Tib. *tshe ring mched lnga*), while the upper register shows five seated dGe lugs pa teachers who are nominally identified thanks to an inscription; beginning on the left hand side, Phun tshogs rgya mtsho, mKhar rdo bzod pa rgyal mtsho (1672–1749), sGrub khang pa dGe legs rgya mtsho (1641–1713), the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngag dbang blo bzang rgyal mtsho (1617–1682), and the Fifth Pañchen Lama Blo bzang ye shes (1663–1737). The painting is approximately dated 1700–1799 by Watt, curator of the Himalayan Art Resources website, in spite of the names of four donors recorded on the backside which allow a better dating.²³

²² For a general presentation and photographs of this painting; see the Himalayan Art website, item no.105; <http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm/105.html>.

²³ Phur bu lcog ngag dbang byams pa (1682–1762), Byams pa ye shes, Blo bzang 'phrin las (1697–1761), and the 49th dGa' ldan khri pa Blo bzang dar rgyas (1662–1723). Assuming the painting was commissioned during the life time of these patrons, the year 1723 would then constitute the *terminus ante quem* for its realisation, unless of course Byams pa ye shes had passed away at an earlier date.

The representation of the dGe lugs pa masters on the north-eastern wall lacks some of the attributes and distinctive features which characterise the fine degree of execution of the scroll painting, such as the moustache and the dharma wheel insignia of the Fifth Dalai Lama. However, the central figure tends to conform to the depiction of sGrub khang pa dGe legs rgya mtsho²⁴ as far as the restoration work allows us to judge. He also holds a text in his left hand and seems to perform the hand gesture of protection while the figure of the scroll painting clearly displays the *mudrā* of argumentation. In the absence of better evidence, the comparison between these two compositions suggests at least that the murals of the upper temple and the scroll painting preserved in the Rubin collection could have been executed more or less at the same time, probably during the first half of the 18th century. As we shall see, other aspects of the iconographical programme support this hypothesis.

In light of our current knowledge, it is reasonable to assume that the monastery of Dangkhar became a dGe lugs pa institution by the end of the 15th century. It is certain that after the mid-17th century, the religious and economic control of the central valley of Spiti was under the dGe lugs pa-led central Tibetan government (Tib. *dga' ldan pho brang*).²⁵ The predominance of Tsong kha pa's school in the region is hence well attested for this period and the supervision of dGe lugs pa monasteries within the Spiti Valley and nearby areas was the prerogatives of the incarnate lineage of Lo chen Rin chen bzang po. The main religious affiliation of Dangkhar Monastery, the presence of dGe lugs pa masters, meditational deities, and protectors on the walls of the upper temple is therefore of very little surprise.²⁶

More remarkable, however, is the intrusion of bKa' brgyud pa religious figures as part of the iconographical programme of the upper temple. It starts with the almost canonical depiction of the forefathers of the "white lineage" (Tib. *dkar brgyud*) which is painted on the north-western wall of the chapel [No.5a-i]. The lineage stems from Vajradhara followed by the Indian siddhas Tilopa and Nāropa.

²⁴ sGrub khang pa dGe legs rgya mtsho was a native of Zanskar (Tib. *Zangs dkar*), a region adjacent to Spiti. He travelled to Central Tibet to further his monastic training. He received teachings at Tashi Lhunpo (Tib. *bKra shis lhun po*) and resided mainly at Sera (Tib. *Se ra*) where he was granted with the establishment of meditation centres (Tib. *sgrub khang*) and hermitages (Tib. *ri khrod*) on the mountain situated behind the monastery.

²⁵ For the organisation of the Spiti Valley and the socio-economic role assumed by its monasteries; see Jahoda (2007 & 2008).

²⁶ In 1654, dPal ldan rgya mtsho (c.1601–1674), a native of Dangkhar, became the 40th holder of the Ganden throne (Tib. *dga' ldan khri pa*), the highest position and head of the dGe lugs pa school; see Dung dkar Blo bzang 'phrin las (2002 : 364).

It continues with the representations of Mar pa lo tswa ba (1012–1097) and his renowned disciple Mi la ras pa (1040–1123). The following figures depart slightly from traditional iconographical conventions but can be asserted as Mi la ras pa's foremost disciples and followers with, to his left, sGam po pa (1079–1153), followed by Ras chung pa (1085–1161), Phag mo gru pa (1100–1170), and finally Gling chen ras pa (1128–1188).

As one of the main founder figures of the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud lineage, Gling chen ras pa announces the presence of the sub-sect on the walls of the upper temple. His depiction possibly recalls biographical elements reflecting the tension between ideals of peripatetic ascetic lifestyle and the more institutionalised aspect of the tradition, which eventually came to characterise the development of the 'Brug pa school.²⁷ While his teacher Phag mo gru pa was a strong advocate of monasticism, Gling chen ras pa's loss of monastic vows and his commitment to yogic practices would seem to be expressed by a loosely worn monastic red shawl uncovering a bare right arm, and a meditation band (Tib. *sgom thag*) similar to those of the cotton clad yogis Mi la ras pa and Ras chung pa. As his hagiographies recall, Gling chen ras pa's early exposure to bKa' gdams pa teachings would never turn him into a fine dialectician. Thus said, he proved himself to be a talented author of mystic songs (Tib. *mnyam mgur*) and tantric treaties which certainly explains why he is represented with a bundle of scriptures on his lap. As previously established, some of the apotropaic deities of the north-western walls were distinctively worshipped by the 'Brug pa followers. In this regard, the representation of Vajrapāṇi right below Gling chen ras pa may well be intentional as a tantric exegesis entitled *A Ritual of the Maṇḍala of the Glorious Bhagavan Vajrapāṇi* was composed by the founder of the 'Brug pa school.²⁸

Still on the same wall, two pairs of distinctively bearded teachers wearing red hats can be asserted as 'Brug pa clerics although their individual identification is not yet clear [No.9 & 13]. The presence of the 'Brug pa lineage is even more evidently attested with the unique depiction of sTag tshang ras pa (1574–1651) on the south-western wall. Easily recognisable from his white garments and turban, his white pearl necklace and black disc-like earrings, his representation on the walls of the upper temple conforms to an established iconographical scheme adopted at the Shey (Tib. *Shel*) and Hemis

²⁷ See Blythe Miller (2005).

²⁸ *bCom ldan 'das dpal phyag na rdo rje'i dkyil 'khor cho ga*. For his other works, see Blythe Miller (2005 : 388).

(Tib. *He mis*) monasteries in Ladakh.²⁹ His presence on the main devotional wall of the chapel is particularly remarkable as it conveys a well-chosen religious and political message. Represented among the bKa' gdams pa figures of the left panel and spatially paired with the Indian siddha Nāropa, it recalls that sTag tshang ras pa was inheritor of both Atiśa's tradition and Nāropa's yogic instructions which he pursued while sojourning at Namgyal Lhunpo (Tib. *rNam rgyal lhun po*) in Central Tibet.³⁰ Moreover, a passage of his hagiography tells how he received, in a dream, the empowerment of the meditational deity Cakrasaṃvara who is depicted right above him [No.15].³¹

Even more significant is his involvement in the cultural sphere of West Tibet which is based, as Schwieger explains, on "a vague prophecy of his teacher lHa-rtse-ba that he would possess a karmic relationship for the benefit of living beings in the area of mNga'-ris".³² The intrepid 'Brug pa pilgrim (Tib. *pho rgod*) went on five different journeys during which he eventually travelled to the western Himalayas and beyond in search of holy Buddhist places. He travelled through Kinnaur (Tib. *Khu nu*) and stayed in Zanskar and Lahaul (Tib. *Gar zha*) for short periods of time before being invited by the king of Ladakh. It would therefore seem reasonable to assume that he might also have visited Spiti during his pilgrimage to Oḍḍiyāna (Tib. *U rgyan*). It is in his role as King Seng ge nram rgyal's chaplain that he would eventually contribute to seal the bond between the 'Brug pa order and the royal family of Ladakh. The special relationship of priest and patron, which is exemplified by the lives of sTag tshang ras pa and King Seng ge nram rgyal, will prove to be instrumental in highlighting the political and cultural context in which the upper temple was possibly consecrated. As we shall discuss, the narrative scene depicted below the left panel should be read in light of the intricate political and cultural ties that prevailed between the Kingdom of Ladakh and the valley of Spiti after the conquest of the latter by King Seng ge nram rgyal in 1630.

Ultimately, the representation within the iconographical programme of O rgyan Ngag dbang rgya mtsho, better known as sTag tshang ras pa, along with Atiśa, 'Brom ston pa, and Nāropa,

²⁹ According to btsun ma Ngag dbang sbyin pa, early depictions of sTag tshang ras pa from the 17th century, as can be observed in Ladakhi shrines, tend to show him in the same attitude as Mi la ras pa, while the more conventional depictions of the Hemis, Shey, and Dangkhār monasteries, are clearly attributed to the next century. Personal communication, March 2013; see Nawang Jinpa *forthcoming*.

³⁰ See Schwieger (1996 : 89).

³¹ See Schwieger (1996 : 100).

³² See Schwieger (1996 : 104).

serves to underline a double religious filiation. It emphasises the common bKa' gdams pa origin of both the pictorially dominant dGe lugs pa order and the intruding figures of the bKa' brgyud pa and 'Brug pa lineages.

3.5 Dynastic Legitimacy

Within the Buddhist realm, the legitimacy of the tradition does not only rest on a shared conception of orthodox doctrines, praxis, and the unbroken transmission lineage, but would also need to be sanctified by a ruling power at the end of the day. From the Tibetan and Himalayan perspective, the various religious narratives are more often than not rooted in the secular and regional context of their production, as Buddhist communities would hardly thrive and perhaps not even survive without the protection and financial support of a royal family. Bearing this in mind, the iconographical programme of the upper temple is no exception. It articulates local and global elements in order to retrace the multiplex conditions that concurred to the formation of the polity of Spiti, and eventually legitimates its state at the time of the consecration of the upper temple. In this regard, the central panel of the north-eastern wall is of particular interest.

As previously observed, the wealth and prosperity programme depicted above the entrance door of the chapel is intriguingly completed by the presence of the three Tibetan Dharma kings, Srong btsan sgam po, Khri srong lde btsan, and Khri ral pa can, to which Śāntarakṣita, the Indian abbot who initiated the first Tibetan monastic community, was added. Their association with the wealth deities and the four Lokapāla helps to convey a sense of continuity with a time when economic prosperity and political stability prevailed throughout the Tibetan Empire. Prompted by 11th- 12th century literary works such as the *sBa bzhed*, *Ma Ni bka' 'bum* and *bKa' chems ka khol ma*, the conversion of the Land of Snows to Buddhism in the course of the 7th- 8th centuries was rewritten through a cosmological narrative in which Tibet was predestined by Buddha Śākyamuni himself to become a Buddhist realm centred around the figure of Avalokiteśvara and his multiple emanations (e.g. Srong btsan sgam po). The persistence of the theme and its aesthetic expressions hence concur to establish the universal character of Buddhism, the legitimacy of the state, and the indivisibility between the two.

Additionally, the lower register of the wealth and prosperity programme is occupied by the autochthonous warrior deities of West

Tibet and their female counterparts. Besides their role as protectors and guardians, we would like to suggest that they assume the anthropological function of *patres genitores* of the people of Guge. The likely derivation of the name Mes ba'u from *mes/mes po* would bear witness to their role of ancestors, forefathers, and progenitors. This symbolic kinship between the autochthonous deities (Tib. *yul lha*) and the ladies of West Tibet would thus explain the representation of a young boy in the arms of the woman riding a goat [No.19e]. The male heir, whose skin tone is distinctively of the women and not of the deities, wears a white garment and turban similar to the local warriors. The iconographical scheme composed of a noble woman wearing a sumptuous attire characteristic of West Tibet who holds in her arms a male child clad in white reappears within the narrative scene of the south-western wall and therefore deserves further consideration.

If our interpretation of the equestrian scene proves to be correct, the narrative depicts the formation of the Kingdom of Guge-Purang (Tib. *Pu hrang*) by King sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon in the 10th century. In the light of Tibetan historiography, the annexation of the western territories by Nyi ma mgon was rendered possible due to his bloodline and, observes Petech, to the support of "two families of the highest nobility [...] who had played a role during the last two reigns of the monarchy".³³ In addition to the aura attached to the person of Nyi ma mgon, the establishment of the West Tibetan kingdom was facilitated by the formation of matrimonial alliances with locals and the exploitation and promotion of economic resources.

From his first wife,³⁴ King Nyi ma mgon had three sons collectively known as the three protectors of Töd (Tib. *stod kyi mgon gsum*).³⁵ After the demise of Nyi ma mgon in the second quarter of the 10th century, the kingdom of the three western dominions (Tib. *stod mNga' ris skor gsum*) was subsequently divided by his three sons.

³³ See Petech (1997 : 231).

³⁴ Tibetan sources record the names of two different ladies for Nyi ma mgon's first wife. According to the *Ladakh Chronicle* (Tib. *La dwags rgyal rabs*), Nyi ma mgon married 'Bro za 'Khor skyong from the 'Bro nobility of Purang, an aristocratic clan which played a major role during the Tibetan Empire as the mothers of Khri ral pa can and Glang dar ma belonged to that family. Following Snellgrove's suggestion, Petech notes that "there is a possibility that the creation of the West Tibetan kingdom was due to the initiative of this clan, which invited sKyid-lde Nyi-ma-mgon to their country in order to give a cover of legitimacy to their local power". The possible matrimonial alliance between Nyi ma mgon and a lady from the 'Bro family of Purang upon the request of the latter would undoubtedly bring grist to the mill of our interpretation; see Petech (1997 : 231-232)

³⁵ We have purposefully translated the term *mgon* as protector, although it could simply refer to the dynastic characteristic of the royal family of Guge.

dPal gyi lde Rig pa mgon inherited Maryül (i.e. Ladakh), bKra shis mgon received Guge and Purang, and lDe gtsug mgon took Spiti, Kinnaur, Lahaul, and Zanskar.³⁶

The meaning of the iconographical depiction of the territorial deities and the ladies of West Tibet would hence hinge upon the possible conflation over time between the local warrior deities and the *mGon* dynasty, founders and protectors (Tib. *mgon*) of the realm. The equestrian scene would therefore serve a threefold purpose. It would first reinforce the post-10th century narrative of an imperial golden age illustrated by the three forefather Dharma kings of Tibet, then legitimate the establishment of the kingdom of West Tibet by one of their successors, and finally emphasise the common kinship shared by the people of the three dominions (Tib. *skor gsum*).

Among the sub-principalities of Western Tibet, the small kingdom of Zangla (Tib. *bZang la*) in Zanskar has articulated the same historical continuity, exploiting very similar cultural elements to position its own dynasty as a direct heir to the central Tibetan imperial period. This was first observed in the late 70s when Dargyay recorded donor chronicles (Tib. *chab brjod*), a type of historical document added to embellished manuscripts, which appears to be specific to the dynasty of Zangla.³⁷ These documents tend to follow the same literary pattern. After praising the triple object of refuge (Tib. *dkon mchog gsum*) and offering a eulogy to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and lamas, the donor chronicles reaffirm and celebrate the role performed by the early Tibetan kings, ministers, and patrons of the Yarlung dynasty as “they brought the light of the teaching to the darkness which hovered at this time over the Tibetan country”. A cosmological narrative explaining how Zanskar eventually became part of that sacred geography is then expounded. Occasionally, Nyi ma mgon is recalled to our attention as the founder of the Kingdom of Ngari and the forefather of the royal house of Zanskar. Furthermore, these texts consistently commemorate the works of masters of the later diffusion, in particular those of Atiśa, 'Brom ston pa, and the translator rNgog Legs pa'i shes rab—along with Mar pa and Mi la ras pa of the bKa' brgyud pa school—who paved the road for the establishment of the dGe lugs pa order in the area, which is praised in the next paragraph. Finally, the chronicles conclude by paying tribute to the meritorious acts of the donors.

As a literary or iconographical contrivance, the religious and secular figures depicted inside the upper temple and those same individuals who are praised in the donor chronicles of Zanskar

³⁶ For a chronological account of this period; see Vitali (2003).

³⁷ See Dargyay (1987).

establish and promote an indisputable sense of spiritual continuity and dynastic legitimacy for polities situated at the spatial and temporal margins of the Tibetan Buddhist realm. Not so surprisingly, the inhabitants of Zangla still welcome their local rulers as the direct descendants of King Glang dar ma.³⁸

3.6 The Consecration-Banquet Scene: A Narrative Cornerstone [Fig.7a-b]

The narrative scene depicted in the lower right hand side of the south-western wall is undeniably the key to the understanding of the iconographical programme of the upper temple [No.21]. The scene is part of the lower frieze and comes after the representations of the seven possessions of a universal monarch and the eight great Bodhisattvas [No.19&20]. The image has unfortunately suffered severe flaking and loss of paint. Furthermore, it appears that the main figures were systematically and tragically defaced.

The action of the scene takes place outside and focuses on a group of celebrants seated in front of a screen-like curtain with a flower pattern with hanging at the top. Two Buddhas situated above the curtain are witnessing the scene. The Buddha on the right is no longer visible except for his mandorla. The one on the left is clearly Amitāyus.³⁹ The nine banqueters, whose heads are encircled by halos, are of different sizes attesting to their importance and rank. The tallest figure on the left hand side presides over the congregation. He holds a rosary in his hands and wears a red Tibetan dress with a white shirt appearing out of his right sleeve. The rest of the figure is irremediably damaged. The following character, slightly smaller in size, wears a monastic robe and a red hat with a folded rim bordered in white. He performs a hand gesture with his right hand and holds a scripture on his lap with the left. The next figure wears a Tibetan red dress with a brown trim, a white shirt underneath, and a white turban topped with a red cone on his head. He holds a cup in front of his chest with the right hand. His left hand is resting on his lap, a white jewel in the palm. The next six banqueters are of smaller but equal sizes. The first three figures are men. They hold a vessel in front of their chests and show only minor changes in their attire. The remaining figures are ladies of nobility who are being assisted by two

³⁸ See Dargyay (1987).

³⁹ The presence of Amitāyus as the main witness and recipient of a consecration scene is also attested inside the red temple (Tib. *Lha khang dmar po*) at Tsaparang where the whole scene is clearly organised around the Buddha of infinite life, or longevity; see Blo bzang tshe ring (2011 : vol.1, 50-55).

standing women of even smaller size. They wear the traditional costume of West Tibet composed of a black and red Tibetan dress with striped sleeves, and a red cape. They have headdresses made of pearls and wear multiple necklaces around their necks. The first two women hold their hands in what appears to be the meditation gesture. Seated at the extreme right of the congregation, the last lady has a child in her arms. The boy is clad in white and wears a red necklace. The details of his face are no longer visible.

In front of the celebrants are tables on which dishes of different shape and size are arranged with a multitude of colourful gems. Round jewels of a much bigger dimension overflow from gigantic containers (Tib. *zangs khog*) and are scattered everywhere on the floor. The source of this profusion is a man standing to the right of the main banqueter. With his black hair knotted on top of his head, he holds on his left shoulder a cornucopian basket out of which emerges a shower of gems, conches, and other kinds of jewels. In the midst of this scene of exuberant wealth, female and male attendants carry large beverage containers (Tib. *khruṅg rkyan*) and dishes towards the leading figure.

The rest of the scene is dominated by two groups of women wearing traditional Western Tibetan garments, jewels, and headdresses. They are dancing (Tib. *sgor gzhas*) to the sounds of drums, oboes (Tib. *sur sna*), and a stringed instrument (Tib. *sgra snyan*). This performance announces the coming of a convoy. The delegation is led by a horse riding herald surrounded by armed soldiers with spears and banners. In front of them, four mules (Tib. *khal drel*) are carrying a tribute made of bags and bundles of material. Finally, a reined and saddled horse is led by a walking man at the rear of the convoy.

The iconographical scheme represented here is reminiscent of other murals in West Tibet. Musicians, women dancers, loaded mules, offerings, vessels, bags, and celebrants constitute some of the formal minimal units of this scheme. Yet, it is difficult to establish whether similar scenes depicted at Tsaparang (Tib. *rTsa rang*), for example, and the image of the upper temple represent the same iconographical theme as many elements in the latter are missing.⁴⁰ One of these elements is the presence of beasts of burden and labourers carrying wooden planks and construction materials.

In any case, these narrative scenes involving strong regional and cultural elements along with historical figures, such as sovereigns, religious hierarchs, and donors, must be understood in relation to the

⁴⁰ For instance inside the white and red temples; see 'Phrin las mthath phyin (2001 : 146-157) and Blo bzang tshe ring (2011 : vol.2, 113-118).

religious edifice within which they came to be depicted. Although the iconographical composition of this type of scene would demand further investigations, their artistic association and semantic assimilation to the religious programme of these buildings is rather unlikely. As a result, it seems reasonable to argue that these scenes celebrate, sometimes together, the foundation and consecration of these edifices.⁴¹ Following the premise that what is being depicted is a temple consecration, or the celebrations accompanying the edification of the upper temple at the very least, what does that image tell us about the identity of the main figures?⁴²

In the absence of any kneeling or seated laypeople who could be identified as additional donors, it seems reasonable to conclude that the main celebrant seated to the far left of the banqueters is not only the actual benefactor and patron of the upper temple but also a man of considerable importance and prestige. His association with a member of the clergy standing to his left would then suggest the presence of a sovereign and his court spiritual adviser (Tib. *dbu bla*). The preceding iconographical themes depicted within the frieze, showing the seven precious possessions of a *cakravartin* and the eight close sons (i.e. Bodhisattvas), already position him as being a universal ruler of great altruistic activity. The historical identification of the monarch will be discussed shortly.

For this reason, the religious affiliation of the royal chaplain is of concern to us. Based on iconographical elements alone, it seems reasonable to argue that the priest belongs to the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud lineage as his hat is very similar to those of at least two of the 'Brug pa masters depicted on the north-western wall [No.9a & 13a]. As for the text in his left hand, it must be viewed as either a consecration manual or an iconographical attribute that should facilitate his identification. The representation of the bKa' brgyud pa lineage and the presence of 'Brug pa historical figures (e.g. sTag tshang ras pa) on the walls of a small religious edifice located within the saturated dGe lugs pa environment of the Spiti Valley, and the absence of institutions belonging to the former in the area establish as a consequence the foreign origin of both the monarch and his chaplain.

Although smaller in size, the third man from the left could also be a foreign dignitary as he stands in line with the monarch and the royal priest. As for the remaining figures, they certainly represent

⁴¹ The representations of donor figures, which are quite common in the Buddhist world, can also be found on stone reliefs, bronzes, and manuscripts.

⁴² In 1933, Tucci and Ghersi already suspected that the narrative image of the south-western wall represented « scenes of events taking place at the foundation of the temple »; see Tucci (1935 : 51).

people of the Spitian nobility. The identification of their rank, title, and individual identity remains uncertain.⁴³

If the depicted monarch can be accounted for the construction of the chapel, it is however not clear who the main wealth supplying figure is. It is our contention however that the cornucopia of gems should be interpreted as a metaphorical expression of the prosperity granted by the foreign ruler celebrated in the scene. Conversely, the delegation with its loaded mules and soldiers may well be the expression of a tribute paid to the monarch in return for his kindness and protection towards the inhabitants of Dangkhar. This interpretation, as we shall see now, is well supported by historical evidence. The following section attempts to address the political and cultural conditions that prevailed at the time of the foundation of the upper temple, and last but not least to suggest a name for its patron.

4. Political & Cultural Contextualisation

The annexation of the old Kingdom of Guge by King Seng ge rnam rgyal in 1630 represents not only the culmination of Ladakhi political power in the western Himalayas but also marks the incorporation of Spiti into the Kingdom of Ladakh. Along with a number of other feudatory kingdoms and sub-principalities, Spiti was from then onward loosely administered by governors appointed by the kings of Ladakh. The nature of Ladakhi control over the Spiti Valley, until its annexation by Rāja Gulab Singh round 1840, is still ambiguous, and the administration of the main dGe lugs pa monasteries of the valley seems to have remained under the jurisdiction of the central Tibetan government.

Following the conquest of the area, the rNam rgyal dynasty seems to have established a palace (Tib. *Pho brang*) in Kaza (Tib. *mKhar tse*) at a well-located distance between the capital Dangkhar and the monastery of Kyi (Tib. *dKyil*) from where the incarnations of Lo chen Rin chen bzang po acted as the main dGe lugs pa religious authority in the valley.⁴⁴ It is probable that a castle meant as a garrison post was also built on top of the ridge during that time, dominating both the village and the monastic complex of Dangkhar.⁴⁵ It eventually became the seat of governors (Tib. *no no*) of unclear origin, who, according to Petech, were entitled to be called “king” along with

⁴³ For preliminary observations regarding the social organisation at Dangkhar; see Laurent (2011).

⁴⁴ See Tucci (1935 : 41, n1).

⁴⁵ See Laurent (2010).

seven other feudatory chiefs of the Kingdom of Ladakh.⁴⁶ Other functionaries and representatives of the Ladakhi administration residing at Dangkhār were castellans (Tib. *mkhar dpon*) and ministers (Tib. *blon po*).⁴⁷ The origin of these dignitaries cannot be ascertained at present and their occurrences in historical sources and inscriptions are few and far between.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the political relationship between Spiti and Ladakh was frequently disrupted for short periods of time during which Spiti would either return under the political control of the Central Tibetan government (i.e. between 1683 and 1687) or under the authority of neighbouring principalities, such as Kulu in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, and Purig between 1734 and 1758. The control of commercial routes, trade activities, and the levying of taxes were, however, sensitive aspects of the political control exerted by the Kingdom of Ladakh over Spiti. The socio-economic conditions in Spiti during the 17th - 19th century, which have been documented by Jahoda, tend to indicate that the political interference with the local power structures were unobtrusive, and were essentially confined to the collection of taxes levied in kind (i.e. barley). While the administrative system (Tib. *chos gzhis*) in Spiti contributed to the economic sustainability of its monasteries on the one hand, an annual tribute composed of funds, grain, cloth, and paper was also due to the kings of Ladakh.⁴⁹

As a place of conjoined political and religious significance, the monastery of Dangkhār bears witness to these customs. In 2010, three partially dissimulated granaries adjusted within the walls of the main building were documented by the Graz University of Technology. They constitute archaeological evidence attesting customary practices which lasted until the first half of the 20th century.⁵⁰ Furthermore, a detail of the consecration-banquet scene, represented on the south-western wall of the upper temple, seems to illustrate, as we have seen, the payment of a tribute. The sacks of grains and bundles of cloth loaded on the back of the mules would have been part of the annual revenues paid to the kings of Ladakh. The presence of soldiers escorting the convoy clearly reinforces this interpretation as the tribute would also have included large amounts of money.

The political authority and legitimacy of the kings of Ladakh was not only based on their ability to appoint functionaries, levy taxes, and dispatch armed contingents to the edges of the realm. As

⁴⁶ See Petech (1977 : 155).

⁴⁷ See Laurent (2011).

⁴⁸ See Laurent (2010).

⁴⁹ Jahoda (2007, 2008 & 2009).

⁵⁰ Laurent (2010).

Buddhist monarchs they were entrusted with protecting the doctrine, supporting monastic institutions, and patronising the construction of religious edifices both in Ladakh and in West Tibet. Despite the political hegemony of the Central Tibetan government and the religious prevalence of the dGe lugs pa school throughout the Himalayan belt, other polities may have favoured different religious orders in the course of their history. From the 17th century onwards, the rNam rgyal dynasty established a personal relationship with the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud tradition. The nomination of sTag tshang ras pa as court chaplain during the reign of King Seng ge rnyam rgyal is after all emblematic of that period and for that very same reason came to be praised on the walls of the upper temple.

However, political tensions between the Kingdom of Ladakh and Tibet often proved to be detrimental to ecumenical inclinations and religious freedom. In the 17th century, the Ladakhi spiritual allegiance to the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud order under the reign of King bDe ldan rnam rgyal (r. 1642–1694) led in part to the Ladakh-Tibet-Mughal war of 1679-1684. The interference of Ladakh in a dispute opposing Lhasa and the Kingdom of Bhutan, another 'Brug pa supporting state, and the apparent hostility of bDe ldan rnam rgyal towards dGe lugs pa institutions in the western Himalayas, severely antagonised Tibet.⁵¹

⁵¹ From the point of view of central Tibetan historiography, the Lhasa regent Sang rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705) notes “[The king of] Ladakh, Seng ge rnam rgyal, out of religious tolerance, was relatively fond of the dGe lugs pa tradition. But later on, in accordance with the saying that a wicked child comes from an extinct lineage and malevolent thoughts come from the decrease of merits, being lost in his own thoughts, his devotion towards the 'Brug pa order increased and all the dGe lugs pa monasteries of Ngari became impoverished. Lately, the descendant of the Dharma king of Tibet, Lha bla ma Zhi ba 'od, reincarnation of the stainless prince Mu tig btsan po, established the monastic college of Tholing where under the patron-priest relationship of the king of Ngari, rNam rgyal lde dpal bzang po, and the master Ngag dbang grags pa, the dGe lugs pa order took its true colour. But as the scriptures recall “a butter lamp does not shine forth from a land infested with venomous snakes”. And although the local laity and clergy were largely and clearly faithful to the dGe lugs pa sect, the monastic community [of Tholing] was reduced to thirty monks due to the pernicious blindness of bDe ldan rnam rgyal who had cast the shadow of destitution upon the kingdom and the church alike”.

La dwags seng ge rnam rgyal phan grub mtha' ris med nas dge lugs la nye ba tsam yod 'dra yang | rigs brgyud zad kar bu ngan dang bsod nams zad kar bsam ngan skye ba'i dpe bzhin phyis skor zhal thur gzigs la thug pas 'brug phyogs su dad 'dun ches pa'i mnga' ris phyogs kyi dge dgon tshang ma nyag phra zhing | nye lam bod chos rgyal gyi gdung dri ma med pa lha sras mu tig btsan po'i skye srid lha bla ma zhi ba 'od kyis btab pa'i mtho ldang gi chos sde 'di nyid mnga' bdag rnam rgyal lde dpal bzang pod dang chos rje ngag dbang grags pa mchod yon nas dge lugs rnam dag pa'i tshos mdog yin rung | bstan bcos las | sbrul gdug gnas pa'i sa phyogs su | | sgron me gsal kyang 'od mi 'byin | | zhes yul mi skya ser byings dge lugs la dad pa'i snang ba dkar kyang bde ldan rnam

In this context, the patronage and construction of the upper temple during the Ladakhi hegemony in West Tibet must be attributed to a member of the rNam rgyal dynasty who was eager to promote religious values and historical bonds shared by the people of Spiti, Ladakh, and Tibet. Based on the popularity of the figure of sTag tshang ras pa and its iconographical development on the murals of Ladakh, along with the identification of the five dGe lugs pa masters of the north-western wall and the establishment of the iconographical theme to which they belong, it is likely that the upper temple was constructed sometime during the first half of the 18th century, in all probability during the reign of King Nyi ma rnam rgyal (r. 1694–1729). Succeeding the disastrous reign of bDe ldan rnam rgyal, King Nyi ma rnam rgyal successfully managed to bring back harmonious relationships with Lhasa and the dGe lugs pa order. He first married bSod nams rgya mtsho, a lady belonging to the nobility of Central Tibet, who was escorted to Ladakh by two representatives of the government in 1694.⁵² Ngag dbang blo bzang bstan 'dzin, who was his younger brother and a monk, visited Tashi Lhunpo and Lhasa where he had an audience with the young 6th Dalai Lama between 1697 and 1699. The main dGe lugs pa monasteries of Ladakh along with those of other schools were eventually placed under the authority of Drepung monastery (Tib. *'Bras spungs*). Emulating his great-grandfather King Seng ge rnam rgyal, and regardless of his support to Tsong kha pa's followers, Nyi ma rnam rgyal remained devoted to the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud sect and appointed Ngag bdang rgyal mtshan (1647–1732), an eminent master from Bhutan, as the spiritual advisor of the Ladakhi court.⁵³

In several epigraphic inscriptions and literary source from Ladakh, Nyi ma rnam rgyal is addressed as universal monarch (Tib. *'khor lo sgyur rgyal*),⁵⁴ great dharma king (Tib. *chos rgyal chen po*),⁵⁵ or Bodhisattva dharma king (Tib. *chos kyi rgyal po sems dpa' chen po*) whose devotional yearning was meant to establish all sentient beings in vast fields of merits.⁵⁶ His activity as a patron and protector of the

rgyal gyi gdug pa'i mun pas bsgrigs te grwa pa sum cu skor tsam las chos srid gnyis ka shin tu nyag phra ba zhiḡ 'dug pa l; see *Vaidūrya ser po* (1998 : 460).

⁵² For the main events related to the life of Nyi ma rnam rgyal; see Petech (1977 : 81-100).

⁵³ Ngag dbang rgyal mtshan arrived in Ladakh in 1706 where he acted as priest court until 1712; see Yontan Dargay & Sørensen (2008 : 133-176).

⁵⁴ Stone inscription, Sl. No.2, Phyang, Ladakh; see Jina (1998 : 3).

⁵⁵ Hymn to King Nyi ma rnam rgyal, Sl. No.67, Saspol, Ladakh; see Francke & Jina (2003 : 90).

⁵⁶ "Nyi ma rnam rgyal was bestowed the kingship and through his deep aspiration of Bodhisattva dharma king commissioned a great variety of sacred representations [to establish] all migratory beings in vast fields of merits". *Nyi ma*

doctrine was therefore irrespective of political or sectarian allegiance. As we are informed, "The Dharma king presented gold water and votive lamps to Lhasa and Samye in particular, and to every temple of Tibet. He made offerings to all lamas without preference and served tea and victuals to monastic congregations. He honoured all the monasteries placed under him, large and small, without discrimination. He voluntarily commissioned statues made of gold and silver, scriptures, and erected walls made of carved maṇi slates. He ordered the printing of consecration formulae, small, medium, and large, for the construction of sacred images. [...] He printed the praise to Mañjuśrī *Gang blo smon lam*, the *Shes bya mkha' dbyings*, the *gSer 'od g.yang skyabs*, the complete Buddhist canon, and the *Le bdun*, and bestowed dharma gifts to all laypeople and monastics. Prayer wheels made of gold, silver, and copper, as well as a great variety of pious dhāraṇī prints were realised".⁵⁷ Nyi ma rnam rgyal abdicated in 1729, leaving the throne to his son bDe skyong rnam rgyal, and eventually passed away in 1739.

Likewise, his activity as a patron in Spiti is well attested by material evidence and so corroborates aspects of the literary tradition. While visiting the area in 1933, Tucci recorded inscriptions which recall that the Nyi ma rnam rgyal financed the renovation of the Sa skya pa monastery of Spiti. On their way up to the monastery, passing by a long maṇi wall, Tucci and Ghersi examined and photographed countless votive inscriptions bearing the name of King Nyi ma rnam rgyal, and occasionally those of local dignitaries as well.⁵⁸

Based on the above, it seems reasonable to say that the king of Ladakh would not have limited his devotional activity to the Sa skya monastery alone but would have contributed to the realisation of sacred images and the construction of religious edifices in other parts of the Spiti Valley as well. The monastic complex of Tabo must

rnam rgyal gyis rgyal srid la mnga' gsol ba'i chos kyi rgyal po sems dpa' chen po'i thugs smon lam chen pos sku gsung thugs rten la sogs 'gro ba yongs kyi bsod nam bzhin du mang du bzheng |; see *Ladakh Chronicle* (1987 : 63).

⁵⁷ *IHa sa bsam yas kyi btsos pa'i bod kyi gtsug lag khang thams cad la gser chab | dkar me | bla ma ris med skyabs rten | dge baun sogs la mang skol | rang zhabs kyi chos lde che chung thams cad la | bsnyen bkur ris med | gser dngul gyi rgyu las | rang mos kyi (kyis) lha sku | gsung rab | rdza nang gi ma Ni ring mo | sku gsung thugs rten bzheng rgyu'i gzung bar rgyas bsodus | 'jam sdud bzang gsum | 'jam dbyangs bstod pa gang blo smon lam | shes bya kha (mkha') dbyings | gser 'od g.yang skyabs | bka' sgyur ro cog | le bdun | par byas legs par bsgrub nas | skya ser thams cad chos sbyin | gser dngul zangs gsum gyis ma Ni the skor | chos kyi zung bar (gzungs par) sna mang bsgrub |.* Amendments given in brackets are ours; see *Ladakh Chronicle* (1987 : 64-65).

⁵⁸ Unfortunately, the recording of these inscriptions and the photographs taken by Tucci were not at our disposal for further study; see Tucci (1935 : 41 n.1, 43-44).

certainly have been the recipient of such largesse and it would not be surprising to find further evidence of King Nyi ma rnam rgyal's patronage *in situ*. As for the capital Dangkhār, with its established dGe lugs pa monastery and newly built castle, it would have deserved a tangible testimony of the Ladakhi political and religious power over the area.

Finally, an excerpt from a stone inscription, which was recorded in Lamayuru (Tib. *Bla ma g.yung drung*) in Ladakh, attests that King Nyi ma rnam rgyal was popularly and locally perceived as the direct and rightful heir of the Kingdom of Guge. The passage reads:

[...] I respectfully pay homage to the translators and paṇḍitas, compassionate Bodhisattvas, and to the Dharma king and queen.

Hūm! The Victorious One has blessed the three precious gems of Kailash where resided the three *mGon* kings of the three western dominions.

Their descendants, the Dharma king Nyi ma rnam rgyal together with his son, are now sitting on the great leonine throne of the mighty kingdom of Ladakh-Maryül in the glorious and great fortress of Leh [...].⁵⁹

Literary documents and epigraphic inscriptions would thus seem to effectively position the king of Ladakh as the patron of the upper temple where he appears as a universal monarch whose spiritual credence and political authority would have gone back to the time of King sKyid lde Nyi ma mgon, and perhaps even beyond.

5. Conclusion

Located half way between the ancient monastery, the old village, and the castle of the governor, the upper temple probably never belonged *sensu stricto* to the monastic complex of Dangkhār. This would explain why even today its maintenance and the daily offering of a butter lamp behove to the villagers and the monks to do so. Based on its dimensions and the nature of the iconographical programme, it can be surmised that the chapel did not assume any specific religious

⁵⁹ *Thugs rze (rje) rmad du byung bai (ba'i) lo pan dang | chos rgyal yab yum rnams la gus pas 'adud ('dud) | hung (hūm) rgyal bas byin rlabs gnas (gangs/gnas) ri mchog gsum du | mua ris (mnga' ris) skor gsum rgyal po mgon gsum byung | de la brgyad brgyas (rgyud rgyas) de la dags (la dwags) mar yul gyi rgyal khab chen po gle (sle) chen dpal mkhar gyi | da lha (da lta) sing geai (sing ge'i) khri chen la bsti bai chos rgyal nyi ma rnam rgyal yam sras (yab sras) bcas |*. The transliteration follows Jina's while the translation and amendments given in brackets are ours; see Jina (1998 : 7).

purpose. It was neither a place for communal services, ritualistic practices, or initiations.

The skilful composition of its murals, organised around fourteen figures of almost life-size dimension, contributes to highlight iconographical themes which would have been appreciated differently by the religious expert, the lay devotee, the local farmer, or a member of the Spitian nobility. The variety of its themes, as we have demonstrated, covers most of the essential aspects of the Buddhist tradition in its Indo-Tibetan form. The health and longevity programme addresses the treatment of diseases, the purification of negative karma, and the restoration of the Bodhisattva vows. The propitiation of apotropaic and protective deities facilitates the removal of internal and external obstacles. The representation of worldly protectors and wealth deities answers both religious and domestic needs. They secure and ensure the prosperity and means of the household, the monastery, and the community at large. The syntagmatic association to this group of somewhat exogenous elements, such as the three Dharma kings of Central Tibet and the autochthonous deities of Ngari, is most peculiar. Their presence on the entrance wall of an 18th century temple in Spiti instigates an interesting shift of narrative which we have tried to explain. As the three main recipients of worship and principal religious figures, the depictions of Sākyamuni, Atiśa, and Tsong kha pa constitute a cultural trend well attested on murals of West Tibet after the 15th century. As a result, the wall-paintings necessarily include the principal dharma protectors and meditational deities worshipped by the dGe lugs pa tradition which largely pervades the iconographical programme. However, the depiction of bKa' brgyud pa and 'Brug pa figures suggests external influences in the composition of the iconographical programme as the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud order is mostly absent from the Spitian religious landscape. Headed by the 17th century sTag tshang ras pa, who is represented among the secondary figures of the main devotional wall, the 'Brug pa presence evidently points towards the neighbouring Kingdom of Ladakh.

In this context, cultural, religious and historical elements, both local and global, converge together in order to celebrate the patron of the temple, who is portrayed as a religious monarch and a son of the Buddhas. Although the iconographical programme is of dGe lugs pa tenor, the royal benefactor assesses his spiritual credence by emphasising the common foundation between Tsong kha pa's tradition and the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud order to which he adheres. The depiction of the founders of the bKa' gdams pa tradition, along with the figure of Nāropa, not only reaffirms the Indian derivation of the two lineages represented on the walls, but situates the religious

discourse within the broader geographical and historical context of Western Tibet. The revitalisation of Buddhism embodied by the figure of Atiśa offers the means to restate the role performed by King sKyī lde Nyi ma mgon's dynasty in the 10th-11th century. Subsequently, the political legitimacy of our royal donor rests on the reorganisation of narratives asserting the intermediate position assumed by the rulers of West Tibet in their role of direct heirs of the central Tibetan kings and forefathers of the western dominions. Altogether, the iconographical programme of the upper temple celebrates the longevity and prosperity granted to the Kingdom of Ladakh (i.e. therefore to Spiti as well) by its royal patron, rightful inheritor of the Tibetan Empire and the Kingdom of Guge, a Dharma king and a Bodhisattva.

Based on the narratives at work and the development of iconographical themes, in addition to literary and material evidence related to the first half of the 18th century, we have put forward the name of King Nyi ma rnyam rgyal as the likely royal patron of the upper temple. In line with the religious policy of his great-grandfather King Seng ge rnam rgyal, Nyi ma rnam rgyal was particularly active in promoting religious concord both inside and outside his dominions. Emulating the patron-priest relationship characterised by the figure of sTag tshang ras pa, he had a prominent 'Brug pa scholar from Bhutan join him as spiritual advisor. Whether or not it is true, we would like to believe that Byams mgon Ngag dbang rgyal mtshan, the court chaplain of King Nyi ma rnam rgyal, is somewhere represented on the walls of the upper temple; perhaps next to the royal benefactor of the consecration-banquet scene. In any case, the person responsible for the composition of these murals must have been of remarkable intellectual stature. The adhesion of Nyi ma rnam rgyal to the 'Brug pa bka' brgyud tradition did not prevent him from lavishly supporting other sects. Following the reign of his predecessor, he restored direct contact with the Lhasa government and liberally honoured the dGe lugs pa establishments.

As we have seen, the Ladakhi authority in Spiti was entrusted to functionaries whose main prerogatives were the levying of taxes and the collection of revenues for the annual tribute. According to Petech, "control over Spiti was always a vague affair". After the reign of King Nyi ma rnam rgyal, however, the political status of Spiti was soon to be disputed again. The position of the Spiti Valley as a buffer zone between contiguous areas of diverse socio-cultural significance and political regimes reaffirms its importance for the understanding of the western Himalayas. Among the last monarchs of the rNam rgyal dynasty, Nyi ma rnam rgyal is the most likely candidate for the sponsorship of the construction of the upper temple.

Dominating the Spiti River downhill, the upper temple of Dangkhar and its festival of images is a vivid testimony to the flamboyant history of Western Tibet. The immediate preservation and renovation of its wall-paintings is therefore *un devoir de mémoire*.

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APPENDIX

Iconographical Inventory¹**South-eastern wall**

- 1 Wall-painted hanging with *simhamukha* (Tib. *sham bu*)
- 2 **The thirty-five confession Buddhas grouped around the Conquerors of the five family** (Tib. *ltung bshags kyi sangs rgyas so lnga ni rgyal ba rigs lnga dang so so'i 'khor drug*)
 - 2a+6 Amoghasiddhi (Tib. *Don yod grub pa*)
 - 2b+6 Amitābha (Tib. *'Od dpag med*)
 - 2c+6 Ratnasambhava (Tib. *Rin chen 'byung gnas*)
 - 2d+6 Akṣobhya (Tib. *Mi bskyod pa*)
 - 2e+6 Vairocana (Tib. *rNam par snang mdzad*)
- 3 **Consorts of the Conquerors of the five family** (Tib. *rgyal ba rigs lnga yi yum*)
 - 3a Samaya Tārā (Tib. *Dam tshig sgrol ma*)
 - 3b Pāṇḍaravāsīnī (Tib. *Gos dkar mo*)
 - 3c Māmaki (Tib. *Mā ma ki*)
 - 3d Buddha Locana (Tib. *Sangs rgyas spyan ma*)
 - 3e Vajradhātviśvarī (Tib. *rDo rje dbyings phyug ma*)
- 4 **The eight Medicine Buddhas** (Tib. *sman bla de gshegs brgyad*)
 - 4a Sunāman (Tib. *mTshan legs*) *
 - 4b Ratnacandra (Tib. *Rin chen zla ba*) *
 - 4c Dharmakīrtisāgaraghoṣa (Tib. *Chos sgrags rgya mtsho'i dbyangs*) *
 - 4d Bhaiṣajyaguru (Tib. *Sangs rgyas sman bla*)
- 5 Buddha making the gesture of fearlessness, i.e. *abhaya mudrā* (Tib. *skyabs sbyin phyag rgya mdzad pa'i Sangs rgyas*)
- 6 **Padmasambhava and consorts** (Tib. *Pad ma 'byung gnas dang yum*)
 - 6a Padmasambhava (Tib. *Gu ru rin po che Pad ma 'byung gnas*)
 - 6b Mandāravā (Tib. *Man da ra ba me tog*)
 - 6c Ye shes mtsho rgyal
- 7 Ekadaśamukha Avalokiteśvara (Tib. *Thugs rje chen po bcu gcig zhal*)
- 8 Buddha Amitābha (Tib. *Sangs rgyas 'Od dpag med*)
- 9 Caturbhūja Avalokiteśvara (Tib. *sPyan ras gzigs phag bzhi pa*)
- 10 Buddha making the gesture of generosity, i.e. *varada mudrā* (Tib. *mchog sbyin phyag rgya mdzad pa'i Sangs rgyas*)
- 11 Amitāyus (Tib. *Tshe dpag med*)
- 12 **The twelve deeds of Buddha Śākyamuni** (Tib. *Sangs rgyas mchog gi sprul pa'i skus 'jig rten du mdzad pa bcu gnyis*)
 - 12a Remaining in and descent from Tuṣita heavenly realm (Tib. *dga' ldan*)

¹ * Identity of the figure within the theme not secured, ** Identification of the iconographical figure not secured, *** Identification of the iconographical theme not secured † Restitution

- gnas nas 'pho ba*)
 12b Entering into Queen Māyādevī's womb (Tib. *lhums su zhugs pa*)
 12c Taking birth (Tib. *sku bltams pa*)
 12d Becoming skilled in worldly arts and demonstrating physical prowess (Tib. *gzhon nu'i rol rtsed*)
 12e Enjoying a retinue of queens and a life of pleasures (Tib. *btsun mo'i khor gyis rol ba*)
 12f Renouncing the world (Tib. *rab tu byung ba*)

South-western wall

- 1 Wall-painted hanging with *śiṃhamukha* (Tib. *sham bu*)
Meditational deities (Tib. *yi dam*)
 2 Vajrabhairava and consort Vajrā Vetālī (Tib. *rDo rje 'jigs byed dang rDo rje ro langgs ma*)
 3 Guhyasamāja and consort Śparsavajrā (Tib. *gSang ba 'dus pa dang Reg bya rdo rje ma*)
 4 Hayagrīva (Tib. *rTa mgrin*)
 5 **A pair of dGe lugs pa teachers** (Tib. *dGe lugs pa'i slob dpon gnyis*)
 5a unidentified
 5b unidentified
 6 **Father and spiritual sons** (Tib. *yab sras gsum*)
 6a rJe Rin po che Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa (1357 – 1419)
 6b rGyal tshab rje Dar ma rin chen (1364 – 1432)
 6c mKhas grub rje dGe legs dpal bzang po (1385 – 1438)
 7 Ādibuddha Samantabhadra (Tib. *Kun tu bzang po*)
 8 unidentified
 9 **Celestial nymphs**
 9a *apsarasah* (Tib. *mchod pa'i lha mo*)
 9b *apsarasah* (Tib. *mchod pa'i lha mo*)
 10 **The historical Buddha and his two main disciples** (Tib. *Thub pa gnas bcus bskor ba*)
 10a Buddha Śākyamuni (Tib. *Shākya thub pa*)
 10b Śāriputra (Tib. *Shā ri'i bu*)
 10c Maudgalyāyana (Tib. *Ma'u dgal gyi bu*)
 11 **The sixteen arhats** (Tib. *gnas brtan bcu drug*)
 11a Gopaka (Tib. *sBed byed*) *
 11b Bhadra (Tib. *bZang po*)
 11c Cūḍapanthaka (Tib. *Lam phran bstan*)
 11d Bakula (Tib. *Ba ku la*)
 11e Kanakavṭsa (Tib. *gSer be'u*)
 11f Vanavāsini (Tib. *Nags na gnas*) *
 11g Vajrīputra (Tib. *rDo rje mo'i bu*) *
 11h Aṅgaja (Tib. *Yan lag 'byung*)
 11i Kanakabharadvāja (Tib. *Bha ra dhwa dza gser can*) *
 11j Nāgasena (Tib. *Klu'i sde*) *
 11k Panthaka (Tib. *Lam bstan*)
 11l Piṇḍolabharadvāja (Tib. *Bha ra dha dza bsod snyoms len*)

- 11m Ajita (Tib. *Ma pham pa*)
 11n Kālīka (Tib. *Dus ldan*) *
 11o Rāhula (Tib. *sGra gcan zin*)
 11p Abheda (Tib. *Mi phyed*)
 12 **The two attendants**
 12a Hwa shang
 12b Upāsaka Dharmatrāta (Tib. *dGe bsnyen Dharma*)
Meditational deities (Tib. *yi dam*)
 13 Kālacakra and consort Viśvamāta (Tib. *Dus kyi 'khor lo dang sNa tshogs yum*)
 14 Hevajra and consort Vajranairātmyā (Tib. *Kye rdo rje dang rDo rje bdag med mo*)
 15 Cakrasaṃvara and consort Vajravāhārī (Tib. *'Khor lo bde mchog dang rDo rje phag mo*)
 16 Nārōpa (Tib. *Nā ro pa*) (c.1016 – 1100)
 17 sTag tshang ras pa O rgyan Ngag dbang rgya mtsho (1574 – 1651)
 18 **Atiśa and his two main disciples**
 18a Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna (Tib. *Jo bo rje dPal ldan A ti sha*) (980 – 1054)
 18b 'Brom ston pa (1005 – 1064)
 18c rNgog lo tswa ba Legs pa'i shes rabs (1059 – 1109) or Nag tsho lo tswa ba (1011 – 1064)
 19 **The seven precious possessions of a universal monarch** (Skt. *sapta rājāyatatna* Tib. *rgyal srid rin chen sna bdun*)
 19a The precious general (Skt. *senāpatiratna* Tib. *dmag dpon rin po che*)
 19b The most precious horse (Skt. *aśvaratna* Tib. *rta mchog rin po che*)
 19c The precious elephant (Skt. *hastiratna* Tib. *glang po rin po che*)
 19d The precious minister (Skt. *pariṇāyakarātna* Tib. *blon po rin po che*)
 19e The precious jewel (Skt. *maṇiratna* Tib. *nor bur in po che*)
 19f The precious queen (Skt. *raṇiratna* or *strīratna* Tib. *btsun mo rin po che*)
 19g The precious wheel (Skt. *cakraratna* Tib. *'khor lo rin po che*)
 20 **The eight close sons or great bodhisattvas** (Skt. *aṣṭa utaputra* Tib. *nye ba'i sras chen brgyad*)
 20a Sarvaṇīvaraṇaviṣkambhin (Tib. *sGrip pa rnam sel*) *
 20b Avalokiteśvara (Tib. *sPyan ras gzigs*)
 20c Vajrapānī (Tib. *Phyag na rdo rje*)
 20d Mañjuśrī (Tib. *'Jam dpal byangs*)
 20e Ākāśagarbha (Tib. *Nam mkha'i snying po*) *
 20f Samantabhadra (Tib. *Kun tu bzang po*) *
 20g Maitreya (Tib. *Byams pa mgon po*) *
 20h Kṣitigarbha (Tib. *Sa'i snying po*) *
 20 The banquet-consecration scene

North-western Wall

- 1 Wall-painted hanging with siṃhamukha (Tib. *sham bu*)
 2 **Group of seventeen Buddhas**
Seven universal or heroic Buddhas (Tib. *sangs rgyas rab bdun nam sangs rgyas dpa' bo dbun*) ***

- 2a rNam par gzigs *
- 2b gTsugs tor can *
- 2c Thabs cad skyob *
- 2d 'Khor ba 'jigs *
- 2e gSer thub *
- 2f 'Od srung *
- 2g Shākya thub pa *
- Buddhas of the ten directions and three times* (Tib. *phogs bcu dus gsum gyis sangs rgyas*) ***
- 2h dKon mchog 'byung gnas *
- 2i Mya ngan med pa *
- 2j Rin chen 'od 'phro *
- 2k rGyal pa' dbang po *
- 2l Pa dmo dam pa' dpal mnga' *
- 2m Nyi ma snang ba' dpal *
- 2n gDugs mchog dam pa *
- 2o Ting 'dzin glang pod pal mnga' *
- 2p Pad ma' dpal nyid *
- 2q dKa' ba' dpal can *
- 3 A pair of dGe lugs pa teachers (Tib. *dGe lugs pa slob dpon gnyis*)
- 3a unidentified
- 3b unidentified
- 4 *The six ornaments and the two excellent ones* (Tib. *rgyan drug mchog gnyis*)
- 4a Nāgārjuna (Tib. *Klu sgrub*)
- 4b Āryadeva (Tib. *'Phags pa lha*) †
- 4c Asaṅga (Tib. *Thogs med*) †
- 4d Vasubandhu (Tib. *dByig gnyen*) †
- 4e Dignāga (Tib. *Phyogs kyi glang po*)
- 4f Dharmakīrti (Tib. *Chos kyi grags pa*)
- 4g Guṇaprabha (Tib. *Yon tan 'od*)
- 4h Śākyaprabha (Tib. *Shākya 'od*)
- 5 *The forefathers of the bKa' brgyud pa lineage* (Tib. *bKa' brgyud pa'i bla ma rgyud pa*)
- 5a Vajradhara (Tib. *rDo rje 'chang*)
- 5b Tilopa (Tib. *Ti lo pa*) (988 – 1069)
- 5c Nāropa (Tib. *Nā ro pa*) (c. 1016 – 1100)
- 5d Mar pa lo tswa ba Chos kyi blo gros (1012 – 1097)
- 5e rje btsun Mi la ras pa (1040 – 1123)
- 5f sGam po pa bSod nams rin chen Dwags po lha rje (1079 – 1153)
- 5g Ras chung pa rDo rje grags pa (1085 – 1161)
- 5h Phag mo gru pa rDo rje rgyal po (1100 – 1170)
- 5i gLing chen ras pa Pad ma rdo rje (1128 – 1188)
- 6 Prajñāpāramitā (Tib. *Yum chen mo* or *Sher phyin ma*)
- 7 Maitreya (Tib. *rGyal ba Byams pa*)
- 8 Uṣṇīṣavijayā (Tib. *gTsug tor rnam par rgyal ma*)
- 9 *A pair of 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud pa teachers* (Tib. *'Brug pa bka' brgyud pa'i slob dpon gnyis*)

- 9a unidentified
 9b unidentified
 10 Sitātapatrā (Tib. *gDugs dkar*)
 11 Mañjuśrī (Tib. *'Jam pa'i dbyang*)
 12 Jāṅguli (Tib. *Dug sel ma*)
 13 **A pair of 'Brug pa bKa' brgyud pa teachers** (Tib. *'Brug pa bka' brgyud pa'i slob dpon gnyis*)
 13a unidentified
 13b unidentified
 14 Nīla Siṃhavaṅktrā (Tib. *Seng ge gdong ma sngon mo*)
 15 Vajrapāṇi (Tib. *Phyag ma rdo rje*)
 16 **The eight Medicine Buddhas** (Tib. *sman bla de gshegs brgyad*)
 16e Aśokottama (Tib. *Mya ngan med mchog*) *
 16f Śākyamuni (Tib. *Shākya thub pa*)
 16g Suvarṇabhadravimala (Tib. *gSer bzang dri med*) *
 16h Abhijñārāja (Tib. *mNgon mkhyen rgyal po*)
 17 Sita Tārā (Tib. *sGrol dkar*)
 18 Syāma Tārā (Tib. *sGrol ljang*)
 19 Parṇāśabarī (Tib. *Ri khrod lo ma gyon ma*)
 20 **The twelve deeds of Buddha Śākyamuni** (Tib. *Sangs rgyas mchog gi sprul pa'i skus 'jig rten du mdzad pa bcu gnyis*)
 20g Practicing asceticism (Tib. *dka' ba spyad pa*)
 20h Reaching the point of enlightenment (Tib. *byang chub snying por gshegs pa*) †
 20i Defeating Māra's hosts (Tib. *bdud btul ba*)
 20j Attaining perfect enlightenment (Tib. *mngon par rdzogs par sangs rgyas pa*)
 20k Turning the wheel of doctrine (Tib. *chos kyi 'khor lo bskor ba*)
 20l Departing for the ultimate peace of parinirvāṇa (Tib. *mya ngan las 'das pa*)

North-eastern wall

- 1 Wall-painted hanging with siṃhamukha (Tib. *sham bu*)
 2 Vajrasattva (Tib. *rDo rje sems dpa'*)
 3 Śyāmanīla Vajravīdāraṇa (Tib. *rDo rje rnam 'joms ljang sngon*)
 4 Akṣobhya (Tib. *Mi 'khrugs pa*)
 5 Rakta Mahākāla (Tib. *mGon dmar*) **
 6 Pañjara Mahākāla (Tib. *Gur gyi mgon po*)
 7 Caturbhuja Mahākāla (Tib. *mGon po phyag bzhi pa*)
 8 Mañjuśrī Nāgarākṣa (Tib. *'Jam dpal nā ga rakṣa*)
 9 Brāhmaṇarūpa Mahākāla (Tib. *mGon po bram ze'i gzugs can*)
 10 Sadbhujā Mahākāla also known as Sarvaviḡṇavināyaka Mahākāla (Tib. *mGon po phyag druk pa* or *mGon po bar chad kun sel*)
 11 Dhūmavarṇa Krodha Ucchuṣma (Tib. *Khro bo sme brtsegs dud kha*) **
 12 Yama Dharmarāja and consort Cāmuṇḍā (Tib. *gShin rje Chos rgyal dang Tsā mundi*)
 13 **Mahākāla's four lieutenants and retinue**

- 13a Kṣetrapāla (Tib. *Kṣe tra pā la*)
 13b Jinamitra (Tib. *Dzi na mi tra*)
 13c Ṭakkirāja (Tib. *Ṭakki rā dza*)
 13d Trakṣad (Tib. *Trakṣad*)
 13e Śrī Devī (Tib. *dPal ldan lha mo* or *bDud mo re ma ti*)
 13f Saṅkhaḥapālī Devī (Tib. *Lha mo dung skyong ma*) **
 14 **Wealth deities** (Tib. *rgyu nor gyi lha rnams*)
 14a Sadbhujā Vasudhārā (Tib. *Nor rgyun ma phyag drug ma*) *
 14b Vasudhārā from the dhāraṇī (Tib. *gZungs las byung ba'i lha mo nor rgyun ma*) *
 14c Jambhala (Tib. *Dzambha la*)
 14d Vasudhārā (Tib. *Nor rgyun ma*)
 14e Mahāpitā Vaiśravaṇa (Tib. *rNam sras ser chen*)
 14f Kṛṣṇa Jambhala (Tib. *Dzambha la nag po*)
 15 **Guardian kings of the four directions** (Skt. *lokapāla* or *cāturmahārājika* Tib. *phyogs skyong rgyal po* or *rgyal chen sde bzhi*)
 15a Dhṛtarāṣṭra (Tib. *Yul 'khor skyong* or *Yul 'khor srung*)
 15b Virūpākṣa (Tib. *sPyan mi bzang*)
 15c Virūḍhaka (Tib. *'Phag skyes po*)
 15d Vaiśravaṇa (Tib. *rNam thos sras*)
 16 **The three forefather Dharma kings of Tibet** (Tib. *chos rgyal mes dbon rnam gsum*)
 16a Chos rgyal Srong btsan sgam po (r. 60? – 649)
 16b Khri srong lde btsan (r. 755 – 797)
 16c Khri ral pa can (r. 815 – 836)
 17 Śāntarakṣita (Tib. *slob dpon Zhi ba 'tsho*) (725 – 788)
 18 *unidentified*
 19 **The equestrian scene**
 19a A human female rider
 19b Autochthonous warrior deity of West Tibet (Tib. *Mes ba'u zhes pa'i gu ge yul lha*)
 19c Autochthonous warrior deity of West Tibet (Tib. *Mes ba'u zhes pa'i gu ge yul lha*)
 19d Autochthonous warrior deity of West Tibet (Tib. *Mes ba'u zhes pa'i gu ge yul lha*)
 19e A human female rider with child
 19f A human female rider
 20 **A group of five dGe lugs pa teachers** (Tib. *dGe lugs pa'I slob dpon lnga*)
 20a Brag sgo Rab 'byams pa Phun tshogs rgya mtsho *
 20b mKhar rdo bZod pa rgyal mtsho (1672 – 1749) *
 20c sGrub khang pa dGe legs rgya mtsho (1641 – 1713) *
 20d The Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617 – 1682) *
 20e The Fifth Panchen lama, Paṅ chen Blo bzang ye shes mtsho (1663 – 1737) *
 21 Vajrapāṇi (Tib. *Phyag na rdo rje*)
 22 Cintāmaṇi Sita Mahākāla (Tib. *mGon dkar yid bzhin nor bu*)
 23 Śrīmatī Pārvatī Rājñī (Tib. *dPal ldan dmag zor rgyal mo*)

- 24** *The goddesses or queens of the four seasons* (Tib. *dus bzhi'i rgyal mo* or *dus bzhi'i lha mo*)
- 24a The spring goddess (Tib. *dPyid gyi rgyal mo* or *dPyid gyi lha mo*) †
- 24b The summer goddess (Tib. *dYar gyi rgyal mo* or *dYar gyi lha mo*) †
- 24c The autumn goddess (Tib. *sTon gyi rgyal mo* or *sTon gyi lha mo*)
- 24d The winter goddess (Tib. *dGun gyi rgyal mo* or *dGun gyi lha mo*)
- 25** *Śrī Devī's other attendants* (Tib. *dPal ldan lha mo'i 'khor bzhan*)
- 25a Makaramukhī also called Makaravaktrā (Tib. *Chu srin mo*) †
- 25b Simhamukhī (Tib. *Seng ge dong ma*)
- 26** *The five sisters of longevity* (Tib. *tshe ring mched lnga*)
- 26a mThing gi zhal bzang ma †
- 26b Cod paṅ mgrin bzang ma †
- 26c bKra shis tshe ring ma
- 26d Mi g.yo blo bzang ma
- 26e gTad dkar 'gro bzang ma





Figure 1
The monastery of Dangkhar, the old village, and the upper temple circled in red,
2010
Photograph © Lobsang Nyima LAURENT

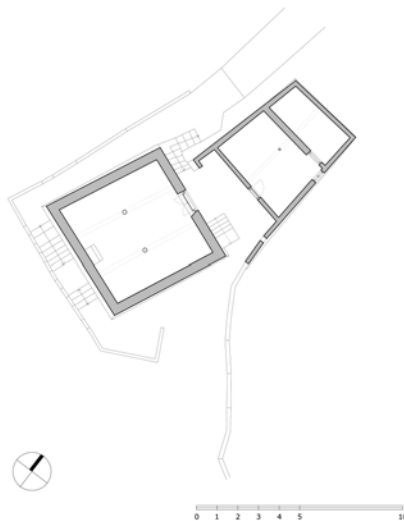


Figure 2a
Plan of the upper temple, scale 1:100, 2011
Drawing © Graz University of Technology

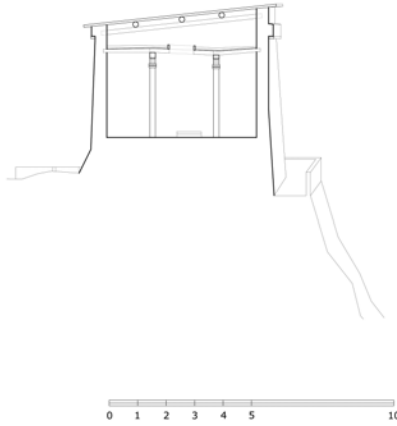


Figure 2b
Cross-sectional view of the upper temple, scale 1:100, 2011
Drawing © Graz University of Technology



Figure 3a
Photo montage of the south-eastern wall, 2011
Photograph © Graz University of Technology

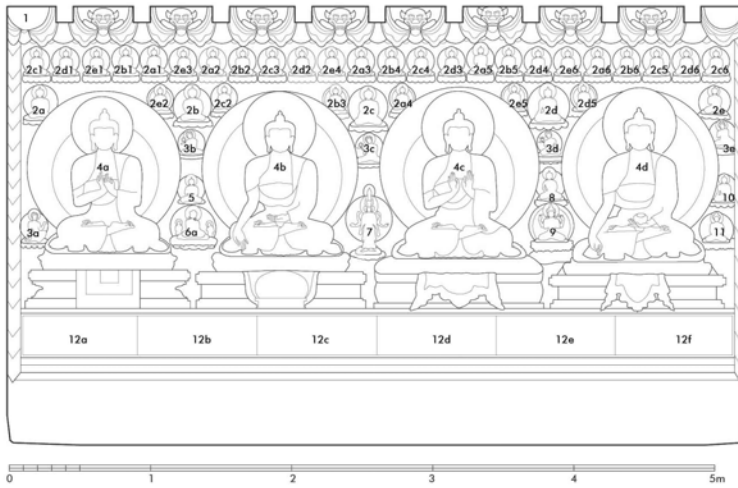


Figure 3b
 South-eastern wall, drawing of the murals, 2013
 Drawing © Graz University of Technology



Figure 4a
 Photo montage of the south-western wall, 2011
 Photograph © Graz University of Technology

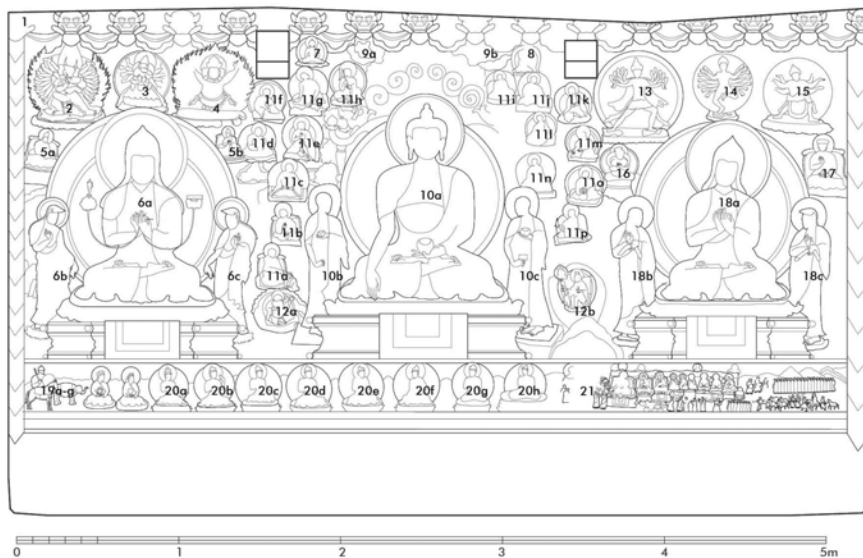


Figure 4b
South-western wall, drawing of the murals, 2013
Drawing © Graz University of Technology



Figure 5a
Photo montage of the north-western wall, 2011
Photograph © Graz University of Technology

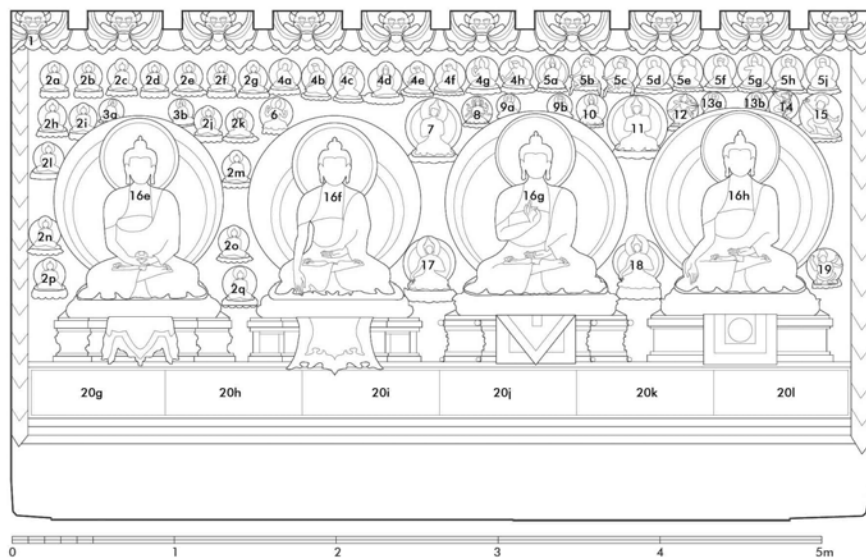


Figure 5b
North-western wall, drawing of the murals, 2013
Drawing © Graz University of Technology



Figure 6a
Photo montage of the north-eastern wall, 2011
Photograph © Graz University of Technology

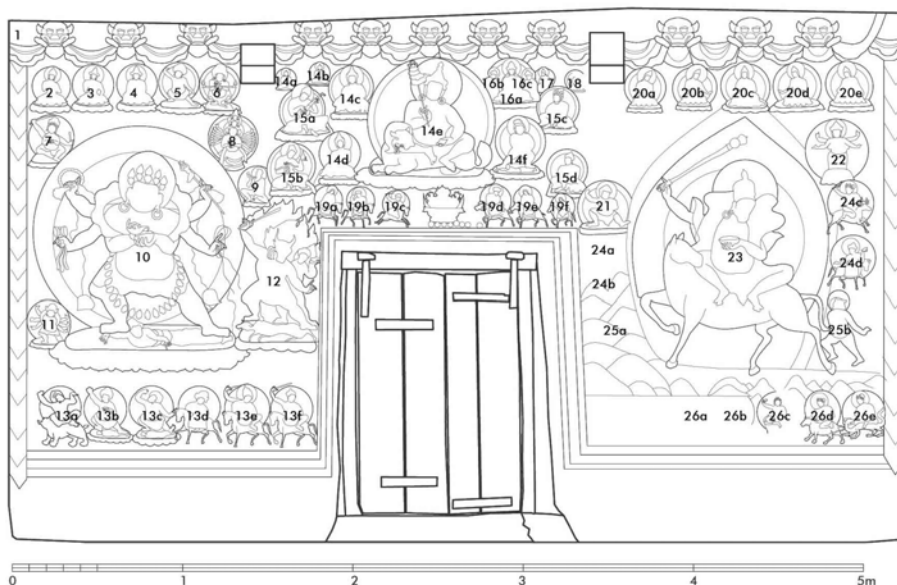


Figure 6b
 North-eastern wall, drawing of the murals, 2013
 Drawing © Graz University of Technology



Figure 7a
 The banquet-consecration scene, 2010
 Photograph © Lobsang Nyima LAURENT



Figure 7b
Outline of the banquet-consecration scene, 2013
Drawing © Graz University of Technology

