The spiritual quest of the Buddha in the Dungkar cave temple – Indian sources and Western Tibetan image-making. Part 1: the narrative cycle from Tuṣita heaven up to the Enlightenment

La quête spirituelle du Bouddha de la grotte de Dungkar – sources indiennes et création visuelle du Tibet occidental. Partie 1 : le cycle narratif depuis le paradis Tuṣita jusqu'à l'Éveil

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La quête spirituelle du Bouddha de la grotte de Dungkar – sources indiennes et création visuelle du Tibet occidental. Partie 1 : le cycle narratif depuis le paradis Tuṣita jusqu'à l'Éveil

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Introduction

- ¹ This article deals with the narrative paintings of the Buddha's life in cave 1 of the three monumental cave shrines at Dungkar (Tib. Dung dkar, also Dun bkar, DuN mkhar, etc.; cf. Vitali 1996, p. 631) in historical Western Tibet, situated north of Tholing in a side valley of the Sutlej (Tsamda district¹, Ngari prefecture – Tib. mNga' ris – Tibet Autonomous Region, PRC), (figs 1-3). These painting of the Buddha's life are of enormous significance as they do not only show completely new themes and aesthetic principles of pictorial space and visual narration compared to earlier life cycles in the region but they also shed light on the conceptualizations of that time with regard to aspects of the social and religio-political context. These temples are among the oldest and most fascinating Buddhist foundations in the Western Himalayas, but their overall programme has not yet been identified in the historical record, while the caves' narratives of the Buddha's life have not as yet been subject of a detailed study.

Figure 1. Map of historical Western Tibet

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Figure 2. Dungkar village

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Figure 3. Dungkar village, and steep cliffs with the caves on the north side of the valley

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- 2 The history of this religious site is embedded in the development of the West Tibetan kingdom of Ngari Korsum (Tib. mNga' ri skor gsum) where in the 10th century the Second Propagation of Buddhism (Chidar; Tib. phyi dar) was initiated by rulers who claimed to be from the lineage of the early kings of Tibet, most importantly by the Royal Lama Yeshe Ö (Tib. Lha bla ma ye shes 'od, 947-1024²). In this period the major early institutions in the area, including the nearby monasteries of Tholing (Purang, TAR, China), Nyarma (Ladakh, Jammu-Kashmir, India) and Tabo (Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India) were founded. According to the Ngari Gyalrab (Tib. mNga' ris rgyal rabs) the locality of Dungkar was chosen by several kings of Guge as their residence in the second half of the 11th century (Vitali 1996, pp.126-127³). The Dungkar cave temples⁴ may belong to the later phase of foundations by descendants of the royal house of Purang-Guge in the 12th century.
- 3 Research in the West on Dungkar started with Giuseppe Tucci who published the site (together with Eugenio Ghersi) in 1937 (Tucci 1978); in his expedition report Tucci writes with enthusiasm on the high quality of the paintings⁵. Much later the caves again became the focus of scholarly interest in China and in the West; they have now been extensively published with an emphasis on individual aspects such as the ceilings and the iconography of the mandala paintings and clay sculptures on the walls⁶. However, a comprehensive scientific documentation including the reconstruction of the historic context is still missing, and the narratives in the cave 1 discussed here have so far been neglected in the scientific literature.
- 4 The Dungkar caves are situated at the bottom of steep cliffs on the north side of the valley (figs 2, 3). Cave 1 is the central cave of the group. Through a small door – the only access and opening to allow light – the devotee/viewer enters a sacred space of enormous richness and visual splendour. The paintings of cave 1 are not only remarkable for their innovations in terms of iconographic programme and pictorial

style; concerning the development of Buddhism in this period, Luczanits (2004a, p. 121) points out that they contrast to earlier temples such as the Tabo Main temple (Tib. gTsug lag khang, created ca. mid-11th century) and herald a new era concerning the religious programme: “The shrine contains a pair of Guhyasamājamaṇḍala on the opposite side of the entrance on the main wall, a pair of Vajradhātumaṇḍala on the left-hand wall and an extensive Dharmadhātuvāgīśvaramaṇḍala [...] on the right-hand wall” (Luczanits 2004a, 114, 223) (figs 4-6). The remarkable ceiling of cave 1 mimics a lantern ceiling featuring an elaborate decorative system and iconography, which has not as yet been studied in detail (fig. 7). It shows a richer repertoire of motifs than the earlier temples at Tabo. The themes at Dungkar reflect a complex layering of meanings to which the descriptions in the *Lalitavistara* (Tib. 'Phags pa rgya cher rol pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo; the epic which presents the life of the Buddha in his own words⁷) and other Mahāyāna texts appear to have greatly contributed⁸.

Figure 4. Dungkar, cave 1, south wall, painted narrative of the Buddha's life in the lowest section

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Figure 5. Dungkar, cave 1, west wall

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Figure 6. Dungkar, cave 1, north wall

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Figure 7. Dungkar, cave 1, ceiling

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- 5 The painted narrative cycle of Sākyamuni's life which is complemented by inscriptions is shown at eye-level on the lowest zone of the walls starting from the left of the entrance (south wall) and continuing in a clockwise direction on the left side-wall (west) and the back wall (north); the final scene is depicted on a small section of the eastern wall followed by a mandala. The frieze is located on the lowest zone of the wall; the total length of the frieze is approximately 17 m and it is roughly 70-80 cm high⁹. The narrative can be "read" by the devotee in the course of ritual circumambulation inside the temple, keeping the wall to their left (figs 8, 9).

Figure 8. Sketch plan of cave 1 with the location and progression of the Buddha's life marked in red

© after Tropper 2018, p. 650

Figure 9. Dungkar, cave 1, sketch with location of the inscriptions 1-13 on the south, west and north wall

A: south wall; B: west wall; C: north wall

© after Tropper 2018, p. 652

- 6 In the following we will examine the first part of the narrative, i.e. the scenes from the Bodhisattva waiting in Tuṣita to Māravijaya, the Enlightenment at Bodh Gayā (the second part of the narrative up to the Nirvāṇa will be published in separate article by the present authors). As we will show in some detail, for these initial episodes the *Lalitavistara* was used as one of the textual sources. Methodologically, we attempt to bring together information from the images, the adjacent framed inscriptional panels (which contain the appropriate portions of the sutra text), and the textual source of the *Lalitavistara*. Kurt Tropper (2018) recently published the text cartouches inserted into the narrative at Dungkar together with translations of most of the legible epigraphic evidence¹⁰ (fig. 9). Some of these inscriptions provide essential clues for the identification of the visual representations.
- 7 Characteristic of most of the temples in the tradition of the Purang-Guge kingdom, to the right of the entrance (south) are depictions of donors (fig. 10). The noble elite is shown in a large assembly in front of a ceremonial tent and surrounded by soldiers; this commemorates the consecration of the temple. They mirror and provide a visual resonance of the first scene of the spiritual biography of the Bodhisattva, describing the excellent abode where the Bodhisattva resides before being reborn on earth.

Figure 10. Dungkar, cave 1, donor depiction on the entrance (south) wall

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- 8 It is significant that at Dungkar we do not find a continuous narrative as in the Main temple (Tib. gTsug lag khang) of Tabo, where the story unfolds in a loose chain of scenes on the walls (figs 11, 12). By contrast, at Dungkar we observe for the first time a succession of single geometric panels in frames. These organize the scenes combined with inserts of rectangular cartouches with inscriptions.

Figure 11. Tabo, assembly hall of the Main temple (Tib. gTsug lag khang), beginning of the painted narrative of the Buddha's life on the lower part of the south wall

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Figure 12, Tabo, assembly hall, Buddha's life, detail with "The transmission of the crown to Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven"

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Panel 1: the transmission of the crown to Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven

- 9 This event is narrated in the chapters 3, 4 and 5 of the *Lalitavistara* (LV): "The complete purity of family", "The luminous doors of the dharma" and "Setting in motion", no inscription is extant in this panel. The Tuṣita heaven (figs 13, 14¹¹) is the abode where the Bodhisattva Sākyamuni was honoured and worshipped and where he taught the dharma to the Tuṣita gods while waiting to be reborn in his final human life before Enlightenment and extinction¹². In this realm he hands over his Bodhisattva crown to Maitreya, who will be the Future Buddha in this sphere.

Figure 13. Dungkar, cave 1 (left half of the image)

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Figure 14. Dungkar, cave 1

© drawing by Huo Wei, Li Yongxian, Zhang Changhong from Huo Wei *et al.* 2008, with adaptations by John Harrison and Christiane Kalantari, 2018

- 10 In the mural, the scene is set in a luxurious interior space, indicating the “excellent abode”. It is depicted as a cubic building with a flat roof and towers on top, flanked by *apsaras* (heavenly beings). The upper border is embellished with textile hangings,

jewels and strings of pearls. The palace not only defines the locality but also structures the whole image panel. The side walls intersect with the vertical borders of the image field adding solidity to the whole structure¹³. The *LV* describes the great celestial palace¹⁴, where the Bodhisattva dwelled on his throne, decked with “rich results of his merits” and “[...] fitted with the finest cotton cloth, redolent of both heavenly perfumes and the smoke of purest incense, gleamed softly with the rainbow colors of fragrant flowers, the throne glowed with hundreds of thousands of precious stones, and over it hung a jeweled lattice, resonating with the sounds of many little bells” (*LV* 4/54).

- 11 In the centre are two seated persons: the right one is Maitreya with a red body colour while the Bodhisattva to the left has a white complexion. The Bodhisattva transfers the crown, holding it horizontally in his palms, while at the same time Maitreya grasps it with one hand; it is hanging down from his hand, orientated to the left. Thus two moments of the handover are shown fused into one scene; this mode emphasizes the central moment of the coronation episode and adds a sense of movement to it.
- 12 A new attitude towards pictorial space can be observed here: the palace provides an architectonic structure which is anchored on the base-line and organizes the whole panel; this imagined space follows a constructive logic and the figures and objects are subjected to it. The Austrian art historian Otto Pächt coined a term “spatialization” for this tendency in European manuscript illumination in the Middle Ages (Pächt 1984). This approach contrasts with the ornamental arcade-like structure of the building in the same scene at Tabo (figs 11, 12), which is instead a decorative compilation of set-pieces of architecture creating a planar frame; the figures and objects are submitted to this abstract formal arrangement as elements of a quasi-ornamental surface pattern.
- 13 Around the central figures are at least two persons kneeling: the left one is folding his hands before his body. On the right is perhaps a standing person. Unfortunately, large sections of the lower part are destroyed. But in a comparable composition of the heavenly palace at Tabo an assembly of Tuṣita gods is shown around the two protagonists (figs 11, 12). The identification as assembly of gods for the lower part may be a possibility for Dungkar as well¹⁵. As described in the *Lalitavistara*, the Bodhisattva “addressed himself to the great assembly of gods” (*LV* 4/54) and he discoursed on the 108 luminous doors of the dharma “which will always be taught to the assembly of gods by the Bodhisattva at the moment of the descent from Tuṣita” (*LV* 4/65). Then he told the assembly that after him the Bodhisattva Maitreya will instruct them in the dharma; taking the diadem from his own head and placing it upon the head of the Bodhisattva Maitreya he stated: “Noble Being, after me you will become the perfect and completely enlightened Buddha” (*LV* 5/71).

Panel 2: Māyā asks for austerity and bestows her care and kindness

- 14 This episode, which cannot be found elsewhere in Western Tibetan paintings, is described mainly in *LV* chapter 5 entitled “Setting in motion” (inscription 1 is about Māyā’s conversation with Śuddhodana; fig. 9; Tropper 2018, p. 655). However, in the preceding chapters 3 and 4 of the *LV*, Māyā’s beauty, excellent nature and noble role as the Buddha’s mother is also extolled.

- 15 The scene at Dungkar depicts the story of the discussion on austerity between queen Māyā and her husband Śuddhodana, king of the Śākya, in the music hall of his excellent palace (figs 15-17). This episode illustrates the moment before Māyā's dream and the conception, when Māyā asks to take on a fast of noble conduct in order to concentrate on the divine and become the mother of the Buddha-to-be out of love and for the benefit of all beings. The scene in the mural takes place in a Tibetan interior space in the form of a mobile residence, indicated by a textile hanging in the background, fixed on poles. Alluding to a marvellous environment, pearls are dispersed in the background, and on the finials of the tent are sitting birds. According to the *LV* text, already while dwelling in Tuṣita abode the Bodhisattva caused eight signs to manifest at the palace of king Śuddhodana, such as the birds which came from the Himalayas, the king of mountains, and which "perched on the terraces and balustrades, [...] all the flowering trees and fruit trees of different seasons suddenly came into bloom" (*LV* 5/73); at the same time, musical instruments all emitted sweet sounds by themselves

Figure 15. Dungkar, cave 1 (right half of the image)

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Figure 16. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 17. Dungkar, cave 1

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- 16 On the left stands Māyā, depicted as a Tibetan queen with her courtly entourage in front of her enthroned husband. In chapter 3, the mother of the Bodhisattva is

described as the enchanting wife of king Śuddhodana, devoted to spiritual pursuits (LV 3/43) and being “the first among a thousand: she has attained perfection. Ravishing the heart like a magical creation, she is called Māyādevī, Goddess of Illusion” (LV 3/46). The king is depicted on a sumptuous throne studded with gems; below him stands a figure, perhaps a servant. The couple is further dignified with umbrellas held above each of them. The honorific parasol of king Śuddhodana is embellished with red streamers; it is held by a servant standing behind the dignitary who is depicted smaller in size. The king wears a red flat turban and is clad in a long Tibetan woollen cloak (Tib. *chupa*), in brownish red colour with a blue lining; large lapels adorn the neckline which is further embellished with a turquoise stone. His right arm is covered by a characteristic overlong sleeve, which he holds aloft in a gesture of discussion.

- 17 His wife also wears a full-length woollen cloak and a white cape with a blue hem. Long braids of hair bedecked with small turquoises fall over her shoulders. A new feature are the dynamic undulations of the folds of the females’ long cloaks. This movement at the “periphery of the body” is a device for expressing body movement; it is motivated in the general tendency towards naturalism of the figures. As hinted at in the inscription 1 – which is about the discussion between Māyā and Śuddhodana (fig. 9) – in the upper right corner, above the tent, Māyādevī, “after bathing and rubbing her body with aloes [...] dressed herself in finest festival garments. Filled with contentment, joy and happiness, she approached king Śuddhodana” (LV 5/74). The text recounts that, preceded by thousands of attendants, Māyā speaks to her husband in verses: “I wish to undertake, o Lord, a practice of strict moral conduct and fasting. For the love of all beings [...] Now is it my desire, Master of Men, to enter the highest apartments of the palace and there where the swans roost, to recline on [a] couch sweetly perfumed and strewn with flowers” (LV 5/74-75). Then Māyā requests care, kindness and liberation for the people in the kingdom and asks her husband to look upon all creatures, like an “only child” (LV 5/76). The king grants her wishes replying “may she recline like a daughter of the gods who went into the Miśraka garden” (LV 5/76).
- 18 In the image, outside the palace, to the left stands a tree recalling a passage in the text describing the beautiful parks of king Śuddhodana’s palace which bloomed and flowered as one of various auspicious signs which appeared (LV 5/73). In general, we find an emphasis on visual abundance and sensual pleasure in the depictions, symbolic of the magnificence of the abode of the Buddha as described in the *Lalitavistara*.
- 19 In the left upper corner are two figures. Their outfit suggests they are personalities of high status in the story: one of the two standing figures has a flywhisk; it is perhaps Māheśvara (the source of knowledge and a manifestation of Śiva), as indicated by the headgear; another evidence for this assumption being that the figure of Māheśvara is later shown in a similar fashion, namely in the Asita episode. It recalls the assembly of “[...] the four Great Kings, Śakra the lord of the gods [...] Brahmā the lord of the sahā world [...] Māheśvara” (LV 5/77) and other hundred thousand gods which arrived. They wish to follow the Bodhisattva during his entry into the womb and also on his way to the final Nirvāṇa.
- 20 In the panel design the new approach towards space is shown on various levels: the architecture, indicated by the upper border of the tent, stands on a base-line. Particularly striking is the heavy throne of the king which emphasizes the fact that objects are conceived as anchored by gravity to the ground. This imaginary space harbours the scene and the figures are shown as the inhabitants of it.

Panel 3: dream and conception

- 21 As described in the *LV* chapters 5 “Setting in motion” and 6 “Entrance into the womb”, the third scene illustrates the events after the Bodhisattva has descended from the Tuṣita abode (figs 18-20). From the outset it is made clear that “His purposeful stay in the womb of the mother shows the Bodhisattva’s power of the earth at his birth” (*LV* 1/9). According to the text, he became a baby white elephant which entered into the womb of his mother Māyādevī when she was lying in the tower of the great palace; Māyā experienced this event as a dream.
- 22 In the right upper corner of this image field we see an interior space, indicated by a background cloth crowned by a large umbrella. Queen Māyā lies on her right side clad in a sumptuous Tibetan attire; behind her stand three female companions, all wearing aristocratic Tibetan robes.

Figure 18. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 19. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 20 Dungkar, cave 1, detail

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- 23 Already the previous chapter 5 addresses the setting of Māyā's tower. Accordingly, the king had the topmost tower ornamented "[...] with beautiful flowers in profusion, with

perfumes and chosen scents, decorate the summit of the most beautiful palace. Arranged there parasols and streamers and a row of tāla trees. [...] May the queen ascend to the sanctuary that is worthy of goddesses to the sound of sweet and moving music from thousands of divine instruments” (LV 5/76).

- 24 Māyā is described as the mother of excellent and foremost soul and also her beauty is described in exuberance: “shining with the splendid merit of stainless virtue, wearing diaphanous garments and row upon row of jeweled bracelets, the goddess enters the swan – filled palace, as a precious jewel is placed inside a beautiful vase, so will this queen be the vase for the god of gods” (LV 5/84-85).
- 25 A white elephant approaches in a cloud from the left upper corner. The text reports: “[...] just at the appropriate moment [...] through her right side he entered in the form of a small white elephant with six tusks, his head the color of cochineal, his tusks of gold” (LV 6/95). And Māyā reportedly “Never [...] had known such pleasure both in body and in mind” (LV 6/96).
- 26 Below various figures are visible in the murals, but their identification is difficult. They may have been the gods which saw Māyā in the chamber. The text states that seen by the gods she rested on her couch and they knew it was time of the Bodhisattva’s descent from Tuṣṭita. And at that time the bodhisattvas came to honor him and they saw how the departing Bodhisattva projected from his body a light surpassing divine light (LV 5/87). To the left of Māyā a large figure with halo and multiple heads is shown, perhaps Brahmā (with four heads of which only three are visible) in a group of gods which are later also present at the time of the birth.
- 27 The text states what happened then: Māyā arose from her bed and descended from the upper apartment, went into the Aśoka wood¹⁶ and “called for the king, who came surrounded by ministers, merchants, [...] and called for Brāhmanas [...] who knew the Vedas, who can interpret the dream” (LV 6/98). A brahmin priest reportedly prophesised that “if he [the Bodhisattva] abandons love, royalty and home, departing to wander as a monk, he will become a Buddha, worthy of the offerings of the three worlds” (LV 6/99). The interpretation of the dream might have once been depicted in the lowest zone, but this must remain speculation.
- 28 On the right side of the panel are two superimposed trees, which perhaps refer to the slim, upright form of the Aśoka tree¹⁷; the upper one links two image fields in the corner, and functions like a clamp directing the viewer’s eye to the subsequent scene.

Panel 4: adoration of the Bodhisattva (the gods see the Bodhisattva in a palace in Māyā’s womb)

- 29 In the same chapter 6, “The Descent into the Womb”, the assembly of gods gather around the jeweled abode enjoyed by the Bodhisattva in the womb of Māyā (figs 21-23). The story is as follows: king Śuddhodana asked in what house would Māyādevī live comfortably without disturbance. The gods answered they will each give beautiful abodes for the Bodhisattva (LV 6/101) as the glorious one who descended from the divine realm of Tuṣṭita cannot remain in a human body with its disagreeable odor. The related wall-painting shows the moment when the Bodhisattva makes each of these gods see these abodes in the womb of his mother Māyā. To our knowledge, the typology of this illustration is unique in Western Tibetan art. The text informs: “[...] each of the

powerful gods [...] offered a dwelling as homage to the Bodhisattva [...] and through the power of the Bodhisattva's great contemplation, Māyādevī appeared to reside in each one of the dwellings. During the time the Bodhisattva lived in the womb of his mother, he remained on the right side, seated with his legs crossed and each of the most powerful gods knew clearly that it was indeed in his own palace that the mother of the Bodhisattva lived, and not elsewhere" (LV 6/101-102).

Figure 21. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 22. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figures. 23. Dungkar, cave 1

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- 30 This episode is shown in the first scene on left (west) wall; the setting is a palace, adorned on top with pagodas or towers. In the corners hover *apsaras* holding offerings. In the centre of the dwelling the Bodhisattva is seated on a throne; he is shown with nude upper body, adorned with a shawl draped on his upper arms. The throne is covered with a striped textile. Around the palace are gods of various kinds; as described in the LV (6/103) these gods, *yakṣas* (nature spirits), *gandharvas* (celestial musicians in Indra's heaven), *garuḍas* (mythic bird-like beings) and other spirits see the Bodhisattva as a luminous body residing in his mother's womb on a throne, in a jeweled and well-furnished pavilion. The jeweled, three-tiered sanctum is described as shining, with "fine proportions wonderful to behold. It was four-sided in shape and rested on four pillars" with a throne for a child (LV 6/106). And in the "Ratnavyūha, the jeweled sanctum of the Bodhisattva, there also appeared an assortment of cloth which was called 'Śatasahasravyūha, Array of a Hundred Thousand'. For no being among the multitudes of beings could such cloth be produced, save only for a Bodhisattva who is in his last existence" (LV 6/108); this illustrates not only the preciousness of textiles but also that of colour pigments as signs of status.
- 31 The Bodhisattva sat on the bedstead in the pavilion, which "manifests on the right side of the mother's womb where the Bodhisattva makes his entry, and he remains seated [...] endowed with limbs, fully formed [...] luminous, glorious, gracious, beautiful to see, seated with his legs crossed within the tier of the Ratnavyūha [...] illuminating the entire body of his mother" (LV 6/108-109). There he sat and the gods arrived to honour, circumambulate and guard him and to hear the dharma¹⁸. The Bodhisattva reportedly resided in this crystal sanctum in his mother's womb for ten lunar months (LV 6/116), the kingdom was filled with prosperity and peace and the king of the Śākya devoted himself in this period to spiritual practice alone.

Figure. 24. Alchi Dukhang

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- 32 Also, in the Alchi Dukhang (Tib. 'Du khang), (fig. 24) the scene of the adoration of the Bodhisattva residing in the womb of Māyā has so far not been properly described or understood in the ongoing debate in this field¹⁹. There the visionary event of the abode of the Bodhisattva in the womb of Māyā is represented in a different form: the palace in the womb is not shown, but the mother of the Buddha is represented enthroned on a lotus like a deity. Māyā, who is referred to as “Māyādevī, goddess of illusion” in the *LV* is depicted in a halo of light, with gods to her right side who came to salute and worship, and with humans in Tibetan aristocratic garb to her left side; she is shown larger as the figures around her. As described in the *LV*, the female body is depicted here as the jeweled sanctum. In addition to the characteristic lotus seat resting on a lotus rhizome which grows out of the base-line indicating the ground and is held by a serpent and sometimes anthropomorphized demigod (Skt. *nāga*), at Alchi Māyā is emanating a light aureole; this indicates the Bodhisattva who lit up his mother's body, as described in the text: “[...] the night, that [the] Bodhisattva entered into his mother's womb, from the great depth of the sea [...] a lotus rose up to the world of Brahmā, seen only by the holy Cakravartin, the Best of Men and by the great Brahmā, commander of millions of beings. Gathered in the great lotus in the form of a drop of nectar was the essence [...] of the great thousand or worlds. Placing this drop into a shining vase of lapis lazuli, the great Brahmā offers this drop of nectar to the Bodhisattva” (*LV* 6/107). The Bodhisattva's mother, too, in meditation, saw the son in her womb, who “like a lighting flash from a great wall of clouds, radiating great light, [...] entered the womb of his mother [...] with majesty, great brilliance, splendor, and color, [...] illuminating the body of his mother” (*LV* 6/109)²⁰.
- 33 This comparison with Alchi serves as an example for completely different forms of presentations of one episode, indicating that the program designers found different ways and visual formulations based on the *Lalitavistara*, and it appears that no standardized canonical pictorial models existed as yet. While Māyādevī is only one figure in the flow of scenes at Tabo, she obtains a new prominent role, and female virtues become visible, in later phases²¹.

Panel 5: travel to Lumbinī

- 34 As recounted in *LV* chapter 7 “The birth”, Māyā is shown standing in the centre of a chariot on her way to Lumbinī (figs 25-27). The king has lavishly decorated the excellent chariot; two banners indicate her royal status. The cart is drawn by a group of figures led by a lady in Tibetan attire (together with her servants). As described in the 7th chapter the king requested: “Let Queen Māyā ride alone with the finest of chariots, drawn by maidens of rank” (*LV* 7/127). She left the palace surrounded by “[...] 84 000 horse-drawn chariots, [...] heroic soldiers armed with shields” (*LV* 7/129) and thousand of gods escorted her singing melodies and praises. On the left are depicted soldiers with shields which escort the queen.

Figure 25. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 26. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 27. Dungkar, cave 1, detail

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- 35 Landscape details such as patches of grass indicate the setting of the scene, working to create an illusionistic continuous space. Trees and musicians in the background and upper part of the image field recall the beginning of this chapter, describing the time when the birth was imminent and signs appeared in king Śuddhodana's garden, such as flowers bursting into bloom and jewelled trees arising from the ground (LV 7/123). The figures in this panel are anchored on a base-ground with the central image of Māyā shown larger. Above, dwelling in clouds, are musicians, saluting queen Māyā with their sounds.
- 36 Concerning the figural type and style, a remarkable sense of individuality is shown on various levels: first an attempt to portray different figural types; second, to make a succession of movements such as the pulling of the cart, and the role of the different figures in action, comprehensible and palpable. This tendency towards humanizing the figures and a focus on the emotions of the various actors of the scenes helps to bring the life-story closer to the devotee and it creates empathy and identification in the viewer.
- 37 The chariot is depicted empty a second time in this scene, linking one rectangular section of the murals with the next. It illustrates the moment, when, stepping forth from her chariot, Māyādevī entered the Lumbinī gardens.

Panel 6: the birth of the Bodhisattva

- 38 The fragments of inscription 2, placed above the animal births, recount the simultaneous birth of other beings; and inscription 3 positioned on the right corner of the panel, identifies the scene as Asita's visit (fig. 9).

Figure 28. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 29. Dungkar, cave 1

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- 39 As described in the 7th chapter “The birth”, Māyā gives birth under the bejeweled tree (figs 28-32). Her image is set against a red background colour, with various scenes arranged around her; Māyā in the centre is shown larger in size than the other figures. On the left side, Māyā, recognizable by her blue robe and the umbrella is shown with her entourage after she has left the cart on the way to Lumbinī. Māyā’s search for a suitable tree for the birth is narrated in great detail in the text: “Māyādevī entered the Lumbinī garden, walking from grove to grove, she looked at one tree after another, until she came to the plākṣa tree, the most beautiful of them all [...] This tree gave off the sweetest perfumes, and its branches were draped with streamers of many colors [...] and it] shone with precious jewels” (LV 9/129).

Figure 30. Detail

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Figure 31. Detail of animal births

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Figure 32. Dungkar, cave 1, detail of inscription

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- 40 In the centre Māyā stands below the excellent tree which “bowed to her in greeting” (LV 7/130). Then Māyā “raised her right arm, shining like a lighting in the sky, and grasped a branch of the tree to bear her weight. Stretching she gazed at the broad expanse of the sky [...] and thousand apsaras drew near to serve her [...]” (LV 7/130). The central scene of the birth is oriented on a base-line and Māyā is shown larger, lending her the appropriate prominence in the pictorial space.

- 41 The scene in the LV culminates in the moment when the boy emerged from his mother's womb. The Bodhisattva issued forth from the right side of his mother, "possessing full memory and knowledge, [...] untouched by the taint of the womb" (LV 7/130). Brahmā took away the jeweled sanctum in which the Bodhisattva had dwelt within the womb of his mother. At the moment when the Bodhisattva was born, reportedly a great lotus arose from the depth of the earth to receive him, and Śakra and Brahmā greeted the Bodhisattva. In the image they stand to the left of Māyā and receive the Bodhisattva in their arms, and royal fans and jeweled parasols appear in the air above the Bodhisattva, "who stood on the great lotus, surveying the ten directions with the gaze of a lion, with the gaze of a great being" (LV 7/131)²². Above Māyā are depicted *apsaras* hovering in the air and throwing offerings, while nymphs salute her with music offerings²³.
- 42 However, the first bath, which is described next in the text, does not seem to be depicted here as at Tabo, where the upper bodies of the *nāga* kings Nanda and Upananda are shown pouring cool and warm water to bathe the Bodhisattva. Here, only Śakra and Brahmā sprinkle him with perfumed waters and flower essence (LV 7/131). It is possible that the *nāga* kings were once depicted below, but it also might well be the case that the "welcome reception" is condensed at Dungkar to the essential appearance of the two gods.
- 43 The text recounts several further events after the birth (LV 7/131). To the right are shown the "Seven Steps" of the Bodhisattva; he is depicted six times in the scene as he walks in six directions (including nadir and zenith). Wherever he steps, lotus flowers emerge. The Bodhisattva states "I will be the Greatest of Physicians, the destroyer of sickness and death" (LV 7/140).
- 44 Around the central scenes are depicted further episodes illustrating the miraculous manifestations taking place. Women with children are shown on the left (upper part), recalling the text passage in which king Śuddhodana is informed that the Sākya race is blessed by good fortune as "five hundred thousand allies have been born [...] as well as thousand foals have been born to the horses with Kaṇṭhaka at their head [...] twenty thousand elephants [...] cows and calves" (LV 7/142).
- 45 On the left we see how simultaneously many animals give birth; for instance elephants are shown with their calves; in the bottom zone of the left side is shown a peacock (representing one of the foremost animals, which had come to salute the Bodhisattva). We find on the right side superimposed wild animals, which come to the palace. Cow and jackal or leopard are depicted above; the text states that lions found their way into the city and they did not hurt any being (LV 7/123), and all animals became tame and gentle at the sight of the Buddha-to-be.
- 46 Seven nights after the Bodhisattva's birth his mother died and was reborn into the realm of the Thirty-three gods. Thereafter the Bodhisattva was escorted to the great city of Kapilavastu and entered in the king's palace (LV 7/149)²⁴. There it was asked, who would be fit to nurse the Bodhisattva; Mahāprajāpatī Gautamī, the prince's maternal aunt was chosen, and in addition thirty-two nurses were engaged.
- 47 The scene in the upper right corner shows the boy's abode, indicated again by a tent-like structure. We see the sleeping Bodhisattva on a throne bedecked with a cloth and above the textile valance the heads of the servants or nurses are visible. An inscription tells us that this scene is part of the following episode, the visit of the hermit ascetic

(Skt. *rṣi*) Asita, who possesses the five superior kinds of knowledge and who realized the supreme truth.

- 48 Asita is not shown in this panel, but the text informs the reader that the seer Asita observed many supernatural phenomena at the moment of the Bodhisattva's birth and foresaw the greatness of the boy. Rising up in the sky he passed from the Himalayas to Kapilavastu as described in the next passage of this chapter (LV 7/150). Asita visits the young prince at his home but the servants say he is asleep. Asita answers they should wake him up, stating that such great men remain always alert (LV 7/152; Tropper 2018, p. 658).
- 49 As a significant feature of the compositions we find again a linkage on a thematic level and between two image fields. The text cartouche and the setting of the Bodhisattva's abode provides a bridge to the episode depicted in the following panel to the right, where the encounter between the boy and the Great Asita is shown in various scenes.

Panel 7: encounters with the hermit Asita and Māheśvara and their prophecies

- 50 A large section of chapter 7 of the *Lalitasvistara* "The birth" concerns the visit of the great Sage Asita²⁵ versed in the five sciences, who predicted the 32 signs of a Cakravartin on the Bodhisattva and prophesized that he will become an Enlightened being on earth (figs 33-36). This event is visualized in several episodes arranged from top to bottom.

Figure 33. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 34. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 35. Dungkar, cave 1, detail

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Figure 36. Dungkar, cave 1, detail

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- 51 In the left upper corner king Śuddhodana appears with the boy in his arm and escorted by two servants; an umbrella dignifies them. To the right is the great Sage Asita clad in a wrap-around skirt. The physical features of his emaciated face are precisely defined. Asita said that a great wonder has appeared in the world; he arose from his seat and – as shown in the image – bowed down in veneration before the boy with folded hands (LV 7/152). The man behind Asita is most likely Māheśvara who appears later in a separate episode in the LV, where – like Asita – he wishes to worship the Bodhisattva. Here it appears that two phases of the text's version of the story are conflated. Māheśvara²⁶ is bearded and his attributes are a turban-like headdress adorned with a ritual weapon in the shape of crossed vajras (Skt. *viśvavajra*; Tib. *rdo rje rgya gram*), and a flywhisk; behind him is a second person, also bearing a flywhisk.
- 52 In the next scene below, Asita is shown kneeling in front of the Bodhisattva, who is held with both arms by Śuddhodana; with folded hands Asita takes the Bodhisattva on his lap. Behind Asita is again perhaps Māheśvara and a bearer of the flywhisk.
- 53 As to the narrative mode, Asita and Māheśvara are represented as if they would visit the prince in the same moment, but in the text they appear after each other. We thus find a conflation of the timing of the two episodes. In the upper right corner in this panel is perhaps the Bodhisattva riding in his cart to the next scene, thus connecting the Asita story with the visit in the temple depicted in the following panel.
- 54 The good condition of this panel allows an appreciation of the secure line drawing and the impressive artistic skills of the painter. The figures have finely executed facial features, and differences of age are subtly characterized. These paintings reflect a master artisan's striking sensitivity and artistic skill.

Panel 8: visit to the temple

- 55 The temple visit is narrated in the 8th chapter of the *Lalitavistara* “The visit to the temple”. The lower half of the painting shows a rectangular building with a sloping roof surmounted by a stupa-like tower (figs 33, 34/ right half of the image, 37). There is again a visual and spatial link between the encounter with Asita and the temple, as it appears that the Bodhisattva, held in the left arm of his father “crosses the border” from the “Asita panel” to the “temple panel”, as if walking downstairs. The latter is “constructed” by a text panel which has a stepped shape. He then enters the temple through a door in the lower left part of the architectural structure. In this panel the narrative develops from bottom to top. Thus, the building organizes the whole image field, and in this tectonic structure the figures move in a quasi-three-dimensional space from left to right and from bottom to top.

Figure 37. Dungkar, cave 1, detail of the upper part (see also right part of figs 33, 34)

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- 56 The next phase of the story is shown as if inside the temple: the young Bodhisattva sits in the left part of the building, identified by a nimbus and an umbrella. In front of the boy, the gods bow down in respect. Two phases of the departure from the temple by the Bodhisattva are perhaps depicted on the top of the building: Śuddhodana with the prince in his arms and a servant with dark complexion next to him to the left of the tower, and the Bodhisattva alone with the servant holding an umbrella to the right of the tower on the roof. In the latter scene the Bodhisattva walks to the right and leads the viewer's gaze to the next episode, the visit to the school. In an interesting detail of the composition, the Bodhisattva moves from the roof of the temple, which slightly overlaps the vertical line and border to the next image panel in which is painted the Bodhisattva in the school. This permeability of scene borders demonstrates that the framing devices are not intended as inviolable barriers. The overlap of one scene into an adjacent one conveys a sense of narrative momentum. This visual strategy is in

particular useful for motifs and sequences of the story which are associated with movement and action.

Panel 9: ornamenting the Bodhisattva and the visit to the school

- 57 The two events depicted in the next image field are set against a red background; they are narrated in the chapters 9 “The jewelry” and chapter 10 “The visit to the schoolroom”. The ornamentation episode occupies the lower left part of the panel (figs 38-40); the story explains that the Bodhisattva, the Supremely Intelligent One, does not need the common ornaments of this world.

Figure 38. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 39. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 40. Dungkar, cave 1, detail

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- 58 In this scene five persons sit under a baldachin, adorned with colourful textile hangings consisting of rows of oblong stripes made of quilted patches of precious textiles in

different colours. These are typical adornments of Tibetan sacred spaces, doorways and pillars. In the background an honorific textile is fixed on poles. In the centre the young prince sits under a honorific umbrella. A figure in front is apparently transferring an objet to him.

- 59 The story explains that the brahmin priest Udāyana, a priest to the king, said the Bodhisattva should have ornaments, whereupon the king had jewelry prepared for the prince (LV 9/181). The following day brahmin priests gathered to adorn and honor the prince, and ten thousand girls came and gazed upon his face. “But no sooner were the ornaments put in place than the splendor of his body outshone them” (LV 9/182)²⁷.

Figure 41. Dungkar, cave 1 (see also drawing/ fig. 39, right part)

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Figure 42. Dungkar, cave 1, detail

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- 60 The visit to the school is narrated in the subsequent 10th chapter of the *Lalitavistara* “The visit of the schoolroom”, but here it is illustrated in the upper section of the same panel as the ornamentation of the Bodhisattva (fig. 41 right half of the image, fig. 42). The text explains that the Bodhisattva was, from his previous lives, expert in all the *śāstras* (commentaries on texts associated with the Buddha or with the Vedas) found in the world as well as in all other sciences. He visited the school in Kapila solely to bring the ten thousand children which surrounded him closer to Enlightenment. In the upper part of this image field, boys are shown kneeling under trees hold writing tablets²⁸ with script on them. The boys are arranged around the Bodhisattva – recognizable by his nimbus and the umbrella – who sits on a pedestal-like stool. In the text only boys are mentioned but among the students in the painting are two persons in Tibetan aristocratic attire, one male with a black board. A single female is identifiable by the long braids and the turquoise ornament on her forehead. She is the only one who does not have a writing tablet, and could be one of the Bodhisattva’s escorts, strewing flowers and holding a jewel as an auspicious sign (LV 10/187).
- 61 In front of the Bodhisattva is a person wearing a turban and seated under a wide honorific parasol on a sumptuous footstool draped with a striped cloth. This is most likely Viśvāmitra, the schoolmaster. He seems to be shown again after falling to the ground, as he was “[...]unable to bear the majesty and the splendor of the Bodhisattva” (LV 10/188). However, an inhabitant of the heavenly world (Skt. *devaputra*) raised him up. And the teacher states that the Bodhisattva has come to the school “so that many children may mature completely in the best of all vehicles [...]. There is no teacher above him in all the three worlds; [...] He has been familiar with scripts whose names you do not even know” (LV 10/188-189). “O monks, while the children were pronouncing the alphabet, countless hundreds of thousand of principal doors of the Dharma appeared, all through the power of the Bodhisattva [...] and the children [...] were brought to complete maturation and their thoughts were

directed toward perfect and complete Enlightenment” (LV 10/195). Below are more sitting figures, but they are too damaged for identification. Perhaps they are the gods who witnessed this event.

- 62 At Dungkar, the visual narrative overall tends to conflate scenes which appear in temporal succession in order to emphasize space and setting. The two depictions of the schoolmaster, in two phases of the episode, illustrates the convention affirming the priority of a shared space embracing two different moments over distinct space-time episodes²⁹.

Panel 10: the meditation under the “rose-apple” (*jambu*) tree

- 63 This episode is narrated in chapter 11, “The farming village”. Inscription 4 tells about the five hermit ascetics who were stopped during flight to the spot where the Bodhisattva meditated under the “rose-apple” (*jambu*) tree.
- 64 The text explains that the Bodhisattva – when he was a little older – wished to visit a farming village; he saw there farmers working hard in the fields and was full of sorrow (LV 11/ 205). He entered into a grove of trees and saw a pleasant “rose-apple” (*jambu*) tree³⁰. He sat in its shade with legs crossed, and there he “attained one-pointedness of mind. Having so fixed his mind, he was free from non-virtue and obscuration and achieved the first level of meditation, in which there is observation and reflection, a meditation endowed with joy and pleasure born of solitude. There he remained steady” (LV 11/199).

Figure 43. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 44. Dungkar, cave 1 (left part of the drawing)

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- 65 In the image, the Bodhisattva sits unmoved in the meditative posture (Skt. *dhyānāsana*) and surrounded by an aureole (figs 43, 44). The text panel (which concerns the hermit ascetics) in the lower part has a double function as text field and as a throne-like pedestal which supports the prince. To his left seems to be a second area with a figure placed above³¹. The “rose-apple” (*jambu*) tree’s trunk flanks the scene on the left side; from it issue long branches on which are located single leaves in a rather ornamental form. The limbs are regularly arranged forming a kind of protective cover or canopy above the prince.
- 66 The story continues with the characterization of the five foreign hermit ascetics, possessing superior knowledge and powers by means of which they traveled through the air, traversing Mount Meru; when they were passing over “[...] the dense grove of trees, they found themselves held back and unable to advance” (LV 11/200). In the composition the story is visualized in a remarkable way: the hermit ascetics (Skt. *rṣis*) travel from left to right and they appear to be blocked by the border of the next image field. The lowest hermit ascetic of the group looks at the Bodhisattva, directing the viewer's attention to the meditating Bodhisattva in the centre. As described in the text the tree is animated with respect, and is shown bowing down to the meditating Bodhisattva who is described as “brilliant with majesty and radiant with splendor” (LV 11/201).
- 67 The shape of the rose-apple tree recalling an umbrella illustrates that during the extended period of his meditation under the tree, its shade had not left the body of the Bodhisattva. Hardly visible is a figure to the left of the Bodhisattva; this might be the

goddess of the forest who came and uttered that he “[...] has entered this grove and given himself over entirely to meditation. The gods, the gandharvas, the master of the nāgas, [...] all pay their respects to him” (LV 11/201). However, it could also be the Bodhisattva’s father who searched for his son; when he saw him in deep meditation he bowed down at his son’s feet. The 11th chapter of the *Lalitavistara* ends with following verse: “After speaking thus with great authority to his father and his followers, the Perfectly Pure One returns to the finest of cities, and conforming to custom, remains in the city. But his mind is occupied with departure from home” (LV 11/208).

Panel 11: the search for a bride for the Bodhisattva

- 68 This event is recounted in chapter 12, “Skill in the worldly arts”. Inscription 5, in the right-hand lower corner tells the viewer that Gopā has a comely appearance, and the inscription 8 in the upper left-hand corner is about the archery in the following panel.

Figure 45. Dungkar, cave 1, detail (see also right part of fig. 44)

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- 69 The scene shows the search for and the courting of the bride Gopā (figs 44, 45), as confirmed by the inscription. The king decided to search for a suitable maiden for the prince because the brahmin priests predicted that if the prince does not leave his family “[...] he will be a Cakravartin king, a king devoted to the Dharma, possessing the seven precious jewels [...]. Having subjugated this great earth without using weapons or force, he will govern by means of the Dharma” (LV 12/211).
- 70 This event is narrated on two levels on top of another: in the left upper level sits the brahmin priest who has been called to give advice and to examine the young women. Next to him is the Bodhisattva; the two appear to be what the text describes as the brahmin priest speaking to the prince about marriage and the prince thought that “for the qualities of desire, I have neither taste nor inclination” (LV 12/212). He decides to

follow the previous wise bodhisattvas who, even though they were married, did not get distracted from contemplation. The text then explains which bride would delight the Bodhisattva, and that he is looking only for the virtues of modesty and pureness in body and birth, family and race. Then he lists as desirable qualities that she should be well educated, in the flower of youth and beauty and yet without pride, benevolent, and without bitterness or meanness and always practising the dharma. Finally, he asks, “may she have no passion for wine or rich food, [...] may she know, like a courtesan, the way of the Śāstras” (LV 12/213-214). Ultimately the daughter of Daṇḍapāṇi of the Śākya, Gopā, meets all these requirements³².

- 71 The scene below the conversation between the brahmin priest and the Bodhisattva shows the prince and Gopā, clad in Tibetan attire in the centre. According to the text, the Bodhisattva was asked by his father to distribute ornaments to all the young women but unable to endure his splendour, they went off quickly carrying the ornaments (LV 12/ 216-217). The figures to the left are unclear; perhaps they are the maidens who came to the assembly hall to be examined and took the jewels. In the centre is perhaps depicted a later phase of the story: by the time the prince saw Gopā all the jewels had been given away so he offered her a ring from his fingers. She refused it as she did not want to deprive him of his jewellery. The king was delighted and sent a brahmin priest to Gopā’s father, asking him to give his daughter to the king’s son.
- 72 It is possible that Gopā’s father is shown in the centre of the panel; however, the figure has Indic clothes as opposed to the Tibetan attire of his daughter Gopā. The father reportedly came to the brahmin priest and told him that it was the custom of his family to give a daughter to one who is skilled in the arts and proficient in martial arts such as wrestling or archery (LV 12/218). The king explained the situation to the prince and he answered he is willing to demonstrate his abilities in a contest. Gopā is promised as the prize for one who wins in fencing, in archery, in boxing and in wrestling. In the right upper corner, badly damaged, a pedestal with a nimbus above can be seen. It is the young prince shooting an arrow, which is also confirmed by the inscription³³; it is an effective textual and visual premonition to the next scenes of the contests with his rival, his cousin Devadatta. His arrow cuts across the frame, which again adds an intensive dynamic element to the overall structure.

Panel 12: contests for Gopā

- 73 In the 12th chapter of the *Lalitasvisatara* “Skill in the worldly arts”, king Śuddhodana announces that the young prince will demonstrate his superiority over all other young Śākya by showing his skills in the worldly arts for seven days (figs 46-48).
- 74 Inscriptions 6-9: no. 6 informs us that the Bodhisattva tosses a dead elephant across the city walls; no. 7 mentions wrestling; no. 8 is about shooting an arrow which as just mentioned also occurs in the previous panel; no. 9 describes the Bodhisattva stringing the exceptionally strong bow of his grandfather.

Figure 46. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 47. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figures. 48. Dungkar, cave 1, the Bodhisattva strings the bow of his grandfather Simphahanu

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- 75 The painted story starts in the lower right corner showing a white elephant which had been led to the city for the Bodhisattva. However, the Bodhisattva's cousin Devadatta, full of envy and pride as a proud Śākya, killed the animal with the palm of his hand (LV 12/219). Above are figures around the dead elephant referring to the next episode when the young Sundarānanda sees a dead elephant at the gate of the city; he took him by the tail and dragged him out of the city. We see a person grasping the tail of the elephant; however, the identity of this figure is not clear. In the text it is next stated that the Bodhisattva came and praised Sundarānanda; however, in order to prevent the city from the decomposing elephant's foul odour, he picks it up by the tail with his toe and tosses him outside the city. It is not clear if one of the figures around the elephant, who heave the animal up, is the Bodhisattva. The stupa in the corner next to it might depict the place where the corpse of the elephant landed, called the "ditch of the elephant" (LV 12/220)³⁴.
- 76 The text then lets the reader know that many monks and Śākyas came to the place – perhaps shown in the middle of the group depicted around the seated, nimbated Bodhisattva at the centre. In the text, his intellectual abilities are first recounted and in a challenge he demonstrated his knowledge of writing. Then with a quick mind he solved problems of mathematics and astrology (LV 12/222)³⁵.
- 77 He then demonstrated his skills in other arts. On the left he is shown in the wrestling contest. The Bodhisattva is the protagonist of two different matches but he is depicted only once. The relevant inscription (7) is in the upper right corner³⁶. First, the Śākyas Nanda and Ānanda were touched by his hand and immediately fell down, unable to resist his power; they appear to lie on the ground above the Bodhisattva (LV 12/229).
- 78 In the second part of the contest the Bodhisattva asks to wrestle with the whole group. Despite their overwhelming numerical advantage, they all fall to the ground in defeat. We find here again a fusion of two scenes happening in chronological succession being depicted simultaneously.

- 79 The archery competition is recounted next in the *Lalitavistara*. First the princes attempted to string the bow of his grandfather Siṃhahanu, but only the Bodhisattva was able to do so (fig. 48); this is explained in inscription 9.
- 80 The competition is shown in the uppermost section. Iron drums were placed between palm trees and a mechanical boar made of iron on the right end (LV 12/ 231). Inscription 8 dealing with archery is in the left upper corner of the former panel. The arrow which is shot by the prince, depicted in the previous panel, penetrated the drums, the palm trees, and the iron boar, and then fell to the ground. Then the *devaputras* addressed king Śuddhodana in a verse (Skt. *gāthā*): “Just as this bow has been bent by the Muni without effort and without rising from his seat, so [...] will he conquer the army of Māra, and soon fulfil his purpose [...] shooting the arrows of egolessness and emptiness through the sky of tranquility to vanquish the enemy, the fettering passions” (LV 12/233-234)³⁷.
- 81 Daṇḍapāṇi then gave his daughter Gopā to the Bodhisattva, and king Śuddhodana accepted her as the betrothed princess³⁸. Gopā herself is not shown here, but a woman depicted in the upper left corner of the next panel is probably Gopā. She stands alone on the palace’s roof turning left (back) to the previous panel, while the Bodhisattva already dwells in the women’s apartment. The narrative mode of space boxes at Dungkar – which function like stages – open up to new possibilities for the artist’s creativity. It also shows that minor episodes do not always follow the chronological sequence in the LV; they are often submitted to the dictates of pictorial space in the panel.

Panel 13: life in palace and great departure

- 82 The relevant texts for this panel are in chapters 13 “Exhortation”, 14 “Dream” and 15 “Departure from Home”. There are two inscriptions: no. 10 is about married life with Gopā in the palace, and no. 11 describes the discussion between the Bodhisattva and his father demonstrating the Bodhisattva’s determination to renounce palace life in order to practice austerity.

Figure 49. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 50. Dungkar, cave 1

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- 83 The following narrative space is dominated by the architectural structure of the royal palace which takes up the left part of the panel. In the centre is the excellent abode of the Bodhisattva in the women's apartment (figs 49, 50). There he decides to leave his home in order to teach the dharma and to help beings cross the ocean of existence. Two inscriptions are placed in the upper left corner; one of them, inscription 10, has to do with Gopā, and is most likely linked to the lady in Tibetan attire; both image and text thus create an interface with the competitions for Gopā shown in the previous panel. Inscription 11 is concerned with the prince's departure from the life in the palace. The

central multi-storied building is depicted with a novel sense of naturalism, gravity and spatialization; it functions as stage inhabited by figures and serves as a focal point from which the story of the Great Departure evolves. The complex pagoda-like palace consists of three storeys topped by a small tower; the middle and upper storeys are decked with sloping roofs, and the upper one is embellished with a further tower. On the right and left edges of the lower storey are shown doors into the plane, while the upper story has openings to balcony-like platforms on which the Bodhisattva stands. These four doors are both borders of the palace and openings to the outside world; the prince steps through these portals to encounter the deficiencies of human life which lead him to the final departure.

- 84 On the upper levels guardians are positioned to prevent the prince from leaving, and on the roofs are also men with shields. The magnificent palace is described in chapter 13 of the *Lalitavistara*: “[...] like the dwellings of the long-lived gods, the palace is remarkable for its terraces, and [...] porticos, for its arcades, round windows, and observation towers. All sorts of precious ornament have been arranged with careful art, as well as parasols, standards, and unfurled banners. Jeweled nets hang from all the many trellises, and hundreds of thousands of silk fringes” (LV 13/ 45).
- 85 In the middle storey the Bodhisattva is shown in the women’s apartment. He sits on a bed under an umbrella, accompanied to his left by a lady with sensuous curves and exposed bosom. This recalls the long passages describing the maidens stretched out at ease on his couch: “The women here are joyful, adorned with brilliant garments, [...] their thoughts are affectionate and tender. But by the power of the Jinās, verses are heard instead from the music urging the Best of Beings to depart” (LV 13/ 254).
- 86 The sitting figures on the bed and the one standing to the left of the Bodhisattva may be the gods who venerate the Bodhisattva and remind him of his purpose and to fundamentally change his life³⁹. Behind the group stand bearers of flywhisks. As described in chapter 13, the gods exhort the Bodhisattva while he is residing in the women’s apartments, encouraging him with melodious voices and instruments: “You vowed to be Protector and refuge of the world, to be the Best of Guides [...] now is the time [...] to depart from home” (LV 13/243-245). Finally, when the maidens listen to the words which emerge from the music, they beg the Bodhisattva to be the highest and first of beings to strive for supreme Enlightenment (LV 13/275).
- 87 Chapter 14 “The dream” recounts king Śuddhodana’s dream of the Bodhisattva departing from home. To prevent the prince from leaving, the king had three palaces built for the prince’s enjoyment. Men were appointed to patrol the staircases of each palace, and heavy gates were made, so that the prince could not leave home without being seen. Then the Bodhisattva asked his father for permission to go to the pleasure garden, and he granted him this wish out of esteem for his son⁴⁰.
- 88 In the lower two storeys we see on each corner a door through which the Bodhisattva seems to depart.
- 89 On every of these four occasions he meets respectively an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and finally a monk. The four encounters are roughly situated according to their orientation in space indicated in the text⁴¹. The *Lalitavistara* relates that the prince departed first through the Eastern gate of the city and met an old man, who had been abandoned in the forest (LV 14/286); after this encounter he asks to return, thinking:

“What do games and pleasures matter to me, I who will be the abode of old age!” The image is damaged but we can still see a man standing before the prince next to the door of the lower storey.

- 90 At another time, when the prince departed through the Southern gate, a man struck by disease appeared there; this is illustrated on the lower left side where a man sits in crooked position while a person holds his arms above him in a protective gesture. On another occasion, the prince left through the Western gate, and saw a corpse on a palanquin covered with a cloth. The two figures with arms held aloft may depict the lamenting family; all this made the Bodhisattva again thinking of deliverance.
- 91 Finally, when leaving through the Northern gate, the gods arranged for a monk with an alms bowl to appear on the road, walking with a peaceful mind (LV 14/290). The Bodhisattva thought that this life of spiritual practice would be desirable. Unfortunately, only the prince stepping out the portal on the upper right side of the palace remains visible.
- 92 When the king heard that the prince had seen these forbidden things, he had strong gates built and had them guarded by armed patrols and cavalry, to prevent the prince from leaving. They are visible on the different terraces of the building⁴². In the meantime, the maidens in the prince’s palace receive the order never to cease their songs, and to ensnare his heart with games and pleasures to prevent him from leaving. But signs of the time of departure appear, such as trees ceasing their blooming, drums and tambourines breaking when struck and making no sound, and the whole city being overcome by sleep (LV 14/292).
- 93 In the upper storey, explained in inscription 11, the Bodhisattva asks for his father’s permission to leave the palace (LV 15/301), as found in the next chapter “The departure from home”. Through a window we see king Śuddhodana – identified by his Tibetan headgear – seated in a room embellished with textile valances. The second person must be the Bodhisattva. He tells the king that he will not leave the palace if old age never takes hold of him, nor illness or death; the king is overcome with sorrow at these words, as this cannot be done. He “restrains his attachment and controlling his love for his son” and says “May you do great good in the world. May you rejoice in liberating beings” (LV 15/303).
- 94 However, when the prince returned to the palace, his father commanded that all gates be closed, locked and guarded and that music must be played. But then the Four Mahārājas entered the capital, and informed the yakṣas that the Bodhisattva will depart (LV 15/306). So the gods put all the people in the city of Kapilavastu to sleep. Śakra opened the gates and showed the Bodhisattva the way out. The text states the Bodhisattva entered into the thoughts of dharma and wished “May I be able to free all beings chained tight by the strong bonds of desire!” (LV 15/308). At that instance a *devaputra* caused the women’s apartment to appear disagreeable and unpleasant. “The Bodhisattva looked at the entire gathering of women [...] he saw that some had torn clothing and dishevelled hair, [...] some were lying naked, coarse bodies in view [...] the Bodhisattva indeed had the impression of a cemetery” (LV 15/310-311). The Bodhisattva thought these creatures were miserable-looking, and revulsion welled up within him. He formed for himself a clear consciousness of the pure and penetrated the idea of the impureness of the body: “Having seen this, what wise man would not look upon his own body as an enemy?” (LV 15/315).

- 95 And the *devaputras* spoke: “Ah, truly, he is as deep as the ocean; it is impossible to take his measure. And truly, the mind of the one without attachment does not attach itself to sense objects” (LV 15/315).
- 96 The image at Dungkar shows the Bodhisattva on the roof, standing orientated to the right side, towards the image of the departure group; as described in the text, the Bodhisattva arose facing the east, and went to the palace roof. “Looking into the expanse of heaven, he saw the large community of masters of the gods [...] holding flowers, incense, perfumes [...] monastic garments and parasols” all bowing before him. The prince called Chandaka to bring the king of horses decorated with his ornaments. The text recounts that Chandaka again asked the Bodhisattva not to wander forth as a monk, but the Bodhisattva replied because of desire he has endured hundreds of sufferings in the course of his previous lives (LV 15/322), bound by the net of ignorance and confusion. He shall now be the lord of the dharma.
- 97 In the upper right part of the panel are shown various scenes connected with the departure. To the right of the uppermost storey we see the prince on his noble horse, led by a group of gods; among them Brahmā is clearly visible. The text recounts this event in ornate verses: He mounted the king of horses, “white as the disk of the full moon, and the whole earth shakes” (LV 15/333), and he travelled through the sky with Kaṇṭhaka: “The Guardians of the World lift the best of horses with their hands, pure as a spotless lotus” and Śakra and Brahmā go before him to show the best route (LV 15/334).
- 98 In the middle section of the right side on the border of the next panel the Bodhisattva cuts his hair with his sword, and Chandaka is shown seated in front of him. After the tonsure he threw his hair to the wind. The Thirty-three gods collected his hair to do it honor and a stupa was erected there, as is depicted above. The black strands of hair are held by an airborne divinity clearly shown in the upper right corner, above the stupas.
- 99 Beneath this the princely horse is shown with lowered head walking towards the palace, perhaps led by Chandaka. This illustrates the moment after the Bodhisattva had handed his horse and his ornaments to Chandaka, asking him to return to the palace (LV 15/338)⁴³. *Devaputras* then carried the Bodhisattva's garments, and Chandaka led the horse Kaṇṭhaka to the palace (LV 15/342).
- 100 In the meantime, the king and Gopā had found the Bodhisattva's couch empty; in despair they ordered messengers to find the young prince. They questioned Chandaka, who told them that the prince will not return (LV 15/341). On the right of the upper storey of the palace a person is shown standing in a doorway This could be the king (once again wearing a characteristic woollen cloak typical of depictions of him) looking for his son.
- 101 In the lowest section to the right of the palace a group of persons appears. This could be the scene when Chandaka “leading the great horse and carrying the ornaments [...] returned to the garden of the palace”⁴⁴. Family members of the prince receive the horse without the Bodhisattva and fall into despair.

Panel 14: austerities, giving up asceticism and recuperating on the banks of the Nairāñjanā river

- 102 The following panel deals with the Bodhisattva's practices which lead to his final path to the seat of Enlightenment (figs 51, 52). The various stories combined in the panel lead from one wall to the next, with the river Nairāñjanā as the connection between the two walls. On this river the Bodhisattva as a wandering monk met various people who became aware of his greatness. He first performed and then gave up fasting, and he received his first meal from the village cow-herding girl Sujātā. These episodes are from the *LV* chapters 16 "The visit with Bimbisāra", 17 "Practice of austerities", 18 "Nairāñjanā river" and 19 "The walk toward Bodhimaṇḍa".

Figure 51. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 52. Dungkar, cave 1

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- 103 Chapter 16 begins with the story of the Bodhisattva who has donned the saffron-coloured garments to become an itinerant monk. Wandering with an alms bowl, he started on the path to the Bodhimaṇḍa. On this path he met various people, and the Bodhisattva informs them of his intention to teach the dharma. At first, he visits king Bimbisāra⁴⁵ who wished to see the excellent being and offered half of his kingdom. The Bodhisattva replied he is no longer attracted by the qualities of desire, whereupon the king requested him to share the teaching when he has attained Enlightenment (LV 16/368).
- 104 In the upper right corner of the narrative space two episodes of these encounters appear to be depicted. They are shown in small image fields one above the other with indecipherable inscriptions. Although these two encounters are described in the text before the Bodhisattva's austerities at the Nairāñjanā river, in the composition here they are shown on the right side, and thus "after" the fasting scenes.
- 105 In the lower field the Bodhisattva sits on a chair in front of a person who appears to be of high rank; perhaps king Bimbisāra of Magadha. However, the Bodhisattva is shown seated, unlike the account in the *Lalitavistara* where he is described as a wandering monk with an offering bowl. In the painting, a man with a turban and a tight-fitting Kashmir-style jacket appears to converse with the Bodhisattva. This most likely represents Bimbisāra who is shown in a very similar attire in a preaching scene after the Enlightenment.
- 106 In the upper field we see the Bodhisattva seated with four or five men standing in front of him. This could be the story of the encounter with Rudraka, the son of Rāma, that is recounted in the following chapter 17 of the *Lalitavistara*. We see a group of ascetics (which perhaps also includes the Five men of good family who came and were practicing under Rudraka as recounted in the text). The text informs us that Rudraka was dwelling in Rājagṛha with an assembly of seven hundred disciples and taught them ascetic practices. The Bodhisattva thought if he does not practice austerities, Rudraka

will not respect him, and the Bodhisattva will not be able to demonstrate superiority of his meditation and to refute Rudraka's false teachings which are transitory and limited (LV 17/373). The Five men were satisfied with the Bodhisattva's reasoning and determination to practice asceticism and they attached themselves to him (LV 17/375). They appear again in subsequent scenes.

- 107 After this decision, the Bodhisattva goes to the Nairāñjanā river depicted on the left side of the image field; the river is described as having pure water and beautiful waterfalls surrounded by pastures. There his mind was extremely content and he decided to practice asceticism. In the upper left corner we see the Bodhisattva engaging in extreme austerities; he sits on the bare earth in monk's dress under a tree, demonstrating the method of nourishing the body with only a single juniper berry, sesame seed and grain of rice; his emaciated body "with a rib cage like an old stable" (LV 17/387) is clearly visible. Two herder boys collecting cow dung in their wicker bags flank him; as recounted in the text they smear dust on him because they take him for a dust goblin. The right one has his arm raised and appears to put grass into the Bodhisattva's ears (LV 17/390).
- 108 Below the emaciated Bodhisattva sits a man, arms in head in front of a woman⁴⁶. This seems to be the Bodhisattva who already left the meditation under the tree, after realizing that strict asceticism would not lead to Enlightenment. It is described in the next chapter 18 of the *Lalitavistara*. The woman could thus be Sujātā, one of the village girls, who reportedly kept offering food (LV 17/404); she will later also offer the first meal to the Bodhisattva at the Nairāñjanā⁴⁷.
- 109 The text of the *Lalitavistara* states that it now occurred to the Bodhisattva that brahmin priests and *śramaṇas*, eating meagrely and tormenting their bodies, do not attain the highest wisdom, and thus such practices do not bring an end to future birth, old age, death and suffering. "On a path where one become exhausted and weak, one cannot manifest complete Enlightenment" (LV 17/403). Here again two scenes – fasting and renunciation – which happen at different points of time, but which are thematically linked, have been combined.
- 110 Below are gods, perhaps with Brahmā among them, who witness the austerities just as the *Lalitavistara* states that also the gods, *nāgas*, *yakṣas* and *gandharvas* and so on witnessed the virtues of the Bodhisattva (LV 17/390). In the lowest zone appear to be persons, at least one of them in Tibetan attire, echoing the passage that king Śuddhodana sent a messenger to the Bodhisattva every day. On the other hand, they may be meant to portray donors.
- 111 In the next scenes along the river the Bodhisattva decides to recuperate from strict fasting, bathes, dresses and meets the Five men and the milk maiden Sujātā to restore his body as described in chapter 18.
- 112 The story in the *Lalitavistara* continues with the criticism by the Five men of good family of the Bodhisattva's relinquishing austerity, but this is joined with the first meal in the Sujātā scene. The painted story starts in the left upper corner of the wall with the washing of clothes after his years of austerity. We see the Bodhisattva picking up a cloth; the text informs it is from a maidservant of the village, Radha by name, who had served Sujātā, who had died and was wrapped in a hempen cloth.
- 113 The Bodhisattva asked for water to wash the rag (LV 18/405). The gods then struck the earth there, and a pond appeared (LV 18/408), as depicted below. The wicked Māra

constructed the pond with high banks, but the Bodhisattva asked the tree goddess to lower a branch of the tree, so that he could climb out of the pond (LV 18/249.) Then he obtained a stone (depicted in the uppermost corner, figs 51, 52) and washed the dust-cloth himself with the stone in accordance with the obligations of a wandering monk (LV 12/406). However, the text recounts gods offered various garments dyed with saffron, such as are suitable to a “mendicant” (Skt. *śramaṇa*); he took them, and dressed himself in a monk’s garment; then he went to the village.

- 114 In the lowest zone of the figure 51, is the Bodhisattva near the Nairāñjanā river with the Five men of good family who were disappointed to see that he had given up austerity and who turned away; they were on their way to Sārnāth to sojourn in the Deer park (LV 18/404), the place of the First Sermon. The Five are depicted again later both in the Enlightenment scene (to the left) and the First Sermon, as they are among the first to hear his teaching.
- 115 Then the maidens, with offering bowls, approach the Bodhisattva from the right; they had served him during his austerity. In the figure 52, the Bodhisattva sits on a stool and Sujātā brings the honeyed milk rice, as the gods have told her that he needs a substantial food. Thus, here again two episodes are joined into one scene, that of the encounter with the Five ascetics and with Sujātā. Chronologically, they are not sequential, but there exists a spatial connection with the river and they are both thematically associated with taking nourishment after practicing austerities.
- 116 In the painting Sujātā offers the Bodhisattva a bowl, described in the *Lalitavistara* as golden; he took the bowl full of food with him and later arrived at the Nairāñjanā river. Placing the bowl and his garment to one side, he entered the river to refresh himself, as depicted in the mural (fig. 52). The text says: “several hundreds of thousands of devaputras rendered homage by filling the river with aloes and powders of sandal wood and tossing into the water heavenly flowers of many colors” (LV 18/408-409). Some of the figures in the river may relate to this passage.
- 117 In the left lower corner of the figure 51, to the right of the river is a figure holding a bowl. It is said that after the Bodhisattva had bathed, the daughters of the *nāgas* who resided there brought a throne, where the Bodhisattva sat and ate his milk rice; then he threw the golden bowl into the river without a thought of attachment (LV 18/409).
- 118 In the lower left corner is an image field or text field and above it an *apsara* or *nāga*, recalling the passage in the *Lalitavistara*: gods scooped up the water and took it away to their abode, and built a *caitya* (sacred place consecrated with Buddhist relics) there⁴⁸. In the upper right corner are teaching scenes which in the *Lalitavistara* take place before the austerity at the Nairāñjanā river, but they are depicted as separate panels on the right, subordinated to the events at the river. We have seen already in the “competition field” (figs 46, 47) that the narrative direction is not always from left to right. As these scenes are concerned with meditation practices, it thus appears appropriate that they are shown in the context of fasting and giving up severe austerities at the Nairāñjanā which strengthens the location as the organizing principle of compositions.

Panel 15: walking toward Bodhimaṇḍa, temptation of Māra and Enlightenment (inscription 12)

Figure 53. Dungkar, cave 1

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Figure 54. Dungkar, cave 1

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- 119 This part of the *Lalitavistara* (chapters 19-21) recounts the events during the Bodhisattva's advance on foot to the Bodhimaṇḍa to achieve the perfect and complete Enlightenment and to overcome the army of Māra (figs 53-57). Chapter 19 "The walk

toward Bodhimaṇḍa”, begins: “Monks, after the Bodhisattva had bathed himself in the Nairāṇjanā river, after he had eaten and regained his strength and vitality, in order to triumph completely over Māra, he turned toward the foot of the great tree of Enlightenment. [...] He walked with the stride of firm mind, indestructible like the vajra [...] a stride [...] showing the road of deliverance, [...] clearing away saṃsāra” (LV 19/415-416).

Figure 55. Dungkar, cave 1, detail, *nāga* king Kālika and the *nāga* queen praising the Bodhisattva

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Figure 56, Dungkar, cave 1, detail

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Figure 57. Dungkar, cave 1, detail

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- 120 After a description of the eruption of beauty in nature as he walked to the Bodhimaṇḍa, the text recounts the different humans and gods that the Bodhisattva encountered on his path towards the seat of Enlightenment⁴⁹. These meetings are illustrated on the left (figs 54, 55), featuring three scenes in separate stacked registers. As confirmed by inscription 12, the top scene (fig. 55) shows the *nāga* king Kālīka and the *nāga* queen

praising the Bodhisattva and worshipping his feet, venerating him together with the *nāga* maidens⁵⁰.

- 121 The identity of the royal or aristocratic family, depicted in the middle field in Tibetan attire, is unclear; in general, persons in local garb can be associated either with the Bodhisattva's family in this cycle, or with the donors who are frequently depicted in the lowest part of the murals.
- 122 The third panel at the bottom most probably shows the Five men of good family. They have the same attire as those in the Nairāñjanā scene. They left the Bodhisattva when he gave up austerity; however, they are among the first who receive his teachings after the Enlightenment.
- 123 In the *Lalitavistara* version of the story, the final encounter before approaching the *bodhi* tree (sacred tree under which the Buddha meditated and was enlightened) is the meeting with the grass cutter Swastika; however, it appears that this is not illustrated here. Swastika gave a bundle of the softest *kuśa* grass (grass on which the Buddha sat under the *bodhi* tree) for the seat of Enlightenment on which the Bodhisattva sat down (LV 19/436) proclaiming that he will not move until he has obtained Enlightenment (LV 19/439).
- 124 There follows in the *Lalitavistara* a glowing description of the miracles and healings which occur, and of the outburst of beauty in nature as the Bodhisattva walked to the Bodhimaṇḍa: "O Monks, the road from the river Nairāñjanā leading up to Bodhimaṇḍa was cleansed by the gods of the winds and the clouds; it was sprinkled with perfumed water by the devaputras of the rain clouds who strew flowers down upon it [...] Each jeweled dais was encircled by jeweled staircases of pearl and lapis lazuli. The calls of thrushes, cranes, and geese, of swans, herons, and peacocks enlivened the air. [...] On] each platform apsaras singing sweet melodies assembled into groups of fifty thousand and played concerts on divine instruments" (LV 19/417-418). "Instruments played while flowers rained down. Thousands of floating banners were waving in the breeze"⁵¹.
- 125 Later in the *Lalitavistara* text the abode of the Buddha-to-be is described as adorned with: "[...] many trees, and at the feet of all these trees stood lion thrones [...] covered with heavenly cloths [...] and thrones of precious jewels" (LV 19/437).
- 126 As already stated, the splendour of the Bodhimaṇḍa – and in particular the tree – is described in great detail in this chapter. In the Dungkar painting, the Bodhisattva is shown performing *bhūmisparśa* under the *bodhi* tree in a circular aureole, described in the text as a "circle of lapis lazuli". "And the goddesses of the bodhi tree, [...] beautified the tree, wonderful and radiant, the tree entirely delighted the mind. [...] here at the centre of the three thousand great thousand of worlds, the earth was unchangeable, its essence immutable, its nature that of a diamond" (LV 19/424). The sumptuous throne is represented in great detail, looking like a mountain-shaped hill, or a pedestal made of jewels, alternating red and blue colour, recalling the passage in the *Lalitavistara* describing the bejeweled throne which appeared to honor the Bodhisattva. Then the Bodhisattva entered into the contemplation called *lalitavyūha* (LV 19/438).
- 127 Chapter 20 of the *Lalitavistara*, "The displays at Bodhimaṇḍa", praises the Buddha-to-be dwelling at the Bodhimaṇḍa. We can see (figs 53, 54) the about-to-be Buddha, the ocean of virtues, sitting in meditation, "eclipsing all other light in all the ten

directions” (LV 20/444)⁵². This is illustrated in the image by the light aureole behind the Bodhisattva.

- 128 The *Lalitavistara*’s chapter 21 “The defeat of Māra” recounts the victory over the lord of the realm of desire and the turning of the thoughts of the *devaputras* of Māra’s realm toward Enlightenment (LV 21/457). We see (fig. 57) distorted and grotesque images of demons with corpulent bodies, with frightening expressions and with hair standing on end, holding weapons, but also loud instruments such as cymbals and drums. These are the troops, the men and sons that Māra assembled, the “allies of darkness” attempting to frighten and to strike the Bodhisattva who sits alone at the foot of the king of trees (LV 21/461). The *Lalitavistara* explains that Māra’s soldiers were “endowed with the ability to change their faces into many different shapes and to transform themselves in a hundred million ways” (LV 21/463). The text further informs us that their bodies were protected by fine coats of armor. On the right side of the figures 53 and 57 bellies with fierce faces and demonic forms on them are depicted.
- 129 Below the seat we see a dark figure with its feet pushing up trying to shake the throne and chasing away the Bodhisattva, recalling the text stating: “They stirred up the great seas and shook mount Meru, king of mountains. They threw their limbs from side to side, uttering great screams of laughter, in the attempt to frighten the Bodhisattva”. The frightful *yakṣas* advanced brandishing wheels of fire and – as clearly shown on the right side of the figure 53 – hurled iron balls and stones. One figure on the right has the head of an animal, recalling the passage: “[...] some had ears like goats, elephant, or boar, some had stomachs like pitchers, with raucous voices, ugly, harsh and frightening, they called out to strike Śramaṇa Gautama and the tree” (LV 21/465). On the right we see a muscular man brandishing a sword with a jagged blade, and below another throws stones towards the Bodhisattva. Māra’s army filled the air, with numerous terrors, occupying entirely the three thousand of worlds.
- 130 Then the *Lalitavistara* text recounts the disputation among Māra’s sons. Those on the right reportedly claim they can defeat the Bodhisattva, and those on the left say the Bodhisattva cannot be defeated. The ignorant sons say they should excite his desires with music, and *apsaras*, but the wise ones state he finds no pleasure in the joys of passion, his pleasure is in the dharma, contemplation and in the meaning of immortality, love, and delivering all beings (LV 21/474). And they ask their father to withdraw: “Yet, even as he views these shocking forms, the mind of the one with the signs of virtue, shining in his glory like mount Meru, remains unmoved” (LV 21/468).
- 131 As the Buddha-to-be sits still in meditation, abiding in the dharma, he reflects: “These who think ‘I’ and ‘mine’ are attached to themselves, and to other things. These wise who see this condition of grasping become intent on breaking free” (LV 21/468). Then the Bodhisattva said to Māra: “[...] through a single offering freely made you have become head of the empire of desire; but I have freely made hundreds of millions of offerings” (LV 21/480). Māra replies that he made an irreproachable offering that the Bodhisattva witnessed, but that the Bodhisattva has no witness to offer evidence to support his claim and so will be conquered (LV 21/481).
- 132 Then Bodhisattva, who during innumerable “aeons” (Skt. *kalpas*) had accumulated virtue, asked Māra to take the earth as his witness. With his right hand he first touched all parts of his body, and then he gently touched the earth (LV 21/481). He stated, “This earth, the home of all beings, is impartial and free of malice toward everything which moves or does not move” (LV 21/482). When he touched the great earth, it trembled

and the earth goddess appeared (and with her other earth goddesses), and revealed the whole great half of her body, as shown in the image. She praised him, and spoke to the Bodhisattva: “Just so, Great Beings⁵³. It is indeed as you have declared! We appear to attest it. Moreover, O Bhagavat, you yourself have become the supreme witness of both the human and god realm. In truth, you are the purest of all beings” (LV 21/482). Having heard the voice of the goddess, Māra and his army became terrified and fled (LV 21/483).

- 133 Then – depicted in the lowest part on the right of the figures 53 and 56 – Māra sent his daughters to display their charms and excite the desire of the Bodhisattva. One sees three half-naked females, described in the *Lalitavistara* as the illusory daughters of Māra, intoxicated with passion, arrogance, and pride (LV 21/484-490); on the left the same three women are shown as old and ugly hags. The text recounts that some of them showed off their firm round breasts, some stretched out their rounded arms, just as illustrated in the image. Their garments were loosely belted or transparent, revealing the curves of the waists, while others were dancing or singing in order to excite the Bodhisattva (LV 21/484). But he remained calm, his body unaffected and glorious, saying “there is no satisfaction to be found in [...] desiring women. [...] Desires collect much suffering; desires indeed are the root of suffering” (LV 21/487-488). He continued: “I do not dwell with either passion or hatred; I do not see anything of permanence, attraction, or self; I do not dwell with what is pleasant or unpleasant; like the wind in the sky, my mind is completely free” (LV 21/489).
- 134 The Bodhisattva told Māra’s daughters that his pleasure is in the dharma, his mind is not delighted with the objects of the senses (LV 21/490), and he sees the body as “unclean and impure, filled with worms, fragile and enveloped in suffering” (LV 21/493). He states that beings who understand wrongdoing will surely be set free (LV 21/494).
- 135 Some of Māra’s daughters then fled in shame while others bowed down to the feet of the Bodhisattva praising him. In the painted image (fig. 56), they are shown as emaciated old women, full of sorrow; in the text they inform their father that the Bodhisattva knows the true nature of the body, and his thoughts are profound (LV 21/496). They asked Māra and his army to turn their backs on him. Then the *devaputras* declared Māra defeated, but the demons did not turn away. They attacked again (LV 21/506). Some fell back, their feet and hand twisted around, and their eyes emitted sparkling flashes (LV 21/507).
- 136 The Bodhisattva again extended his right arm and called the earth as his witness; when he touched the earth it resounded like a bronze vase that has been struck, knocking Māra down to the ground (LV 21/508). “The goddess of the tree of wisdom, moved with pity, takes water and sprinkles the ally of darkness, saying: Arise quickly! Depart without delay” (LV 21/509).
- 137 Māra’s army has thus been put to rout, and finally Māra regrets that “for not listening to the gentle and wise words of my sons, for having offended a pure being, I have today obtained great suffering, fright, misfortune, sorrow and ruin” (LV 21/510). Then the gods, *asuras* (powerful demigods), *garuḍas* (mythic bird-like beings), and *kinnaras* (mythic hybrid creatures), all hail in triumph; they offer garlands of pearls, standards, and banners. They rain down flowers while musical instruments play. The *Lalitavistara* chapter concludes with the gods rejoicing: “O Here, having gently overcome by your

love the forces of the crafty demon, here on the best of seats you will today obtain incomparable Enlightenment” (LV 21/510).

- 138 The sumptuous seat of Enlightenment marking the central event of the life story, which is described in detail in chapters 22 “Attaining perfect and complete Enlightenment” and 23 “Praise” of the LV is not only shown in the form of a jeweled throne base below the excellent *bodhi* tree (fig. 53). In addition, the lavish descriptions of the environment and the rich treasures which showered from the heaven are visualized in the medium of painting throughout the narrative cycle as well as in other parts of the sacred space. The signs which appeared include *apsaras* showering flowers and honorific textiles (LV 23/539) and adorning the sky with silks, pearls, bells and lotus flowers (LV 23/552-3), as well as circling birds and rows of *tāla* trees (see footnote 51), as depicted on the ceiling of the cave temple (figs 7, 58-61). Thus motifs from Buddha’s life extend to other parts of the overall decoration of the cave. In particular, the ceiling was deemed suitable for events located in the air or in heaven, such as animals swirling in the air⁵⁴ or “flying Buddhas”⁵⁵ – the latter referring to miracle stories in which the Buddha was able to fly. Also, the acrobats and atlantes supporting the ceiling’s rafters at Dungkar (from the illusion of a lantern ceiling) are adapted from such descriptions in the Māra episode. The assimilation of these motifs on the ceiling’s design is in line with the urge of spatialization; the aesthetic principle to represent the logic of a palpable reality finds its counterparts in the aesthetics of the overall decoration of sacred space in this period.

Figure 58. Dungkar, cave 1, detail of the ceiling’s depictions

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Figure 59. Dungkar, cave 1, detail of the ceiling's depictions

© Rob Linrothe, 2005

Figure 60. Dungkar, cave 1, detail of the ceiling's depictions

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Figure 61. Dungkar, cave 1, detail of the ceiling's depictions

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- 139 All these are the material riches, outbursts of nature and fertility, and sensual treasures that render homage to the “lamp of wisdom”, “which can awaken this world and those who listen to the Dharma”, as described in the *Lalitavistara* text. They function to eulogize the sumptuous throne of the Noble one, the King of the dharma, and to praise the perfect and complete Enlightenment⁵⁶.
- 140 In general, the *Lalitavistara* is not only a medium to disseminate abstract philosophical ideas and moral values. The text attempts to narrate the Buddha’s life story vivaciously, trying to appeal to an emotional identification by the onlooker. It describes in abundance the visual pleasures and beauty of thrones, jewels, ornaments, textiles, flowers, perfumes⁵⁷, trees and animals, suggesting a world where nature and humans are not regarded as separate entities. These descriptions of beauty and exuberance express the superb quality of the family in which the Bodhisattva was born as the pure abode, the magnificence of the Buddha-realm, the excellent nature of the Buddha and his teaching, and the rejoice of nature at the moment of his Enlightenment. In later temples of Dungkar and at Alchi various references to the Buddha’s magnificence as described in the *LV* are depicted also on the ceilings, transforming the temple to the sumptuous abode of the Enlightened One as described in the sutra text.

Dating, artistic context and stylistic attribution

- 141 Nothing concrete is known about the founders and patrons who sponsored the 12th century west Tibetan monuments, and of their programme designers⁵⁸. The construction of the Dungkar temples appears to coincide with the period in which the main seat of the Guge kings (after rTse lde) was transferred from Tholing to Dungkar, but we have no clues for the dating of the caves⁵⁹. One can only try to approximate the time-frame from the style and iconography of the paintings. The Dungkar paintings

belong to a strand of the Western Himalayan painting tradition geographically centred on the Guge kingdom which continues a painterly Indo-Tibetan style (figs 62, 63); another example of this style are the temples of Nako situated further to the north-west, in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh/India, ca. first half 12th century (figs 69, 70)⁶⁰. This style contrasts with the more graphic Kashmir-style predominant in western areas, for which Alchi is the most prominent example.

Figure 62. Dungkar, cave 1, detail of deity on the entrance wall

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Figure 63. Dungkar, cave 1, detail of deity on the entrance wall

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- ¹⁴² Dungkar may represent one of the latest royal foundations in the area, founded towards the end of the 12th century. This late date is suggested on the one hand on the basis of the iconography, namely by virtue of the prominence of the types of mandala, in particular the representation of the Guhyasamājamaṇḍala as the religious focus on the main wall of cave 1 (Luczanits 2004a, p. 118). In addition, the depiction of the Buddha's life displays important innovations, both in composition and narrative mode and in the setting of the life-story: Dungkar's narrative is perhaps the first extant example where the complete narrative is set in a Tibetan milieu.
- ¹⁴³ There are many stylistic differences with the narratives in the Alchi Dukhang; however, there are similarities with regard to the narrative mode and the Tibetan setting. This gives us a further clue to the chronology of Dungkar, as we have a reference point for a dating of Alchi first proposed by Roger Goepper (1990, 1993). It has been generally accepted these are provided by lineage depictions with inscriptions in the Sumtsek and in the "great stupa" of Alchi that give names of the donor and show portraits of a Drigung (Tib. 'Bri gung) hierarch, Jigten Gönpö (Tib. 'jig rten mgon po), who died in 1217⁶¹. We thus propose a dating for cave 1 of Dungkar to the second half of the 12th century⁶².
- ¹⁴⁴ Only a few wall-paintings of the life of the Buddha remain from the early religious-artistic period between the 10th to 13th centuries in the Western Himalaya⁶³. The first painted life cycle can be found in the assembly hall of the Tabo "gTsug lag khang" in Spiti (Himachal Pradesh, India) created around the middle of the 11.th century (figs 11, 12, 64). Chronologically this is followed by the 12th century narratives in the Nako Lotsaba Lhakhang (of which little survived). The paintings in the Dungkar cave and in the monuments of Alchi (in the Dukhang, fig. 24, and in the Sumtsek, fig. 65) and in Mangyu⁶⁴ (fig. 66) in Ladakh (Jammu and Kashmir, India) are datable to the end of the 12th century to the beginning of the 13th century.

- 145 At Tabo the state of preservation of the scenes from Tuṣita to the Birth (including the Seven Steps) is quite good, but most of the later scenes up to the Enlightenment are damaged or have been overpainted; only in the central part fragments of the Departure and the Practice of asceticism are still visible ⁶⁵. The scenes unroll along the lowest part of three walls (west, north, east) of the Assembly Hall; they are complemented on the southern wall by the narrative of Sudhana's journey (Steinkellner 1996). The scenes up to the Enlightenment are organized as a continuous frieze in chronological order without dividers between the episodes. The arrangement of the scenes and the motifs is still "abstract-formal". That is, objects and figures are placed on a flat background of the wall, densely arranged in a stream of scenes which covers the whole wall in a rather ornamental way, almost like a carpet design. After the scenes from the *Lalitavistara* (which end with the first sermon) are episodes such as teachings and miracles; they are organized in additional independent rectangular panels.

Figure 64. Tabo, assembly hall, Buddha's life, north wall

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Figure 65. Alchi, Sumtsek, skirt (Skt. *dhōṭī*) of a colossal Bodhisattva Maitreya depicting the Buddha's life

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Figure 66. Mangyu, Vairocana I temple, "dispensing gifts to the brahmin"

© Christian Luczanits, 1994 (private archive, CL94 39,2)

- 146 At Dungkar there is only one narrative, the Buddha's life, which runs along the lowest part of the temple's walls in a clockwise direction starting from the left of the entrance

(south) and ending at the east wall (covering a small section of the latter). In this phase one observes a new urge of the painter or programme designer to develop a systematic, continuous illustration of the complete life story, from Tuṣita heaven to the final Nirvāṇa. The narrative becomes richer and more detailed and we see a reordering of the “image inventory”: the episodes are perhaps for the first time arranged in separate geometric, rectangular panels. The backgrounds of the panels are painted in alternating colours (blue, red and white) which both separate the panels and unify them in an overall surface pattern. Another feature distinct from the Tabo life cycle is that the panels at Dungkar include cartouches with inscriptions and inserts of single or groups of framed rectangles with additional scenes.

- 147 This mode of clearly separated scenes can also be found in the Alchi Dukhang and in the nearby Vairocana I temple at Mangyu, both in Ladakh. However, in the Alchi Dukhang the scenes are smaller and condensed, and trees are used as scene dividers. Another significant difference is that in the Ladakhi examples the scenes are arranged in superimposed registers on one wall, e.g. in the Alchi Dukhang on the entrance wall to the left of the door. Another format for the Buddha's life has been used on Maitreya wrap-around skirt (Skt. *dhoṭī*) in the Alchi Sumtsek where 48 single scenes are organized in connected circles mimicking a textile design (Luczanits 2004b; fig. 65 in this article).
- 148 At Dungkar the organization of the image fields reflects a fundamentally different aesthetic compared to earlier 11th century paintings. The picture inventory is newly distributed shaping a unified scene which is anchored gravitationally on an imaginary base-line and motifs are weighted to this base-line or ground surface. Take for example the scene where Māyā asks for permission to practice asceticism (figs 15, 16); there the throne is a massive piece of furniture standing on the base line and the scene is given an architectural background in the form of a tent, which shapes an inner unity of the scene. The birth scene (fig. 28) is another example where the central action is anchored to a base-line on the lower border of the panel; the whole scene is organized as a unified, concrete space.
- 149 Frequently the images at Dungkar are contained within an architectural structure or a mobile residence. The depiction of architecture or of the interior space of a building not only defines locality, it has an important role in the spatialization of the image field. If we compare the scenes of the Tuṣita palace at Tabo and at Dungkar, this new attitude towards space becomes evident. The structure in this scene at Tabo (figs 11, 12) consists of multi-lobed arches with a stepped roof on which fabulous creatures rest; this assemblage of decorative elements borrowed from architecture rather recalls a planar frame or arcade⁶⁶. Also the architectural structures in the subsequent scenes at Tabo recall assemblages of single elements or set pieces which indicate the setting and they fill the gaps between the motifs in the meandering flow of scenes.
- 150 In contrast, at Dungkar the depiction of architecture or interior space of a building creates an imaginary space, giving the convincing illusion of a certain three-dimensionality. The building houses the scenes and the figures and objects act in it. A good example is the Bodhisattva residing in the palace before the departure (figs 49, 50); the palace creates a space of a certain shallow depth and the figures and objects are submitted to this imaginary three-dimensional building. The whole story evolves in and around the palace.

- 151 Another characteristic principle of space and image construction is that the individual large image panel is not a strict, impermeable border: frequently single motifs cut the border and function as visual bridges between two panels such as the empty cart in the scene of Māyā's travel to Lumbinī (figs 25, 26); another example is the Bodhisattva with his bow standing in the panel prior to the competition scene and "shooting" into the following panel, where the actual competition takes place; this mode helps to dynamize the narrative and defies the rigid structure of the framed panels (fig. 46).
- 152 In addition, inscriptions help to link the fields by referring to events depicted in the next panel. In sum, the narrative at Dungkar provides more variations than the continuous (first) part of the Tabo narrative, which more or less flows in chronological order along the plain, flat walls (fig. 64).
- 153 Concerning the ordering of scenes within a panel, the direction of the scenes is variable, and the ordering can be flexible; this means the episodes are submitted to the logic of the imaginary space. Scenes from different phases of the story can be joined if they match thematically or if they occur at the same location; this system strengthens the primacy of space and the landscape's continuum. Take for example the scenes of the encounters with Sujātā and the Five men (figs 51, 52): both episodes occur at the Nairāñjanā, but at different points of time; here they are depicted together, affirming the logic of space.
- 154 Another characteristic of the narrative mode at Dungkar is what Dehejia termed a "synoptic narration", whereby multiple episodes from a story are depicted within a single visual field, but their temporal sequence is not communicated. One example is the encounters with the hermits Asita and Māheśvara which are fused into one scene (figs 33-35). A prominent precursor of such narrative techniques is the 8th century Kashmiri ivory in the Cleveland Museum of Art featuring the asceticism of the Bodhisattva (Linrothe 2015), in which three phases of the episode (Austerity, Giving up of ascetic practice, and the First meal) are condensed into one composition and represented in a way as if it would be one moment of the story. In the Dungkar scene of the handover of the crown to Maitreya in Tuṣita heaven (figs 13, 14) two moments of the action, are shown fused into one scene. This recalls a long exposure in photography and adds a sense of movement and humanization to the scene. This contrasts with the narrative at Tabo, where Śākyamuni and Maitreya are shown twice in two superimposed aureoles, creating independent abstract spaces. In the Sumtsek at Alchi only one moment – the result of the action – is shown in a rather naturalistic and economic manner.
- 155 A specificity of the panels' pictorial space at Dungkar is the inclusion of inserts of (single or groups of) framed rectangles for images that show related episodes from the *Lalitavistara*. These picture inserts are not always in chronological order, i.e. in the reading direction from left to right. One example is the Nairāñjanā scene (fig. 52) where the inserts on the right show encounters and conversations which happen before the First Meal that is depicted on the lower left side (fig. 52); here the smaller episodes are grouped according to a thematic focus⁶⁷.
- 156 Concerning the cartouches with texts, there is frequently a close inner contact between image and script. Frequently inserts of texts are positioned near figures and "make them speak", adding to the tendency towards individualization and of the figures and the humanization of the narrative.

- 157 This new “naturalistic” approach towards pictorial space finds its counterpart in the figural style. Continuing the painterly Indo-Tibetan style of Nako, we observe a further development towards individualization. The figural style in this artistic phase displays an interest in the depiction of scenes in which the figures act in a lively way, full of movement; they are set into a Tibetan environment replete with motifs of local material culture, making the story from a remote past perceptible in the here and now⁶⁸.
- 158 The figural types at Dungkar are refined and show a variety of emotional expression. To this tendency of individualization fits the interest in subtle, organic shading of the body; one of the best examples are the well-preserved images of the hermit Asita and Māheśvara (fig. 35). These paintings reflect a master artisan's sensitivity and technical skills. In contrast, at Tabo the Kashmir-style figures in minor scenes appear rigid, flat, schematic and graphic with little shading of the body (figs 67, 68). The rather abstract figure patterns consist of simple graphic shapes for details of the face and characteristic almond-shaped forms for eyes, which protrude out of the silhouette of the face; these decorative figural forms find their counterparts in the objects which are densely decorated with ornamental patterns which cast a quasi-ornamental unity of the whole.

Figure 67. Tabo, assembly hall of the Main temple (Tib. gTsug lag khang), Bodhisattva in the ambulatory, mid-11th century

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Figure 68. Tabo Assembly Hall, painted cycle in the lowest zone showing the birth of the Bodhisattva and the bath

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- 159 The narratives in the temples of Dungkar and the early temples of Alchi (1200-1220) share a common “Zeitstil” (style of a specific time) period style in terms of composition of the narratives in single panels. However, the rendering of the figures is quite different: at Alchi a rather graphic, ornamental Kashmir-informed tradition is at work. As we have seen, at Dungkar a more painterly style prevails in the tradition of the Indo-Tibetan idiom (figs 62, 63). A similar tradition prevails in the temples of Nako (ca. 12th century; figs 69, 70); (Luczanits 2015; Kalantari 2016). All this makes an attribution of the Dungkar paintings to the second half of the 12th century plausible.
- 160 Regarding the iconography, at Dungkar many themes were newly implemented as images. The narrative at Tabo appears less extensive, more straightforward and more concise than in the later paintings at Dungkar and Alchi. Scenes such as the episodes of Māyā asking for consent to practice austerity and of the Bodhisattva in the womb of Māyā do not occur at Tabo. The latter episode is also found in the Alchi Dukhang (fig. 24). While at Dungkar this episode is depicted as a palace in which the young prince rests, at Alchi the event is shown as the majestic, deified image of Māyā, residing on a lotus, representing the “jeweled sanctum of the Bodhisattva”. She is depicted in hieratic form and larger than the figures surrounding her. This means the new ideals of spatialization and humanisation – taking somehow the magic of the sacred – had to be balanced by a hieratization of the main figure.

Figure 69. Nako, Lotsaba lhakhang, Indic deities in the mandala

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Figure 70. Nako, Upper temple, main wall, Bodhisattva in a shrine

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- 161 This illustrates that the programme designers at Dungkar found individual ways and formulations based on the *Lalitavistara* and related sources, and it appears that no canonical pictorial models existed as yet. At Mangyu⁶⁹ (fig. 66) completely new and singular scenes are illustrated, such as the “Royal couple dispensing gifts to the

brahmin ascetic” which occurred after the Dream of Māyā. This expansion of themes leads to a new visual and narrative richness.

- 162 While the designers of the programme at Dungkar used the *Lalitavistara* and related texts or oral transmissions for the creation of some of the new images (and perhaps also visual models), for well-known and popular scenes – such as the central scene of Māra’s Assault and Enlightenment – a long image tradition existed. For example both in Eastern Bengal (Bautze-Picron 1992) and in the Himalayas (including Nepal: Pal 2003, pp. 50-51; Heller 2009, fig. 79) the event is shown in much detail. Such scenes appear much earlier at Dunhuang as well (Whitfield & Otsuka 1996, p. 189). It cannot be excluded that visual models circulated in the form of larger portable objects such as paintings on cloth⁷⁰. An example for a detailed scene of Māra’s Assault in the Western Himalaya is the title page of a manuscript at Pooh (Himachal Pradesh, India; fig. 71); it is a densely filled scene in which the demons harass the Buddha and different grotesque forms are portrayed in great detail and with a great sense of variation⁷¹ (Allinger & Kalantari 2012). Interesting in this context is the appearance of the daughters of Māra who, in the Himalayas, are frequently depicted at the moment of the Enlightenment (Pal 2003, pp. 50-51; Allinger & Kalantari 2012)⁷².

Figure 71. *Prajñāpāramitā* MS, Pooh, Kinnaur/ H.P, India, frontispiece, detail with “Enlightenment scene on the left side of the folio”

© Christiane Kalantari, 2006

- 163 In Dungkar, and the Western Himalaya in general, there was an urge to represent the Enlightenment in visual richness. Therefore, various motifs (for example the demons, and the horrors spread by the adversaries of the Buddha) were illustrated, taking inspiration from detailed textual descriptions. The urge to find new visual solutions allowed a certain freedom of imagination for the Western Tibetan artist (fig. 71).

- 164 From the fact that on the Maitreya skirt in the Alchi Sumtsek 32 of the 48 scenes are devoted to the Life of the Buddha up to the Great Departure, while the remaining themes are rather reduced, we can deduce that there was a vital interest in the depiction and eulogy of the royal household of the Buddha in the later phases. An enormous variation is found in the scenes of aristocratic pastimes, lifestyles and material culture⁷³. In general, we find an emphasis on visual abundance and sensual pleasure in the depictions, which is characteristic for the descriptions of the royal abode of the Buddha in the *Lalitavistara* and which appear as signs when he reached Enlightenment. Thus, they are mainly symbolic of his magnificence.
- 165 Such displays of splendour must have conformed to the self-representations of the sponsoring elite, among whom women played prominent roles as founders and sponsors of temples. The mother of the Buddha features prominently in various scenes not only as giving birth to him but also in textually-based portrayals of her, where she is shown in the sumptuous robe of a Tibetan queen. Her powers as nourisher and protectress are also portrayed in original forms⁷⁴. We have already indicated that at Dungkar one finds an increase in the number of scenes with an emphasis on the royal household of Śākyamuni. In addition, in the depiction of material culture in the life cycle at Dungkar we observe a transition from the overall Indic environment depicted at Tabo to the setting of the story in Tibetan material cultural terms. There is continuity between depictions of the living courtly sponsors of the paintings and the characters in the narratives. This is in line with the concept of Religious Kingship instigated by the Royal Lama Yeshe Ö in the 10th century (Jahoda & Kalantari 2015). By contrast, the paintings at Alchi and Mangyu represent a unique aesthetic-cultural multi-lingualism of Tibetan and Kashmiri courtly culture in interaction with Iranicate signs of luxury art and prestige⁷⁵. In conclusion, the article provides the first overview of the previously understudied narrative at Dungkar cave 1 and an identification of the complete cycle up to the Enlightenment. Despite the damaged condition of the paintings, there is much to be learned about the overall development of Western Himalayan narrative art by close observation of the formatting, spacing, and textual relationships. Using documentations generated through multi-sited and multi-disciplinary research in historical Western Tibet (Tsamda/Ngari, Spiti and Ladakh) the article assesses the art-historical context and it assembles a bigger picture on the transformations of contents and styles of life stories of the Buddha and the variety of narrative modes developed in the early Buddhist temples in region up to the 13th century.

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NOTES

1. Tib. rTsa mda' rdzong (see Gyalpo 2006, p. 173).
2. Yeshe Ö played a significant role in the Buddhist transformation of the region. In a joint effort with the Great Translator Rinchen Zangpo (Tib. Rin chen bzang po, 958-1055), he supported the translation of sacred texts from Sanskrit to Tibetan and sent promising students to Kashmir in his effort towards the establishment of a "pure" Mahāyāna doctrine in Western Tibet.
3. Stoddard (2004, p. 93) has put it as follows: "Lha Bla ma Ye shes 'od's two sons are well known, however his daughter, Lha'i Me tog [...] deserves better fame, since it appears that she is the founder of the now famous Dung dkar cave temple, in ca. 1000, and thus was the first princess among the patrons of the early Phyi dar [...]". According to mNga' ris rgyal rabs (cf. Vitali 1996, p. 114) she was ordained and founded the Kre wel dbu sde temple. Whether this temple and the community of nuns can be related to the cave sanctuaries of Dungkar known to us cannot be stated with certainty. Cf. Vitali's statement (1996, p. 274): "Kre.wel, a temple unknown to me". However, Vaiḍūrya ser po mentions the monastery Dung dkar bKra shis chos gling and that lHa'i Me tog supported 30 monks at this place long before this temple's foundation (*ibid.*, pp. 274-275).

4. The nearby Zhag cave, Be (Tib. 'Bye) valley, Phyiwang (Tib. Phyi dbang) near Dungkar appear to belong to the same religious-artistic phase.

5. Tucci states in his 1937 report: "L'esplorazione delle grotte intorno a Dunkar ci serba sorprese; erano probabilmente cappelle di anacoreti e luoghi di meditazione, [...] Pietà di discepoli abbellì queste grotte, levigò le pareti, fece più alte le volte e le ricoperse con superbe pitture, [...] avvenire, a giudicare dallo stile, intorno al XV secolo: Non c'è superficie, che non sia stata mirabilmente affrescata [...] Il lavoro è così accurato, i colori così vivi, i disegni così vari che il soffitto sembra ricoperto da delicatissime stoffe ricamate. Neppure in Tsaparang né in Toling ho ammirato lavoro d'arte più raffinata; evidentemente questi affreschi di Dunkar sono veri capolavori della pittura di Guge nella sua piena maturità" (Tucci 1978, pp. 137-138) [The exploration of Dungkar provided surprises; probably they have been used as chapels for hermits and places of meditation originally, [...] Buddhist followers decorated the caves, erected the walls, created high ceilings which they covered with superb paintings, [...] judging from the style, they are from the 15th century: there is no part of the surface which is not painted in an admirable fashion, [...] The work is so detailed, the colours so vivid, the designs so varied, that one has the impression that the soffit has been covered by a delicate embroidered cloth. Not even at Tsaparang or at Toling there are paintings which are more refined; obviously, the frescoes of Dunkar are true masterpieces of Guge painting tradition in its full maturation] (translation: Christiane Kalantari).

6. Thomas Pritzker (1996) was among the first to visit and document the area after the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Neumann (1999, 2000) focused on different aspects of the iconography and style of Dungkar and other sites in the region; Kalantari (2000, 2016) analysed the function and meaning of the ceiling paintings in Western Tibet, while Klimburg-Salter (2001) looked at the specifics of the cave's "lantern roof". Visual highlights of the art of Dungkar have been published in China (Namgyal & Chi li ta qin 1998; Yang Jia *et al.* 2000), followed by studies by Huo Wei (1997), Huo Wei & Li Yongxiang (2001) and Huo Wei *et al.* (2008). Luczanits analysed the iconography and individual aspects of style and chronology within his trans-regional analysis of clay sculptures (Luczanits 2004a).

In 1996 Pritzker proposed the designation of the sanctuary discussed here as cave 1. This has been commonly accepted among scholars: Luczanits (2004a) argues the proposed numbers of this group of temples correspond to a possible chronology.

7. For the *Lalitavistara* we use the English translation by Gwendolyn Bays that is based on the French translation from the Sanskrit and Tibetan by Edouard Foucaux and then compared with an 8th century Tibetan translation (cf. Bays 1983, preface). We compared some of the images, which were doubtful for us, with the Tibetan translation together with Kurt Tropper.

8. The *Lalitavistara* recounts in detail the splendour of the abode of the Buddha and the outburst of nature's beauty and abundance; it symbolizes the qualities developed by the Bodhisattva and his actions and accomplishments. Comparable eulogies can be found in the story of Sudhana (Tib. Nor bzangs) story: the moment of attaining higher states of perfections is described as entering through the portal of a tower adorned with ornaments, jewels, while signs and light appear (for the epigraphic evidence see Steinkellner 1996, p. 48).

9. The overall measurements of the walls are 6,5 x 6,7 m (Namgyal & Chi li ta qin 1998, p. 11).

10. Tropper's article provides an edition and translation of the epigraphic cycle and he states: "The inscriptions of Dung dkar may well be the oldest epigraphic sources on the life of the Buddha that are still extant in the Tibetan cultural realm" (Tropper 2018, p. 652). The documentation has been made available at www.univie.ac.at/Tibetan-inscriptions (accessed 30 September 2020).

11. The original drawing in the Chinese publication is reverse.

12. The excellent abode is first described in the second chapter of the *LV*.

13. Sumptuous architectural structures that define sacred abodes are a constant feature in the religious texts cited, and also in Kashmir-inspired art; media for such a transfer from texts to murals are not only manuscript illustrations but also fine ivory sculptures from Kashmir (cf. Allinger & Kalantari 2012); enriched with elements of the rich and elaborate local Himalayan architecture in wood.

14. He stepped from his crystal palaces described as adorned with “tiny jeweled bells, parasols, and standards and streamer floating unfurled” (LV 2/22), to the great palace *dharmoccaya*, where he taught the gods of the Tuṣita realm (LV 3/29).

15. Chapter 3 of the LV describes that the Bodhisattva formed an assembly of the *bodhisattvas* from the ten directions and “sixty-eight thousand kotis of being, all united in the same thought of profound meditation” (LV 3/29).

16. The Aśoka tree obtains a prominent place in Sanskrit literature symbolizing inter alia spring, but it also has healing properties (cf. Syed 1990).

17. The Bodhisattva spent all of the major events of his life amid the natural forest, and the tree became one of the most sacred symbols; of course, it was already a major symbol in pre-Buddhist periods.

18. The text further informs that Māyā devoted herself to the five rules of discipline and moral conduct, and she was without bodily desire, and for everyone who saw her every illness of humans disappeared.

19. As for this scene at Alchi, van Ham (2018) erroneously proposes Māyā is depicted discussing with her husband the dream and the consultation of the brahmin priest. However, no brahmin priest is depicted there; instead Māyā, depicted as a deity, is clearly oriented towards the gods who see the Bodhisattva in her womb.

20. Māyā, while the Bodhisattva was in her womb, felt nothing but lightness, and pleasantness, and all humans in that city named Kapila who were ill all regained their health, when the Bodhisattva’s mother placed her right hand on their heads (LV 6/115).

21. It is a singular scene as compared to earlier temples, which is also uncommon in India. The programme at Tabo features right of Tuṣita the burning Pratyeka Buddhas; above the elephant; followed by the dream and the discussion in the palace between Māyā and Śuddhodana and below the brahmin priests, wise men which the king invited to interpret the dream. It cannot entirely be excluded that below the dream was Māyā asking for austerity, but this must remain speculation.

22. The text states that they sprinkled him with scented water, but this is not depicted here.

23. As described in another passage of this chapter, thunder was heard from the heights of heaven, the gods caused a light rain to fall and from the land of the gods came all sorts of flowers, garments and ornaments (LV 7/133). Divine nymphs of auspicious, clear, luminous like the moon and the sun, with sweet voices, arrived at Lumbinī and supported Māyā with oils, divine scented water, unguents and divine clothes, and enquired as to her easy delivery and the non-fatigue of her body (LV 7/144).

24. In a previous passage Śākya built 500 houses for the prince (LV 7/148), and the king “had the Bodhisattva stay in each house”.

25. Asita predicted that “Hearing the Dharma from this pure being, who knows the Dharma from his birth, one will be completely delivered from birth and old age, from sickness, sorrow and lamentations [...]” (LV 7/154), and Asita wept because he is aged and he will not be there when the prince will attain supreme Enlightenment (LV 7/153). He then departed through the sky by his miraculous powers and went to his own hermitage, where he said to his nephew, the brahmin youth: “Naradatta, when you hear it is said that a Buddha has appeared in the world, go to him and become a wandering monk under his tutelage. Thus will you find benefit, help and happiness for a very long time to come” (LV 7/158).

26. The attribution as Māheśvara is based on his occurrence in the text. However, as an appearance of Śiva, Māheśvara doesn't usually wear a "turban". Artists perhaps had a degree of freedom when they represented this god; alternatively, this may be a west Tibetan interpretation.

27. The text does not state who gave the jewels to the prince. The scene shows a person sitting kneeling on a pillow to the left of the prince, who is dignified by an umbrella; he perhaps holds the ornaments. He looks like Brahmā but it is not clear what his function should be in this context.

28. According to the text the Bodhisattva took up an exquisitely coloured writing tablet made of sandal wood (LV 10/190).

29. Vidya Dehejia studied the complex visual techniques of presentation of narratives in Indian art and identified various distinct modes. In her extensive works on narrativity she defined a "synoptic mode" which organizes visual narratives on the basis of space rather than temporal continuity (Dehejia 1990, 1999).

Whether the "Indo-Tibetan" artists assimilated something from Indian conventions, since they employ some of the particular strategies, or if they developed independently out of an artistic-religious aim remains a question for future debate; however, analysis of the narrative techniques in Western Tibet art is a strand of Tibetan art history which is still in its infancy.

30. A tree (*Syzgium cumini*, syn. *Eugenia jambolana*, rose-apple tree in English) described in Buddhist scriptures as a lofty and enormous tree that abounds in Jambudvīpa. Jambudvīpa literally means "continent of jambu trees" (Syed 1990, p. 292).

31. A further (empty) inscription panel is placed above the Bodhisattva, under the tree.

32. In between is a space for the narrative to be depicted, which is in bad condition so that only some pairs of legs are visible. We can only speculate that they could be the brahmin priests searching for women in the city of Kapilavastu as requested by the king.

33. Tropper's (2018) numbering of inscription 8 (cf. fig. 9) follows the occurrence in the *Lalitavistara*. He proposed its position in the previous section of the murals was chosen due to the lack of sufficient space in the next image panel. Instead, we propose that it was a conscious decision by the programme designers following aesthetic principles.

34. In the text the stupa is not mentioned, but stupas built on significant places of the Buddha-to-be's life are described in various episodes the text; cf. the cutting of the hair after the departure; these place became later on holy sites.

35. Even the great mathematician Arjuna was filled with admiration and presented garments and ornaments as he was tutored by the prince in the numeration" which penetrates the dust of the most subtle atoms" and the calculations of the great thousands of worlds (LV 12/225-227).

36. According to the text the arrogant young Devadatta also tried to challenge the Bodhisattva, but the prince picked Devadatta up with his right hand and tossed him into the air; but with no intention of hurting him, only to reduce his pride (LV 12/229-230).

37. In the lower section various scenes are arranged like a pyramid, with a stupa placed in the right lower corner. In the upper parts are trees, indicating a unified environment.

38. After the contests, Gopā did not veil her face, saying that the gods know her intentions, her virtues and modesty. King Śuddhodana is enchanted by the wisdom of young Gopā of the Śākya, and "he was filled with contentment, satisfaction, and pleasure. With great joy, he presented young Gopā with two pieces of white cloth sewn with precious stones, [...] and uttered: My son is adorned with great virtues, and his bride has qualities like his own" (LV 12/238).

39. In this chapter "Exhortation" it is told: "[...] the gods, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kinnaras, and mahoragas, Śakra, Brahmā and the Guardians of the World, all found delight in making offerings to the Bodhisattva as he dwelt in the women's apartment" (LV 13/241).

40. King Śuddhodana thought, that surrounded by the most beautiful women, the prince would enjoy himself and would not think of leaving home and he tried “to remove all disagreeable things from view so that the prince will see nothing unpleasant on the way” (LV 14/284).
41. In Tibetan mandalas the West is on the top; however, the succession of directions in the image fits this system. What is thought as three-dimensional in space is shown unfolded in a plane in the image.
42. Then Gopā had a dream seeing the whole earth shaken; when hearing of it the prince says that she will soon remove the veil of false views; among other favorable things she will also “cast off her female body, and will be born as a man” (LV 14/295), and there will be for her neither unfortunate rebirths nor sorrow.
43. The episode of the *devaputra* who in the form of a huntsman gave the Bodhisattva the saffron garments so that the young Siddhartha could become a monk (LV 15/339) is apparently not depicted in Dungkar.
44. Kaṇṭhaka, the favorite white horse, plays an important role in the text as Chandaka repeats the circumstances of the departure in his aim to console the king in the final passages of the chapter, and he remarks upon the fine actions of the horse, for which it “will enjoy divine pleasures in the abode of the Thirty-three gods” (LV 15/352).
45. First crowds of men and women came to see him and “behold the one who is like pure gold. His self-mastery is complete” and they told it to king Bimbisāra (LV 16/364).
46. In the successive text Māyā has been informed – in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven – by the *devaputras* about the condition of her son; she came down to see him and she began to weep and uttered *ghātās* lamenting that he has gone to his death in the forest without obtaining Enlightenment. However, she is obviously not depicted here, because when the Bodhisattva consoled her as she will soon see the Enlightenment of a Buddha (LV 17/386), he was still in his meditation. The text then recounts how Māra approaches, speaking sweetly in order to seduce him to abandon his striving for perfection (LV 17/399).
47. Here it is explained that the village girls “prepared several kinds of food which they offered to the Bodhisattva. He partook of them and thereafter regularly sought alms in the village. So that he regained his colour and his strength, and became known as the beautiful śramaṇa” (LV 17/404).
48. Alternatively, it could perhaps be Indra, who took the form of a *garuḍa* and sought to take the golden bowl from the *nāgas* but did not succeed. As soon as the Bodhisattva had eaten, his body regained its former beautiful colour “through the strength of his merits and the force of his wisdom” (LV 18/409). And he had the strength to go forth to the *bodhi* tree, the king of trees, and become an omniscient Buddha.
49. The encounters with different kinds of beings are recounted next in the text: “[...] gods, the *nāgas* and the *yakṣa*, the *kinnaras* [...] reflect that their own airy abodes are cemeteries in comparison” (LV 19/426).
50. The Bodhisattva’s radiance completely illuminated the abode of Kālīka, the king of the *nāgas*, and in the following verses Kālīka praises this, saying there can be no doubt that a king of the dharma has been born (LV 19/428).
51. In order to pay honor to the Bodhisattva, the *devaputras* decorated the Bodhimaṇḍa with rows of *tāla* trees which rimmed the altars (LV 19/423). The *tāla* tree (*Borassus* species, or Palmyra palm) can reach a height of 30 m; palm leaf manuscripts are manufactured out of the dried leaves of this tree (cf. Syed 1990, 308).
52. From the lower region, the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Ratnagarbha approached and caused “golden lotuses which grow in the water of jambu to appear within the circle of lapis lazuli. In the hearts of the lotuses appeared radiant maidens revealing the upper halves of their bodies well ornamented” (LV 21/449-450).

53. The translation “Great Beings” in plural by Bays 1983 remains unclear here, however, obviously Māra is not addressed here.
54. The animal swirls (birds, deer, etc.) are a further symptom of an assimilation process in which the inventory of ceiling patterns of earlier temples succumbs to the imperatives of the spatialisation and in this case integrates the principles of “domes of heaven” in Central Asian cave temples from the period of the Tibetan domination such as Dunhuang (Papa-Kalantari 2007); there, comparable dynamic motifs can be observed indicating the ceiling is not conceived as an upper border but an opening to the sky or heaven.
55. The Buddha walking as a wandering monk and flying in the sky are depicted on the walls of the Zhag cave (Be valley, Ngari) and on the 12th century ceilings at Alchi.
56. It has been generally assumed that for depictions of architecture, material culture, trees, plants, nature and decorative features of jewelry, visual models have been used and little attention has been paid to the texts as a source of the setting of the scenes. The *Lalitavistara* (and other Mahāyāna texts) gives numerous accounts of the natural and built environment and of the sumptuous abode of the Buddha, with ample descriptions of honorific parasols, precious silks with gold, banners, and of nature, animals related to water and clouds, as dispensers of plenty and well-being. Many of these heavenly creatures and divinities of nature such as female tree gods have been assimilated and integrated from the pre-Buddhist Indic realm.
57. The text addresses also the sense of hearing and the olfactory sense replete with descriptions of the smell of perfumes, of fine incenses, flowers and oils used to honour but also to heal; all this emphasizes the aesthetic aspect and provides an emotional access for the devotee to the story, the magnificent realm of the Buddha and the Buddhist doctrine. However, a certain contradiction lies in this, as on one hand the depiction of desire and sensual pleasures celebrates and glorifies the divine, and on the other hand the abstention from it by the Buddha, the “world renouncer”, is praised as his major achievement.
58. As emphasized by Luczanits, the 12th century is an important period for the development of Tibetan Buddhism, which took place mainly in Central Tibet (Luczanits 2004a, pp. 119-120); it is a phase of the collection of specific texts, as well as the development of the notion of a teacher’s reincarnation and of teaching lineages.
59. However, Tholing retained its position as spiritual centre of the kingdom (Vitali 1996, pp. 352-355; see also Petech 1997, p. 110).
60. The Lotsaba Lhakhang at Nako can be considered as the first sacred space to display fully developed mandala as geometric configurations covering the walls, dateable to the beginning of the 12th century (Luczanits 2004a, p. 129).
61. Roger Goeppe found the inscriptions in the third floor of the Sumtsek in 1983 and published it in 1990. He was the first who attributed the foundation of Alchi to a considerably later date than previously assumed, namely 1200-1220 for the Alchi Sumtsek. He explained that in the Sumtsek the inscription written by Tsültrim Ö (Tib. Tshul khrims ’od) gives clues about the time when the Sumtsek was erected and of the sectarian affiliation; he deducted a lineage of transmission, beginning with the mystic Bodhisattva Vajradhara (Tib. rDo rge chang), over the Indian “adept” (Skt. *siddha*) Tilopa (10th c), Naropa, Marpa, down to Drigung Jigten Gönpö (died in 1217), (Goeppe 1990, p. 116). In 1993 he published the inscription on the eastern beam of “great stupa”. The analysis of the content revealed that the stupa was built by Tsültrim Ö of the noble ’Bro clan, thus the stupa is part of the early sacred compound and we arrive at a dating of about the same time as the Sumtsek, ca. 1220.
62. See also Linrothe 2001 for the development of new religious-artistic themes in this period such as group portraits of teachers and Great Adepts (Skt. *mahāiddhas*) at Alchi and Luczanits 2006 for a discussion of Alchi in the context of the Drigungpa School of Tibetan Buddhism.

63. The oldest cycle of the Buddha's life in the Western Himalaya is preserved in wood-carvings on the monumental portal of the Khorchag temple (Gyalpo *et al.* 2015; Kalantari & Allinger 2018; Kalantari, in press).
64. Goepper & Poncar 1996; Klimburg-Salter 1997; Luczanits 2015.
65. From the First Sermon onwards the scenes are legible again, followed by the Miracles, Mahāparinirvāṇa, the Cremation and the Distribution of the relics in the last part.
66. In general architecture and architectural ornaments are symbols of the magnificence of the Buddha realm; they are important art forms of the time, in particular in the Kashmir artistic realm.
67. The latter scenes are lifted out of the main pictorial space and assigned inserts, in order to maintain the integrity of the spatial order of the image panel.
68. The dynamic element is emphasized also in the earlier narratives such as the woodcarvings at Khorchag (Kalantari & Allinger 2018).
69. In Mangyu nine scenes are visible, organized in four registers; they are in the uppermost register: Dream of Māyā; Discussion between Māyā and Śuddhodana; Alms offerings to the Ascetics (cf. Ham 2010, p. 93), (the Birth is overpainted); in the second register: a bodhisattva or prince in a setting with books and offering vessels in conversation with a person which could be the Buddha-to-be; image not legible; Competition, (lost: Palace and Departure); in the third register: Hair-cutting before Austerity; two scenes not legible, one of them with three figures (they could be from the Five men of good house); in the lowest register only the miracle scene of the Gift of honey can be identified.
70. For early portable artefacts from Western Tibet such as *thangka* see Heller, 2014.
71. An interesting element are the “spaces for creativity” outside the image field with graphic depictions of faces, like in a sketchbook.
72. The daughters of Māra appear to play an important role in the Himalaya; in the Enlightenment scene on the Sumtsek skirt almost solely the daughters are represented (in Luczanits 1999, see fig. 1p, scene 40).
73. A similar phenomenon has been described in Poell, in press, in regard of the carved scenes on the Alchi Dukhang's portal.
74. This is in line with the prominence of the depiction of the female protector Hārītī of Indic origin in various temples, such as at Tabo and Dungkar, prominently depicted above or near the portal.
75. Ebba Koch (2010) coined this term in the context of Mughal art and ideology.

ABSTRACTS

The case study identifies and analyses the detailed depiction of the story of the life of the Buddha up to the Enlightenment in the early Western Trans-Himalayan Buddhist temple of Dungkar. It examines the relation between image and text, assesses the art-historical context, and explores the narrative modes. Comparative investigations based on multi-sited and multi-disciplinary research in historical Western Tibet (Tsamda/Ngari, Spiti, and Ladakh) show that the designers of the visual programmes at each of these sites developed different solutions of cycles based on textual sources and also visual models have been used in various ways.

Cette étude identifie et analyse la représentation détaillée de l'histoire de la vie du Bouddha jusqu'à l'Illumination dans le temple trans-himalayen occidental de Dungkar. Elle examine les traditions artistiques et explore les modes narratifs. Une analyse comparative basée sur une recherche multi-disciplinaire à travers plusieurs sites du Tibet occidental historique (Tsamda/Ngari, Spiti et Ladakh) montre, qu'à chacun de ces sites, les concepteurs des programmes visuels ont développé, à partir des sources textuelles, différentes solutions de cycles iconographiques.

INDEX

Keywords: Buddha, Buddhism, visual narrative, textual sources, art, Western Tibet, Dungkar

Mots-clés: Bouddha, bouddhisme, narration visuelle, sources, art, Tibet occidental, Dungkar

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