

A VAJRADHĀTU MANDALA IN A PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ MANUSCRIPT OF TABO MONASTERY

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In the introduction to his part of the *Catalogue of the Manuscript Collection of Tabo Monastery* Paul Harrison describes the unfortunate fate of the collection in considerable detail (see Harrison 2009: xiii ff.). In the course of its history this collection has been so often and severely disturbed, including incidents of burning, that less than twenty percent of the original corpus remained.² In addition, Harrison (Harrison 2009: xvii) notes that “*The unusually small number of illustrated folios left at Tabo and the almost total absence of gser yig manuscripts remains strongly suggest that the collection has been picked over by travellers passing through the region.*” It is thus not surprising that the few illustrated folios preserved in the collection belong to a number of different manuscripts. Among them, the illuminations of the deities of the Vajradhātu mandala in the focus of this article are exceptional in this regard.

ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS AT TABO

Even though the Prajñāpāramitā literature (the *yum mdo* section of the Tibetan canon), which most often contains illustrations, represents the main corpus of the texts preserved at Tabo, altogether only 53 of roughly 35,374 manuscript folios contain illuminations. Fortunately, more than half of the Tabo illustrations, namely 28 folios, come from a single manuscript, a *Pañcaviṃśatikā Prajñāpāramitā*, while the remaining 25 illuminations come from nine different manuscripts. Statistically the number of illustrated folios among the latter group of manuscripts remains well below the average for the collection as a whole, indicating that looting of illustrated folios may well have contributed to the present state of the collection.³

1 We thank Gudrun Melzer, who not only generously shared her own observations with us, but also contributed her analyses of the diverse Prajñāpāramitā sources. Helmut Tauscher generously provided the photo documentation of the Tabo manuscripts. Documentation used in as comparison to develop the argument of this article has been provided by Carlo Cristi, Paul Harrison, Jaroslav Poncar, Tom Pritzker and family, Helmut Tauscher, among others. The abbreviation WHAV refers to images housed at the Western Himalaya Archive Vienna.

2 For earlier descriptions of the state of the Tabo manuscripts see, for example, Francke 1914, describing his visit in 1909, Tucci 1935; Tucci 1988 and Steinkellner 2001, all of which are also cited by Harrison.

3 All statistics of Harrison 2009, in particular xvii–xviii and n. 17.

Among the manuscript illuminations, 51 can stylistically be attributed to the earliest part of the collection.⁴ Commonly such illuminations are representations of the Buddha with little or no direct connection to the text they are found in, but the Tabo manuscripts preserve some interesting other examples. A number of scenes preserved at Tabo illustrate the story of the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita and his quest for the Perfection of Wisdom, and thus directly relate to the texts they are found in (see Luczanits 2010 and below). The illuminations of the manuscript discussed in detail below, in contrast, illustrate a topic with no direct connection to the text's content, the deities of the Vajradhātu mandala.

To set this manuscript with the Vajradhātu assembly in context, we first summarise the other types of illuminations as they are preserved at Tabo. Five of the Tabo manuscripts contain depictions of seated Buddhas:

- Running No. 6: Harrison (2009: 45) records two folios of an *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript under Cat.No. 1.1.5.2, which contain stylistically quite different Buddha depictions. It is thus very likely, that these folios stem from two different manuscripts, most probably Cat.No. 1.1.5.2 and Cat.No. 1.1.5.6 (Running No. 167, see below).⁵ Here we thus consider only one of the depictions as part of RN 6, which shows a seated Buddha performing *vitarkamudrā* with the right hand and the left hand held towards the side of the body (Figure 2).
- Running No. 7: Of the 57 preserved folios of another *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.2.16, Harrison 2009: 31 f.) six preserve very similar Buddha depictions, each of them with the earth touching gesture (*bhūmisparśamudrā*; Figure 5).
- Running No. 9: Of the 86 folios of a *Ratnakūṭa* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.3.4, Harrison 2009: 95 f.) three show a seated Buddha performing the earth touching gesture (*bhūmisparśamudrā*; Figure 1).
- Running No. 13: Of altogether 257 preserved folios of a *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.2.5, Harrison 2009: 23 f.) one folio has three seated Buddhas on it and four folios contain a single Buddha each (Figure 3).

⁴ The earliest manuscripts of Tabo can be attributed to the 10th and 11th centuries, as corroborated by C-14 examples reported by Scherrer-Schaub & Bonani 2002. For a Tabo manuscript datable to the first half of the 11th century due to its historical information see Scherrer-Schaub 1999.

⁵ The two folios have the same measurements, but one has ten lines of text and the other only nine. The folio with nine lines (Ka 85) possibly fits to RN 167 (Cat. no. 1.1.5.6; Harrison 2009: 47). This manuscript measures 20,5 x 66,5 cm (RN 6 measures 20,5 x 66,4 cm) and also shares the large red circles. Further, folio Ka 85 is missing in RN 167.

- Running No. 167 (Cat.No. 1.1.5.6, Harrison 2009: 47, see RN 6) only comprises of eight folios of an *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript. On folio Ka 85 a seated Buddha is depicted which shows the gesture of fearlessness (*abhayamudrā*; Figure 4).

All these illustrations are found at the end of a chapter or another marked section of the text (*le'u, bam po*). The quality of the illuminations varies as do the Buddha depictions. Generally speaking, the five manuscripts represent three different types of Buddha depictions which likely also reflect a chronological range. Among them the Buddhas of Running No. 9 (short RN 9; Figure 1) and RN 6 (Figure 2) appear to be the earliest, as they represent Buddha types known from contemporaneous wall paintings in the region. Of these the Buddhas of RN 9 (Figure 1) with the two-coloured edge of the robe and the fine rays in the halo reflect the Buddha depictions in the murals of the Tabo Main Temple, but the excessive shading of the body is not found as such there, but appears to represent a further development from the latest phase of the Tabo paintings. The Buddhas of manuscript RN 13 in the list above also reflect the early western Himalayan type, but they also bear numerous idiosyncratic features, such as a disproportionately small head, multicoloured halos with unusual decorations, and complex textile patterns (Figure 3). In most cases the edge of the robe is still of a different colour, and the robe falls the same way as in early depictions, but its decoration and that of the halo are entirely different. This type is thus already considerably removed from the 11th century comparisons.

RN 7 then represents an entirely different Buddha type deriving from northeast India (Figure 5). Everything about this Buddha's representation is atypical for the region and the Buddha is even seated on a cushion. New strands of art deriving from Northeast Indian prototypes only get established in West Tibet in the course of the 13th century, the Buddhas of this type thus belong to a later phase of the Tabo manuscripts. The red Buddha presumably belonging to RN 167 wears a pink patchwork dress (Figure 4). Although largely following the early western Himalayan type in proportions its somewhat naïve rendering and the swallow tail shaped end of the robe lying on his left shoulder indicate that this illumination is not much earlier than those of RN 7. These Buddha depictions, thus, span approximately 300 years, but the formal appearance of the manuscripts they are found in has hardly changed from the earliest to the latest.

The illuminations of two other Tabo manuscripts clearly refer to the narrative of *Sadāprarudita* in search for the Perfection of Wisdom. This narrative is found at the end

of three texts from the Prajñāpāramitā corpus, namely the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* and the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*.⁶

- Running No. 10: A *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.1.23, Harrison 2009: 13 f.) is preserved only through three beautifully illuminated folios: Folio 312 (Tha-Nga 12) *recto* contains the last lines of chapter 73 and is further marked as the end of *dum bu* 10 and *bam po* 20. With the upper left corner of the picture exactly at the end of the chapter the large illumination is off centre to the right and towards the bottom of the page. It shows a teaching Buddha and a red Bodhisattva in 3/4 profile to his proper right directed towards the Buddha and obviously in conversation with him (Figure 6).⁷ This depiction can not be exactly identified. It neither illustrates the conversation at the end of chapter 73, where the Buddha talks with the monk Subhūti, nor those of the beginning of chapter 74, where Maitreya and Śāriputra converse.

The text on Folio 320 (Tha-Nga 20) *recto* is from chapter 74 but marks the end of *dum bu* 10 and *bam po* 30.⁸ Just underneath the record of the *bam po* in the first line an illumination depicts the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita, wearing the traditional dress of the West Tibetan youth of the time and seated in a posture of reflection with the right hand raised towards his face (Figure 7).⁹ It may well be, that this depiction illustrates the textual content of this folio which narrates how a voice from the sky

6 We would like to thank Gudrun Melzer to provide her research on the most common versions of the Kanjur: The number of chapters differs in the diverse editions of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Those of the the Derge, Peking and Stog Kanjur end with only 72 chapters and do not contain the chapters dedicated to the Bodhisattvas Sadāprarudita und Dharmodgata. The Narthang edition has 75 chapters and includes those containing the story of Sadāprarudita and Dharmodgata. The editions of Phugbrag and London have 77 chapters and differ somewhat from the Narthang version. Similar to a *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* from Tholing (see 'Phrin las mthar phyin 2001: p. 41) the Tabo manuscript RN 10 had 76 chapters (probably counting chapters 74 and 75 of the Phugbrag and London version as one chapter), and thus an equal number of chapters as the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. However, Tholing and Tabo (see e.g. Harrison 2007: 242–243, no. 11) also preserve other manuscripts in 77 chapters, which presumably are somewhat later than the manuscript in the focus of this article.

7 The illumination has previously been published in Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig. 225.

8 The beginning of the new *bam po* relates the Sadāprarudita episode. It roughly corresponds with the beginning of chapter 75 of the version of Phugbrag and London; however, the exact wording is different.

9 The exact posture of the hand is not clear, as much of the illumination has been effected by water. It does appear though, as if one finger is stretched towards the cheek, which would be a clear reference to representations of the Bodhisattvas Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara in reflective pose. Even if the actual sitting posture of Sadāprarudita differs from the usual *lalitāsana*, given the popularity of these Bodhisattva representations in the Northwest, it is quite likely that this is an intended reference. This depiction has previously been published in Luczanits 2010: fig. 6.

suggest to him to proceed towards the east to find the Perfection of Wisdom. Folio 349 (Tha-Nga 49) *verso* contains the end of chapter 75 in the fifth line. The corresponding illustration shows the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata teaching Sadāprarudita, the merchant's daughter and her maidens, who are shown kneeling to one side and wearing local West Tibetan dress (Figure 8).¹⁰ Between them the book of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) rests on a stand. As in the previous illustration, Sadāprarudita's taken off hat is represented as well. In fact, the end of chapter 75 and at the beginning of the following chapter 76 describe the teaching of Dharmodgata and how Sadāprarudita attains the Perfection of Wisdom.

- Running No. 11: Of the second manuscript only a single considerably damaged folio is preserved (Cat. No. 1.1.5.1, Harrison 2009: 45). It contains text of chapter 75 of a *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and unusually there is no other text section marker, such as *bam po* or *dum bu*, either.¹¹ This folio contains three depictions directly illustrating the text found on these pages. In contrast to the depictions in RN 10, Sadāprarudita is shown as a Bodhisattva, and only the maidens are dressed in local fashion.

The single picture on the *recto* page depicts how Sadāprarudita, the merchant's daughter and her maidens offer the blood of their body to moisten the dusty floor in front of the throne they have prepared for the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata to teach the Perfection of Wisdom (Figure 9). They have to resort to this method, as Māra hid the water to hinder their preparations.

The *verso* page contains two illustrations. In the first one Indra fills a bowl of Sadāprarudita with heavenly *mandārava* blossoms, that he can cover the seat of Dharmodgata with them (Figure 10). In the second picture, the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata teaches Sadāprarudita and his company (Figure 11).

Stylistically the illustrations of RN 10 are very close to the Tabo renovation murals finished before 1042 CE and it is thus likely that they were made around the middle of

¹⁰ Previously published in Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig. 229.

¹¹ As this damaged folio neither preserves a chapter marker nor a page number, it has been attributed to chapter 31 of an *Aṣṭasahasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Harrison 2009: 45). However, since the text of this folio diverges considerable from that those of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and also the *Śatasāhasrikā* as found in the common Kanjur editions, it can be securely attributed to a *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. For example, the Tibetan rendering of the personal names differs among the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts; in the *Aṣṭasahasrikā* and the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* Sadāprarudita and Dharmodgata are referred to as *rTag tu ngu* and *Chos 'phags*, but in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* their names are more fully given as *rTag par rab tu ngu ba* and *Chos kyis 'phags pa*. We thank Gudrun Melzer for sharing this observations with us, and also for her analysis of the relationship of the text on the folios to the illustrations.

the 11th century. In terms of the rendering of the hair, the teaching Buddha in one of the illustrations (Figure 6), can be seen as direct predecessor to the Buddha in Figure 2. The hairstyle of the Bodhisattva in this illustration and the main Bodhisattva in Figure 7 is not found in the Tabo murals, and their jewellery is painted in gold. However, other details as well as the local dresses worn by the other figures depicted in this manuscript are consistent with the Tabo renovation phase.

The three illuminations of manuscript RN 11 found on the two sides of the same folio, are of lesser material and artistic quality than those of RN 10, and also in a poorer state of preservation, but the proportions of the figures and the details of the scenes are still more reminiscent of the Tabo murals than of any other comparative monument. This manuscript may thus be attributed to the second half of the 11th century.

Another noteworthy manuscript from Tabo shows illustrations of a different type and relationship to the text:

- Running No. 153: From this *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.5.5, Harrison 2009: 46 f.) two of the 40 preserved folios are illuminated. At the end of the third chapter titled “Reverence for the receptacle of the perfections, which holds immeasurable good qualities” a stupa with a single eye on the dome is depicted (Figure 12). The second picture marks the end of chapter five titled “The revolution of merit” and shows a book topped by flaming jewel (Figure 13). Although not narrative, in both cases the illuminations actually illustrate the content of the preceding chapter. Chapter three describes the merit gained from building and venerating a stupa, and chapter five emphasises the merit accrued from copying the Perfection of Wisdom text.

With its high base, the multiple cornered terraces, and the almost circular dome the stupa represents a type which on the basis of comparisons to stupa shapes in Ladakh can be attributed to the 13th century. The eye painted on the dome also supports an attribution to this time or even later. Eyes on stupa domes are not found in the earliest depictions of the western Himalayas, but appear in the course of the 13th century in monuments painted in a Central Tibet derived style. It remains unclear so far, if this feature is also an expression of a Nepalese background.

Thus, the Tabo manuscript illustrations of RN 10, 11, and 153 expand the chronological range visible in the Buddha depictions further. RN 10 is likely the earliest manuscript with an illustration preserved at Tabo, and RN 153 is possibly the youngest we have discussed so far. Now that we have surveyed the comparative illuminated manuscripts found at the site, we can turn to the manuscript that preserves most of the illuminations.

VAJRADHĀTU MANDALA ASSEMBLY

As mentioned above, Running No. 5, a *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.2.7, Harrison 2009: 25 f.), preserves more illuminations than all other manuscripts together, namely 28. Of these, 26 are on fully preserved pages and two on fragments. The succession of the depictions could be established through the page and chapter numbers, but the iconographic relationship of the depictions remained unstudied and is the subject here. This only became possible through the complete photo documentation of all pages in their succession done by Helmut Tauscher¹² and the catalogue of the Tabo manuscripts by Paul Harrison (2009).

An analysis of the folios shows, that the illuminations are always found at the end of a chapter, regardless if that is on the *recto* or *verso* page. Thus, we can assume that originally there were at least 76 illuminations, for each chapter one. Of the approximately 1100–1200 folios of the manuscript itself, 675 folios are preserved, which is considerably more than 50% of the text. In contrast, the 28 illustrations represent less than 40% of the original illuminations, a difference in ratio that could be accidental, but may also be another indication of selective looting.

In terms of their relationship to each other and to the text, the illuminations of this manuscript are exceptional for the Tabo corpus. In contrast to the manuscripts discussed so far, at least a part of the illuminations on this manuscript represents a theme not related to the text at all, namely the deities of the Vajradhātu mandala. Even before the exact relationship of the depictions was studied in detail, some of the deities could easily be recognized as belonging to this or a closely related mandala, even more so as captions written in cursive script at the bottom of most of the pages identify the deities. That this subject is found on a Western Himalayan manuscript did not come as a surprise, as depictions of such deities are known since long from a few folios collected by Giuseppe Tucci from Tholing and now housed in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Inv. nos. M.81.90.6-17).¹³ However, the captions found underneath these depictions remained puzzling,¹⁴ and a future article of Gudrun Melzer's will suggest an explanation for them. More recently, further folios of Western Himalayan manuscripts with Vajradhātu mandala deities turned up in publications¹⁵ and on the art market.¹⁶

12 We would like to thank Helmut Tauscher for generously providing this material.

13 These depictions have been published several times, the most important among them being Tucci 1949: pls. C and D; Klimburg-Salter 1982: 183, pl. 101; and Pal 1990: pls. 1–2, figs. M1, b–f, h, i.

14 See Harrison 2007, in particular p. 236.

15 Pal 2009: fig. 4 contains up to seven relevant deities, one represented twice.

In the following each depiction is listed in the succession of its occurrence within the manuscript. Each deity is identified and shortly described. If there is a caption identifying the depiction, usually found at the bottom of the page underneath the main text and in cursive script, a transcription and interpretation of this caption is provided as well. The succession of illustrations and their relation to the chapter ends clarifies some characteristic features of this Vajradhātu mandala assembly.

1. Buddha Vairocana (Figure 14)

The first illustrated folio preserved of this manuscript (Ka 25) contains the end of the first chapter in the first line of the *verso* page (*gleng bzi'i le'u*). Buddha Vairocana is depicted in the middle of this page. He is white, sits on a lion-throne, and performs the gesture of highest enlightenment (*bodhyāgrimudrā*).

From the succeeding illuminations it is clear that the four goddesses surrounding Vairocana are not represented in this variant of the assembly. Instead, Vairocana at the end of chapter one was immediately followed by Buddha Akṣobhya at the end of chapter two, who then was followed by the Bodhisattvas that surround him on the eastern lotus. Chapter three accordingly ended with a representation of Bodhisattva Vajrasattva, who is not preserved either, but the following Bodhisattva is.

2. Bodhisattva Vajrarāja (Figure 15)

Chapter four ends in the second line of the *verso* page numbered Ka-Na 19. In the center of the page the Bodhisattva Vajrarāja is depicted, holding an *aṅkuśa* the hook of which is shaped as a bird.

Caption: *rdoe rgyal po lag pa nya kyis lcags kyu mdog ser* = Vajrarāja [holding] and *aṅkuśa* with both(?) hands¹⁷ [and] yellow coloured¹⁸

3. Bodhisattva Vajrarāja (Figure 16)

Chapter five ends in the sixth line of the *recto* page numbered Ka-Na 39. In the lower centre of the page the Bodhisattva Vajrarāja is depicted. He is red, holds an arrow pointing downwards in the right hand to the side of his body and a bow in the left

16 In particular Carlo Cristi, who in recent years had a number of folios with Vajradhātu related deities for sale which will be referred to here in comparison.

17 While the reading of the Tibetan leaves no other choice, the meaning of *nya* in this context remains unclear. It would be tempting to read *bya* and thus “bird-hook” instead, but such a reading contradicts both the shape of the letter and the agentive particle *kyis* between the two words. We thus prefer to interpret the *nya* as an incomplete *nyi* for *gnyis*, as the attribute is indeed held in both hands and other captions sometimes specifically mention the hand an attribute is held with.

18 It is remarkable, that all yellow (*ser po*) deities (nos. 2, 7, 12, 14 and 18) in this manuscript are orangy yellow with strong orange shading. It may well be that a bright yellow has not been available to the artists.

hand resting at the hip.

Caption: *rdoe chags pa dmar po lda' zhu*¹⁹ = Vajrarāga, red, [with] arrow and bow

The succession of these two Bodhisattvas surrounding Akṣobhya conforms to the common enumeration. The last Bodhisattva of the eastern lotus would then be Vajrasādhū at the end of chapter six. Thus in the manuscript illustrations the Tathāgata of the respective direction is followed immediately by the four vajra-Bodhisattvas surrounding him, and only then the next Tathāgata is listed, which in the usual succession is Buddha Ratnasambhava, at the end of chapter seven, followed by the primary Bodhisattva of his direction, Vajratatna, at the end of chapter eight.

4. Bodhisattva Vajratejas (Figure 17)

Chapter nine ends in the seventh line of the *recto* page Ka-Ma 34. In the lower centre of this page is the red-coloured Vajratejas holding a red sun in his hand.

Caption: *rdoe zi 'rjid nyi ma'i mdog cen g.yas na pad ma'i steng na nyi ma snam yon kur*²⁰ = Vajratejas, sun-colored, holding a sun on a lotus in the right [hand, and] the left at the body

The following two Bodhisattvas of the southern assembly are missing, as is the Buddha following them, Amitābha, who should be represented at the end of chapter twelve. However, the next securely identifiable illumination is Vajratīkṣṇa at the end of chapter thirteen, but in the usual succession there is another Bodhisattva between Amitābha and Vajratīkṣṇa, and it is this Bodhisattva who is represented on one of the fragmentary pages.

5. Bodhisattva Vajradharma (Figure 18)

A fragmentary page with a chapter number between 10 and 19 (*le'u bcu ?*) in the seventh line preserves an image that can only represent the Bodhisattva Vajradharma, a form of Avalokiteśvara heading the Bodhisattvas in the West surrounding Amitābha. In the depiction the Bodhisattva is red (the texts are ambivalent concerning his colour) and holds a lotus in the right hand to the side of his body. The second hand is at his hip and does not open the lotus at the heart as is common and described for this deity. It is likely that this depiction is found at the end of chapter twelve, as also assumed by Harrison (2009: 26). Vajradharma is the main Bodhisattva of the western assembly.

This means that if every deity marks the end of a chapter one deity is missing between Vajratejas and Vajradharma. Where that deity was represented is a matter of

¹⁹ Read *mda' gzhu*.

²⁰ In accordance with other captions of this manuscript, we read here *g.yon skur*.

speculation, but it seems clear that a mistake was made with the distribution of the deities. Another error is illustrated through the following illuminations.

6. Bodhisattva Vajratīkṣṇa (Figure 20)

The small depiction of this Bodhisattva at the end of chapter 13 is clearly an afterthought. The chapter ends in the eighth line on the *recto* page numbered Kha 82 (*rab 'byord kyi'u*). The depiction is only of the size available between the text lines at the chapter end. Unlike the other deities in the manuscript, he is not set in a picture space of his own. Vajratīkṣṇa is blue and brandishes a sword.

7. Bodhisattva Vajrahetu (Figure 21)

Chapter 14 ends in the sixth line of the *recto* page numbered Kha-Na 1. In the centre of the page is the dark yellow coloured Vajrahetu. He holds a wheel at the side of his body and the left hand rests at the hip.

Caption: *rdoe rgu ser po khor lo g.yon kur* = Vajrahetu/rDo rje rgyu, yellow, [with] wheel [and] the left [hand] at the body

8. Bodhisattva Vajrabhāṣa (Figure 23)

Chapter 15 ends in the eighth line of the *verso* page numbered Kha-Na 15. In the lower right area of the page Vajrabhāṣa is depicted along with a small square ornament that reminds of a ritual mandala depiction. The Bodhisattva is red and holds a lotus at the side of the body that supports a red elongated object with a rounded top. Only the context allows this object to be identified as a (vajra-)tongue. The left hand rests at the hip.

9. Buddha Amoghasiddhi (Figure 24)

Chapter 16 ends in the seventh line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 37. The Buddha is placed in the centre of the page. He is green and shows the gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya mudrā*), and his family attribute is not represented.

Caption: *don yod grub pa myi 'jig*²¹ *sbyin gyon ku* = Amoghasiddhi, bestowing fearlessness [and] the left [hand] at body

The presence of Amoghasiddhi in this position is the final proof, that the Buddhas are followed by their surrounding Bodhisattvas. Of his Bodhisattva retinue three are preserved in the manuscript, this group thus being the most complete.

10. Bodhisattva Vajrakarma (Figure 25)

Chapter 17 ends in the second line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 47. The picture of Vajrakarma is slightly off centre to the right. The Bodhisattva is green and unusually is seated within a palace structure. He should hold a *viśvavajra* in the hand in front of

²¹ Read *mi 'jigs pa*.

the breast, but the attribute can't be recognized on the available photographs. The left hand rests on the hip.

Caption: *rdoe las sna tshogs kyi mdog can sna tshogs due*²² = Vajrakarma, of variegated colour [and holding] a *viśvavajra*.

The divergence in the colour is the only clear case where the information in the caption differs substantially from the actual depiction. Of variegated colour means that different body parts are of different colours, just like the prongs of the crossed vajra (*viśvavajra*). While this feature is depicted in a number of cases²³, most often deities of variegated colour are represented green.²⁴

11. Bodhisattva Vajrarakṣa (Figure 26)

Chapter 18 ends in the seventh line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 59. Vajrarakṣa is shown in the middle of the page, he is yellow and holds a mail shirt with vajra-ends in front of the breast.²⁵

Caption: *rdoe bsrung ba ser gyi mdog can go cha snams* = Vajrarakṣa, yellow coloured [and] holding an armour

12. Bodhisattva Vajrayakṣa (Figure 27)

Chapter 19 ends in the second line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 65. The somewhat damaged depiction of Vajrayakṣa is placed into the centre of the page. He is black and holds two long teeth in front of the breast.

From the group of Bodhisattvas around Amoghasiddhi only Vajrasandhi is missing, who likely was depicted at the end of chapter 20. With him the group of the five Buddhas with their surrounding Bodhisattvas is concluded.

22 The reading of the last syllable is uncertain. It should read *rdoe* for *rdo rje*, this can, however, not be read into the remaining traces.

23 In the Dharmadhātuvāgiśvaramaṅjuśrīmaṇḍala of Khartse the Bodhisattva Vajrakarma is of variegated colour.

24 This is also the case on another depiction of this Bodhisattva in a manuscript illumination on the *recto* page of a *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript folio numbered Tha-Na 32 from Carlo Cristi, where he is represented at the end of chapter 41. Here the Bodhisattva holds a crossed vajra (*viśvavajra*) in front of the breast, while the second attribute can not be recognized on the available pictures. See Pal 2009: fig. 4, top left corner. Green forms of this Bodhisattva are further found in the Nako Translator's temple and the Alchi group of monuments, while in the Tabo Assembly Hall and Sumda Vajradhātu sculptures are a dark greenish blue and pale white with bright blue shading.

25 Vajrarakṣa is also depicted on the *recto* page of a *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript folio numbered #-Na (the upper letter uncertain) 30 from Carlo Cristi, where it is found at the end of chapter 24. See Pal 2009: fig. 4, bottom left corner.

The deities in the centre of the mandala are then followed by the eight offering goddesses.²⁶ In contrast to the previous deities, the goddesses are not shown frontally but off centre in three-quarter profile and directed towards the centre of the manuscript page. This depiction conforms to their common depiction in mandalas and is certainly also a visual means to indicate their subsidiary role and position. Of this group the first five goddesses are preserved in succession, which conforms to the usual sequence.

13. Goddess Lāsyā (Figure 29)

Chapter 21 ends in the ninth line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 79. The picture of the offering goddess is placed in the bottom right corner of the page and is severely damaged. Lāsyā is white and holds a *vajra* in the right hand at the hip, her left hand is not preserved. The caption is immediately underneath the depiction.

Caption: *sgeg mo kar mo lag mar rer #o de de*²⁷ *snaṃs*²⁸ = Lāsyā, white, holding [a vajra in each hand]

14. Goddess Mālā (Figure 30)

Chapter 22 ends in the second line of the *verso* page Kha-Na 96. The illustration is placed in the left area of the page. The goddess, directed towards the centre, is yellow and holds a garland of jewels with vajra-ends in front of her body.

Caption: '*sreng*²⁹ *ba ma ser mo rin po che 'i breng ba snaṃ* = Mālā, yellow [and] holding a jewel garland

15. Goddess Gītā (Figure 32)

Chapter 23 ends in the sixth line of the *recto* page Kha-Ma 17 (*brgya byin gyi le'u*). The goddess of song, Gītā is shown in the right area of the page and directed towards the centre. She is red and holds bow and *vīṇā* to the sides of the body, not playing the instrument.

Caption: *glu ma dmar skya bi bang*³⁰ *snaṃs* = Gītā, bright red [and] holding a *vīṇā*

26 These goddesses belongs to the core deities of the Vajradhātu mandala, and thus to the inner assembly. However, in mandala depictions they are commonly represented in the corners of the two inner squares, four in the corners of the inner palace and four together with the 16 Bodhisattvas of the Bhadrakalpa.

27 Although this reading is uncertain, the meaning can be concluded from the remains of the caption and the usual depiction of this goddess.

28 Above this caption, another longer *dbu med* text can be recognized but is not legible anymore. The function of this text thus remains unclear.

29 For '*phreng*'; this actually looks like a copying mistake, or the writer did not know how to represent the *ph* in this script. The same issue is found again at the end of the line, although there in a different variant.

30 Read *pi wang*.

16. Goddess Nṛtyā (Figure 34)

Chapter 24 ends in the third line of the *recto* page of *Kha-Ma* 38 (*yongs su sngo ba'i le'u*). Nṛtyā, the goddess of dance is depicted in the centre of the page but directed towards the right. She is green with her hands raised to the sides of the head.

Caption: *g # # ljang gu gar byed ba'i tshul* = [Nṛtyā], green [and] in the manner of performing a dance

It is interesting to note, that the dance posture of Nṛtyā, with both feet on the ground and only the arms shown in movement, may well reflect the local dance style, in which the hands do most of the rhythmic movement, while the legs move comparatively restrained and slow.³¹

17. Goddess Dhūpā (Figure 35)

Presumably at the end of chapter 25 the goddess of incense, Dhūpā, is depicted. Of this page only the fragment containing the illumination is preserved. The goddess presumably is represented on the right side of the central text area and faces left. She stands in a dance pose and holds an incense burner.

Caption: *dug³² pa ma kar mo s s n b ng³³ snam* = Dhūpā, white [and] holding ...

The remaining offering goddesses, presumably depicted at the ends of chapters 26 to 28 are missing. Of the following four gate-keepers, depicted in the usual succession at the end of chapters 29 to 32, two are preserved. As the offering goddesses they are shown standing and directed towards the centre of the manuscript page.

18. Gate-keeper Vajrapāśa (Figure 36)

Chapter 30 ends in the second line of the *recto* page Ga 42. The picture with the Vajrapāśa is in the centre of the page. The gate-keeper is orange and holds a noose in both hands in front of his body, its vajra-ends dangling of the hands. He is the protector of the south.

Caption: *sgo ba zhags pa ser po zhags pa snams* = gate-keeper Pāśa, yellow [and] holding a noose

19. Gate-keeper Vajrāveśa (Figure 37)

Chapter 32 ends in the fourth line of the *recto* page Ga 71. Vajrāveśa is shown in the centre of the page facing left. He is green and holds a bell in with both hands in front

31 Vajranṛtyā is also represented on the *recto* page of a manuscript folio numbered Ja-Nga 23 from Carlo Cristi, where she is seated and only moves the arms. See Pal 2009: fig. 4, second row left and bottom centre depiction (depicted twice). This illumination is remarkable for its frame.

32 Read *bdug*.

33 The resolution of the available picture is too low to enable a reading of this part of the text. What is recognisable differs too much from the expected *spos snod*.

of the breast. He is the protector of the north.³⁴

Caption: *sgo ba 'bebs pa ljang ku rdo rje*³⁵ = gate-keeper Āveśa, green [and with] vajra

The gate-keepers are followed by the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Aeon (*bhadrakalpa*), which end chapters 33 to 48. However, of this large group only a single one is preserved, which indicates that this group is again represented frontally and seated.

20. Bodhisattva Bhadrapāla (Figure 38)

Chapter 43 ends in the fifth line of the *recto* page Ga-Na 89 (*gang 'ga'i lha mo'i le'u*). Bhadrapāla is represented somewhat off centre to the right (in the right third of the page). He is white and holds a red lotus carrying a large triple jewel.

Caption: *bzang skyong kar pad ma'i steng na rin po che* = Bhadrapāla, white [and with] a jewel on a lotus

That only one deity of this large group is preserved is a pity. In both texts and illustrations different versions of this group exist and the succession of these Bodhisattvas could have been particular telling.

With the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Aeon the representation of the main deities of the Vajradhātu mandala assembly is concluded. Theoretically the gate-keepers could be repeated here once more, as is the case in some mandala depictions, but this appears rather unlikely, as in this case the inner gate-keepers are commonly represented peaceful or even female.

The following chapters of the text are then illustrated mostly with unidentified Buddha representations.

21. Buddha (Figure 39)

The Buddha at the end of chapter 54, the chapter ends in the seventh line of the *recto* page (Nga 52), is centred on the page. His original depiction has largely been smudged and was replaced by a—presumably rather recent—line drawing. This Buddha has his hands joined in front of the breast in a way that only the tips of the fingers touch each other.

34 On a verso page of a *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript folio numbered Tha-Ma 26 from Carlo Cristi the same gate-keeper is found at the end of chapter chapter (*le'u*) 47. See Pal 2009: fig. 4, middle image in the second row. In this case the deity holds both vajra and bell side by side in front of the breast.

35 If this reading is correct, then the verb is missing. The word *snam* or one of its variants used in these captions for 'holding' can not be read in this case.

22. Buddha (Figure 47)

The Buddha at the end of chapter 55, the chapter ends in the first line of the *verso* page Nga 56 ('og ma), is seated in meditation (*dhyānamudrā*) and wears a green robe that covers both shoulders.

23. Buddha (Figure 40)

The Buddha at the end of chapter 59, the chapter ends in the third line of the *verso* page Nga 93, is yellow and has his hands in a strongly simplified variant of the teaching gesture (*dharmacakramudrā*) in front of the breast. He wears a red robe with the right shoulder covered from behind.

24. Buddha (Figure 52)

The Buddha at the end of chapter 60, the chapter ends in the fifth line of the *recto* page (Nga-Na 12), is orange yellow with green shading, performs the gesture of touching the earth (*bhūmisparśamudrā*) and has the left hand in front of the breast. He wears a red patchwork robe leaving the right shoulder exposed.

25. Buddha

The Buddha at the end of chapter 66, the chapter ends in the third line of the *recto* page (Nga-Ma 7), is yellow, has his hands in the teaching gesture in front of the breast and wears a green robe leaving the right shoulder exposed.

26. Kneeling Buddha (Figure 41)

The Buddha(?) at the end of chapter 68, the chapter ends in the eighth line of the *verso* page (Nga-Ma 20), unusually represented kneeling sideways. The page is torn at the right side and the small Buddha depiction partly lost. The Buddha has his hands raised in what is to be interpreted as veneration gesture (*namaskāramudrā*) towards the right. He wears green robes and his right shoulder is covered from behind. As the illumination is cut off at the right side it remains unclear if the Buddha is directed towards some other representation to his side.

27. Buddha

The Buddha at the end of chapter 69, the chapter ends in the fifth line of the *verso* page (Nga-Ma 26), is yellow, performs *dharmacakramudrā*, and wears a red patchwork robe with the right shoulder covered from behind.

Remarkably, the last chapters of this manuscript probably were accompanied by illustrations of the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita's quest for the Perfection of Wisdom, although this identification cannot be considered entirely certain.

28. Meditating Bodhisattva (Figure 42)

At the end of chapter 74, the chapter of Sadāprarudita (*rtag par rab tu ngu ba'i le'u*) as found in line nine of the *recto* page (Nga-Ma 62), a meditating Bodhisattva is depicted, this time seated in an architectural frame. The Bodhisattva is red, wears rich jewellery and a yellow cape covering the shoulders from behind.

Given the place in the manuscript this illustration is found in, it is very likely that this scene illustrates the story of the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita in search for the perfection of wisdom, possibly representing the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata meditating in the city of Gandhavaṭī.³⁶ After their first meeting the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata went into his house, where he “*remained for seven years immersed in one uninterrupted state of trance, and he dwelt in countless thousands of concentrations, peculiar to Bodhisattvas, issued from perfection of wisdom and skill in means.*”³⁷ As we have seen, Dharmodgata can be represented red (Figure 8) as well as white (Figure 11).

This manuscript is remarkable for a number of reasons. First of all, its illuminations (likely) show three different themes not related to each other, namely the deities of the Vajradhātu mandala, repeated Buddhas and (possibly) the narrative of Sadāprarudita. As we have seen above, the two latter themes occur in other Tabo manuscripts as well, and the narrative at the end has a direct relationship to the text's content. Due to these three themes, but also within them, the manuscript shows an unusual variety in its depictions, which appears both intentional, such as setting the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata within an architectural frame, and unintentional, such as the miniature representation of Vajratīkṣṇa.

Also the direct relationship of the depictions to the text is noteworthy. Not only are the illuminations always found at that side of the folio where the chapter actually ends, but at least some of its locations are chosen in direct relation to the chapter ends.

Consequently, the placement of the pictures on the page appears random. Even more remarkable, with the Vajradhātu deities the placement of the depiction also considers their iconography and usual depiction within a mandala representation. Such relationships, to our knowledge are not found in Indian manuscripts, such as the “Manuscript in Five Collections”.³⁸ Finally, the representations of the Vajradhātu mandala

³⁶ In contemporaneous western Himalayan painting Sadāprarudita himself is commonly represented as a youth of the western Himalayas (see the Tabo manuscript depictions referred to above and Luczanits 2010).

³⁷ Conze 1958: 220.

³⁸ See Allinger 2008.

deities in this manuscript offer the possibility to compare them with the same deities in roughly contemporaneous murals of the same region.

ICONOGRAPHIC COMPARISONS

There is no direct relationship between the Vajradhātu mandala and the Prajñāpāramitā literature, but both have been extremely prominent in early western Himalayan Buddhism. In fact diverse topics of teachings traditional classified as Yoga tantra are found throughout the early monuments of the western Himalayas. In most cases, the Vajradhātu mandala represents the main theme and complementary topics, partly featuring the same groups of deities, cover the other walls.³⁹ Much less is preserved in Central Tibet, but it can be assumed that there Yoga tantra topics, and particularly the Vajradhātu mandala, have been of equal importance and thus were also frequently depicted. However, only few of these representations are preserved today.⁴⁰

In contrast to later canonised versions of mandala assemblies, these early representations and in particular the Yoga tantra topics are represented in many variants distinguished by composition, the number of deities and their relationship, as well as the iconography of single deities, providing the possibility that the Tabo manuscript deities can actually be related to a particular place and time. Given that the manuscript is found at Tabo, the Vajradhātu mandala as preserved in the Tabo Assembly Hall is of course the first reference of comparison, but comparative examples are utilised from all the western Himalayan region and beyond.

As mentioned already, the Tabo manuscript is also part of a small group of illuminations depicting the Vajradhātu deities. The most important and most well known among these are the already mentioned manuscript leaves originally brought by Giuseppe Tucci from Tholing and now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M.81.90.6-17).⁴¹ These, and some additional ones that turned up on the art market in recent years, offer an additional body of comparison. As they lack context, these comparisons are only of secondary importance and mainly serve to demonstrate that the typological and possibly also chronological range of such depictions is broader than it appears from the market.⁴¹

39 On the most important topics in the early western Himalayan monuments, see Luczanits 2004: 201–223.

40 Besides the monuments cited below, see also the temples centred on Vairocana mentioned in Richardson 1990.

41 Traditionally any West Tibetan illumination is attributed to the 11th century.

Sadly the title page of the manuscript is not preserved and it remains unclear what could have been represented there. Obviously, the goddess Prajñāpāramitā is a likely candidate, but in the only comparison in this respect, the LACMA manuscript fragments, the goddess is actually at the end of a manuscript, and that is not the same one as that with the Vajradhātu deities.⁴² Interestingly, this page has a verse dedicated to Sudhana or Norzang (Nor bzang), the hero of the Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra added to it.⁴³ Another possibility is a Buddha representation and an interlocutor represented on the sides of the folio, as frequently occurs in other manuscripts.⁴⁴

In the Tabo manuscript, Buddha Vairocana (Figure 14) is white and has his hands joined in front of the breast in what probably represents a variant of the gesture of highest enlightenment (*bodhyāgrimudrā*). Although our picture is not entirely clear, it appears that he has his right hand turned towards himself—and thus with the back towards the viewer—covering almost the entire left hand. Further the mandorla is smaller than the figure and the lions are literally squeezed underneath the lotus seat of the deity. The Vairocana sculpture of Tabo has the hands exactly in the reverse positions. Instead the closest comparisons are found in the Alchi group of monuments, with those depicted in two mandalas of the Sumtsek gallery floor being the closest.⁴⁵

From the illuminations succeeding Vairocana it is clear that four goddesses of the core assembly of the mandala are not represented in the manuscript. There is neither space for four goddesses surrounding Vairocana, as they are represented in the earliest depictions, nor for the four consorts of the surrounding Buddhas represented in later versions of the mandala. This does immediately remind on the Tabo Assembly Hall, where the four goddesses are missing also, but there they could be reconstructed as once present at the corners of Vairocana's throne.⁴⁶

The Bodhisattva Vajrarāja holds an unusually shaped elephant goad (*aṅkuśa*), with the hook in the shape of a bird (Figure 15). In the earliest West Tibetan monuments, as in the Tabo Assembly Hall or the Alchi monuments, the *aṅkuśa* is consistently shaped as the head of a *makara*, his trunk forming the hook. Besides the attribute itself, also the

42 Harrison 2007: 238–40 (no. 8).

43 Translated in Harrison 2007: 239.

44 See, for example, the many examples in Heller 2009, likely following an earlier convention, as also demonstrated by the depiction of the Bodhisattva Pramuditārāja requesting the Buddha Śākyamuni to teach the Bhadrakalpikasūtra in the Tabo Ambulatory (Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig. 161). A similar pair, both appearing to be Buddhas occurs on a folio offered by Carlo Cristi, but these are not at the beginning of the text but mark the end of the first *bam po*.

45 See Goepper & Poncar 1996: 189.

46 See Luczanits 2004: 46–51 and fig. 40.

way it is held across the body with two hands can be compared. In this case the depictions in the oldest temples of Alchi, Nako and Sumda Chung conform to that on the manuscript, the closest in terms of hand positions being that of the Alchi Assembly Hall.

The Bodhisattva Vajrarāga (Figure 16) has his bow and arrow in an inactive position, the arrow head pointing downwards and the bow at the hip. This contrasts with the active shooting position found with most of the early western Himalayan depictions, including the Tabo Assembly Hall. In fact, so far only a single comparison to the passive depiction in the manuscript has been found, namely in the depiction of the Vajradhātu mandalas in the recently discovered Khartse cave.⁴⁷

Little can be deduced from the depiction of the following Bodhisattva, Vajratejas (Figure 17), who is depicted in most comparative examples alike, but Vajradharma's representation is again rather unusual (Figure 18). The red Bodhisattva holds a lotus in the right hand, but it is held to the side and the second hand does not "open it at the heart" as described⁴⁸ and commonly pictured. The depiction on the manuscript, in contrast is found in several instances among the Alchi monuments, in the wrathful depiction of this Bodhisattva in the Alchi Dukhang and two other ones in the Alchi Sumtsek (gallery, both mandalas on the right side wall; Figure 19). While this comparison is important, it needs to be noted that the last three Bodhisattvas of the Tabo manuscript are practically identical in their posture and the location of their arms.

Bodhisattva Vajratīkṣṇa, painted as an afterthought in-between the text lines, brandishes a sword, but does not hold a book in the left hand (Figure 20), as certainly was the case in the Tabo Assembly Hall. However, his depictions are too varied in the comparative depictions—in colour (blue and yellow), posture (brandishing the sword or holding it upright in front of the breast), and attribute (holding a book or not)—that any meaningful conclusions can be taken from them.

In the case of the Bodhisattva Vajrahetu the only telling detail is the shape of the wheel he holds to the side of the body, which has the shape of a yellow blossom with five petals (Figure 21). Again the depictions of the deity and the way the attribute is held, if it is depicted at all, vary across the western Himalayas, but the depiction in the manuscript has its best comparisons again in the Alchi Sumtsek, where even the attribute has a similar shape (Figure 22).

47 We owe the documentation of this cave to the Pritzker family. The cave is also the subject of Tsheringyal po et al. 2009.

48 For a summary of the relevant details in the iconographic description of Ānandagarbha see Luczanits 2004: 296–99. Unless otherwise noted, it is this description we refer to.

The Bodhisattva Vajrabhāṣa is again very distinctive. Instead of holding the (vajra-) tongue in his hand, it is placed on a white lotus to the side of the body, standing upright on it as if it were the red stigma of the lotus' pistil (Figure 23). This attribute has always been very difficult to depict, even more so as it has the same colour as the Bodhisattva, and there are consequently a high number of variants in its representation. In most cases it is clear that it has been attempted to depict an actual physical tongue, a red often slightly bent object, and occasionally a vajra-head is added on one side. Although in most depictions the tongue is held to the side of the body, none of the comparisons uses a lotus base for the attribute.

Following Buddha Amoghasiddhi (Figure 24), the only other of the five Buddhas besides Vairocana preserved in this manuscript, is the primary Bodhisattva of his family, Vajrakarma (Figure 25). The photos available to us are too blurry to verify his attribute, the *viśvavajra*, and the posture alone varies quite a lot across the other depictions of this deity. What is interesting though, is the architectural frame represented around the Bodhisattva, the palace within which he is depicted. Supported by two pillars it has a raised central section with corner finials and each of the two platforms has a structure on top which is similar to the one-eyed stūpa from another Tabo manuscript discussed above (Figure 12). More decisive, however, is that in the wall paintings such more architecture oriented frames only come up in the course of the 12th century.⁴⁹ Comparative frames, although not with this peculiar stupa like shape are found in Lalung and the Alchi group of monuments.

Bodhisattva Vajrarakṣa as usual holds a mail shirt in front of his breast, the vajra- heads on both sides clearly visible (Figure 25). More interesting is the black Vajrayakṣa, who holds two long silver coloured fangs (Figure 27). The latter is interesting, since he is described as a black a wrathful figure, but in depictions is rarely shown this way, and often even the colour is changed to a brighter one. The Tabo manuscript depiction most closely compares to the ones at Nako, in particular his two representations in the side wall mandalas of the Lhakhang Gongma (Figure 28).

While the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas discussed so far demand more hieratic and static representations, there is considerable freedom with the offering goddesses. In fact, in the Tabo manuscript these are shown with agitated movements and exaggerated postures. This can best be demonstrated by the representation of Lāsyā (Figure 29), which is so far the only representation of this goddess that is shown so much in profile

49 See Luczanits 2004: 249–56.

that her two hands are joined at hip level on the side she is looking towards. Usually the hands are on both sides regardless if she is represented frontally or looking sideways.

The Goddess Mālā faces the right side, but her body is twisted in such an extreme manner, that her breasts are directed towards the left (Figure 30). She holds a garland with pending jewels and vajra ends, which corresponds most closely to representations in the Alchi Dukhang and the Khartse cave. A similar but much less pronounced body posture, in contrast, is only found in a Phyang cave (Figure 31). Gītā, the goddess of song, is shown in a similar extreme posture and holds her instrument, the bow and the *vīṇā* passively to the sides of the body (Figure 32). With the exception of one depiction of the Alchi Sumtsek (Figure 33) in all other depictions available to us, the goddess actually plays the *vīṇā* or has her right hand very close to the instrument.

With Nṛtyā, the goddess of dance, the movement is expected, but it is unusual that she raises both her hands (Figure 34). Most commonly the goddess raises one hand over the head, but occasionally she may have both hands raised, usually holding the ends of a scarf with them that falls behind the body. Of these, the portrayal in the Nako Lhakhang Gongma and one Alchi Sumtsek depiction, from the same mandala as the comparison for Gītā, are closest to the one in the manuscript. In terms of movement, the most extreme depiction on the manuscript is certainly that of the goddess Dhūpā (Figure 35). Her motion is so exaggerated, that her breast projects underneath her arm. The shape of the incense burner she is holding is very distinctive and we have not yet found it elsewhere.

The two gate keepers, Vajrapāśa (Figure 36) and Vajrāveśa (Figure 37) do not provide much additional information, their depictions are too varied to be significant. In the case of Vajrāveśa— also called Vajraghaṇṭā in reference to his main attribute, the bell—the holding of the bell with both hands in front of the breast is shared by depictions in the Nako Translator's temple, the Khartse cave temple, and another manuscript illumination that has recently been on the market is very similar to it.³⁴

The iconography of the sixteen Bodhisattvas of the fortunate aeon (*bhadrakalpa*) included into the Yoga Tantra mandalas is too varied to allow for a similar comparison in case of the Bodhisattva Bhadrāpāla (Figure 38). In the ambulatory of the Tabo Main Temple, the two groups of sixteen Bodhisattva are even inscribed, but as the example of Bhadrāpāla there makes clear, it is far from certain that these captions are actually correct.⁵⁰ In any case, the iconography of this Bodhisattva on the manuscript, white with

⁵⁰ See Luczanits 1999: 151.

a triple jewel on a lotus, conforms to one of his description, and the triple jewel is his common attribute.⁵¹

Although these iconographic comparisons relate the Tabo manuscript depictions of the Vajradhātu deities to most of the Western Himalayan monuments, there are a few general observations that can be made from them. The variations in the depictions of the Vajradhātu deities found throughout the Western Himalayas are an indication of numerous parallel traditions on this topic in both religious and artistic terms. There are also indications for substantial variations in the depictions of single deities even if their iconography is firmly established. While found at Tabo, the illuminations of the manuscript do not compare well to the Tabo Main Temple. Instead the closest comparisons are found at sites like Nako and Alchi, and a general trend for comparisons to monuments most likely dating to the 12th century, or even its second half, can be observed.

STYLISTIC OBSERVATIONS

As we have seen from the discussion of the Buddha depictions, the Tabo manuscript illuminations reflect the stylistic development of Western Himalayan painting from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. It is thus possible to relate the murals and the book illuminations, and it is generally assumed that the same artists that worked on the large mural programs have also participated in the creation of manuscript illuminations. However, the situation would seem to be more complex, in that the manuscript illuminations are only rarely of the same quality as the murals. In the following section we will attempt to outline a stylistic development of Western Himalayan art that also takes these qualitative differences into account.

The oldest comparative paintings in the region probably date to the first half of the 11th century, and have been rediscovered in the north-west chörten at Tholing, one of two such partly preserved structures in the vicinity of the temple of Yeshe Ö.⁵² This chörten once contained three sculptures housed in niches and flanked by secondary painted deities. As many of the physical features in these paintings are also found on more or less contemporaneous Kashmiri bronzes, they are generally assigned to the Kashmiri tradition.⁵³ Since virtually no Kashmiri paintings have been preserved, the question of how these paintings came to be executed at Tholing remains a matter for speculation.

51 de Mallmann 1986: 116.

52 See Namgyal 2001: 126–31, and Heller 2010.

53 See, for example, Luczanits 2004: 226–28 and Heller 2010.

The figures in the chörten are painted in an extremely hard linear style (Figure 43). The body is modelled with a thick application of pigment that creates an almost pattern-like effect but does not result in the impression of depth or plasticity. All details, such as the opulent jewellery and the textile patterns, are painted with precision. The superb quality of these paintings makes it likely that the artists were brought in from an important cultural centre, at that time probably Kashmir.

The same artists may have been responsible for the Tholing manuscript paintings of Vajradhātu deities held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Figure 44). However, there are a number of deviations from the harsh linearity of the Tholing murals. While the facial features are the same, with the small elongated eyes, the projection of the further eye in three-quarter profile, prominent nose, small mouth and the marked chin, and the bodies have similar proportions, the overall impression is softer and more playful, as evinced by the narrow diaphanous scarves around their shoulders. The only modelling occurs as shading along the outlines.

The paintings in the Ambulatory of the Tabo Main Temple, which can be securely attributed to the mid-eleventh century, exhibit a strong similarity to those of the Tholing manuscript (Figure 45).⁵⁴ There is the same faint shading along the outlines of the body, although there is considerable variation here depending on the base colour,⁵⁵ and while the heads are somewhat broader and the shape of the mouth a little narrower, the facial features are similar. At Tabo occasional slight modelling of the face is found, making the figures more sensual than those of the Tholing manuscript. Due to their large size, the Tabo depictions are exceptional in terms of their detailed and varied representation of jewellery, textile patterns and attributes.

While the Buddha depictions of the Tabo manuscript RN 9 (Figure 1) exhibit similarities to the style of the Tabo Ambulatory paintings, they are clearly of far inferior quality. In this respect the depictions of the Thousand Buddhas in the same Ambulatory offer a better basis for comparison, especially those on the inner wall, which while refined are still of lesser quality than those on the outer wall (Figure 46).⁵⁶ The way the body and dress are drawn is similar, in particular the bi-coloured edge of the robe. The rays drawn within the nimbus are actually finer in the manuscript than in the murals. The modelling of the body

54 See also Klimburg-Salter 1997: 154–71, in particular figs. 163–80; the Bodhisattvas belong to her Period IIA (see Klimburg-Salter 1997: 49ff).

55 In the Tabo Ambulatory the blue and green Bodhisattvas display considerably more shading than those with white and red complexions.

56 See also Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig.162.

is still rather harsh, which compares well to some of the Tholing manuscript illuminations⁵⁷.

In their treatment of the hieratic figures, the narrative depictions at Tabo exhibit a number of similarities to the style of the paintings in the Ambulatory. By and large, however, the depictions are of a wholly different character: the figures are conceived in purely graphic terms and lack any kind of corporeality. The focus of interest here is the rendering of motion and the interplay between the figures.⁵⁸ The same profane characteristics are also found in the paintings illustrating the *Sādāprarudita* chapters in manuscripts RN 10 and RN 11. Here too it is the graphic manner of representation that is important and not the corporeality of the figures.

The style of the Tholing chörten continued to exert influence, as can be seen from the early 13th-century paintings of the Alchi Sumtsek (Figure 48).⁵⁹ The crisp outlines of the body are further enhanced through the contrasting colour of the background. Here the modelling of the body is no longer pattern-like, instead emphasizing its plasticity clearly. The shading is frequently executed in contrasting colours. The facial features are similar to those of Tholing and Tabo, while the head is relatively small in relation to the body. The jewellery and opulently decorated dress are even more richly depicted than at Tabo, both communicating a sense of luxury.

The same elements are already present in the earlier Alchi Dukhang. The depiction of a Buddha from this temple (Figure 49) shares the same proportions and modelling, and with his richly patterned patchwork robes can be compared to the Buddhas of the Tabo manuscript RN 13 (Figure 3). Despite the substantial difference in size both Buddhas wear rich robes, their heads are relatively small, and the bodies exhibit modelling albeit of a considerably more schematic nature than that in the Tabo manuscript illuminations. If one compares the hard linear style of the Tholing chörten and its modifications in Tabo and Alchi with the twelfth-century murals of the Translator's Temple at Nako⁶⁰ it is

57 This representation of the Buddha in the Tabo ambulatory is essentially the same type as one of the Buddhas of manuscript RN 5 (Figure 47). Nonetheless if we compare these Buddhas, we notice that despite the similar appearance some crucial features in the depictions have changed: the bodily proportions, in particular the body-head ratio, are different; in the manuscript illuminations, the body is revealed through the dress, which has a hem of one colour only, and the way the dress falls at the legs as well as the halo are completely different.

58 See Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig.128.

59 See also the diverse forms of Green Tārā on the left-hand wall of the Avalokiteśvara niche and the Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā ar gallery level (Goepper & Poncar 1996: 72 ff., 159).

60 On the date of Nako see Luczanits 2004: 85.

evident that the latter has a very different painterly style, even though a number of the motives are similar (Figure 50). The outlines of the body are considerably softer than in the linear style; lacking the tension of the graphic lines, the bodies make a looser, more 'relaxed' Impression. In contrast to Alchi, where the bodies seem almost like jointed dolls, at Nako the various parts of the body flow organically into one another.

Furthermore, the modelling does not follow the contours of the body more or less schematically, that is from the outline to the centre of the respective part of the body, but is adjusted individually for each part and appears to have been finely smudged with the ball of the thumb in order to allow parts of the body to stand out independently of the outlines. The colours are not as strong and hardly contrast with one another, while neither dress nor jewellery are emphasised to any great extent.

This more painterly style also occurs in manuscript illuminations, most clearly on the title page and in the first group of illuminations of the first volume of a *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript from Pooh village in Upper Kinnaur (Figure 51).⁶¹ The shading is here barely visible. Illuminations further on in the manuscript are much more schematic and of inferior quality, and may thus be the work of pupils. However, a number of leaves from this manuscript offer good opportunities for comparisons with the Tabo manuscript featuring the Vajradhātu mandala (RN 5; compare Figure 52 with Figure 53). While there are major differences in the appearance of the Buddhas, the details of their dress, the lotuses and even the halos all share a similar schematic approach in the execution. The comparison also demonstrates how crudely the Tabo depictions were executed.

The illuminations in the Tabo manuscript RN 5 are obviously not painted by one of the main artists—one of the latter would probably have been commissioned with the title page, which has not been preserved—but by pupils, as can be seen from the clumsiness of many of the details. A telling example is the representation of the breasts of female deities in three-quarter profile. In more sophisticated examples (Figure 31), the countermovement of the breasts is used to suggest the elegant flexure of the body, but in the manuscript this feature has been executed in an extreme, almost grotesque manner. (Figure 34). As regards the movement, a depiction in the Nako Lhakhang Gongma comes closest to that in the manuscript, but is still very far removed from it.

The figures in the paintings of Tabo RN 5 also have minimal shading but exhibit the same softly lines as in the Nako murals. In the latter, the Pooh manuscript and RN 5 the heads tend to be broad, while the mouth is of normal size, or at least not as thin as in

61 On the different styles and hands in this manuscript see Allinger 2006.

the linear style, and the eyes are almond-shaped, with the exception of the Pooh manuscript, where they are very narrow or almost slit-like.

While these stylistic comparisons are not conclusive, they help to locate the Tabo manuscripts in time and place. Despite the striking differences in quality, the style of Tabo manuscript RN 5 can probably best be compared to the paintings of the Nako Translator's Temple.

ATTRIBUTION AND CONTEXT

It is very fortunate that two of the themes preserved in the few illustrated folios of the Tabo manuscripts are also depicted in the Tabo Main Temple: the Vajradhātu mandala in the Assembly Hall and the story of Sadāprarudita's quest for the Perfection of Wisdom in the Ambulatory. Both themes belong to the renovation of the Tabo Main Temple likely concluded in 1042 CE. However, this fact should not make us assume that the manuscript illuminations are all from the same period. As we have seen already, the Buddha depictions of the manuscripts cover a wide chronological range, while those of the Sadāprarudita narrative are roughly contemporaneous (RN 10 and 11) and slightly later than the Tabo mural depiction. It is thus, clear, that we should not generally assume, that all distinctively early western Himalayan (or Purang-Guge) manuscript depictions are of the eleventh century.

If the chronology of Western Himalayan temples as suggested in Luczanits 2004 is taken as a base,⁶² the closest comparisons to the Tabo Vajradhātu manuscript RN 5 in both stylistic and iconographic terms are found in twelfth century monuments.

Stylistically, the manuscript most closely resembles the Nako murals, but this association is not close enough to establish an origin for the painters. However, As artists and workshops have been working at different sites throughout the region, usually the origin of the painters cannot be established for most of the manuscripts. An itinerant background of the artists is one possible explanation why the iconographic comparisons are spread over a wide geographic region and temporal spread. Some of the iconographic comparisons are exclusively from the Alchi Sumtsek, which is datable to the early thirteenth century.

Thus, despite depicting the Vajradhātu mandala and likely also the Sādāprarudita episode, the Tabo manuscript dates to the mid twelfth century at the earliest. Such a date and a local, itinerant workshop setting would also explain some of the

⁶² While this chronology has not been accepted by a number of senior scholars, it also has not been challenged seriously in terms of the arguments it presents.

idiosyncrasies found in this manuscript, especially some of the more grotesque figures, the type of architectural frame found in one depiction (Figure 25) and the flame shaped *ūṣṇīṣa* of the Buddhas along with characteristics that clearly continue from the Tabo mural paintings.

In conclusion, we hope that this analysis of the Tabo manuscript illuminations suffices to establish a number of important points:

- Similarly to the monuments found throughout the region, Western Himalayan manuscript illumination is not restricted to the 11th century but actually has a long and complex history which includes changes in the subjects the manuscript illumination are depicting and the relationship of text and illuminations. In this respect, a larger body of evidence may enable to work out how Western Himalayan manuscript illumination has developed in terms of style and depicted subjects.
- Once a more detailed chronology for manuscript illuminations is established, it may help to refine the chronology for early Western Himalayan manuscripts as well.
- The Vajradhātu mandala assembly is an important topic among the early manuscript illuminations, and the iconography of the depicted deities has the potential to establish relationships to monuments in the region.

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64 We thank Christiane Kalantari for this identification.



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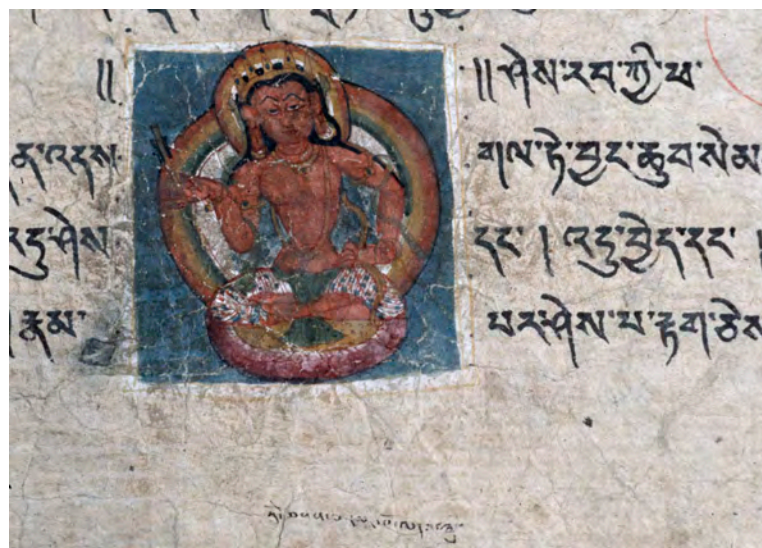
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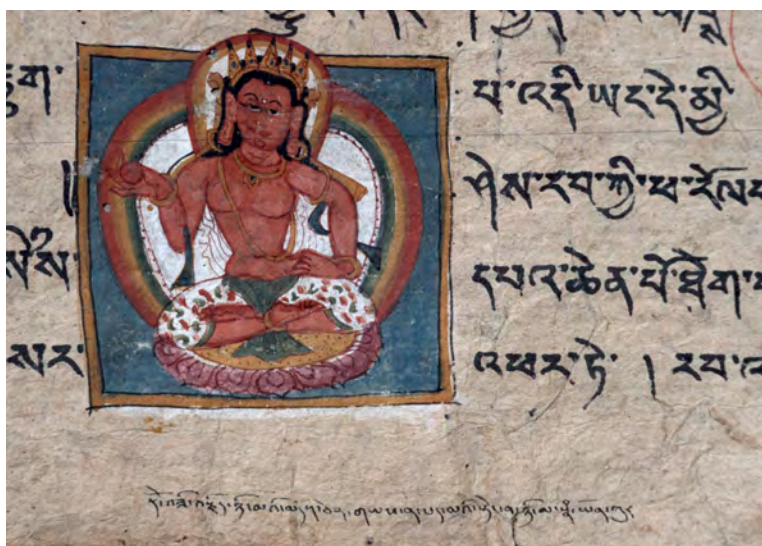
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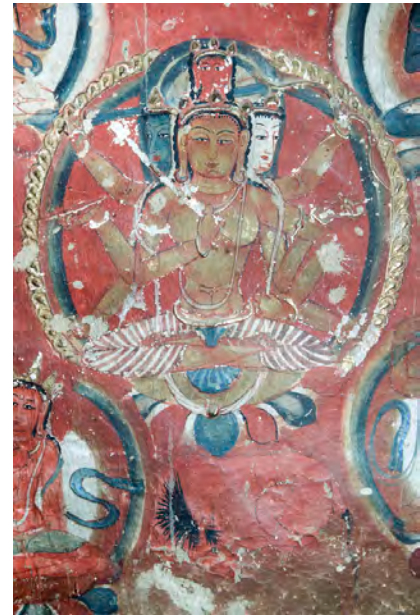
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