

**A STUDY OF THE ICONOGRAPHY, STYLE, AND ORIGIN
OF THREE TIBETAN THANGKA PAINTINGS**

A Thesis

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip H. G.", written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and extends to the right with a long, sweeping tail.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the style and iconography of three brightly colored and carefully detailed paintings depicting three of the five Jina Buddhas, along with a host of other deities. As I will show, these paintings were originally produced as part of a set of five, although the whereabouts of the other two are not known. This partial set is one of the earliest known commissions to a Nepali artist from a Tibetan patron, and a wonderful document of the fine craftsmanship of the Nepali painter combined with the complex and symbolic iconography of Tibetan Tantric art.

Although these three paintings have come to be publicly known only in the last forty years, they have since been published frequently in books on Tibetan or Nepali painting, especially museum collection or exhibition catalogues. However, much of the iconography has not been identified or discussed at any length. In particular, the small deities in the

top and bottom horizontal registers of all three paintings have been illustrated exactly as described in the Buddhist texts, however their identities have, for the most part, gone undocumented. One task of this paper is to properly identify all of the deities in these three paintings, including the Jina Buddhas, the Eight Great *Bodhisattvas*, or *Aṣṭamahābodhisattvas*, and many other popular Buddhist deities, and discuss their iconography in the Tibetan context. I will also discuss the translation of the Tibetan inscription on the reverse of two of these paintings and the consecration ritual. Following this is an analysis of the stylistic characteristics of these paintings, which have been variously dated to the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. By comparing them with the mural paintings at the Shalu Monastery, I suggest that they most probably date from the early to mid-fourteenth century.

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Photographic Credits:

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Plates 1, 4, 8.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Plate 2.

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Plate 3.

Plate 6 after S.L. Huntington and J.C. Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree* (Dayton: Dayton Art Institute in Association with the University of Washington Press, Seattle and London), Cat no. 113.

Plate 9 after Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, Cat. no. 57.

Plate 10 after Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, Cat. no. 49.

Plate 11 after Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, Cat. no. 60.

Shelly and Donald Rubin, Plate 13.

Plate 16 after J.C. Singer and P. Denwood, *Tibetan Art: Toward a Definition of Style* (London: Laurence King and Alan Marcuson in association with Weatherhill, 1997), Figure 207.

Plate 17 after J.C. Singer and S.M. Kossak, *Sacred Visions* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999), Figure 20.

Plate 19 after R. Vitali, *Early Temples of Central Tibet* (London: Serinda Publications, 1990), Plate 71.

Plate 20 after Vitali, *Early Temples*, Plate 61.

Plate 21 after Vitali, *Early Temples*, Plate 66.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Tantric Buddhism, the five Jina, or Victor, Buddhas represent the five aspects of the fully enlightened mind and the defeat of all evils and aggregates that comprise human existence. This paper explores three Tibetan paintings, in *thangka* format, each showing one of the Jina Buddhas. The paintings, now in the permanent collections of three different American museums, include a *thangka* showing Ratnasambhava (Plate 1), which is part of the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and was purchased in 1981; a *thangka* of Amitābha (Plate 2), which was acquired in 1967 by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; and a painting of Amoghasiddhi (Plate 3), which was bequeathed to the Philadelphia Museum of Art by the estate of Stella Kramrisch in 1994.

The paintings are assumed by scholars to be part of a set,¹ based on their similar composition, style, iconography, and size, and a recent comparison of the Tibetan inscription (Plate 4) by Drs. John Huntington and Dina Bangdel confirms that they were consecrated together.² All three paintings feature a large central Buddha flanked by two standing *bodhisattvas*, above which are six seated *bodhisattvas*. At the top of each composition are two rectangular divisions, each housing four deities. Similarly, the register along the bottom of all three paintings contains seven red auras surrounding Buddhist figures, or, as in one case, ritual implements. A diagram outlining the composition of all three paintings can be seen in Plate 5. Although the sizes of the three *thangkas* vary, the difference is minimal. The painting of Ratnasambhava is 41 x 32.9 cm, the painting depicting Amitābha measures 43 x 33 cm, and the *thangka* of Amoghasiddhi measures 39.5 x 31 cm. All three *thangkas* are in the distinctive Nepali painting style, though their iconography is decidedly Tibetan. Finally, the inscription on the backs of two of the paintings, the *thangkas* of Ratnasambhava and of Amoghasiddhi, are identical and have been written by the same hand and the extreme similarity in the details of drawing and the style of the painting would suggest that the three were painted by the same workshop of artists. *Thangkas* of the Jina Buddhas are meant to be viewed as a set, and almost certainly would have been conceived of as a set by the patron and the artist. Therefore, although

there are some differences between the three, specifically the number of animals in the throne-back, the design of the deities' drapery, and the size of the *thangka* itself, we can speak of these three paintings as a set.

Although these three paintings have become publicly known only in the last forty years, they have appeared in several books on Tibetan or Nepali painting, especially museum collection or exhibition catalogues.³ While the main figures have been identified, the auxiliary deities in the top and bottom horizontal registers of all three paintings have not been discussed extensively. The iconography of these deities, who have been illustrated exactly as described in the Buddhist texts, is especially interesting in the context of Tibetan cultural studies, since, as I will show, they reveal a link between desire for spiritual and material gains. Although the identification of the *bodhisattvas* surrounding the each of the central deities is a more difficult task, in this study I will attempt to identify the "Eight Great *Bodhisattvas*," or *Aṣṭamahābodhisattvas*, as they are depicted in the paintings. A diagram for the iconographic discussion can be seen in Plate 5.

In addition to the iconographic study, this paper includes a detailed analysis of the stylistic characteristics of these paintings in relation to their likely date. While the paintings have been variously dated to the eleventh,⁴ twelfth⁵ and thirteenth centuries,⁶ my conclusion suggests that they probably date from the early to mid-fourteenth century

and are approximately contemporaneous with the mural paintings at the Shalu Monastery in Central Tibet.

Finally, this study examines three factors, their iconography, style, and the inscription written on the paintings' reverse sides, in order to determine the likely circumstance of their creation, which I attribute to a Nepali artist working for a Tibetan patron.

Pratapaditya Pal was the first scholar to study these paintings, and they are illustrated in several of his books and catalogues on Nepalese painting. In his 1975 catalogue, *Nepal: Where the Gods are Young*, Pal dates the Ratnasambhava painting to the twelfth century.⁷ As in all of his studies of these *thangkas*, his discussion is limited to a brief description of the composition and stylistic chronology. In his 1978 book *The Arts of Nepal: Painting*, Pal was the first to suggest that the paintings of Ratnasambhava and Amitabha were part of a set, and dates them to the thirteenth century. In his 1985 publication, *Art of Nepal*, Pal also dates the paintings to early thirteenth century, and notes that the Boston Museum had given the *thangka* of Amitābha an eleventh century date.⁸

All three paintings appeared together for the first time in the catalogue for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1998-9 exhibition, *Sacred Visions*, in which Steven Kossak notes that Pal has dated the paintings "solely on the basis of style."⁹ However, Kossak follows Pal's dating without argument. In the catalogue entry by Steven Kossak, the

paintings are compared to the *thangka* of Green Tārā in Cleveland (Plate 6) and dated earlier than Tārā's debatable date of ca. 1300. In terms of iconography, he names the two standing *bodhisattvas* in each painting, but does not discuss any possible identification for the other six. Regarding the horizontal registers, he writes, "The identification of many of the deities in these registers has proved extremely difficult. In many cases, only their color, number of hands and heads, and attributes can be established.¹⁰" Most of these secondary figures are also either unidentified or wrongly identified by Kossak.¹¹

Also, according to Kossak, the recent discovery of the third painting of Amoghasiddhi in 1994¹² was important to the confirmation of a Tibetan provenance, because it is this painting of the set of Jina Buddhas that usually depicts the consecrating monk.¹³ However, while the priest and other religious figures in the painting are Tibetan, the inscription on the back of the Ratnasambhava had already proven that these paintings had a Tibetan patron.¹⁴ Further, Kossak discusses the two figures wearing white robes, ascertaining that they must be of the Sakya sect, thus establishing that the set of *thangkas* must have been made for a Sakya patron.¹⁵ This, he argues, is because members of the Sakya lineage, unlike other sects were allowed to marry, but the married members wore white robes to distinguish themselves from the "fully ordained monks." In fact, other orders of Tibetan Buddhism also allowed high-ranking officials

who had not taken the vow of celibacy until the reform by Tsongkhapa in the fourteenth century. Lastly, Kossak points out that, though he believes the paintings should be dated to the first half of the thirteenth century, their dating is still somewhat speculative.¹⁶

Helmut Neumann, in his article “Mural Paintings at the Lori Stūpa,” more successfully discusses some stylistic characteristics, such as facial type and drapery style, but only indirectly as they parallel characteristics of the murals at the Lori Stūpa and Shalu Monastery. Nevertheless, his article is very helpful in determining a likely date for the paintings, as it provides a starting point for the stylistic comparison of these three paintings to dated Nepali works.

Aside from the articles written on these specific paintings, many other resources are helpful in the discussion of iconography and style. Several books and iconographic guides are useful in the identification of the secondary deities. In particular, *Deities of the Tibetan Pantheon* by Martin Brauen and Martin Willson is an extremely well written guide, which quotes the textual passage from a specific *sādhana* for each deity and then depicts the deity exactly as described. Also useful for the identification of these deities were Benoytosh Bhattacharyya’s *Indian Buddhist Iconography* and Antoinette Gordon’s *Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*. Robert Beer’s *Tibetan Iconography* is a wonderful guide for the discussion of the symbolism of the animals and attributes that appear

in these paintings. The most important sources for the discussion of the style of these paintings are *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, by Susan L. Huntington and John C. Huntington, which discusses the cultural exchange between India, Nepal, Tibet and China, and *Temples of Central Tibet* by Roberto Vitali, which has a thorough study of the Shalu Monastery murals and their artists.

Although there are several books on Tibetan iconography and the Nepali style and its importance in Tibetan art history, these three paintings have not been studied to any satisfactory end. Not only are they magnificent works of art in their own right, but also they are a wonderful tool in the study of the Tibetan patronage of Nepali artists. My contribution to the ongoing study of these specific paintings, including the complete identification of the iconography and a more likely date for their creation, will hopefully be a successful starting point for the examination of the cultural meshing of Tibet and Nepal during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

CHAPTER 2

ICONOGRAPHY

Each of the paintings features the large central Jina Buddha, seated on a lotus with a decorative throne back. The Buddhas wear patterned *dhotīs*, jewels, and crowns. The Nepali *torāṇa* design adorns the throne-backs, varying slightly between the three. Eight *bodhisattvas*, two standing and six seated, surround each of the Buddhas. The identities of the eight are the same in each painting, though their position varies. At the top of each composition are two rectangular divisions, each housing four deities and below each throne are seven petal-shaped auras, surrounding a figure or, in one case, ritual accoutrements. The discussion of the complex iconography of these three paintings is divided into three sections: Jinas, Bodhisattvas, and Auxiliary Deities.

JINAS

In Tantric Buddhism, Jina, or Victor, Buddhas are personifications of the five aspects of the transcendental wisdom of a fully enlightened mind.¹⁷ They are jeweled and crowned to represent their status as celestial beings, the *sambhogakāya*, or bliss body, aspect of the Buddha. A Buddha is said to possess three bodies (*kāyas*). The Sanskrit word *kāya*, like the English word body, has more than one meaning. The fundamental definition of the term “*kāya*” is “physical-body,” human or material form, but it also implies a collection of things, as in the phrase “a body of knowledge.”¹⁸ The body-of-*Dharma* (*Dharmakāya*) is the collection of truths, the body of Buddha qualities. It is all encompassing; everything exists within it and it exists within everything. It is formless and ineffable, and is therefore described most commonly as the sum of its parts. It is comprised of two *kāyas*, the beatific- or bliss-body (*sambhogakāya*) and the transformation-body (*nirmanakāya*).

The *Dharmakāya* is inconceivable to those who have not experienced enlightenment, and, therefore, its explanation must be in physical terms in order to be grasped by the human mind. The bliss-body, *sambhogakāya*, is one way in which the essence of the Buddha-mind can be discussed and depicted in art. In Tantric Buddhism, the *sambhogakāya* is best described as the embodiment of the *Dharmakāya* in the Jina Buddhas. These five deities each represent one of the five transcendental insights that characterize the fully enlightened Buddha

mind. With the attainment of each wisdom, one of the elements (*skandha*) that comprises the illusory individual is overcome and an evil is destroyed, until, finally, the being is of pure mind.¹⁹

Though there are many different meditations in Tantric Buddhism, the system of the Five Transcendent Buddhas (*Pañcajina*) is one of the most basic and universal. The five Jinas symbolize the process of the enlightenment of Śākyamuni Buddha as well as, among other things, a stage in the development of transcendental knowledge. Though only three paintings of this set are known to be extant, it is almost certain that two others would have been included, as the Buddhas, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, Amoghasiddhi, and Vairocāna, comprise a standard set of five. Therefore, it is necessary in understanding their function in Buddhist art and religion to discuss the philosophical meaning and symbolism of all five.²⁰

In theory, as well as in many visual representations, each of the Buddhas dwells in one of the five sections of a sacred circle (*maṇḍala*), symbolizing the cosmological space of Mount Meru. The section in which a Buddha resides indicates the stage in meditation, initiation, and Buddhist development he represents, as the *maṇḍala* is a map to enlightenment. Aside from their position in the *maṇḍala*, the Jina Buddhas are also identifiable by the color and hand gestures (*mudrās*) assigned to them in the *maṇḍala* or other pictorial representation. In

other words, each Buddha has specific iconography that is related to him and to his family (*kula*). The five *kulas* of Buddhist iconography are headed by one of the Jinas and are associated with a particular symbol, animal, and color. Each Buddha also has a female counterpart (*prajñā*), who represents wisdom, the feminine aspect of enlightenment. When the female joins in sexual union with the male, who represents compassion, the masculine aspect of enlightenment, the result is the state of non-duality of the Void (*śūnyata*).²¹

One of the most important aspects symbolized by the Jina Buddhas is the representation of the five transcendental wisdoms (*jñāna*). Each of the five aspects of the Buddha-mind corresponds to one of the Jina Buddhas and is represented iconographically by his color and hand gesture (*mudrā*). These knowledges are considered antidotes to the five *skandhas*, which compose the illusory body, and the five evils, which propagate continuation in the cycles of life. The Jina Buddhas aid in destroying the hindrances that prevent an individual from attaining enlightenment, replacing them with the wisdom necessary to enter the realm of *śūnyata*.

The meditative mandalic path to enlightenment by the practitioner begins with Akṣobhya, “The Immovable One,” the Buddha who presides over the eastern quarter. Akṣobhya, ruler of the *vajra kula*, generally has a blue body or is symbolized by the color blue, and he performs the earth

touching gesture (*bhūmisparśa -mudrā*). The *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* is associated with an important event in the life of Śākyamuni Buddha, the victory over Māra, or death, (*Māravijaya*). The knowledge represented by Akṣobhya is the mirror-wisdom (*ādarśajñāna*), which reflects the world as it really is.²² It is the metaphysical insight into mysteries and truths of the real world and the ability to understand reality without looking through colored glass. One who has *ādarśajñāna* has overcome the *skandha* of physical form (*rūpa*) and the evil of wrath. With this *jñāna*, all egoisms, biases, and prejudices disappear until things can be seen clearly and accurately. With *ādarśajñāna*, a *yogi* possesses the will to attain enlightenment, which is necessarily the first step on the path to enlightenment.

The second Buddha, residing in the southern portion of a *maṇḍala*, is Ratnasambhava, “The One Born of the Gem,” and his family is called Ratna. This Jina Buddha is yellow in color and performs the gift-bestowing gesture (*varada-mudrā*). This offering gesture can be interpreted as the invitation to achieve enlightenment, and, as both his name and his *mudrā* suggest, Ratnasambhava manifests the ability of this attainment. The *jñāna* associated with this Jina Buddha is the transcendental knowledge of the unity of all things (*samatajñāna*). This wisdom is achieved when all of the inequities of the universe are leveled. It destroys desire, because it is the realization that nothing in the

material world is permanent. Therefore, the “gift” being offered by Ratnasambhava is not of the material world, but it is instead the “gem” of the Buddhist *Dharma*. At this point in the meditation the *yogi* is awakened to the understanding of the oneness of the universe and has defeated the *skandha* of sensations and feelings (*vedana*).

The western section of the *maṇḍala* is the abode of the Jina Buddha Amitābha, whose name means “Boundless Light” or “Unending Light.” Amitābha, the leader of the *padma*, or lotus, *kula*, is red in color, and performs a gesture denoting deep meditation (*dhyāna-mudrā*). Meditation is the means to enlightenment and this Buddha represents the bliss of its attainment. The *jñāna* that is associated with Amitābha is the insight of the investigation of the sameness of all things (*pratyavekṣajñāna*). This knowledge conquers the *skandha* that recognizes and understands feelings (*saṃjñā*) and the evil of hatred. In this enlightened state, there is no distinction between desire and no desire, being and nonbeing.

The fourth Jina, residing in the northern portion of the *maṇḍala*, is the ruler of the *viṣvavajra kula*, Amoghasiddhi, whose name means “Unfailing Success.” This Jina Buddha is green and his hands are shown in the fear not gesture (*abhaya-mudrā*). *Abhaya* literally means “without fear,” and as this is a teaching gesture, it can be interpreted as “without fear of death,” because by understanding the Buddhist teachings one does not fear death. The knowledge associated with Amoghasiddhi is the

wisdom of action through being steadfast (*kriyanuṣṭhanajñāna*). With this knowledge, one has the strength and the ability to remain steadfast in expressing wisdom and teaching the Buddhist *Dharma*. Through *kriyanuṣṭhanajñāna*, the evil of envy and the *skandha* of mental formations (*samskara*) are eliminated and the enlightened Buddha has the ability to overcome any obstacles or difficulties, and impart his knowledge to others. Because Amoghasiddhi represents the attainment of this knowledge, it is apt that he be portrayed in the *abhaya-mudrā*.

The Jina Buddha Vairocāna, “Brilliant Light,” occupies the center of the *maṇḍala*. Vairocāna, symbolizing pure consciousness, is generally white, though he is sometimes shown as blue in color when he changes places with Akṣobhya. He performs the gesture of the wheel of the Law (*Dharmacakra-mudrā*) and his clan is the *Dharmacakra kula*. Vairocāna represents the knowledge of the realm of *Dharma* (*Dharmadhātujñāna*) and with this wisdom the enlightened being is reintroduced into the *śūnyata* and is able to cease the cycles of transmigration, the ultimate goal of Buddhism. There is no longer a karmic need for reincarnation, and the evil of ignorance and the *skandha* of consciousness are overcome.

Together, the five Jinās represent the fully enlightened mind of the Buddha. The symbolism of the five Jina Buddhas can be very simple or very complicated depending on what is prescribed by the specific *tantra* being practiced, but the meaning and symbolism are always the same.

Because the five Jinas are not intended to be viewed separately but as a group, we may infer that these three paintings must have been part of a set of five and that these five would have been used together to aid in meditation.

Iconography of Plates 1, 2, and 3

Ratnasambhava

Ratnasambhava, the yellow Buddha of the South, dominates the large central portion of the painting in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Plate 1). He is seated in meditation, *vajraparyankāsana*, with his left hand on his lap and his right hand pointing downward, with the palm out in *varada-mudrā*. He wears a patterned *dhotī* on his lower body, and his chest is bare. He is lavishly adorned with the jewels and crown of a prince. Ribbons from his crown can be seen at the sides of his head, and he has a small *ūrṇā* on his forehead. The three tiers of his hair beneath the crown, called *merujāta*, specifically represent Mount Meru, the Buddhist ideal of cosmological space.²³ The crown is topped by a *vajra*, which represents the ultimate attainment of the wisdoms of the five Buddhas. The *vajra*, as its name indicates, is indestructible; it also symbolizes the masculine aspect of enlightenment.

Ratnasambhava is seated on a lotus-throne, ornately decorated with many colors jewels and animals, both real and mythical. Two black,

saddled horses, representing the *vāhana* of Ratnasambhava, are found in the throne base. In the center of the base, between the two horses, is a floral carpet. In the center of the carpet is a *triratna*, representing the *ratna kula* of this Buddha, and two antelope flank the three jewels. Iconographically, the jewels are an important element, as the three jewels are not only the symbol of the *ratna* clan, but they represent the Buddha, the Buddhist teaching (Dharma), and the monastic community (Sangha). Therefore the “gift” being offered by Ratnasambhava’s *varada-mudrā* is interpreted as the gift of the Buddhist faith. The antelope refer to the Buddha Śākyamuni’s first teaching, which took place at the Deer Park at Varanasi. In the Tibetan context, the deer, or antelope in this case, may also represent well-being, as Tibetans believe that medicine created from the tips of the horns of deer bestow longevity, health and vitality.²⁴

Several animals adorn the horseshoe-shaped, red throne-back. This type of throne element includes two side uprights and an arch at the top, called a *torāṇa*. In this painting of Ratnasambhava, elephants appear at the base of this support structure. The elephants wear jeweled harnesses and red saddles, and are depicted quite naturalistically. They represent the perfection of concentration and immutability.²⁵ Perched on the backs of the two elephants are snow lions. These friendly-looking mythical animals are considered the national symbol of Tibet and are said to dwell in the Tibetan mountains. The snow lions support lotuses, upon which sit

hybrid creatures with the heads of rams and the bodies and tail-feathers of birds. This may be a representation of one of the “victorious creatures of harmony,” which combines the head of one animal with the body of its natural enemy.²⁶ Above the tail feathers of these animals are two winged, hybrid leonine animals, called *śārdūlas*, with riders on their backs. Above the throne’s horizontal architectural elements are *makaras*. The *makara*, a mythological sea-creature, has “the lower jaw of a crocodile, the trunk of an elephant, the upper tusk and ears of a wild boar, the wide staring eyes of a monkey, the scales and flexible body of a fish, and the extended tail feathers of a peacock.”²⁷ These ancient symbols of power and auspiciousness are spewing jewels as offerings to the faithful. Intertwined with the tail feathers of the *makaras* are the tails of two *nāgas*, ancient snake deities that are said to control the waters and that are often worshipped for rain. Perched at the top of this *torana* design is Garuḍa, the mythical bird-man. His striped wings are spread, asserting his power as the *nāgas* seem to recoil from him.

Amitābha

Plate 2 features the red Buddha, Amitābha, whose hands are in the gesture of meditation, *dhyāna-mudrā*, and his legs crossed in *vajraparyankāsana*. Except for color and hand gesture, the Buddha appears identical in size, style, and posture to Ratnasambhava. Likewise,

his throne differs from the one in Plate 1 in very few aspects. First, Amitābha's *vāhana*, the peacock, is present in the throne base, instead of Ratnasambhava's horses. Also, unlike the *triratna* symbol in the center of Ratnasambhava's throne's platform, the Amitābha painting has a lotus, the symbol of the *padma kula*. The animals decorating the throne-back are also similar to those in Plate 1. Both paintings have a seven-animal design for the throne-back, with pairs of elephants, snow lions, composite animals, *śārdūlas* with riders, *makaras*, and *nāgas*, as well as a Garuḍa. The point of difference can be found in the elements of the composite animal. In the Amitābha painting, in contrast to the ram's head in the Ratnasambhava painting, the animal has a human head and torso and plays a flute.

Amoghasiddhi

The green Buddha, Amoghasiddhi (Plate 3) also sits in *vajraparyāṅkāśana*, with his left hand palm up on his lap and his right hand up, palm out in *abhaya-mudrā*. He is adorned similarly to the other two Buddhas, and his *vāhana*, Garuḍa, and *kula* symbol, the double crossed *vajra*, or *viṣvavajra*, occur correspondingly with the *vāhana* and *kula* symbols of the other two Jinas. The major difference in this painting is found in the animals of the throne-back. Five animals instead of seven decorate and support the throne of Amoghasiddhi. Near his knees at the

bottom of the throne, instead of elephants and snow lions, are two pairs of mythical birds called *kimnaras*. The yellow males, whose long tail-feathers spiral upward, embrace the green females. Leaping from the top of the golden feathers are two *sārdūlas* with riders on their backs. Level with the Buddha's head are *makaras* spewing jewels, their tails entwined with those of the *nāgas* above. At the top center is the, wings spread in flight.

BODHISATTVAS

In each painting, eight *bodhisattvas*, two standing and six seated, surround the central Buddha. These figures are probably meant to represent the “Eight Great Bodhisattvas” (*aṣṭamahābodhisattva*). The list of eight *mahābodhisattvas* varies, but the most common grouping appears to be represented here. It consists of Ākāśagarbha, Avalokiteśvara, Kṣitigarbha, Maitreya, Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, Sarvanivaraṇaviṣkambhin, and Vajrapāṇi. The *bodhisattvas* symbolize the eight directions as well as the eight inner awarenesses in Buddhist methodology, and are associated with the four Jina Buddhas of the cardinal directions. The directions and associated awareness of the eight *mahābodhisattvas* are as follows: Kṣitigarbha: east, visual awareness of

the illusory nature of the material world; Maitreya: southeast, aural awareness of the unchanging *Dharma*; Samantabhadra: northwest, the awareness of smell; Ākāśagarbha: south, sense of taste; Avalokiteśvara: west, awareness of the body; Mañjuśrī: northeast, awareness of thought; Nirvāṇaviṣkambhin: southwest, awareness of the universe; and Vajrapāṇi: north, the awareness of enlightenment.²⁸

Each of the *bodhisattvas* either carries a flower with an attribute placed on top or holds the identifying attribute in his hand. Because the figures are so small and the attributes difficult to discern, and also because some of the paint has worn off with age, some of the *bodhisattvas* are not positively identifiable. Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, and Vajrapāṇi are the only four that can be certainly identified in all three paintings, though I will discuss the iconography of all eight and attempt their identification. Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Maitreya were the three most commonly depicted *bodhisattvas* in the art of the Pāla period,²⁹ and Vajrapāṇi had been popular in India since Gandharan times, so it is not surprising that these four *bodhisattvas* were the first to have canonized iconography.³⁰ These four also often appear individually in Tibetan art.³¹

The *bodhisattvas* Mañjuśrī (2) and Avalokiteśvara (3), as seen in the diagram in Plate 5,³² flank the Buddha Ratnasambhava, with Avalokiteśvara standing to the Buddha's proper left, and Mañjuśrī, the

red *bodhisattva*, standing to his right. Avalokiteśvara is the *bodhisattva* of compassion, whose identifying attribute is a white lotus. Mañjuśrī carries the *Prajñāpāramitā* text, representing his position as the *bodhisattva* of wisdom. The identity of the other *bodhisattvas* can be suggested, based on the remaining deities most commonly included in depictions of eight *bodhisattvas* and their varying textual descriptions. Clockwise from the bottom left, the seated *bodhisattvas* are Sarvanivaraṇaviṣkambhin (?) (4), white with a moon disc (?) in his flower; the blue Vajrapāṇi (5), whose *vajra* rests on his flower; a red *bodhisattva*, possibly Ākāśagarbha (?) (6), holding a red lotus with a gem; blue Samantabhadra (7) with a red flower; yellow Maitreya (8) with a vessel of *amṛta* in his flower; and green Kṣitigarbha (?) (9), whose flower holds a *viṣvavajra*.

In the painting of Amitābha the two standing *bodhisattvas* are Avalokiteśvara (2) on the proper left, and Maitreya (3), the Buddha of the future, on the right. Maitreya holds the *kalaśa*, or vase of *amṛta*. The seated *bodhisattvas* are Ākāśagarbha (?) (4), Vajrapāṇi (5), Mañjuśrī (6), Sarvanivaraṇaviṣkambhin (?) (7), Kṣitigarbha (?) (8), and Samantabhadra (?) (9).

The two figures flanking Amoghasiddhi are Avalokiteśvara (2) and Mañjuśrī (3). Clockwise from the bottom left the other *bodhisattvas* are: Ākāśagarbha (?) (4), Maitreya (5), Vajrapāṇi (6), Sarvanivaraṇa-
viṣkambhin (?) (7), Kṣitigarbha (?) (8), and Samantabhadra (?) (9).

AUXILIARY DEITIES

The identities of the deities depicted in the top and bottom registers of all three paintings are more easily identifiable than the *bodhisattvas*, but the reason for their choice and the relationship between most of the figures is more of a mystery. Except for a few groups of deities who are linked by a common text, these figures are seemingly unrelated. An explanation is provided by Loden Sherap Dargyab, who writes that Tibetan paintings commonly depict several unrelated deities, determined only by the choice of the person or persons who commissioned the work.³³ Thus, any conclusion about the meaning or relationship of these figures can only be postulated.

Several elements common to the iconography of many Tibetan deities should be understood before we begin looking at the specific deities in these paintings. First, gods and goddesses are often described by texts as youthful in appearance and very beautiful. This is not the case with fierce or *krodha* deities. Instead, they are described as unpleasant looking, and are often said to have fangs and a ferocious appearance. *Krodha* deities are distinguished from others in one or more of the following ways: they are corpulent; they wear an animal skin around their hips; they assume an angry position with one leg bent and the other out straight; they use a threatening gesture; they have five skulls rather than five jewels in their crowns; they wear a garland of skulls; and their red aura is decorated with a flame design.

In the three *thangkas* under discussion, nearly all of the deities' attributes are identifiable. Therefore, a discussion of specific meanings of the different objects is merited. In the identification of each deity below, his or her attribute will be noted, but I will first discuss the general meaning of some of the more common attributes that appear in these three paintings.

First, the white lotus is probably the most common attribute to Buddhist deities in general. It represents many things, including spiritual purity and the female sexual organ. The *vajra* is also common and may be the most important attribute to Tantric Buddhist deities. It

means “hard” or “indestructible,” and thus is often translated as “diamond.” The *vajra* represents the masculine aspect of enlightenment, the method, called “skillful means”, and the male sexual organ. It is often paired with the *ghaṇṭā*, or bell, a feminine symbol representing wisdom. When these two, or any two masculine and feminine attributes are paired, the implied result is complete enlightenment. The jewel, or *ratna*, as we have already encountered, represents the riches of the material world as well as the Buddhist faith. Further, gemstones are believed to have medicinal and protective properties in addition to astrological significance.³⁴ The Buddhist rosary, or *mālā*, is generally made from 108 beads that are used in reciting *mantras*, which are often chanted during activities of pacifying or destroying.³⁵ The *kalaśa*, or vase of *amṛta*, is another attribute that we have already seen. *Amṛta* is the sacred nectar of immortality. Obviously, this has more than one meaning; to the Tantric practitioner, the *amṛta* releases one from the cycles of life and death, but to the layman, the *amṛta* is considered an elixir of long life. The *cakra* was originally considered a weapon of Hindu gods, and may be used as a weapon by Buddhist deities as well, but, more importantly, it also represents the Buddhist path and the *Dharma*. The sword, or *khadga*, is a symbol of wisdom and cuts through ignorance and illusion to reveal the Truth. The bow (*dhanus*) and arrow (*bāṇa*) are commonly paired together, though they may be held alone. When the *dhanus* and *bāṇa* are held

together in the left hand they represent the conjunction of wisdom (*dhanus*) and compassion (*bāṇa*), and thus, enlightenment. When they are drawn for shooting, they symbolize “the concentrated and spontaneous activity of wisdom and method aimed precisely at the heart of an enemy.”³⁶ The *khaṭvāṅga* is a Tantric staff. It is the symbol of the ultimate *bodhicitta*, the mind of enlightenment, and, as such, can symbolize either a male consort when held by a female, or a female consort when held by a male. It is made of an octagonal shaft with a *vajra* base and is topped with three impaled heads, one freshly severed, one partially decayed, and one a skull. The *karttrkā*, or flaying knife, often held by female deities, represents the masculine aspect of method and is held by the right (male) hand. The *karttrkā*'s most common counterpart, representing wisdom, is the skull cup, or *kapāla*. The *triśūla*, or trident, is most well known in Asia as the characteristic weapon of the Hindu god Śiva. In Buddhism, the *triśūla* is held by protective deities as a weapon against enemies, physical or spiritual. The scythe is used to sever limbs and decapitate enemies, symbolic of the destruction of evil. The *gadā*, or club, is often carried by fierce deities to destroy the enemies of the Dharma. The *pāśa*, or noose, is a weapon held by the left, or wisdom, hand. In the context of peaceful deities, the *pāśa* binds true wisdom to the minds of the faithful. When a *krodha* deity holds it, it has the more harmful aspect of the destruction of ignorance. The *ankuśa*, or elephant

hook, is often paired with the *pāśa* as the masculine aspect, pulling sentient beings to enlightenment. The *paraśu* is an axe, used to defeat enemies of the physical and spiritual planes.³⁷ Less common attributes that appear in these paintings will be discussed as they occur in the context of the specific deity.

In the discussion of these secondary deities, it is significant to understand that most Buddhist deities have more than one meaning to the practitioners of Buddhism, and, often, one deity may be worshipped for two or more entirely different reasons. Generally, Buddhist deities are important for both spiritual aspirations as well as for mundane concerns, like staving off famine and disease or for bringing health and wealth. Based on his or her personal choice and objective, the person who is commissioning the work of art is able to choose which deities will be depicted from the entire pantheon, though certain deities often fill particular roles. However, because the description of a deity's function often does not appear in a text, or perhaps the function of the deity in a local context is more significant than his primary or canonical purpose stated in the text, it is difficult to be certain about the meaning that was intended by the patron.³⁸ It is with this general understanding that we will consider the secondary figures of these three paintings.

The *thangka* of the Buddha Ratnasambhava contains images of eight Buddhas in its upper two rectangular divisions (10-17). They are

red or yellow and display various gestures. It is possible that these figures are the eight Mānuṣi, or human, Buddhas, including the six Buddhas of the past, namely, Vipāśin, Śikhin, Viśvabhu, Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, and Kaśyapa, the Buddha of the present *kalpa*, Śākyamuni, and the Buddha of the future, Maitreya. If these figures do represent the Mānuṣi Buddhas, their individual identities cannot be ascertained because they do not seem to correlate with any known iconographic standard.

Another possibility is that these figures represent the eight Medicine Buddhas, who are greatly revered in Tibet. According to Antoinette Gordon, author of *Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*³⁹, they are usually depicted in a manner similar to that of the eight Buddhas in this painting of Ratnasambhava: “These Buddhas are seated in *dhyānāsana*; wear monastic garments; no ornaments; and generally have the *ūrṇā*, *uṣṇīṣa* and the long-lobed ears.”⁴⁰ Her description of the eight Buddhas’ colors and *mudrās* is as follows: gold in *dhyāna-mudrā*, ? (no color given) in *vitarka-mudrā*, yellow with *abhaya-mudrā*, yellow-red in *varada-mudrā*, yellow-white in *dharmacakra-mudrā*, light red in *dhyāna-mudrā*, red in *dharmacakra-mudrā*, and red in *varada-mudrā*. This description is not the only variation on the iconography of the Medicine Buddhas,⁴¹ although this description is very close to the iconography of the eight

Buddhas in this painting, and therefore this identification must be considered as a distinct possibility.

The lower register encloses seven figures, including Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara and his four attendants, along with the goddesses Ekajaṭā and Mārīcī. From left to right they are: 18) Śyāma Tārā, 19) Hayagrīva, 20) Amoghapāśa, 21) Amoghapāśa Lokeśvara, 22) Bhṛkutī, 23) Ekajaṭā, and 24) Mārīcī. The four-armed red Hayagrīva, whose name means “neck of a horse,” has a horse’s face protruding from the top of his head. Hayagrīva is a *krodha*, or angry, deity who belongs to a group of eight deities considered to be “defenders of the faith” (Dharmapala),⁴² while Hayagrīva himself is said to be the “protector of horses.”⁴³ He holds a *gadā* and a *cakra* in his two right hands and a red *padma* in his back left hand. His primary left hand is held in a threatening gesture (*tarjanī-mudrā*). The standing red Amoghapāśa, “Unfailing Noose,” is in his four-armed form, carrying a *vajra*, *pāśa*, *mālā* and *ankuśa*. Bhṛkutī, the four-armed white goddess, holds a *gadā* and *padma* with her right hands and a *mālā* and a *kalaśa* in her left hands. The sixth figure at the bottom of the Ratnasambhava painting is a fierce form of Ekajaṭā. The blue goddess has three faces, white, blue, and red, and eight arms. She carries a *khadga*, *pāśa*, *padma* and *bāṇa* in her right hands and a *cakra*, *gadā*, *triśūla* and *dhanus* in her left hands. All four of these deities attend Avalokiteśvara in his Amoghapāśa Avalokiteśvara form. This form of

Avalokiteśvara, who carries a *padma* in his left hand and performs *varada-mudrā* with his right, is differentiated from his Padmapāṇi form only by his four attendants. Amoghapāśa is most often attended by Tārā, Bhr̥kuṭī, Hayagrīva, and Sudhanakumāra, and the form of Amoghapāśa and his four attendants that appears here is based on a specific Tibetan teaching.⁴⁴

Śyāma Tārā, the figure on the far left of the bottom register of the Ratnasambhava painting, is the green goddess who is an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. Her right hand is lowered in the *varada-mudrā* and she holds a blue *padma* (*utpala*) in her left. This savior and protector is one of the most popular deities in Tibet.⁴⁵ She is said to save from the “eight perils,” (*aṣṭamahābhaya*) which are sometimes seen as physical and sometimes spiritual.⁴⁶ The eight spiritual evils and their earthly metaphors were discussed in relationship to each other by the First Dalai Lama, though the connection between earthly danger and spiritual unrest is likely much older than that. The spiritual and earthly perils are: pride / lions, ignorance / elephants, anger / fire, envy / snakes, wrong views / robbers, avarice / chains, attachment / flood, and doubt / demons.⁴⁷ Mārīcī, the goddess on the far right, is a six-armed deity with three faces, the left being the face of a boar. She holds a *bāṇa*, *vajra* and a needle (*sūcī*) in her right hands and a *dhanus*, thread (*sūtra*) and a tree branch in her left hands.

The rectangular border in the upper left section of the painting of Amitābha encloses four unadorned Buddhas: a red Buddha in *abhaya-mudrā* (10), a yellow Buddha in *varada-mudrā* (11), a red Buddha in *Dharmacakra-mudrā* (12), and a red Buddha in *dhyāna-mudrā*. The first three may be tentatively identified as Amoghasiddhi, Ratnasambhava, and Vairocāna, while the fourth, a red Buddha holding a medicine bowl in his clasped hands, is the *nirmaṇakāya*, or earthly, form of Amitābha. These four may be intended to represent the Jina Buddhas in their *nirmaṇakāya* forms. Though these four Buddhas do make the gestures of the corresponding Jinas, their colors do not correlate. This may be explained by the Buddhist tradition of portraying the Mānuṣi Buddhas in flesh tones, as they are considered historical figures. If the double representation is intended, the identification is as follows: Amoghasiddhi / Kanakamuni (10), Ratnasambhava / Śikhin (11), Vairocāna / Vipāśin (12), and Amitābha / Krakucchanda.⁴⁸

The figures in the upper right each carry attributes, which facilitates their identification. The eleven-headed, eight-armed form of Avalokiteśvara is the leftmost of this group. His two principal hands are together in *añjali-mudrā*, while his lower right hand is in *varada-mudrā*. His other two right hands hold a rosary and a *bāṇa*, while his three remaining left hands hold a Buddha image, a *dhanus*, and a *ratna*. This *bodhisattva* is said to have had such great compassion that when he saw

the terrible state of the earth, his head split into eleven pieces. His spiritual father, Amitābha, then assembled the pieces as eleven heads so that the *bodhisattva* could more easily watch the earth and act with compassion. Next to him is blue Acala, a fiercely compassionate deity whose *khadga* and *pāśa* are meant to capture and destroy obstacles on the path to enlightenment. The third figure on the right side is Akṣobhya, whose presence here seems to confirm the identification of the four Buddhas on the left, as he completes the set of five Jina Buddhas.⁴⁹ He is blue in color and holds a *vajra* with his left hand, representing his *vajra* clan, while his right hand reaches down in *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*. The final figure in the group, though damaged, can be identified as Vajrasattva, the adamantine being, who holds a *vajra* in his right hand at chest level and a *ghaṇṭā* in his left hand, which rests on his hip. Identified with the practitioner, Vajrasattva is often considered the “sixth Buddha” of a *maṇḍala*, representing complete enlightenment and reintegration with the *śūnyata*. His *vajra* and *ghaṇṭā* symbolize the male and female aspects of this “non-dual” state of enlightenment.

The bottom register of the Amitābha painting contains seven figures: the five Pañcarakṣā goddesses, and Uṣṇiṣavijayā and Sattvavajrī. From left to right they are: 18) Mahāsāhasrapramardanī, the six-armed white goddess associated with Vairocāna. Her lower right hand is in *varada-mudrā*, while the other two hold a *khadga* and a *bāṇa*. In her

three left hands are a *dhanus*, *paraśu*, and *pāśa*; 19) the four-armed blue Pañcarakṣā from Akṣobhya's clan, Mahāmantrānusāriṇī. Her lower right hand performs the *varada-mudrā*, while she holds a *vajra*, *pāśa* and *paraśu*; 20) Mahāpratisarā, the yellow, four-faced goddess associated with Ratnasambhava. Her eight hands carry a *bāṇa*, *khadga*, *triśūla*, *cakra*, *dhanus*, *pāśa*, *paraśu* and *vajra*, and her four faces are white, yellow, red, and blue; 21) Uṣṇīṣavijayā, a white eight-armed goddess. She carries a *bāṇa*, *ratna*, and Buddha image in three of her right hands, while the fourth is in *varada-mudrā*. Her four left hands carry a *kalaśa*, a *pāśa* with *tarjanī-mudrā*, a *dhanus* and an unidentified object; 22) The green Pañcarakṣā goddess Mahāmāyurī, who is associated with the Buddha Amoghasiddhi. She has three faces, blue, green, and red, each with three eyes. With her six hands she clutches peacock feathers, a *bāṇa*, a *kalaśa*, a *dhanus*, and a *ratna*, and performs *varada-mudrā*; 23) The red, four-armed Mahāsītāvati is associated with the clan of Amitābha. Her lower right hand is in *varada-mudrā*, while the others grasp a *mālā*, the *Prajñāpāramitā* text, and a staff with a hook; and 24) Sattvavajrī, the female counterpart of the adamantine being Vajrasattva, who is directly above her in the upper enclosure. Like her consort, she holds the *vajra* and *ghaṇṭā*, representing the male and female aspects of enlightenment.

The appearance of the Pañcarakṣā goddesses, who are protective emanations of the Jina Buddhas, in Himālayan art is not a surprise. In

fact, Benoytosh Bhattacharyya states that every Buddhist family in Nepal would have possessed a copy of the *Pañcarakṣā* manuscript.⁵⁰ These goddesses are invoked to protect against disease or some other evil and so that the practitioner may have happiness and long life. They may be worshiped as a group or separately, as they each protect from something different. Their specific functions as individual deities are: Mahāsāhasrapramardanī, who protects from earthquakes, storms and evil spirits; Mahāmantrānusārīnī, who protects from diseases; Mahāpratisarā, who protects from specified evils, physical dangers, and sins, Mahāsītāvātī, who protects against ferocious animals and poisonous plants; and Mahāmāyūrī, who protects from snakes.⁵¹ The goddesses are personifications of the spells that keep negative spirits at bay, and these spells are considered very sacred.⁵² Bhattacharyya postulates that more “interesting and attractive prospects” were associated with the *Pañcarakṣā* goddesses in order to make their worship more attractive to a larger number of people.⁵³ Thus, they were also venerated to bring rain for the crops and for safety in childbirth, both desires appealing to the laity. Similarly, Uṣṇīṣavijayā is revered as the Goddess of Long-Life. She is one of the three most important longevity deities (along with Amitāyus and Sita Tārā) in the Tibetan pantheon. However, eliminating the obstacles to long life (i.e., disease, misfortune) is not her only function.

She is also believed to purify the negativity that leads to ignorance and to bestow wisdom on her followers.⁵⁴

A relationship between the figures in the upper portion and those beneath Amitābha's throne may be cautiously asserted. If, in fact, the five Jina Buddhas are to be found in the upper two rectangular divisions, it follows that the five Pañcarakṣā goddesses, who are manifestations of them, would appear below. Likewise, the images of Vajrasattva and Sattvavajrī are complementary. The eleven-headed form of Avalokiteśvara can be related to the goddess Uṣnīṣavijayā, who is also a member of Amitābha's *padma kula* and holds an image of Amitābha,⁵⁵ and perhaps the image of Acala was added for symmetry. Relationships between the deities of the upper and the lower registers must be viewed with prudence, as it seems that the figures in the other two paintings are not as certainly connected.

In the left rectangular portion of the upper register of the Amoghasiddhi painting, the first three figures are forms of the *bodhisattva* of wisdom, Mañjuśrī. Mañjuśrī, along with Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, was one of the most popular Buddhist deities in Pāla India and later in the Himālāyan region. He is said to confer wisdom, memory, and intelligence upon his devotees.⁵⁶ The leftmost figure is a five-faced form of the deity, the two *padmas* at his shoulders holding his attributes the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and a sword. Next is Mañjughoṣa seated on a

lion in his form as “Lion of Debaters”. His hands are in *dharmacakra-mudrā* and his lotuses also hold a book and sword. The third figure is Arapacana Mañjuḡhoṣa, who has the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* book perched on a lotus to his left side, but holds his sword behind him, ready to strike. The fourth figure in the group is Lokeśvara, the “patron saint” of Tibet who holds his primary two hands in *añjali-mudrā* in front of his chest, while his other two hands grasp a *mālā* and a *padma*. The Dalai Lama, the head of the Gelugpa sect, is considered to be an incarnation of this form of the *bodhisattva* of compassion, while members of the Sakya and Kadam sects trace their lineage to Mañjuśrī.⁵⁷ The presence of the *bodhisattvas* of wisdom and compassion complete the equation of enlightenment. Also, for those with more earthly concerns, Mañjuśrī’s Mañjuḡhoṣa form and the four-armed form of Avalokiteśvara are two of the several deities invoked in Tibet to combat or protect from specific illnesses.⁵⁸

The first figure on the left in the right portion of the upper register of Plate 3 is a green Vajrapāṇi, holding a *vajra* at his chest with his right hand, and a bell at his hip with his lowered left hand. Vajrapāṇi is the God of Rain and may be worshipped for bringing rain for the crops or to end the rain when there is a flood.⁵⁹ He is also, along with Amitāyus and Avalokiteśvara, considered to guard the *amṛta*, or Elixir of Life.⁶⁰ Next to him is the Simhanāda form of Avalokiteśvara. The white deity sits on a

lion and holds a *padma* and a *trīśūla* with a *nāga* entwined. This form of the *bodhisattva* is regarded by Mahāyana Buddhists as the “Curer of All Diseases.”⁶¹ The red goddess Kurukullā stands in the dancing position in the third red aura. She holds a *dhanus* with her top left hand and *bāṇa* with her right, poised to shoot, and a *trīśūla* and *pāśa* in her other right and left hands. Kurukullā is said to confer the power to “enchant” men and women and to cast spells.

The final figure in the top register is a Tibetan religious figure wearing a white undergarment and a red patterned robe. Kossak identifies this man, along with the figure in the lower register who also wears a white under-robe, as a “lay Buddhist practitioner,” which, he says, would make him a member of the Sakyapa since he is given such an important position in the painting.⁶² Because the figure in this painting has an *ūrṇā* on his forehead, indicating that he is enlightened, and he performs the Dharmacakra-mudrā indicative of teaching, it is likely that he is an important member of the lineage, perhaps the founder of the sect or the head of the order. It is true that in the Sakya tradition, important members of the monastery were allowed to be householders as well as practitioners and that, in order to distinguish themselves from the celibate monks, the householders wore white robes. However, other sects of Tibetan Buddhism, namely the Kadam, Nyingma and Kagyu, allowed similar practice, before the reformation by Tsongkhapa in the fourteenth

century,⁶³ and the red robes are also universal among the four sects.⁶⁴ Therefore, the fact that this figure is dressed as a monk who has not taken the vow of celibacy is not sufficient evidence to decide the sect of the painting. Kossak noted in “Sakya Patrons and Nepali Artists,” that the location of a figure in a white robe in the top register with Buddhist deities was “unusual.”⁶⁵ In fact, figures such as this are often placed in similar locations within a row of deities,⁶⁶ and the head of monasteries are said to be incarnations of a deity. It may also be noted that most Buddhist lineages are considered to descend from a specific deity, and that Buddhist practitioners of all sects are to place their guru higher than all other deities, even the Buddha. Also, we should consider both that the Sakyapa and the Kadampa considered themselves descendants of Mañjuśrī.⁶⁷

At the bottom left of the painting is the consecrating monk of this set of paintings, wearing a red patterned robe and holding an incense burner. Instead of a figure to his left, the aura houses offerings and ritual paraphernalia. A third religious figure, dressed like the one in the upper right of the painting, is seated on the other side of the offerings holding what appears to be a *vajra* and a *ghaṇṭā*. In the center of the lower register is Vaiśravaṇa, dressed in a blue and gold robe and wearing a headdress. He carries a *dhanus* and *bāṇa* under his left arm, and a lance in his right. His left hand probably holds the neck of a mongoose spitting

coins or jewels. Vaiśravaṇa is an interesting deity with a complex history. Probably most important to his iconography is his position as the Lokapāla, or Guardian, of the North. The Lokapālas are said to live on Mount Meru, guarding the entrance to the Buddhist paradise. It is for this reason that these deities wear the garments of a warrior, including coats, boots and helmets. Vaiśravaṇa is also the King of Yakṣas, an ancient class of deities who, among other things, are said to bring disease and famine, and thus by venerating Vaiśravaṇa one could avoid such misfortune. In this capacity, he is also considered a god of wealth, bringing good fortune and riches to those who worship him. He is an important deity in the Tibetan pantheon, and there is even a specific ceremony asking him to bring material wealth.⁶⁸ His most common attribute, the jewel-vomiting mongoose, derives from a Central Asian custom of using a mongoose skin as a moneybag. Also, the mongoose is traditionally an enemy of the *nāgas*, who are guardians of treasures and wealth.⁶⁹

Next to Vaiśravaṇa is the green, snake-tailed Rahula. This nine-headed deity also holds a *dhanus* and *bāṇa* in his left hand, and wields a snake in his right. The sixth aura surrounds a four-armed form of Mahākāla. This blue, three-eyed figure holds a *karttrkā* and *kapāla* in his two principal right and left hands, while his back right hand brandishes a *khadga* and the left holds a *trisūla*-topped *khaṭvāṅga*. Mahākāla is often

considered an angry aspect of Vaiśravaṇa, the God of Wealth.⁷⁰ He is also one of the *Dharmapala*, or Defenders of the Dharma, and one of several deities invoked in the protection against disease. The final deity in the bottom right corner of the painting is the raven-faced Karma-Mahākāla, who also holds the *karttṛkā* and *kapāla* while trampling a figure representing ignorance.

Though the identities of the smaller figures in these paintings is certain, their intended meaning individually and as a group can only be theorized. As we have seen in the discussion of the individual deities, most, if not all, of the gods and goddesses in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon are venerated for both spiritual and material gains. Many protect against disease, assist in childbirth or promote health and longevity, while others offer wealth directly through coins and jewels, or indirectly through rain for the crops. These same deities are the guardians of the Dharma, offering the “riches” of the Buddhist faith, removing the obstacles to enlightenment, or conferring wisdom to the faithful.

CHAPTER 3

INSCRIPTION

The reverse sides of the Ratnasambhava painting (Plate 4) and the one of Amoghasiddhi are inscribed with the Buddhist Creed and an invocation to the central deity. Though only a photograph the back of the Ratnasambhava painting and a photocopy of the Amoghasiddhi were available to me, it can be inferred that a similar inscription was likely written on each painting in the set. The *pratiyasamutpāda-gāthā*, the creed of dependent co-arising, most commonly referred to as the Buddhist Creed, is very often found inscribed on examples of Pāla art of the eighth through twelfth centuries. This tradition was transmitted to Nepal and Tibet along with religious and artistic traditions, and it is considered the most common Buddhist inscription.⁷¹ This Creed, along with the syllables OM AH HUM and a *mantra* to the main deity of the painting, are all

written with red pigment and would have been added at the time of the consecration ceremony.

In South Asia and the Himālayān region, the eye opening ceremony is significant, as the deity is invoked into the painting so that the devotee who views it is actually interacting with the deity.⁷² In Tibet, while the eye-opening ceremony is only a small part of the consecration of a work of art, the consecration rituals, including *mantras* and *bijas*, vivify the object. The main purpose of the consecration is to establish a “receptacle” in which the deity can reside and to invoke the deity into the receptacle.⁷³

Though not clearly defined, the placement of the writing appears to replicate the shape of a *stūpa*, a type of Buddhist reliquary that represents the sacred conceptual space of Mount Meru. This practice was common on early *thangkas*, which sought to physically represent the Buddha’s body, speech and mind. The painting itself corresponds to the body, the Buddhist Creed to the speech, and the *stūpa* represents the mind of the Buddha.⁷⁴

The Buddhist Creed, as it appears on this painting, is in Tibetanized Sanskrit. This invocation is most often written phonetically. This is because it is believed that the sounds of the words are so powerful that they should only be spelled phonetically, in order to invoke the deity into the painting. The transliteration of the Tibetan script is:

*Om . ye . dharma .
he . tu . pra . bha . ba . he . tun . te .
ṣaṇ . ta . thā . ga . to ||hya . ba . dad . teṣān .
ci . yo . ni . ro . dha || ye . baṃ . ba . dī . ma . hā
. śra ma . ṇa . ye . svā . hā ||⁷⁵*

The correct Sanskrit version of the Creed should read:

*Ye dharmā hetu prabhavā
Hetuṃ teṣāṃ tathāgataḥ hy avadat teṣāṃ
Ca yo nirodha
Evaṃ vādī mahā śramaṇaḥ⁷⁶*

This is translated as:

*These cause arisen dharmas,
the Tathāgata has declared their causes
and their cessation.
Thus taught the Great Śrāmana {Śakyamuni}.⁷⁷*

Following the creed on the Ratnasambhava painting is an invocation to the Buddha Ratnasambhava, also written phonetically:

*Om . sa . rba . byid . svā . hā . || ||
Om . rad . na . sam . bha . va trim svā . hā⁷⁸*

Or:

Om sarvid svāhā

Om Ratnasambhava trim svāhā.

Which is translated as:

O hail All Knowing One!

O hail Ratnasambhava! TRIM!

TRIM is the *bīja* syllable that invokes Ratnasambhava.

The large characters of the syllables OM AH HUM appear in a vertical line in the center. These syllables awaken the head, throat, and heart *cakras*.

Unfortunately, no date was recorded on this painting, and the inscription actually tells us very little about the painting. However, the use of Tibetan suggests that it was made in Tibet for a Tibetan patron. It is possible that an inscription on one of the other three paintings recorded the name of the patron, artist, and date of consecration.

CHAPTER 4

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

Though the iconography and inscription of these *thangkas* is decidedly Tibetan, the paintings were probably done by a workshop of Nepali craftsmen. Such a suggestion is not surprising since the Nepali style was revered in Tibet, and it was quickly adopted and adapted.⁷⁹ This specific style of painting is called *Bal bris*, literally “Nepali drawing.” A discussion of the *Bal bris* School of painting brings to focus some of the central problems regarding Himālayan painting, namely the issues of influence, production, and provenance. In addition to the clarification of these issues, this portion of my paper compares the details of these paintings of the Jina Buddhas to dated paintings in order to place the set within a specific timeframe. This chapter is divided into three sections, Historical Background, Stylistic Comparison, and Analysis and Dating.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Though Tibetan painting is a common topic among Asian art historians, Nepali art and its connection to Tibet has received relatively little attention. Pratapaditya Pal and Steven Kossak are two of the very few scholars who have written on the subject.⁸⁰ However, the specific details of the development of Nepali painting have not been dealt with thoroughly. The Nepali painting style developed both out of its own indigenous aesthetics and from Indian painting of the Pāla period. In some cases, it is difficult to say precisely which elements found in Nepali painting have been derived from the Indian style, or which are native to Nepal.

Before discussing the style of the three paintings, it is essential to understand the general development of Buddhist art in the Himālayān region. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the development of the Buddhist religion, some knowledge of the transmission of Buddhism, from its homeland, India, to Nepal, Tibet and beyond, is necessary. The basic philosophies of Buddhism are much more ancient than the traceable history of the religion itself, which comes to prominence with the birth of Śākyamuni Buddha in the fourth century BCE near the border of modern India and Nepal. Well established Trade

routes between Nepal, Tibet, Central Asia, and China, facilitated the spread of the Buddhist philosophy, *sutras*, and art, and the religion was quickly accepted by many cultures and easily adapted to the native beliefs. The culture of India traveled along the Silk Road in different directions, therefore passing through different countries or cultures and picking up on their adaptations. Buddhism and its art traveled from India through modern Pakistan, Afghanistan, Western Tibet and Central Asia, and, finally, to China and Japan and also through Nepal to Central Tibet and on to Central Asia.

The small area known today as Nepal is bordered on all sides by either India or Tibet. However, traditional “Nepal” is much smaller, consisting of the approximately 150 square miles of the Kathmandu Valley.⁸¹ Though the area is quite small in relation to the vast expanse of the Tibetan region, a culture particular to the people of Kathmandu Valley, the Newars, flourished in this densely populated region. As Nepal was a major trade route between India and the northern regions of Tibet, the rulers became quite wealthy by charging taxes to those who traveled the route with goods or who conducted business in Nepal.⁸²

During the seventh and early eighth centuries, Nepal was a major intermediary on the route between Bihar, in eastern India, and Tibet. Nepal’s culture had been melded with Indian culture at least from the third century CE and Nepali art showed ties with the Gupta art style of

the fifth century, as well as the artistic developments of the Pāla dynasty.⁸³ The artistic style that developed in the Kathmandu Valley was considered by the Tibetans second only to the Indian style and it was not uncommon for Nepali artists to move to Tibet to work for Tibetan patrons. Many stayed in Tibet and take Tibetan wives. After the destruction of Indian Buddhist monasteries of Pāla India by the Muslims in the late twelfth century, the Nepalis were considered by the Tibetans to be the propagators of the Buddhist religious and artistic tradition. Because the Tibetans considered India to be the fundamental source of both the religion and the art of Buddhism,⁸⁴ they were partial to the Pāla style at which the Nepalis were adept.⁸⁵ Though some Nepali painters worked in Tibet, others would make sketchbooks of the iconography and style preferred by Tibetans and take these back to Nepal for reference while completing a commissioned work, as indicated by the many iconographic sketchbooks from Nepal.⁸⁶

In Nepal, two artistic traditions developed side by side, one for Tibetans and one for Nepalis. Though the two are quite similar, the native tradition employed a more animated composition and did not require the bilateral symmetry of Pāla art.⁸⁷ This can be seen in the comparison of manuscript pages of the eleventh century Gaṇḍhavyūha (Plate 7), which was made for a native Nepali,⁸⁸ with the Jina Buddha paintings.

Alternatively, the Tibetan artistic tradition developed with regional variations, and Tibetan style can be divided into Western, Central and Eastern traditions. Though important to the complete understanding of the development of Tibetan painting, the Western and Eastern Tibetan stylistic traditions will not be discussed here, as it is the Central Tibetan style that is most affected by Nepali art. First, the “*Shar mthun*” style, or the style of Eastern India, developed in the tenth through eleventh centuries. This was considered a true “Pāla” style and was strictly adhered to throughout Tibet. The characteristics of this style, namely muted colors, limited numbers of figures, and strict bilateral symmetry, were quite different from the Nepali interpretation of the Pāla style. After the demise of Indian Buddhism, when the Nepalis became the artistic authority to the Tibetans, the Nepali artistic tradition was more revered. Thus, the Tibetans adapted this style in a tradition called *Bal bris*. Ultimately, the *Bal bris* school became so similar to Nepali painting that it can be difficult to differentiate the two. However, there are some diverging features. Below, each feature of these three paintings will be explored in detail in order to determine the tradition of origin, and, ultimately, to assign a date to the three paintings.

STYLISTIC COMPARISON

The style of the three paintings in Plates 1, 2, and 3 must be considered in relation to the conditions under which they were made. First of all, the stylistic preferences of Nepalis are different from Tibetans, and, though I suggest that these paintings were produced by Nepali craftsman, the style is in the Tibetan taste. This is a difficult concept to understand without comparing the elements of painting in both the style Nepali painting for Tibetan patrons and the style employed by Tibetans for their own use. To this end, the analysis will distinguish the Nepali elements and the artistic features specific to “pure” Tibetan art. To explore the various aspects of style in a coherent manner, the term “style” is divided into three components: Form, Colors and Textures, and Composition, as proposed by traditional painters.⁸⁹

Form

The first component, “form,” refers to body type, facial features, and position of the figures, and “proper” form should be based on Indian prototypes.⁹⁰ Many of these iconometric elements of form are canonical, derived from textual descriptions of deities’ *āsanas* and *mudrās*. These three elements are generally very similar in both the “Tibetan style” and the “Nepali style.” This is illustrated in a comparison of the fourteenth-

century Ratnasambhava in the Tibetan style (Plate 8) and the Ratnasambhava (Plate 1). Both are depicted in the yellow color assigned to the deity and both are seated in *vajraparyāṅkāśana* and perform the *varada-mudrā* with the right hand.

The major differences with regard to the “form” of the figures are found in the body type and the facial features. Peaceful deities are generally described as being sixteen years of age, and therefore are intended to appear youthful. However, regional interpretations of perfect, adolescent beauty vary. The Nepali depiction of these deities can be most easily observed in the faces of the three Jina Buddhas in Plates 1, 2 and 3. The smooth, round face with a wide forehead and jawbone gives the deity a youthful appearance. The chin and nose are small and the slightly upturned lips form a childlike smile. These delicate qualities are distinctive to Nepali art, particularly in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, and are reminiscent of sculpture from the Gupta period and the later Pāla period in India. However, though little painting survives from India, it would appear that Indian painting did not follow this same model. The figures in Pāla painting of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as seen in Plate 9 have more oval face shapes, larger noses and a more prominent chin. One noticeable facial feature that does remain in these Nepali paintings from Pāla manuscripts and sculptures is the downward curve of the upper eyelid at the pupil. This feature remains in Tibetan

painting as well, and is probably meant to represent the peaceful and transcendent nature of a fully enlightened being. The shading on the face is minimal in the Nepali paintings, emphasizing the smoothness of the skin. The modeling that does occur is created with white paint under the eyebrows, on the nose, and on the lips. The two white lines indicating the shape of the nose is a feature that can be seen in the famed Śyāma Tārā in the Cleveland Museum of Art (Plate 6). This painting has been dated to the mid-twelfth to early thirteenth century by John Huntington,⁹¹ a designation that is generally agreed upon by scholars.⁹² Other shared facial characteristics are the “bow-shaped eyebrow,” a feature used in South Asia dates from at least the fifth century, and the similarly common neck-lines. The hourglass body shape and broad, rounded shoulders are derivative of Pāla sculpture, but is not seen in known Pāla painting. However, this body type is seen in Western Indian and Tibetan murals, suggesting that it was also a feature of Pāla painting. The subtle, undulating curves of the abdomen just above the lower garment gives the figure a feeling of fleshiness, even though the area is not shaded. This curving feature is found in painting from the Pāla period and can also be seen in most Tibetan and Nepali painting.

The ornamentation of these figures is also adapted from Pāla painting, though with a Nepali interpretation. In comparing the Jina *thangkas* with the circa twelfth century Pāla sculpture of Plate 10, we can

see many similarities in the jewels. First, the major difference is that the two long necklaces that our three Buddhas wear fall straight down from the neck rather than curving in a sort of “s” shape. However, these same necklaces show similarities. They consist of a double strand of pearls, with a third jeweled garland falling from the left shoulder down under the right arm. Another shorter double strand of pearls and an ornately jeweled necklace is also worn by the Nepali Buddhas and the Pāla *bodhisattva*. The armbands, worn just above the elbows, are also comparable, with a triangular-shaped, jewel-incrusted medallion pointing upward. The ankle bracelets worn by the three Buddhas, which connect to the toe-ring, are similar to the *bodhisattva*’s, but not identical. The earrings are also different. The earrings worn by Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi are hoops that pass through the ear. The hoops worn by the Pāla *bodhisattva*, and also by Śyāma Tārā in Plate 6, are placed inside the stretched earlobe in the manner, which appears to be more common in Pāla art. Though wearing the hoops through the ears is more common in Tibetan and Nepali art, they are not unknown in the Pāla idiom. One feature that is intrinsically different from the Pāla style is the crown worn by the three central figures. In fact, while the iconography and function of the crown remains the same throughout the history of Buddhist art, its form constantly changed.

The two standing *bodhisattvas* that flank the central Jina Buddha in each of the three paintings are depicted in a contorted body posture. The face is seen at a three-quarter view, while the shoulders face forward toward the viewer and the feet point inward toward the center of the painting. The back foot is lifted to give a sense of movement to the figures that are otherwise static. The six seated *bodhisattvas* in each painting are more animated. Their weight shifts in various directions, and their tilted heads balance their uneven shoulders. The four seated *bodhisattvas* on the outer edges of the painting look directly at the viewer, and share the youthful facial characteristics of the central figure. The other two seated *bodhisattvas* look inward and are shown in a three-quarter view. All eight *bodhisattvas* are ornamented like the Jina Buddhas except that they do not wear the two double-stranded pearl necklaces, and the crowns are simplified.

The secondary figures, found in the separated registers, are also similar in shape, derivative, for the most part, of the revered Pāla idiom. The depiction of *krodha* figures is a particular feature, which, though similar to the Pāla style (Plate 11), is quite different from the Tibetan style (Plate 13). Though the figures appear plump in both the Tibetan and the Nepali styles and they assume the canonical *āsanas* and *mudrās*, the Tibetan figures are much more fierce in appearance in comparison to the more delicate features of the Nepali figures. For example, in the detail

of Mahākāla from the painting of Amoghasiddhi (Plate 12), the attributes, *āsana*, and color are identical to those found in the Tibetan representation of the same deity.

The arch of the throne design, as discussed in Chapter 2, was prevalent in Nepali art at least as early as the Licchavi period (ca. 300-800). The *torāṇa* appears to be of Nepali origin⁹³ and is very common in Hindu and Buddhist art of all kinds, though the *padma* became the standard seat for deities during the Pāla period as a symbol of their transcendence. Inside the red aura, which is decorated with animals, the Buddhas pillowed throne back connects to the protruding bars, forming a triangular motif. This design is a refinement from the Pāla style and offers a sense of regality to the painting. Though different in structure, the *torāṇas* of the three Jina Buddhas can be compared to that of Śyāma Tārā (Plate 6), particularly in the form of the jewel-vomiting *makara*. The curling elephant trunks curl upward, revealing a wide-open mouth, and rams horns curve behind the pointed ears. In both examples, the *makaras* appear to be walking forward, with the clawed outer foot placed behind them. Finally, the similarities in the spiraling tail feathers cannot be ignored (Plates 14 and 15).

Colors and Textures

The stylistic component “colors and textures” refers to pigment colors, the representation of textures and patterns in clothing, and floral and flame motifs and the like. Later Tibetan standards of painting prefer the Chinese method of depicting these elements,⁹⁴ but most of the color and texture in these paintings is in the Nepali style.

The predominance of red is an obvious feature of these three paintings as the color is used for the auras of every figure. This feature, a characteristic of Indian painting, is common in Nepali paintings and is later adopted by artists of the Tibetan *Bal bris* school, though they use the color in a more subdued manner. Other colors used in these paintings are deep blue, light blue, bright blue, yellow, white, gold, pale green, olive green, pink or mauve, and brown.

The depiction of flame behind the *krodha* deities is a major point of stylistic divergence between Tibetan and Nepali painting. In Tibetan painting, the tongues of the flames form the shape of the aura (Plate 13), while the distinctive auras of Nepali paintings before Tibetan influence contain the stylized flames within the horseshoe shape and are more foliate in appearance (Plate 12). Similarly, the “water” in the aura behind the small Rahula in the Amoghasiddhi painting consists of spiraling forms. This foliation occurs in several places in the paintings, the red *prabhāmaṇḍala* and the white halo of the Jina Buddhas, the throne’s

dark-colored pillow, the gold outlines and the white triangular elements of the throne.

The clothing of the figures is one particular element of interest in the discussion of the eclectic style. First, the central deities wear bold, brightly colored *dhotīs* that end just below the knee. The pattern of the *dhotīs* worn by Ratnasambhava and Amitābha have the same pattern of bright red, green and yellow circles inside a pattern of squares, while Amoghasiddhi's *dhotī* has concentric circular patterns inside wide stripes. The *dhotīs* tie in the center and the extra material spreads out beneath the folded legs in undulating pleats. The large, bold pattern can be seen in the twelfth century Indian sculpture in Plate 10, as well as in the painting of the Pāla period. The seated *bodhisattvas* are also dressed in this manner, but the two standing *bodhisattvas* in each painting have a slightly different dress. They wear a short, opaque undergarment under a longer, sheer, patterned *dhotī*. A thick sash is tied around the hips, while the extra material flares out in ruffled pleats, highlighted in white, quite similar to the drapery of the *bodhisattva* from the Lori in Plate 16.⁹⁵

Composition

The third component, “composition,” refers to the manner in which figural and architectural elements are arranged, which is determined by the Tibetan standard.⁹⁶ The most obvious feature of the composition is the large Buddha in the center flanked by two smaller *bodhisattvas*. This reveals the hierarchical scale and bilateral symmetry dictated by the Pāla tradition. These elements were particularly important to Tibetan patrons, but they are not as important in painting done for Nepali patrons. Much effort has been made in these three paintings to subscribe to this traditional format. The standing *bodhisattvas* mirror each other in position, each having the front foot place behind the other, the front hand at the hip and the inner hand at the chest. Even the number of flares in the drapery and the ribbon of the crown are identical. The seated *bodhisattvas*, as well, mirror each other in position.

Though extant examples are primarily miniatures, it appears that Pāla painting was relatively simple in composition, and few figures were employed. However, the Tibetans broke from the Pāla tradition as increasing numbers of deities were depicted in Tibetan art. Apparently, in order to maintain the organized symmetry of their predecessors, Tibetans began using separated horizontal, and eventually vertical, registers to house the secondary deities. In these paintings, there are three such divisions, two at the top flanking the Garuḍa of the *torana*,

each housing four figures, and one beneath the throne, containing seven figures. Each of these smaller auxiliary figures is surrounded by a red, petal-shaped aura. The background of each painting is deep blue and is covered in flowers, an element that was popular in Pāla painting.

ANALYSIS AND DATING

Although the style of these paintings can be discussed in terms of the geographic origins of the various elements, placing the set within a specific time range is a more difficult task. Although stylistic elements evolved over time, the sense of tradition in the art and religion of much of Asia calls for continuity. For this reason, a painting or its style may be copied much later, and only small differences may be found, sometimes making precise dating virtually impossible. Many paintings from Nepal and Tibet have been given various dates by scholars on the basis of “style.” Because so few of these paintings can be dated with any certainty, this stylistic analysis will focus on comparing these three paintings with works that are either dated by inscription or which can be placed in a definite time range on the basis of specific iconographic elements.

First, we should look to the cover of an *Aṣṭasahaśrika Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Plate 17), which is dated in the colophon to a

date equivalent to 1207.⁹⁷ The central Buddha in this painting on wood is seated on a lotus throne with an abbreviated *torāṇa*. The throne-back and arms are decorated with the scrolling motif found in the throne-back and auras of secondary deities in the Jina *thangkas*. The pattern on the cloth that drapes over the seat of the throne is almost identical to the one found in the painting of Amoghasiddhi in Plate 3. Eight *bodhisattvas* and four haloed monks surround the Buddha in the *Prajñāpāramitā* painting. Certainly similarities can be seen in the faces and body types of these figures in comparison with those in the *thangkas*, but the *bodhisattvas* in the manuscript painting are dressed in transparent *dhotīs* and three pointed crowns that are different from those in Plates 1, 2, and 3. Also, the “rain of flowers” falls in front of a red background, rather than a deep blue one.

Nepali artists often made sketchbooks of Tibetan motifs and iconography,⁹⁸ and we are fortunate to have one that is dated to offer us a standard for dating the paintings by Nepalis. A book of sketches by the artist Jivarama is dated to the equivalent of 1435.⁹⁹ Several motifs remain in the painting tradition for centuries, but as we can see in comparison of the earlier manuscript painting with a page from the sketchbook in Plate 18, they become increasingly elaborated. The convoluted tails of *makaras* and *kinṇaras* increase greatly in size and detail with the passage of time. Because the *thangkas* are thus obviously later than the manuscript but

earlier than the Jivarama sketchbook, they can be placed firmly between the years 1207 and 1435. To narrow this gap, we will look to Nepali painting in Tibet from the early fourteenth century.

The mural paintings at Shalu (Plates 19, 20 and 21) reveal the most telling comparisons to the three *thangkas*. Buton Rimpoche, who lived at the Shalu monastery from 1320 to 1364, first documented the building and decoration of Shalu in the fourteenth century. According to him it was founded in 1027, but very little of the current architecture actually survives from this first building phase. A second building phase began in 1290, due to an interest in the monastery by the powerful Sakya sect, which had strong ties with Yuan China. From 1290-1306, murals of the five Jina Buddhas, Vajrahumkara and the founder of Shalu were painted in a “Newar-derived style.”¹⁰⁰ In 1306, Drakpa Gyeltshen visited the Yuan court and returned in 1307 with a group of artists who had been trained at the court by young Nepali artist Aniko.¹⁰¹ This is the style in which most of the murals at Shalu are painted and which bears a strong resemblance to our three *thangkas*.

A particularly strong similarity can be seen in the comparing the painting of the Ratnasambhava from Shalu (Plate 19) and the Ratnasambhava from the set of *thangkas* (Plate 1). The face types are quite similar, with wide foreheads and jaw, long, thin eyes, long noses with two white lines for definition, and a small triangular part in the

middle of the hairline. The heart-shaped face, small chin and thin, smiling lips are almost identical. The body shape, too, is similar, with rounded shoulders and a small waist with four small mounds of flesh bulging out over the lower garment. However, the Shalu Ratnasambhava's shoulders are much broader, and a more mechanical sense of definition has been given to his body structure. Defining lines carve out the pectoral muscles, the inner arm, hands and feet, and the bone of the ankle. Shading on the face and neck is also much darker on the mural. The *thangka* painting is much more subtle, though we should certainly take into consideration the relative sizes of these paintings in comparison of these features.

The crowns of these two figures are more alike than different, particularly in comparison with the wide variety of crown types that were popular in India, Nepal and Tibet. The pillowed throne-back on both, acts as a halo and body aura, and they are seated on a white cloth with a ruffled green edge. Though the *thangka* painting has a double, multi-colored lotus for the seat while the mural's lotus is a single row of petals, both share the small point and the swirling design on each petal and, a less common motif, the small pearl on each petal. Beneath the lotus on each painting is a patterned cloth, in front of which are the *ratna* symbol and the two deer. Horses flank this cloth in both the mural and the *thangka*. The convoluting *makaras* tails at the sides of throne differ in

several ways. Like the detailed and deliberate shading on the body of the Jina, the tail feathers of the *makaras* on the mural are much more dramatic and carefully depicted. The secondary deities and the *bodhisattvas* are also arranged differently in these two paintings, though the framing aura, simple throne style, and the figural type are alike.

In the comparison of the *bodhisattvas* in the *thangkas* with the *bodhisattvas* from Shalu we can see much similarity in body type, facial features and position, but the mural figures are more ornately jeweled. Particularly in the standing figures (compare Plates 21 and 22) some features are almost identical, such as the flaring pleats from the *dhoti* and the body posture. The style of painting in the murals, most significantly in the figures, but also in secondary elements is so closely related to the three *thangkas* that it is likely that they were made during the same period of time, and therefore can be dated to the early to mid-fourteenth century.

The differences between the *thangka* paintings and the Shalu murals should be seen in context with the size of the paintings and with the skill of the artists. The most renowned artists in the world, those who had been taught by Aniko at the Yuan court, had been summoned to paint the murals at Shalu, which are quite large in size. The *thangka* paintings, on the other hand, are of much smaller small size. However, because the similarities are so strong, it is likely that the painters had

been trained in the same school. Perhaps, even, the master painter of the workshop that painted the three *thangkas* was trained at the Yuan court by Aniko or one of his disciples. There is also a strong possibility, due to specific similarities in the style of the Buddhas, that the artists of the workshop had direct knowledge of the murals at Shalu, and were commissioned to recreate them on a smaller scale with the patron's chosen iconography. The similarities between the paintings of the Jina Buddhas in Plates 1, 2, and 3 and the murals at Shalu reveal contemporary dating, and thus the set of *thangkas* should be dated to the early to mid fourteenth centuries, not earlier, as has been previously suggested.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Although the main deities in these three paintings are the Jina Buddhas, the other figures are also important. Their iconography is quite rich, as discussed in this study, and the patron probably selected each deity individually for specific reasons. Because the majority of the deities depicted in these paintings are intended to protect and to bring health, longevity and wealth, it is likely that these were important concerns of the patron. Indeed, the secondary figures of a Tibetan *thangka* can be even more important than the central figure, as they lead the practitioner who meditates on them to the realization of the spiritual enlightenment symbolized by the main deity. John Huntington notes in *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree* that in discussions with Tibetan informants, he has learned that this is, indeed, the case, particularly among the laity.¹⁰²

The importance of iconography in Buddhist art should not be overlooked in the study of these three paintings, and the identification of the previously undefined deities has proved important not only to the provenance of the painting, but to the understanding of the patron's desires as well. Similarly, the study of style is important in the determination of a Tibetan provenance, as the paintings display very Nepali characteristics, and have been formerly categorized as "Nepali."¹⁰³ In light of my discussion of the Tibetan iconography and of the Tibetan style, I propose that, while the paintings were produced by Nepali craftsmen, that they be considered Tibetan.

While these paintings have appeared in several books and museum catalogues on Tibetan or Nepalese painting, the discussion has remained quite limited. Using these three paintings, I have identified two elements of Tibetan painting, style and iconography, which need to be further explored. First, in relation to the symbolism and meaning behind Buddhist deities, the veneration of such deities should be examined in context with sociological, political, and anthropological studies. Second, a more thorough examination of the relationship of Nepali and Tibetan art must be undertaken, as the enormous and important study has only begun. This study has laid the foundation and identified the starting points for a more complete study of the entire corpus of Tibetan art completed by Nepalis.

NOTES

¹ See, for example, P. Pal, *Nepal Where the Gods are Young* (New York: Asia House Gallery, 1975); P. Pal, *The Arts of Nepal II. Painting* (Leiden, Koln: E.J. Brill, 1978), S. Kossak, "Sakya Patrons and Nepalese Artists in Thirteenth Century Tibet," eds. J.C. Singer and P. Denwood, *Tibetan Art. Towards a Definition of Style* (London: Laurence King and Alan Marcuson in association with Weatherhill, 1997); S.M. Kossak and J.C. Singer, *Sacred Visions. Early Painting from Central Asia* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998).

² I would like to thank Stephen Markel at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Darielle Mason at the Philadelphia Museum of Art for providing me with images of the reverse of the Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi paintings. Also, thanks to ;Dr. John C. Huntington and Dr. Dina Bangdel for their assistance in examining the calligraphy.

³ P. Pal, *Nepal Where the Gods are Young* (New York: Asia House Gallery, 1975); P. Pal, *The Arts of Nepal II. Painting* (Leiden, Koln: E.J. Brill, 1978); P. Pal, *The Arts of Nepal. A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Arts Collection* (Los Angeles and Berkley: The Los Angeles County Museum of Art in association with the University of California Press, 1985); S. Kossak, "Sakya Patrons and Nepalese Artists in Thirteenth Century Tibet," and H. Nuemann, "Paintings of the Lori Stūpa," eds. J.C. Singer and P. Denwood, *Tibetan Art. Towards a Definition of Style* (London: Laurence King and Alan Marcuson in association with Weatherhill, 1997); S.M. Kossak and J.C. Singer, *Sacred Visions. Early Painting from Central Asia* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998).

⁴ Pal, *The Arts of Nepal*, 202. Pal cites *Asiatic Arts in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Boson Museum of Fine Arts, 1982), 148.

⁵ Pal, *Nepal Where the Gods are Young*, 19.

⁶ P. Pal, *The Arts of Nepal*, 202 and Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, 143.

⁷ Pal, *Nepal. Where the Gods are Young*, 19.

⁸ Pal, *Art of Nepal*, 202.

⁹ Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, 143.

¹⁰ Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, 143.

¹¹ Kossak writes of the upper registers: "In the Ratnasambhava, there are two groups of four Tathagatas (Ratnasambhava is not portrayed). In the Amitābha, there is a similar group of Tathagatas (without Amitābha) on the left, but four different deities on the right: a seated eight-armed, eight-headed white deity, a blue deity, and a seated white deity with a pendant leg. In the Amoghasiddhi, there is no set of four Tathagatas. Instead, in the upper left, are: a five-headed white deity seated on a lotus and holding a book; a green deity with hands across the chest, seated on a lion; a god with a sword and perhaps a manuscript, seated with lotuses behind him; a gold Manjuśri wielding a sword above his head; and a Shadakshari Lokeshvara. In the upper right are a yellow Vajrapāṇi balancing a *cakra*, a Simhanada Lokeshvara, a dancing *dakini*, and a figure

wearing a white robe and a red mantle patterned with gold. The lower registers portray a variety of figures: in the Ratnasambhava, from left to right, a Green Tārā, Hayagriva, a four-armed god, Padmapāṇi, and a Mahākala flanked by two goddesses; in the Amitabha, seven seated goddess, all but one multiarmed (perhaps the seven mother goddesses); in the Amoghasiddhi, from right to left: Vajrapāṇi in his form as Garuda; Mahākala; Rahula; Vaiśravaṇa; a lay practitioner wearing a white robe and a red mantle, holding a vajra in his right hand and a ghanta in his left; offerings on stands sheltered by a gauze canopy with tassel ends; and the consecrating monk with a incense burner.” Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, 143. Very few of these identifications are correct. See the section of this thesis on iconography for a discussion.

¹² The painting had previously been in the private collection of Philadelphia Museum of Art's South Asian curator Stella Kramrisch until it was bequeathed to the museum in 1994.

¹³ Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, 143 and S.M. Kossak, “Sakya Patrons and Nepali Artists in the Thirteenth-Century Tibet,” 29. In a footnote for the article “Sakya Patrons,” Kossak notes the two known exceptions.

¹⁴ Pal, *Art of Nepal*, 202.

¹⁵ Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, 143 and “Sakya Patrons”, 31.

¹⁶ Kossak, “Sakya Patrons,” 31.

¹⁷ Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*, 56-66.

¹⁸ John J. Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 5. Makransky also provides a detailed description of the three kāyas and their meanings and implications.

¹⁹ Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*, 55-56.

²⁰ Sources for the discussion of *pañcajina* iconography include: D. I. Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*, (Boston and Shaftesbury: Shambala, 1989) 62-74, and F.D. Lessing and A. Wayman, *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems* (New York: Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1968), 29-35.

²¹ Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*, 52.

²² For discussion of the jnanas associated with the five Jina Buddhas, please see Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*, 104-115.

²³ S.L. Huntington and J.C. Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree. The Art of Pāla India (8th-12th centuries) and Its International Legacy* (Dayton: The Dayton Art Institute in association with the University of Washington Press, 1990), 338.

²⁴ R. Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* (Boston: Shambala, 1999), 83.

²⁵ Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 82.

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- ²⁶ Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 73.
- ²⁷ Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 68.
- ²⁸ Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead*, 116-117. Lauf recognizes that the awarenesses vary depending on the text and that these identifications are based only on one text.
- ²⁹ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 106.
- ³⁰ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 106.
- ³¹ S. Lohia, *Lalitavajra's Manual of Buddhist Iconography* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1994), 35.
- ³² Refer to the diagram in Plate 5 for the discussion of the iconography of all three paintings, Plates 1, 2, and 3. The numbers in the text indicate the deities' placement in the painting in which they appear.
- ³³ L.D. Dargyab, *Tibetan Religious Art* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), 26.
- ³⁴ Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 210.
- ³⁵ Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 215.
- ³⁶ Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 268.
- ³⁷ Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*.
- ³⁸ Dargyab, *Tibetan Religious Art*, 25.
- ³⁹ A.K. Gordon, *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism* (Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1959).
- ⁴⁰ Gordon, *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, 56.
- ⁴¹ Most often the Buddha Baiṣajyaguru is depicted as blue in color and holding a medicine bowl, surrounded by the other seven (or six or eight) Buddhas.
- ⁴² Gordon, *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, 36.
- ⁴³ Gordon, *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, 42.
- ⁴⁴ The "five deity Amoghapāśa Avalokita" is based on the Amoghapāśa *dharani* from the Bari Lotswa tradition. Brauen and Willson, p. 265.
- ⁴⁵ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 318.
- ⁴⁶ The Sanskrit language is full of words and phrases with more than one meaning, and the Buddhist religion also uses this method of double *entendre*. By inference, this, and other, paintings may be imbued with multiple levels of meaning.

⁴⁷ J. Landaw and A. Weber, *Images of Enlightenment. Tibetan Art in Practice* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1993), 88.

⁴⁸ See Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 337 for a similar comparison.

⁴⁹ This identification is corroborated by Wilson and Brauen, though many scholars would identify this figure as Vajrapāṇi. see Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, 51. Getty notes a manuscript image of this form that is painted white instead of blue. The reason for this is that the manuscript image is showing Akṣobhya, who is sometimes depicted as white, and not Vajrapāṇi.

⁵⁰ B. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1958), 302.

⁵¹ Gordon, *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, 78-79.

⁵² Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 68.

⁵³ Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 69.

⁵⁴ Landaw and Weber, *Images of Enlightenment*, 93-95.

⁵⁵ M. Wilson and M. Brauen, *Deities of Tibetan Buddhism. The Zurich Paintings of the Icons Worthwhile to See* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 311.

⁵⁶ Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 100.

⁵⁷ L.A. Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1918), 53.

⁵⁸ Gordon, *The Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, 57.

⁵⁹ The *vajra* is sometimes called a “thunderbolt,” though this definition is problematic. The *vajra* is a symbol of the male sexual organ, and in Nepal sexual intercourse is often equated with “the rains.”

⁶⁰ Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, 51.

⁶¹ Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 127.

⁶² Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, 143.

⁶³ After Tsongkhapa’s reformation, the Kadam sect became the Geluk, which does not allow sexual relations of any kind. The Nyingma and Sakya continue to allow monk-householders, though they are called “turncoats,” referring to the different colored robes they wear to distinguish themselves. Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 93.

⁶⁴ M.H. Duncan, *Customs and Superstitions of Tibetans*, 177.

⁶⁵ Kossak, “Sakya Patrons,” 31.

⁶⁶ See for example, Catalogue numbers 11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20,30, 31, 45, and 47b in Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*.

⁶⁷ Waddel, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 63.

⁶⁸ Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, p. 160.

⁶⁹ Beer, *Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*, 212.

⁷⁰ Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*, 161.

⁷¹ Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 105.

⁷² See D. L. Eck, *Darśan. Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, PA) for an explanation of this interaction.

⁷³ Bendor, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism*, 39.

⁷⁴ Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, 19-20.

⁷⁵ Transliteration provided by John Huntington.

⁷⁶ According to John Huntington.

⁷⁷ Translation provided by John Huntington.

⁷⁸ Transliteration by John Huntington.

⁷⁹ Please see Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree* for a thorough discussion of Nepali style painting in Tibet.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Pal, *Arts of Nepal II. Painting*, and Kossak, "Sakya Patrons."

⁸¹ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 253.

⁸³ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 254.

⁸³ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 254-55.

⁸⁴ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 290.

⁸⁵ Nepali patrons, however, did not demand art in the Pāla style, allowing a more native tradition to flourish, and there is a distinct difference in art made by Nepalis for Tibetans and art made by Nepalis for Nepalis.

⁸⁶ M.L.B. Blom, *Depicted Deities. Painters' Model Books in Nepal* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1989).

⁸⁷ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 258.

⁸⁸ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*,

⁸⁹ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 257. Huntington sites Gega Lama's *Principles of Tibetan Art*.

⁹⁰ G. Lama, *Principles of Tibetan Art. Illustrations and Explanations of Buddhist Iconography and Iconometry According to the Karma Gardri School* (W.B. Darjeeling, India: Jamyang Singe, 1983), 47.

⁹¹ Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 329-333.

⁹² Pal, *The Arts of Nepal*, 1978, 72. This dating is a complex matter and will not be argued in this paper.

⁹³ John Huntington states that the "*makara prabhāvalī*" is "found only in the art of Nepal and its Tibetan successors." Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 331.

⁹⁴ Lama, *Principles of Tibetan Art*, 47.

⁹⁵ H. Neumann, "Mural Paintings at the Lori Stūpa in Mustang," in Singer and Danwood, eds., *Tibetan Art. Towards a Definition of Style*.

⁹⁶ Lama, *Principles of Tibetan Art*, 47.

⁹⁷ Singer and Kossak, *Sacred Visions*, 42.

⁹⁸ Bloom, *Depicted Deities*.

⁹⁹ Pal, *Art of Nepal*, 146.

¹⁰⁰ H. Kreijger, "Mural Styles at Shalu," in Singer and Denwood, eds., *Tibetan Art. Toward a Definition of Style*, 175.

¹⁰¹ Vitali, *Early Temples of Central Tibet*, 105.

¹⁰² Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree*, 339.

¹⁰³ For example, see Pal, *Arts of Nepal*, and Pal, *Nepal: Where the Gods are Young*.

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Plate 1. Ratnasambhava. Attributed to a Newar artist working in Central Tibet. Early to mid-fourteenth century.



Plate 2. Amitābha. Attributed to a Newar artist working in Central Tibet. Early to mid-fourteenth century.



Plate 3. Amoghasiddhi. Attributed to a Newar artist working in Central Tibet. Early to mid-fourteenth century.

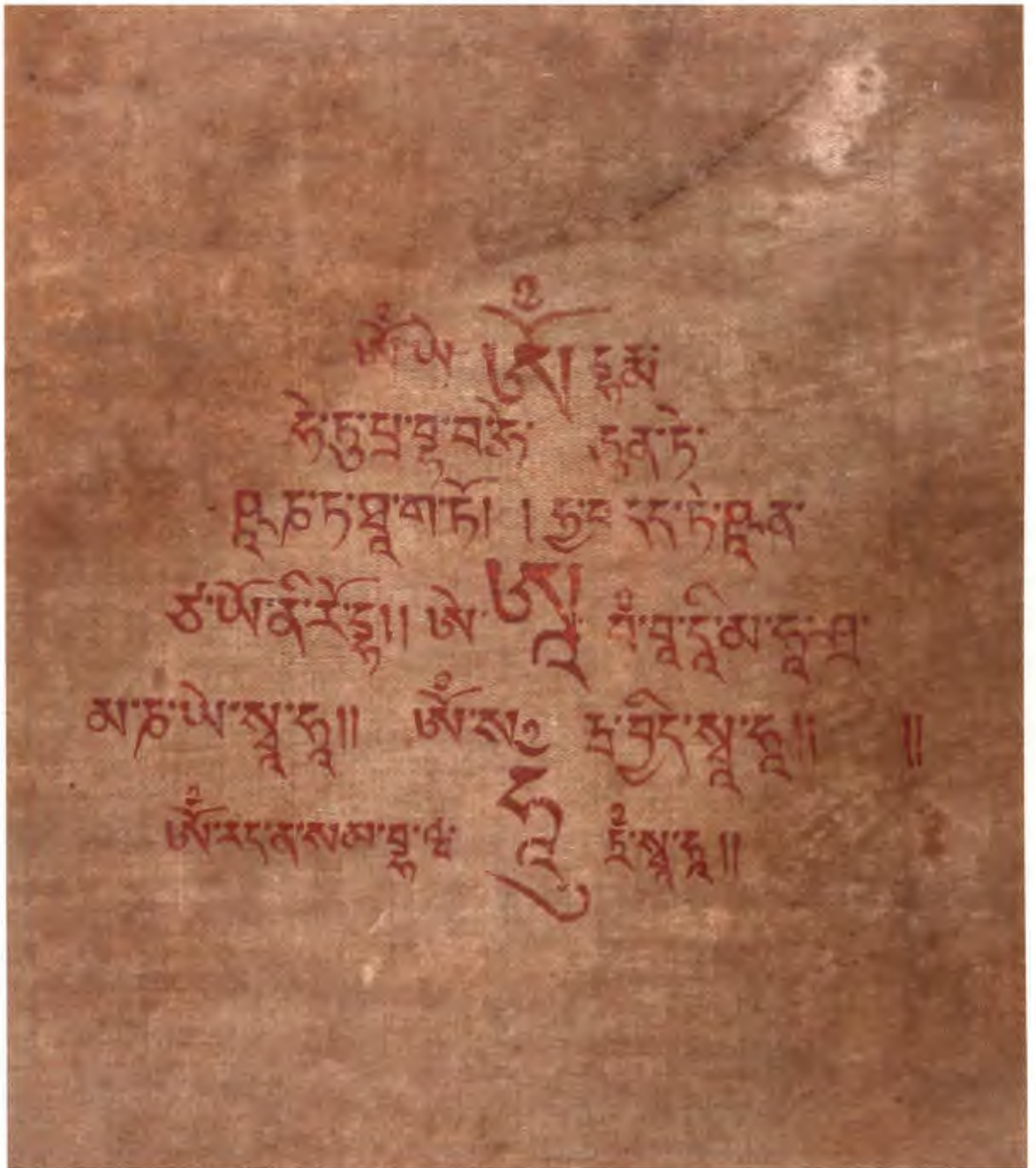


Plate 4. Reverse of Ratnasambhava in Plate 1.

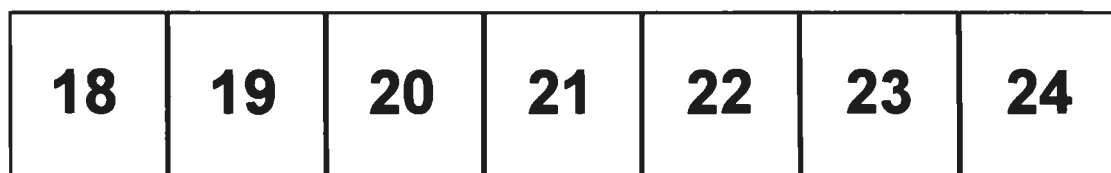
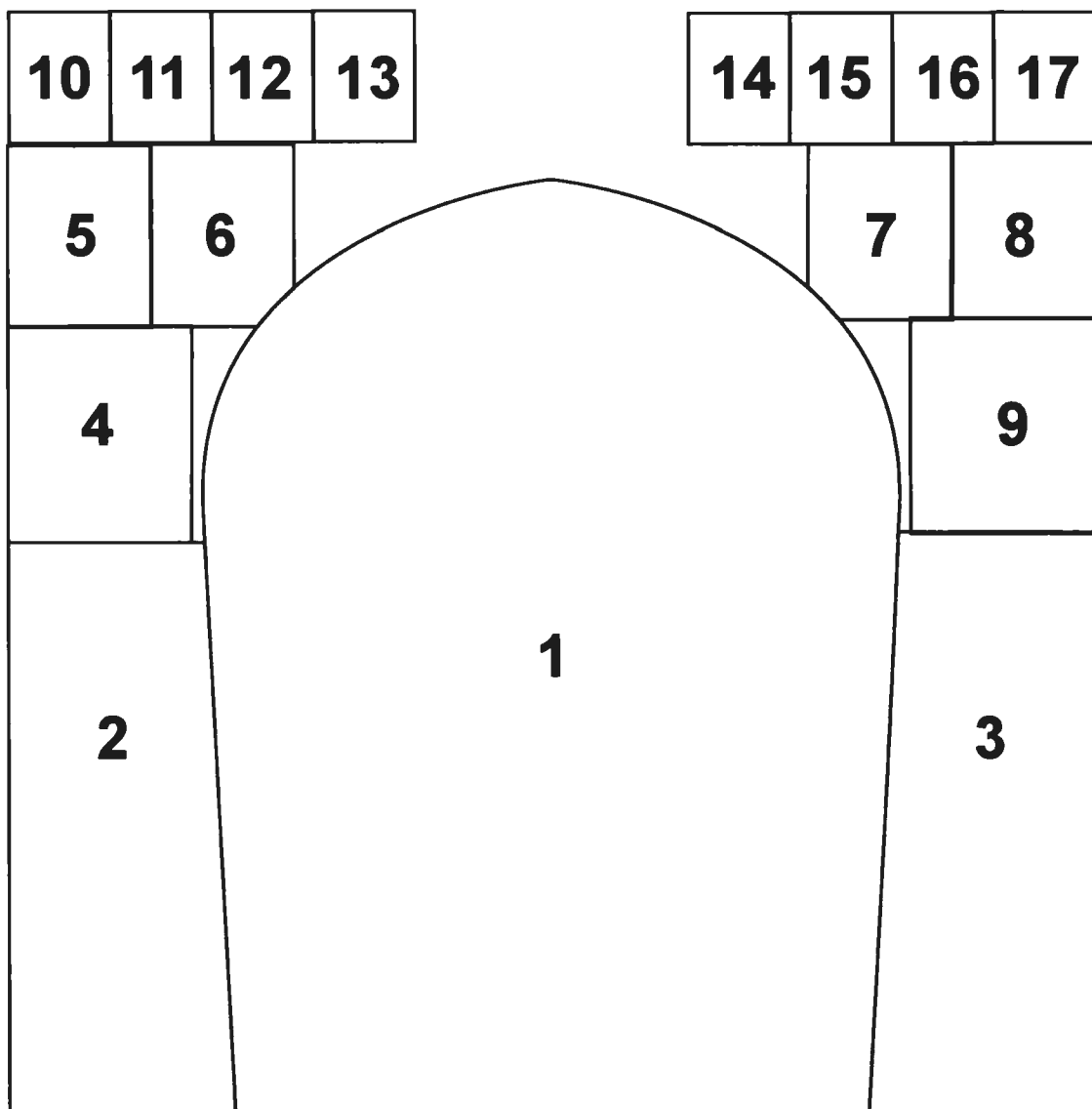


Plate 5. Diagram for Plates 1, 2, and 3.



Plate 6. Śyāma Tārā. Attributed to a Newar artist working in Central Tibet. Ca. mid-thirteenth century.



Plate 7. Page from a Gaṇḍhavyūha manuscript.
Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Ca. eleventh century.



Plate 8. Ratnasambhava. Tibet.
Ca. fourteenth century.



Plate 9. Maitreya from an *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript. Eastern India. Ca 1105.



Plate 10. Maitreya. Eastern India. Ca. twelfth century.



Plate 11. Krodha deity. Eastern India or Bangladesh. Ca. twelfth century.



Plate 12. Mahākāla.
Detail from Fig. 1.3.



Plate 13. Mahākāla. Tibet.
Fifteenth century.



Plate 14. Detail from Plate 4.



Plate 15. Detail from Plate 1.



Plate 16. Bodhisattva. Lori Stupa, Mustang, Nepal.
Ca. late twelfth to early fourteenth century.



Plate 17. Cover of an *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript. Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. 1207.

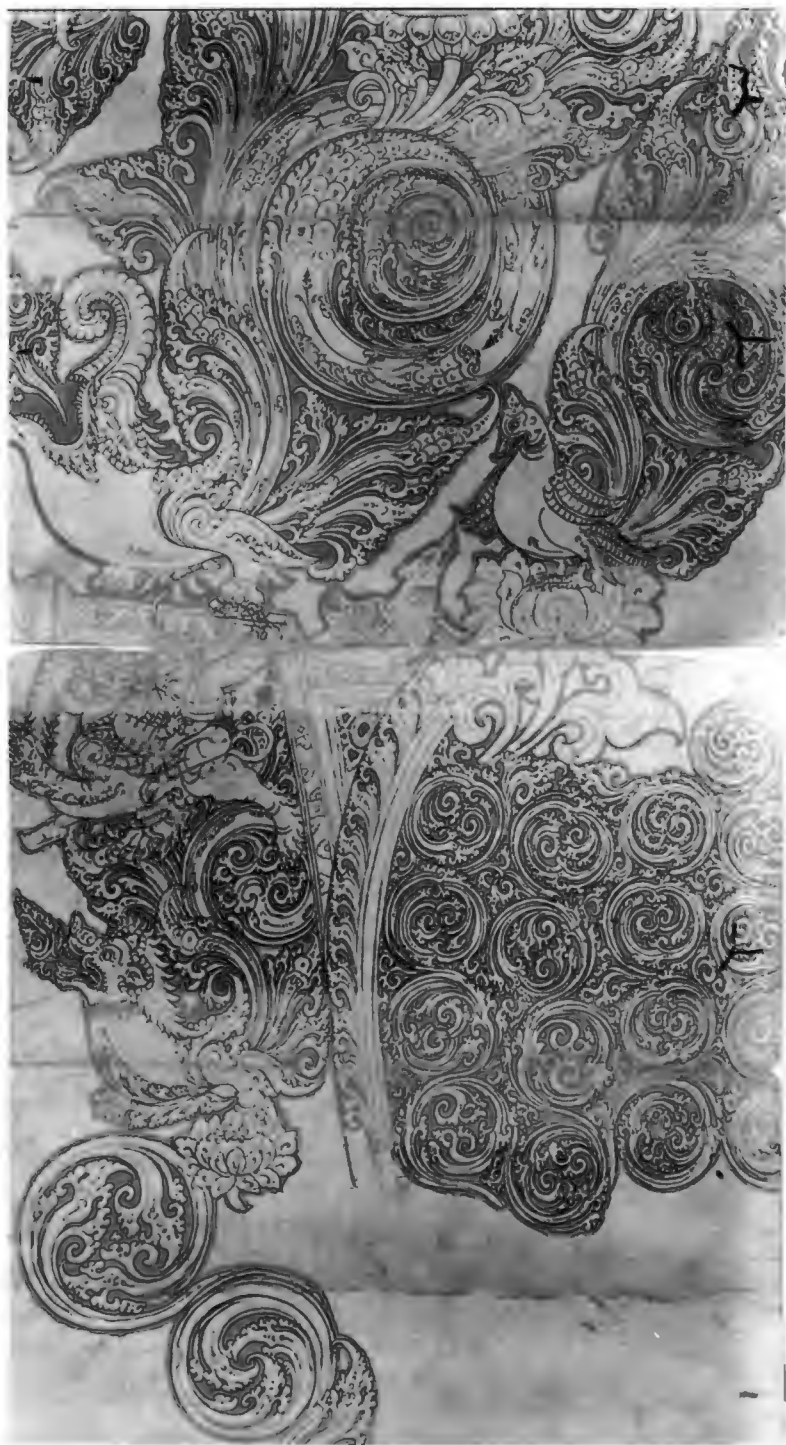


Plate 18. Page from a model book by the Newar artist Jivarama working in Southern Tibet. Dated N.S. 555 (1435).



Plate 19. Ratnasambhava. Shalu Monastery,
gTsang po Valley, Tibet. 1307-1333.



Plate 20. Bodhisattvas. Shalu Monastery,
gTsang po Valley, Tibet. 1307-1333.



Plate 21. Bodhisattva. Shalu Monastery, gTsang-po Valley, Tibet. 1307-1333.



Plate 22. Detail from Plate 1.