

ON AN UNUSUAL PAINTING STYLE IN LADAKH¹

by

Christian Luczanits, Vienna

Only 15 years ago it was the general opinion among scholars that the paintings of the lHakhang So-ma in Alchi are attributable to the 12th–13th centuries.² In addition, thangka paintings of a similar style were dated to the same time range and vaguely attributed to the “Western Trans-Himalaya” (e.g. Klimburg-Salter 1982: pls. 109–112). Today the historical picture has changed quite dramatically thanks to the vastly increased amount of objects and documentation available.

As a result of Goepper’s recent studies (1990), which date the gSum-brtsegs to c. 1200–1220, the chronology of the Alchi monuments must be reconsidered. Further, many more artifacts, mainly thangkas, have appeared on the art market, some with a known provenance.³ In addition, the archaeological evidence is today more accessible as some of the preserved Central Tibetan monuments of that period have been partly published,⁴ and related schools of art, like the one from Khara Khoto, are also available to a greater public.⁵

Today it is generally accepted that the thangka paintings bearing similarities to the lHakhang So-ma paintings mentioned above are usually from Central Tibet⁶ and that several stylistic variations occur in Central Tibet right into the 14th century. However, a detailed analysis of the stylistic variants of the painting schools of 12th–14th-century Central Tibetan thangka painting has only just begun. Among the Central Tibetan thangkas, the large group associated with sTag-lung monastery discussed by J.C. Singer (1997) is outstanding.⁷ An interesting

¹ The research for this article was conducted under a grant from the Austrian *Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung*. I am particularly grateful to Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter for carefully reading and correcting this paper and for discussing several crucial points with me.

² E.g. Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977: 64–70, 79, col.pl. xvii, figs. 55–64; Klimburg-Salter 1982: 165, 167, figs. 14, 17, 26, 45; Pal 1982: 62; figs. LS1–37.

³ Cf. e.g. the catalogue of Rossi and Rossi 1994: nos. 5, 9–14. It is said that more than 200 early Tibetan paintings have appeared on the market in the last two decades. Although only approximately a quarter of these have been published, and are thus available to a larger number of scholars, this material has greatly improved our knowledge of the art of the 12th to 14th centuries.

⁴ E.g. Vitali 1990 on Yemar, Drathang, the Lhasa Jo-khang and Shalu; Henss 1994 and 1997 on Drathang; Ricca and Fournier 1996 and Kraijger 1997 on Shalu.

⁵ E.g. through the exhibition catalogue *Die schwarze Stadt an der Seidenstrasse. Buddhistische Kunst aus Khara Khoto. (10.–13. Jh.)*, ed. M. Pjotrowskij 1993, also published in other European languages.

⁶ An exception is presented in Klimburg-Salter 1997.

⁷ According to Singer (1997: 52) over 50 thangkas can be related to the monastery of sTag-lung and the school of the same name. Singer has certainly succeeded in presenting a conclusive chronological sequence for a part of these paintings, particularly the portraits of the sTag-lung hierarchs. Regarding the style represented by these paintings she argues that one cannot talk of a distinctive sTag-lung school or style as such (id. 62–3). However, despite the uniquely large number of thangkas associated with one place and a limited period, she has not yet attempted to differentiate between the styles, stylistic variants or schools of painting employed at or for sTag-lung monastery. The definition of distinctive schools of painting of 12th–14th-century Central Tibet remains a task for the future.

approach to the problem of the derivation of a certain group of Central Tibetan paintings is presented by Bautze-Picron (1995/96 and in this volume). She attempts a detailed analysis of the iconographic and stylistic similarities between Pāla stelae and some Tibetan thangkas. The discovery of a distinctive group of West-Tibetan thangkas belonging to the same period by D.E. Klimburg-Salter (1997b and in this volume) represents another crucial piece in the puzzle of early Tibetan art history.

On the basis of new primary documentation this article attempts to give a clearer picture of Buddhist painting in Ladakh from around 1200 through the 13th century. After a survey of the well-known West Tibetan painting styles and the presentation of a number of motifs differentiating the contemporary Central Tibetan paintings from the Alchi paintings, a crucial phase in the history of the Alchi paintings is examined. Around 1200 the beginnings of the influence of Central Tibetan painting is discernible at Alchi with the occurrence of new motifs in a small painted *mchod-rten* within the Alchi *chos-'khor*. While the style remains typical for Alchi the new motifs most probably occur due to the influence of the 'Bri-gung-pa school (cf. below).

In the second part of this article an unusual and distinctive painting style will be presented which was documented in 1994 at Alchi and Lamayuru inside two very ruined gateway *mchod-rten*. This distinctive painting style displays all the motifs known from Central Tibetan painting and has little relation to the paintings at Alchi. In the light of this new evidence the origin of the simple Early Ladakhi painting style as represented by the lHa-khang So-ma will be briefly reconsidered.

Naming Early West Tibetan Painting Styles

While the paintings of the Tabo sGo-khang are in a simple style with poor-quality colours the paintings dating from the renovation completed in 1042 are sophisticated and are done in rich, good quality colours. The paintings of the renovation period have been called Indo-Tibetan painting (cf. Klimburg-Salter 1994: 441), a term that takes the present location in Northwest India and the (presumed) derivation of the painting style into account. It is in fact quite possible that the artisans decorating the Tabo gTsug-lag-khang were Indians. This painting style of the Tabo renovation period is continued in Mangnang, Nako, and Dungkar, until the establishment of the 15th–16th-century temples in Tholing, Tsaparang, and Tabo (cf. Klimburg-Salter 1997a: 207–227). It is a distinctive painting school with a restricted geographical spread.⁸ It is because of the occurrence of this style solely in West Tibet that this style should rather be termed West Tibetan than Indo-Tibetan. It is evident, too, that this painting school has been handed down in West Tibet as it occurs far beyond the presumed direct influence of India. It seems reasonable therefore to speak of a West Tibetan style, the earliest representative of which has been preserved from the renovation period at Tabo (i.e. c. 1042) and which terminates with the paintings at Tsaparang.

On the other hand, it is quite likely that the Alchi paintings – as well as paintings from related monuments – were executed by Kashmiri painters. This assumption is supported not only by the depiction of contemporary Kashmiri temples on the Avalokiteśvara *dhoti* in the Alchi gSum-brtsegs (Goepper and Poncar 1996: 50–51), but also by the fact that this sophisticated – and in details somewhat mannered – painting style found no major successors

⁸ It is not clear if the style was actually restricted to the regions once belonging to the Guge kingdom, or if it also occurred in Purang. In addition there are obvious relations to the Alchi paintings, although the two groups of paintings can be easily differentiated.

in Ladakh or West Tibet.⁹ Considering the derivation of the painters, the painting style preserved at Alchi and related monuments can be called Kashmiri style.

In contrast to the Kashmiri paintings at Alchi, the somewhat crude and naive paintings of the Alchi lHa-khang So-ma and the temple at Shang-rong, the bCu-gcig-zhal at Wanla, the Seng-ge lHa-khang at Lamayuru, the Guru lHa-khang at Phyang and the cave at Saspol¹⁰ are certainly the products of a native Ladakhi painting school. The style of this group of monuments could uniformly be termed Early Ladakhi style. However, despite many similarities the paintings preserved in these temples are quite distinct from one another. Until now there is no fixed point for dating any of these temples and their decoration may have been accomplished over a long period as suggested by Béguin and Fournier (1986: 382–85).¹¹

An International Style of Painting?

The Early Ladakhi painting style shares many features with the Central Tibetan paintings of the 12th to 14th centuries. As similar paintings occur in Khara Khoto in Central Asia and Pagan in Burma as well, different collective names were used to indicate the relation of all these paintings. At the plenary session at the IATS, Graz 1995, the term “Middle Asian International Style, 12th–14th century” was used as a working title.

Given the clearly discernible distinctions between the regional styles, and their subdivisions, the concept of an International Style had to be dismissed. It is not a style that links the art of Central Tibet and Ladakh, of Pagan and Khara Khoto over a period of more than 200 years, but rather a number of characteristics that are shared internationally within a Buddhist environment but are represented in local variations. While shared characteristics do help us in defining the relationship between different groups of painting and sculpture (cf. e.g. Bautze-Picron’s approach in 1995/96 and this volume), the dissimilarities between the groups are crucial for defining stylistic groups and painting schools.

The characteristics under discussion are not solely of a stylistic nature, but include the composition, the typology of representation, the iconographic preferences as well as a number of isolated decorative motifs. It is rather the composition of the main elements in the painting which is the decisive element when attributing a painting to the period under discussion.

⁹ In fact, the monuments of Alchi, Mangyu and Sumda are found within a very restricted geographical area. In addition, it is clear that the time gap between the Alchi 'Du-khang and the Alchi gSum-brtsegs temples – and with it the occurrence of the Kashmiri style in Ladakh – cannot be much more than two generations (cf. Goepper and Poncar 1996: 18). Only a few later Ladakhi *mchod-rten* contain a very simplified variation of the Alchi style without the mannerism of the detail. These *mchod-rten* paintings could well have been done by local painters imitating the Alchi paintings. Despite different shapes and different decorations all early (pre-dGe-lugs-pa ?) Ladakhi *mchod-rten* are locally associated with Rin-chen-bzang-po.

¹⁰ For pictures of the Alchi lHa-khang So-ma cf. note 2 and Khosla 1979: pl. 41, Béguin and Fournier 1986: figs. 10–14; for Alchi Shang-rong Béguin and Fournier 1986: figs. 3–9, for the bCu-gcig-zhal at Wanla cf. note 27, for the Seng-ge lHa-khang at Lamayuru cf. Khosla 1979: pl. 53, Genoud 1982: ‘Lamayuru’ 1–6; for the Guru lHa-khang at Phyang cf. Genoud 1982: ‘Guru Lha khang’, Béguin and Fournier 1986: figs. 19–21; and for the cave at Saspol cf. Snellgrove and Skorupski 1980: col.pl. iv, figs. 69–73, Genoud 1982: ‘Saspol’, Béguin and Fournier 1986: fig. 22.

¹¹ Despite the scarcity of comparable material at that time, Béguin and Fournier rejected the early dating of these temples. They attribute the temple at Shang-rong to the end of the 14th century, the Guru lHa-khang to the first decades of the 15th century, the lHa-khang So-ma to the end of the 15th century and the cave of Saspol to the beginning of the 16th century.

Among the characteristics which are shared by all the distinctive stylistic groups alike, the following are the most relevant in the present context:

* The strict division of the decorated surface into rectangular units often clearly separated by a border. This border is usually not a simple line, but consists either of a row of petals or gems painted usually red, green, and blue. The border can also be defined by stylised rocks. Only in West Tibet a simple line does occur quite commonly.

* The throne-back is covered by a cushion decorated with scrolls and sometimes with knobs at the sides. The throne-back is often only represented by triangular projections at the height of the shoulder. In addition, the head-nimbus is incorporated into the throne structure.¹²

* The standing Bodhisattvas flanking the main image in a triad are usually shown in 3/4 profile for the body, but full profile for the feet. The toes are directed towards the central image. Sometimes the body is represented frontally, but the feet are shown in profile or the legs are in a dancing posture. The same position is also used for other standing deities, as the seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya on two Central Tibetan thangkas (Rossi and Rossi 1994: nos. 12 and 14).

* The standing Bodhisattvas wear a short *dhotī* that does not cover the knees, and a transparent long one reaching to the feet. Their high *uṣṇīṣa* is situated at the back of the head (only visible in profile). Typical are also the narrow pointed ornaments of the jewellery and helmet-like crowns.

* The paintings are without any notion of space. Behind and front are differentiated only by the front element covering the one behind. The bodies of the figures are only slightly shaded.

All these characteristics can have very distinctive regional variations as evident when comparing them in detail.¹³ Here I have chosen only those elements which differentiate Central Tibetan thangkas from the paintings preserved at Alchi and related monuments. Naturally the Alchi paintings cannot be confused with the Central Tibetan ones, as their general aesthetic is in any case completely different. Nevertheless, the two groups also share many motifs, for example the throne base or pedestal with square compartments containing grinning lions, elephants etc., the leogryphs and other animals flanking the sides of the throne, one placed on top of the other, or the *makara* on the horizontal top of the throne with the *garuḍa* holding their tails. Such motifs should be considered pan-Indian elements in Tibetan painting rather than having a distinctive regional origin. Nevertheless, these pan-Indian motifs are usually not differentiated from “the north-east Indian influences” one sees in the Central Tibetan paintings.

Alchi and the 'Bri-gung-pa

To complicate matters there is a clear influence from Central Tibet recognisable in some Alchi paintings, particularly in the depiction of the so-called Rin-chen-bzang-po. In a small *mchod-rten* inside the *chos-'khor* the “Rin-chen-bzang-po” is flanked by two Bodhisattvas (fig. 1).¹⁴ The triad of a Buddha, or his representative (a personification of his teaching) in the shape of

¹² In later paintings, or paintings more removed from the original source of this peculiarity, the cushion assumes the same function as a halo and often only the triangular projections and the scroll pattern recalls the original function of this element.

¹³ E.g. the Khara Khoto group with the wide un-Indian heads and where the sacred thread is often misunderstood, or the sTag-lung group with their peculiar iconography where the *bla-ma* is represented as Buddha.

¹⁴ This *mchod-rten* is numbered J2 in Snellgrove and Skorupski (1977: 78–9, col.pl. XIII).

an eminent *bla-ma*,¹⁵ flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas of considerably smaller size, is far from being common in West Tibetan painting. It neither occurs in the Tabo Main Temple¹⁶ nor in the Alchi gSum-brtsegs.¹⁷ This group therefore did not belong to the iconographical repertoire of West Tibet or Kashmir but reveals a foreign influence. In Alchi it first appears under the influence of the 'Bri-gung-pa school.

A lineage of the 'Bri-gung-pa is preserved in the third storey of the gSum-brtsegs and serves as a *terminus post quem* for the gSum-brtsegs paintings (cf. Goepper 1990). They cannot have been done before the last decades in the life of the 'Bri-gung Rin-po-che (1143–1217), the founder of this school, mentioned as the last in the lineage. A similar, but unclear, lineage consisting of seven figures is depicted in the small *mchod-rten* above the “Rin-chen-bzang-po”. In addition several Mahāsiddhas are represented at the sides of the composition. Although panels have been prepared beside the figures, their names were never filled in.

Taken alone, the formal characteristics displayed in the central “Rin-chen-bzang-po” are quite similar to the depiction of a sTag-lung-pa hierarch in Central Tibetan painting (fig. 2). In both cases the cape is used to frame the figure and moreover the details of the dress resemble each other. But the style of the two paintings is completely different. The way the cape is depicted in the *mchod-rten* is not common in the Alchi paintings, where the cape falls behind the body in an essentially triangular shape (cf. the donor depictions Goepper and Poncar 1996: 79, 110–15). In the gSum-brtsegs, even in the depiction of the lineage, the capes are of the Alchi type (Goepper and Poncar 1996: 216–7). By contrast, the lineage figures depicted in the small *mchod-rten* wear capes whose shape conforms to the Central Tibetan typology.

How can this change be explained? It seems that the gSum-brtsegs was decorated at a time when the 'Bri-gung-pa (or their reputation) had just arrived at Alchi. Their lineage is included, but the style of their depiction and the iconography of the whole temple follows the old Ladakhi school deriving from the work of Rin-chen-bzang-po. In Ladakh the centre of this old school was apparently Nyar-ma, where sKal-ldan-shes-rab, the founder of the Alchi 'Du-khang, and probably also Tshul-khrims-'od, the founder of the gSum-brtsegs and the large *mchod-rten*, were educated (cf. Denwood 1980: Inscription 3, lines 10–11 and the fragmentary inscription 7). The insertion of the 'Bri-gung-pa lineage may also explain the occurrence of two teachers (Dvags-po-'on and Dvags-po-chung-pa between sGam-po-pa and Phag-mo gru-pa) who do not occur elsewhere. In the small *mchod-rten* the Central Tibetan influence is not only evident in content, but also in some of the motifs (e.g. the triad, the round cape) and in the iconography (the lineage and the Mahāsiddhas well as the teacher as Buddha). It can quite safely be assumed that these changes are a result of the increasing influence of the 'Bri-gung-pa school.

To sum up, the triad of a teacher flanked by two Bodhisattvas, the manner in which “Rin-chen-bzang-po” is represented, the lineage above and the Mahāsiddhas at the sides of the

¹⁵ On the identification of an eminent *bla-ma* with the Buddha in a bKa'-bgyud context in 13th-century Tibet and an extremely interesting visual representation of this theme cf. Singer 1994: 116–7, fig. 21. For a better picture cf. Singer and Denwood 1997: fig. 308.

¹⁶ Cf. Klimburg-Salter 1997. A similar group is only present in the form of the clay sculptures in the cella; however, there the flanking Bodhisattvas are actually only the first pair of four images, the other two being located just in front of the cella.

¹⁷ Cf. Goepper and Poncar 1996. I also do not remember any such composition in the Alchi 'Du-khang, but this temple is not sufficiently published. There is also no evidence of this group in the related monuments of Mangyu and Sumda.

central figure can all be considered as resulting from Central Tibetan influence brought by the 'Bri-gung-pa. It is evident that under these circumstances it is highly unlikely that the central image is in fact a representation of Rin-chen-bzang-po.¹⁸ Despite the Central Tibetan influence on motifs and iconography the *mchod-rten* is painted in the typical Kashmiri style of Alchi.

Taking all these factors into consideration, it is most likely that the small *mchod-rten* is not much later than the gSum-brtsegs and the Great Stūpa, both of which were founded by Tshul-khrims-'od (Goepper 1993). With the latter it shares the depiction of the same four priests on the walls of the inner *mchod-rten* and the manner in which the "Rin-chen-bzang-po" is represented (Goepper 1993: fig. 14).¹⁹ In the Great Stūpa, too, "Rin-chen-bzang-po's" dress is depicted in the Central Tibetan way, but he is not surrounded by secondary figures and the painting is of exceptional quality. The small *mchod-rten* is probably the last monument in Alchi to be painted by Kashmiri painters.

Two Painted *mchod-rten*

There are many *mchod-rten* throughout Ladakh with a small painted chamber or a gateway containing paintings in a simple variant of the Alchi style.²⁰ These *mchod-rten* paintings could well have been done by local painters imitating the Kashmiri paintings found at Alchi and elsewhere. However, there are also two ruined *mchod-rten* preserving a distinctly different style, which is not related to the Alchi paintings. Both the poor state of preservation of the two *mchod-rten* paintings and my rather cursory documentation done in 1994 limit the present iconographic and stylistic analysis.

A nearly collapsed gateway *mchod-rten* stands near the hamlet of Alchi Shang-rong (fig. 3). The square chamber inside the dome is painted and has a lantern ceiling of six levels. The few remaining traces of painting on the ceiling show a chessboard pattern and a swastika pattern. On each of the side walls of the chamber four *jinās/tathāgatas* are represented in the centre of the wall, each flanked by two Bodhisattvas. All the painting is severely damaged and the colours have completely disappeared. The central panel is surrounded by the Thousand Buddha motif and some irregularly placed secondary deities. There is a horizontal row of eight to ten Buddhas above and below each of the panels, and beside the panels are placed five rows of two Buddhas each. The Buddhas perform the *mudrā* (and presumably had the colour) of the respective *tathāgata* presiding on the wall. At least in some cases, additional small Buddhas are represented in the upper corners of the central panel.

On the east wall the central panel with Vairocana (white, *dharmacakramudrā*) is flanked by an image of Śākyamuni to Vairocana's right and a priest to his left (fig. 4). The Ratnasamḥhava panel in the south has a small image of a white protector to Ratnasamḥhava's right, presumably a form of Vajrapāṇi,²¹ and a deity with two arms raised at the sides to his left (fig. 5).²² The

¹⁸ A detailed analysis of the paintings in the *mchod-rten* including the other walls would go beyond the present context and remains a future task.

¹⁹ The inscription found in the Great Stūpa only indicates that the gSum-brtsegs already existed. It gives no clue to the larger historical context or the identity of the priests depicted (cf. Goepper 1993: 112–5, 142–3).

²⁰ I have documented such *mchod-rten* in Nyarma, Tikse, Stok, Basgo, Alchi and Lamayuru and plan to publish some of them in a future article.

²¹ Mallmann 1986: 414. Otherwise only Vajrāṅkuśa, the protector in the eastern gate of the Vajradhātumaṅḍala, is painted white, but such an identification is beyond the present iconographical context.

Amitābha panel on the west wall has another priest flanked by six smaller figures to Amitābha's right. The four upper small figures flanking the priest are representations of four Buddhas. The unrecognisable figure to the right of the central panel, possibly also a priest, is also flanked by smaller figures, presumably Buddhas. In the north, Amoghasiddhi is flanked by a white Bodhisattva to his right and a (green ?) Tārā, holding an *utpala*, to his left.

It is evident that the *mchod-rten* is dedicated not to Vairocana, but to Akṣobhya, who is not depicted among the four *tathāgatas*. To the right of Vairocana, a form of Śākyamuni is represented performing *bhūmisparśamudrā* (fig. 4). He is dressed as a Buddha, sits on a lion throne and is flanked by two monks. It is thus Śākyamuni in the same iconography as Akṣobhya, who has shifted into the central position of the five families.

Stylistically these paintings share many of the characteristics of Central Tibetan paintings absent in the paintings of Alchi, for example the cushion at the throne-back (once finely decorated with a scroll pattern as visible behind Vairocana, fig. 4, and Amitābha), the flanking Bodhisattvas and their dress, the crown, the spatial organisation (as usual in West Tibet there are no borders), and the flat rendering of the figures.

Some features of these *mchod-rten* paintings are distinctive. The Bodhisattvas are standing in an extreme *tribhaṅga*, their hips pushed forwards. The *tathāgatas* and the Bodhisattvas wear crowns with extremely large fan-shaped knots at the sides. The *dhōī* of the *tathāgatas* covers the knees and is decorated with bands painted in a such way that they are parts of circles of which the centre is on the respective knee. On the Vairocana *dhōī* a rosette pattern is discernible capping the knee. At the top of the throne-back, at the height of the nose of the *tathāgata*, the thick horizontal bar with upturned ends terminates in a large flower.

The figure of Śākyamuni has the wide white band indicating an edge of the *saṃghāṭi* crossing the upper left arm. The way the two lion heads are placed at the sides of the lotus, the open mouth turned towards Śākyamuni, reveals that the painter was familiar with West Tibetan or Kashmiri painting as preserved at Tabo or Alchi. The lions at the sides of Vairocana's throne face towards the sides but are hardly visible. Despite the fragmentary state of the paintings it is clear that the painters did not just follow a strictly prescribed pattern, but could produce variations on a theme. This is visible in the depiction of the flanking Bodhisattvas. Each Bodhisattva to the sides of Vairocana holds its right hand in front of the breast, while to the sides of Ratnaśambhava, the Bodhisattvas are completely symmetrical. To the sides of Amoghasiddhi, the Bodhisattvas have the outside arm placed at the hip and the Bodhisattvas flanking Amitābha are shown frontally.

Another *mchod-rten* with a similar painting style – presumably from the same school and roughly contemporary with the first one – is found in a group of *mchod-rten* at the western end of Lamayuru village. Earlier it was also a gateway *mchod-rten*, but today the eastern end is closed by a wall. As with the *mchod-rten* at Alchi Shang-rong, the gateway is organised on the east-west axis.²³ The Lamayuru *mchod-rten* contains a chamber measuring *c.* 2.15 x 2.15 metres and is considerably larger than the Alchi Shang-rong *mchod-rten*. Of the original lantern ceiling only the outer three layers are preserved, its painting being fragmentary. In the corners fragments of a *pūrṇaghaṭa*-motive are discernible (fig. 11), and on the second level a simple swastika pattern with rosettes appears. The paintings on the walls are in poor condition and also

²² It might be Śaḍaḱṣarīlokeśvara, but the central arms are not recognisable. His throne appears to be flanked by lions.

²³ Present entrance towards the west at 285°.

fragmentary and only the north and south walls are largely preserved. Today only the colours white, grey, red, brown, bright brown, and blue (for the background) can be differentiated.

The composition of the deities on the side walls is similar to the *mchod-rten* of Alchi Shang-rong. In Lamayuru the section for the central deity takes up one third of the wall's total space (fig. 6). There are seven rows of four Buddhas to each side of the central panel, all Buddhas performing *bhūmisparśamudrā*. The rows of Buddhas are again interrupted by other deities, a larger one – occupying the space of four Buddhas – to the proper right of the central panel and a small one – taking one Buddha's space – to the proper left. A valance with *kīrtimukhas* goes all around the walls at the top (fig. 11).

On the east wall only a few traces of the paintings remains and the west wall is completely void of the original decoration. To the left of the central panel with Ratnasambhava on the south wall (fig. 6) a white Buddha performing *varadamudrā* and holding a *pātra* is represented (fig. 10). To the right a small goddess takes the space of one of the Buddhas. On the north wall Amoghasiddhi's panel (fig. 7) is flanked by a six-armed (?)²⁴ Bodhisattva to the Buddha's right and a small goddess to his left. The frontally depicted elephants on the throne pedestal have a red tusk and the lions are grinning. As all the small Buddhas are performing *bhūmisparśamudrā* it is quite certain that here, too, Akṣobhya is the main deity of the *mchod-rten*.

The style displays similar features to those discernible at Alchi Shang-rong, but there seems to be an even wider range of variation. These variations might also be due to the larger size of the paintings. Ratnasambhava wears a long *dhotī* with a rosette pattern at the knee (visible in fig. 9), while Amoghasiddhi wears a short *dhotī* and a scarf which floats over the arms and terminates in front of the legs (fig. 8). On the Ratnasambhava panel the horizontal upper edge of the throne-back terminates in a blossom or bud, while Amoghasiddhi has a different throne-back. The flanking Bodhisattvas are again standing in an extreme *tribhaṅga*. The crown-points seem to be somewhat wider than in Alchi.

Some features are different from the Alchi *mchod-rten* or have not been identified there. The Bodhisattvas have a trapezoid *ūrṇā*, their eyes are thin slits with a curved upper lid, eyes and eyebrow project over the edge of the face and a line is painted from the lower lip to the chin. A knot is clearly visible at the back of the *dhotī*, and a long ribbon hangs down from it along the leg. The Bodhisattvas flanking Amoghasiddhi have a turban-like *uṣṇīṣa* with the folds of the cloth clearly indicated (fig. 8). The Bodhisattva to the right of Amoghasiddhi has a wide scarf crossing in front of his hip, a loop of which is lying on his left arm held in front of the breast, while the Bodhisattva to the right of Ratnasambhava (fig. 9) has a knee-long lower *dhotī*. The latter has a helmet-like crown and he is holding an *utpala* with a sword on top. The bell-shaped tassels between the hair-locks on the shoulders are also remarkable.

The Thousand Buddhas (fig. 10) have a smiling mouth and again the white band is shown crossing the left upper arm. The depiction of the larger Buddha shows some additional unusual features: the three-parted *uṣṇīṣa*, the wavy edge of the *saṃghāṭi* crossing the breast, the wavy double line inside of the elbow and the band crossing the upper left arm and continuing over the left lower arm as if it would be a scarf.

A number of details of the *pūrṇaḡhaṭa* are also worth noting (fig. 11). The vase stands on a lotus, has a very narrow neck and a wide, flat rim, and is decorated with a scarf knotted at the

²⁴ The deity carries an arrow and a bow in the upper two hands raised at the sides and the middle arms are both in front of the body. However, it could also be that the deity is only four-armed.

sides. It is filled with large leafy greenery and two fan-shaped blossoms are depicted at the sides encircled by their own stems.

The Style

Despite the bad state of preservation the paintings are extremely clear and it is still possible to appreciate their workmanship. In addition the paintings display a large range of variation in details. It is particularly noteworthy that in the Alchi Shang-rong *mchod-rten* the nearby Kashmiri paintings have been quoted in stylistic as well as iconographic features. The representation of the lions has been noted above, but also the depiction of priests surrounded by Buddhas and other figures are features apparently taken from the Alchi paintings. The variations and quotations present in both *mchod-rten* are evidence of a fully developed painting school.

The paintings represented by the two *mchod-rten* not only have some of the internationally shared characteristics absent in the Alchi group of paintings; the composition, the style, and the iconography are also completely different. As we have seen, some of the features present in the two *mchod-rten* are clearly related to Central Tibetan painting, but several others are quite distinctive of the paintings preserved in the two *mchod-rten*. Let us consider some of these distinctive features.

Generally the central panels have a somewhat crowded appearance unknown in Central Tibetan paintings. Instead of the clearly separated spaces allotted to each figure or element of the composition, the different elements overlap, e.g. in fig. 9 the paw of the leogryph is in front of the Bodhisattva's left arm and the *makara* above is virtually treading on the Bodhisattva's nimbus. The flower terminating the horizontal bar of the throne-back is in front of the nimbus and the *makara*. The space above the throne-back is filled with the elaborate volutes from the tail of the *makara* (figs. 5 and 6).

The thick horizontal bar of the throne-back with the upturned ends and the large flowers (cf. fig. 5 and fig. 9) is unusual in painting. This feature is better known from carved wooden book covers, although there the construction of the throne-back is usually somewhat different. The throne construction of the *mchod-rten* appears to go back to the elaborate throne constructions made at rKyang-bu (cf. Vitali 1990: fig. 9) in 11th-century Central Tibet. The Amoghasiddhi at rKyang-bu also wears Bodhisattva dress and a long *dhoti*. It is particularly remarkable that the faces of the Bodhisattvas in the Lamayuru *mchod-rten* paintings (figs. 8, 9) share also the same facial features with the rKyang-bu and g.Ye-dmar sculptures. In both cases the faces are square and have a prominently marked chin.

The *dhoti* covering the knees is common in paintings of Nepalese origin or workmanship which are attributed to the 13th century (cf. Béguin 1990: no. 9, no. F [p. 176–7]; Kossak 1997: figs. 2, 4). These Nepalese paintings also share the throne construction and the crowded character. However, the motifs and features the Nepalese paintings share with the *mchod-rten* paintings in Ladakh are executed in a completely different manner. It is sufficient simply to compare the manner the *dhoti*-cloth is represented in the two cases to demonstrate that there is no direct relationship between the Nepalese paintings and the ones in Ladakh.

The band in a contrasting colour crossing the upper arm of a Buddha's *saṃghāṭi* becomes a common feature in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Tibetan painting – in Central Tibet as well as in West Tibet (cf. Klimburg-Salter 1997b). The probably earliest example, attributed to the “13th century or earlier”, with this feature that I have noticed is a small painting published in Rossi and Rossi (1994: no. 5). The roughly contemporary bronze Buddha that follows (Rossi

and Rossi 1994: no. 6) shows a perfect three-dimensional rendering of this feature. However, it is unclear to me where this feature derives from.

Considering these comparisons, it is evident that the two *mchod-rten* in Ladakh preserve a unique painting style with affinities to Central Tibet and, vaguely, to the southern regions of the Tibetan plateau, where there was a tradition of carving wooden book covers. However, the comparisons are not sufficient to attribute the origin of the paintings or the painters to a smaller geographic region. The quite strong affinities to the rKyang-bu Amoghasiddhi²⁵ and the common vocabulary shared with Central Tibetan paintings are, however, sufficient to attribute the origin of this painting style to Central or South Tibet.

The *mchod-rten* paintings cannot be considered a direct predecessor of the style preserved in the lHa-khang So-ma and the related monuments. These Early Ladakhi paintings adopt rather the much gentler rhythm usual for Central Tibetan paintings. Nevertheless the two *mchod-rten* represent a painting style in Ladakh which does not derive from the western regions but comes from the east, from Central or South Tibet. The paintings in the two *mchod-rten* are more refined than the rather simple Early Ladakhi paintings in temples such as the lHa-khang So-ma.

The Historical Setting

The small Alchi *mchod-rten* allows me to suggest when the new painting style reached lower Ladakh. It shows that a new type of painting, with a new style and iconography, became known at Alchi at the beginning of the 13th century. Certain elements of the new iconography were employed in the small *mchod-rten*, but the style was not yet adopted at Alchi.

Variants of the new painting style can be seen throughout West Tibet. It was used for the renovation of the Tholing Main Temple (the temple of Ye-shes-'od) as well as for the decoration of *mchod-rten* in Tabo (Klimburg-Salter, figs. 4–6, in this volume). The group of West Tibetan Thangka paintings, possibly produced in Spiti, published by Klimburg-Salter (1997b) are also evidence of the new style in West Tibet. The two *mchod-rten* introduced here represent a Ladakhi variety of this new painting style.

This new style is clearly related to Central Tibetan painting, the similarities being not solely stylistic, but also (or perhaps even more) formal and iconographic. Nevertheless, the West Tibetan varieties of this style are clearly distinct from the Central Tibetan ones.

Historical information about West Tibet in the 12th and 13th centuries is scarce and there is no clue as to how the different varieties of the new style are related to each other nor in which context they were developed. As can be seen in the example of Alchi, the new painting styles are most probably the result of the increasing influence of some Central Tibetan schools established in West Tibet. Of these schools, the 'Bri-gung-pa were apparently the most important. They are present in Alchi already by 1200–1220 and had contacts with the ruling houses of Purang, Guge and Ladakh throughout the 13th century (cf. Petech 1997: 240–42; Vitali 1996: 372–90, 408–25, 437–41). A bKa'-gdams-pa background can be assumed for at least some of the paintings published by Klimburg-Salter (1997b).

Given that the new style coincides with the influence of the newly founded schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the emergence of the new painting style in West Tibet can thus not predate the last quarter of the 12th century. Only in the 13th century is the increasing influence of the

²⁵ This relationship is particularly remarkable and should be borne in mind when comparing the sculptures of rKyang-bu and associated monuments with painting.

Central Tibetan schools also documented in textual sources. It is therefore most likely that the variants of the new style were used not earlier than the 13th century.

The two Ladakhi *mchod-rten* can be linked neither to a definite historical event nor to a particular artistic school. The rather unusual details of the paintings and the few comparable paintings also do not allow specific statements about the genesis of the influences or the origin of the painters. The two *mchod-rten* therefore can only be roughly attributed to the 13th century.

The style evidenced in the wall paintings of the two *mchod-rten* is possibly a predecessor of the distinct Early Ladakhi painting style mentioned above. This style occurs in usually small, single, square structures and shares all the characteristics of 12th–14th-century Central Tibetan painting. Probably the best known example from this group is the lHa-khang So-ma of Alchi. The bCu-gcig-zhal of Wanla, the Seng-ge lHa-khang at Lamayuru, the Guru lHa-khang at Phyang, another lHa-khang at Alchi Shang-rong and the cave above Saspol may be counted as belonging to that group.²⁶ The establishment of a date and an inner chronology for all these monuments in this style in Ladakh remains a task for the future.²⁷

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bautz-Picron, Claudine (1995/96) “Śākyamuni in Eastern India and Tibet in the 11th to the 13th Centuries.” *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 4, Journal of the Institute of Silk Road Studies, Kamakura, 355–408.
- Béguin, Gilles (1990) *Art ésotérique de l’Himālaya. Catalogue de la donation Lionel Fournier*. Musée national des arts asiatiques, Guimet, Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris.
- Béguin, Gilles and Lionel Fournier (1986) “Un Sanctuaire Méconnu de la Région d’Alchi.” *Oriental Art* XXXII (4), Winter 1986/87, 373–387.
- Denwood, Philip (1980) Temple and Rock Inscriptions of Alchi. In D.L. Snellgrove & T. Skorupski, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh, Vol. 2: Zangskar and the Cave Temples of Ladakh*, 118–163. Warminster.
- Francke, A.H. (1914) *Antiquities of Indian Tibet, Part I: Personal Narrative*, [A.S.I., New Imperial Series Vol. XXXVIII] Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta (repr. Asian Educational Services, New Delhi 1992).
- Genoud, Charles (1982) *Buddhist Wall-Painting of Ladakh*, Photographs: Takao Inoue, Genève [Edition Olizane].
- Goepper, Roger (1990) “Clues for a Dating of the Three-Storeyed Temple (Sumtsek) in Alchi, Ladakh.” *Asiatische Studien (Études Asiatique)* 44, no. 2 (1990): 159–175.
- Goepper, Roger (1993) “The “Great Stūpa” at Alchi.” *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. LIII, 1/2, Museum Rietberg Zurich: 111–143.
- Goepper, Roger and Jaroslav Poncar (1996) *Alchi, Ladakh’s hidden Buddhist Sanctuary. The Sumtsek*, London, Serindia Publications.

²⁶ In addition to the temples mentioned, the repainting in the Lo-tsa-ba lHa-khang, and the ’Jam-dpal lHa-khang within the Alchi *chos-’khor*, the paintings of the ‘Tsa-tsa Puri’ in Alchi Gomba (cf. Khosla 1979: 66–68, fig. 11, pl. 58) and a fabulous *mchod-rten* said to be at Nyoma in the upper Indus valley (cf. Francke 1914: 56–8) should also be considered.

²⁷ Béguin and Fournier (cf. above note 11) have attempted such a chronology but had no access to any of the preserved temples. Of the early Ladakhi temples, the bCu-gcig-zhal at Wanla appears to be the most promising. It not only has most of its original decoration intact, but also preserves an interesting founding inscription. The publication of the Wanla inscription and its implications for the history, art history, and cultural history of Ladakh is in preparation.

- Henss, Michael (1994) "A Unique Treasure of Early Tibetan Art: The Eleventh Century Wall Paintings of Drathang Gonpa." *Orientalia*, June 1994, Hong Kong, 48–53.
- Henss, Michael (1997) "The Eleventh-Century Murals of Drathang Gonpa." *Tibetan Art. Towards a definition of Style*, eds. J.C. Singer and P. Denwood, 160–69.
- Khosla, Romi (1979) *Buddhist Monasteries in the Western Himalaya*. Kathmandu [Ratna Pustak Bhandar].
- Klimburg-Salter, Deborah E. (1982) *The Silk Route and The Diamond Path. Esoteric Buddhist Art On The Trans-Himalayan Trade Routes*, Los Angeles.
- Klimburg-Salter, Deborah E. (1994) "Tucci Himalayan Archives Report, 2. The 1991 Expedition to Himachal Pradesh." *East and West*, Vol.44 (1), 13–82.
- Klimburg-Salter, Deborah E. (1997a) *Tabo, a Lamp for the Kingdom*, Milan.
- Klimburg-Salter, Deborah E. (1997b) "A Thangka Painting Tradition from the Spiti Valley." *Orientalia*, Nov. 1997.
- Kossak, Steven M. (1997) "Sakya Patrons and Nepalese Artists in Thirteenth-Century Tibet." *Tibetan Art. Towards a definition of Style*, eds. J.C. Singer and P. Denwood, 26–37.
- Kreijger, Hugo (1997) "Mural Styles at Shalu." *Tibetan Art. Towards a definition of Style*, eds. J.C. Singer and P. Denwood, 170–77.
- Mallmann, Marie-Thérèse de (1986) *Introduction à l'Iconographie du Tāntrisme Bouddhique*, Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient J. Maisonneuve.
- Pal, Pratapaditya (1982) *A Buddhist Paradise. The Murals of Alchi Western Himalayas*, Photographs by Lionel Fournier, Basel.
- Petech, Luciano (1997) "Western Tibet: Historical Introduction." *Tabo, A Lamp for the Kingdom*, ed. D.E. Klimburg-Salter, London.
- Pjotrowskij, Michail ed. (1993) *Die schwarze Stadt an der Seidenstrasse. Buddhistische Kunst aus Khara Khoto (10.-13. Jahrhundert)*. Milan.
- Ricca, Franco and Lionel Fournier (1996) "Notes Concerning the *Mgon Khan* of *Źwa-lu*." *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. LVI (3/4), Museum Rietberg, Zurich, 343–363.
- Rossi, Anna Maria and Fabio Rossi (1994) *Selection 1994*, London.
- Singer, Jane Casey (1994) "Painting in Central Tibet, ca. 950–1400." *Artibus Asiae* LIV (1/2), Museum Rietberg, Zurich, 87–136.
- Singer, Jane Casey (1997) "Taklung Painting." *Tibetan Art. Towards a definition of Style*, eds. J.C. Singer and P. Denwood, 52–67.
- Singer, J.C. and P. Denwood eds. (1997) *Tibetan Art. Towards a definition of Style*. London.
- Snellgrove, David L. and Tadeusz Skorupski (1977) *The cultural heritage of Ladakh*, Vol.I, Central Ladakh, Warminster [Aris and Phillips Ltd].
- Snellgrove, David L. and Tadeusz Skorupski (1980) *The cultural heritage of Ladakh*, Vol.II, Zangskar and the Cave Temples of Ladakh, Warminster.
- Vitali, Roberto (1990) *Early Temples of Central Tibet*, London: Serindia.
- Vitali, Roberto (1996) *The Kingdoms of Gu.ge Pu.hrang according to the mNga'.ris rGyal.rabs by Gu.ge mkhan.chen Ngag.dbang grags.pa*. Tho.ling gtsug.lag. khang lo.gcig.stong 'khor.ba'i rjes.dran.mdzad sgo'i go.sgrig tshogs.chung, Dharamsala.



Fig. 1: The “Rin-chen-bzang-po” in the small *mchod-rten* of the Alchi *chos-'khor* (CL94 18a,19)



Fig. 2: The sTag-lung master Tashipel, c. 1200 (detail of Singer 1997: fig. 37)



Fig. 3: The collapsing *mchod-rten* at Alchi Shang-rong (CL94 14,35)

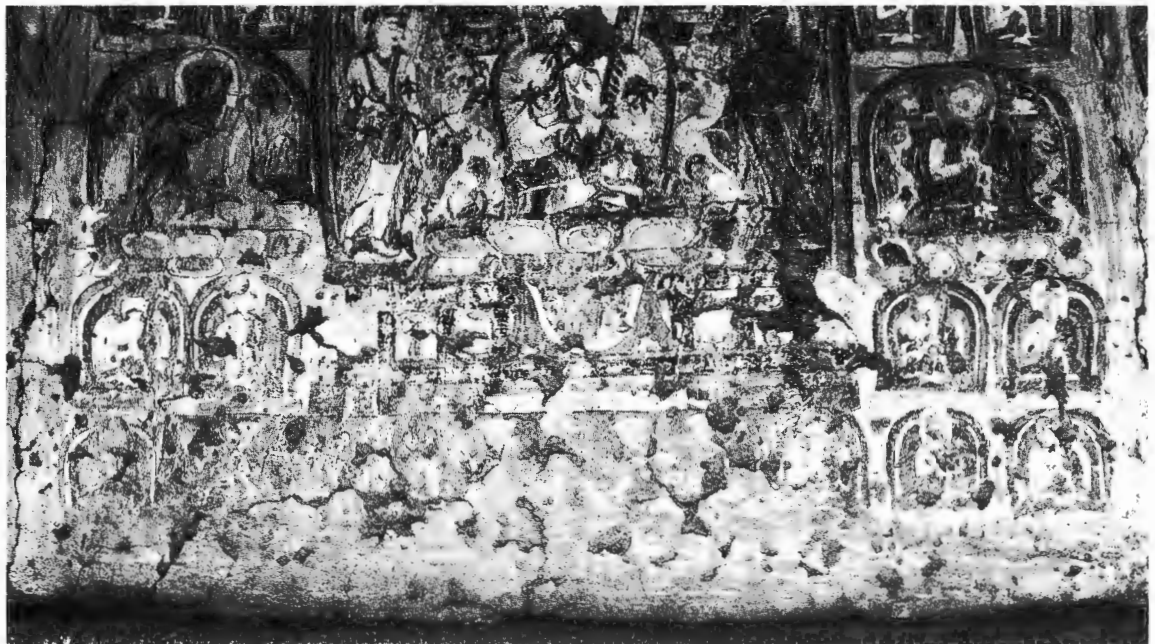


Fig. 4: The east wall of the *mchod-rten* at Alchi Shang-rong with Vairocana (CL94 20,3)

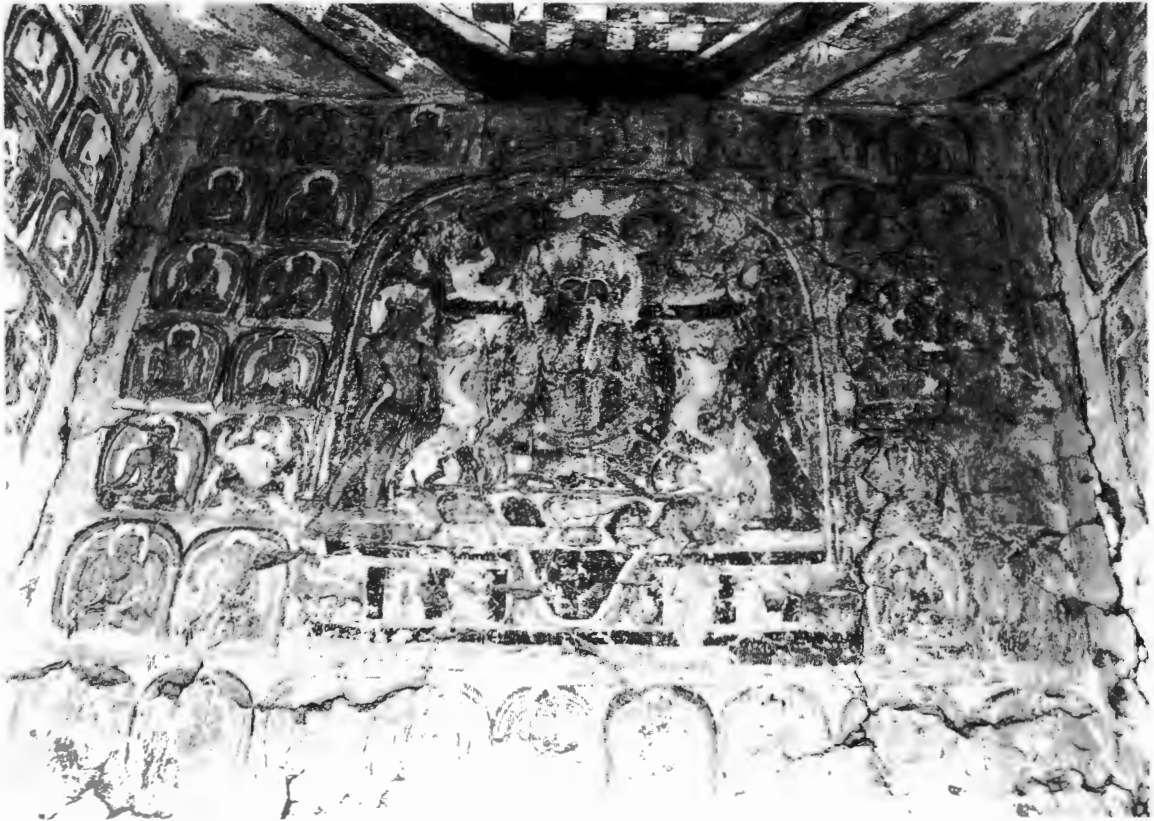


Fig. 5: The south wall of the *mchod-rten* at Alchi Shang-rong with Ratnasambhava (CL94 20,4)



Fig. 6: South wall of the gateway *mchod-rten* at Lamayuru with Ratnasambhava (CL94 28,5)



Fig. 7: The central panel with Amoghasiddhi flanked by two Bodhisattvas, north wall of the gateway *mchod-rten* at Lamayuru (CL94 28,9)



Fig. 8: Bodhisattva to the proper right of Amoghasiddhi, north wall of the gateway *mchod-rten* at Lamayuru (CL94 28,10)

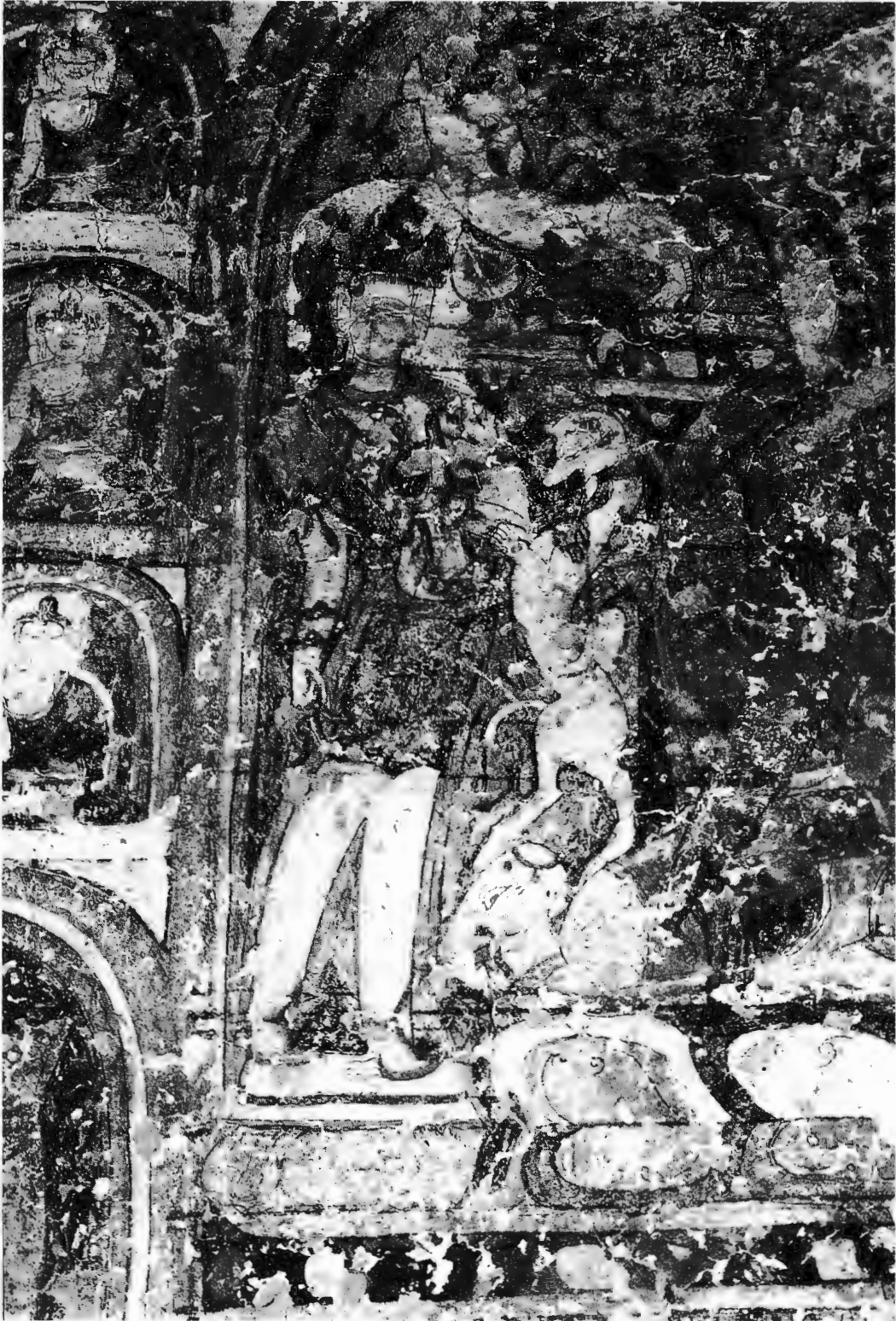


Fig. 9: Bodhisattva to the proper right of Ratnasambhava, south wall of the gateway *mchod-rten* at Lamayuru (CL94 28,12)



Fig. 10: Detail of the Thousand Buddhas and Ratnasambhava/Śākyamuni, south wall of the gateway *mchod-rten* at Lamayuru (CL94 28,13)



Fig. 11: A *pūrṇaghaṭa* is painted in the far corners of the lantern ceiling of the gateway *mchod-rten* at Lamayuru, a valance with *kīrtimukha* decorates the upper edge of the walls (CL94 28,14)

ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN
PHILOSOPHISCH-HISTORISCHE KLASSE
DENKSCHRIFTEN, 267. BAND

Proceedings of the
7th Seminar of the International
Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995

General Editor: Ernst Steinkellner

Volume VII

The Inner Asian International Style 12th–14th Centuries

Papers Presented at a Panel of the
7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies
Graz 1995

Edited by

Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter and Eva Allinger



VERLAG DER ÖSTERREICHISCHEN AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN
WIEN 1998

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
Deborah E. KLIMBURG-SALTER, Is there an Inner Asian International Style 12th to 14th Centuries? Definition of the Problem and Present State of Research	1
Claudine BAUTZE-PICRON, The Elaboration of a Style: Eastern Indian Motifs and Forms in Early Tibetan (?) and Burmese Painting	15
Ursula TOYKA-FUONG, The Influence of Pāla Art on 11th-century Wall-paintings of Grotto 76 in Dunhuang	67
Kira SAMOSSIUUK, Two Tibetan Style thangkas from Khara Khoto	97
Eva ALLINGER, The Green Tārā in the Ford-Collection: Some Stylistic Remarks	107
Heather STODDARD, The “Indian Style” <i>rGya lugs</i> on an Early Tibetan Book Cover	121
Amy HELLER, The Caves of gNas mjal che mo	133
Christian LUCZANITS, On an Unusual Painting Style in Ladakh	151