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&
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On the cover: The Wanla temple in Lower Ladakh (photo Christian Luczanits)

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THE WANLA BKRA SHIS GSUM BRTSEGS*

CHRISTIAN LUCZANITS

Wanla is a village in Lower Ladakh located at the confluence of two streams in a side valley between Khalatse and Lamayuru. The valley opens out at this point and is relatively flat and fertile. The village houses are placed on the slopes around a prominent rock hill that once boasted an impressive castle. Today the ridge of the rock is dominated by the lofty structure of the three-storeyed Wanla temple and the rather clumsy residential building built roughly 20 years ago on one side (Pl. 89). Of the castle, which once surrounded the temple, only two towers from different periods and a number of walls remain.

The Wanla temple is, in my opinion, one of the most underestimated monuments in the context of academic research on Tibetan and in particular Ladakhi history. In Wanla not only is a practically complete monument of the founding period preserved, but the temple even contains an extensive inscription relating to the background of its foundation. Although the importance of this inscription has been well known since Francke's work on the "Antiquities of Indian Tibet" and several authors have used information from the inscriptions, it has never been published.¹ Together with the art historical

* I am grateful to Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter and Eva Allinger for their comments on a previous version of this article and to Gerald Kozicz and Holger Neuwirth (Technical University Graz) for discussing the architecture of the temple at length with me. My research on early Buddhist art in the western Himalayas is since years generously funded by the Austrian *Fonds zur Förderung wissenschaftlicher Forschung* (FWF) and since recently also by a research grant of the Austrian Programme for Advanced Research and Technology (APART) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

¹ Francke (Francke 1914: 97) was told by his monk informant in Lamayuru that the Wanla inscription records that the Wanla temple, the Seng ge sngang (Seng ge *lha khang*) of Lamayuru, a ruined temple at Chigtan, and the Lha bcu rtse *lha khang* at Kanji are of the same period called "Bka' gdams pa time". Consequently Francke sent 'a man' to record the Wanla inscription and afterwards suspected a second inscription as, in his interpretation, the inscription copied is not from the "Bka' gdams pa time" but from the Muslim period. Francke already recognised the importance of the inscription (Francke 1926: 273), but a number of erroneous readings led him to some curious interpretations. Francke saw in the Wanla inscription "the only Tibetan record of the Kashmir expeditions against Ladakh in the fifteenth century", and he

evidence, Wanla provides information on an otherwise practically unknown period of Ladakh's history, the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. This information also appears to be highly relevant for the history of Tibetan Buddhism in general, as the art preserved at Wanla also provides evidence of the reception and adaptation of Central Tibetan Buddhist art in the western Himalayas.

This article aims to demonstrate the relevance of the Wanla temple for Western Tibetan history and art history on the basis of the inscription and the artistic decoration of the temple. After an introduction covering the historical context of the temple I will give an impression of the art the temple contains and its relevance for a discussion of painting styles and school attribution in Tibetan art. My colleague Gerald Kozicz discusses the architecture of the building in a parallel article in this volume. A more comprehensive discussion of the art and architecture of Wanla, including a detailed description of temple's contents and its art historical significance as well as an edition of the Wanla inscription will be published in the near future.

Historical Context

In the chronicles of Ladakh Wanla is mentioned for the first time when the Ladakhi king Lha chen Nag lug is said to have built a castle at Wanla in a tiger year, and one in Kha la rtse in a dragon year (Francke 1926: 36, 96-97).² This event occurred at some point in the 12th century.³ It may well be that parts of the present day ruins go back to this original foundation (Pl. 89). However, while it is rather unlikely that the remaining fragmentary woodcarvings on a balcony of one tower are remnants of the original foundation, it is also not entirely impossible (Pl. 90).

At the time of the events described in the Wanla inscription the castle already existed and was home to the four sons of a minister of

placed the inscription in a Muslim context as he sees what he takes to be Muslim names (e.g. A li erroneously read for the place name A lci) occurring side by side with Tibetan ones.

Vitali published apparently hastily copied excerpts of the inscription and drew on its historical information (Vitali 1996: 385-90).

² *rgyal po des stag gi lo la wan lar mkhar rtsigs / 'brug gi lo la kha la rtse* (L. Ms. *kha la rtse mkhar brtsigs so*) *rtsigs so* // (Francke 1926: 36).

³ According to Francke King Lha chen Nag lug ruled ca. 1110-40 (ibid.: 96).

an unnamed government in the Wanla valley termed *rgya shing*. The eldest son, a certain 'Bhag dar skyab, is the hero of the inscription and the founder of the temple. He was first appointed leader of the district (*mi sde'i gtso bo skos*) and at the age of thirty took over the throne of the small kingdom around Wanla. Consequently he is said to have conquered the surrounding region from Wakha, Kanji and Suru in the south to Alchi, Mangyu and Ensa (?) in the north, i.e. a substantial region of Lower Ladakh.⁴ He further is said to have been offered the throne of Kashmir (*kha ce'i yul*, v38)⁵ and to have collected tribute from the northern nomads. Finally, the Wanla Bkra shis gsum brtsegs temple, as the temple is described in the inscription, is erected at the centre of the castle.

It is evident from the inscription that the small Alchi dominion, which made it possible for the monk descendants of the 'Bro clan to erect numerous magnificent temples of imported workmanship of highest quality, no longer existed by then. As I will specify below, these events occur in an otherwise completely obscure period of Ladakh's history between the foundation of the Alchi group of monuments,⁶ the latest of which are to be attributed to the early 13th century, and the establishment of the kingdom of Ladakh in the early 15th century (Petech 1977: 20-22). Mnga' ris was not part of the two censuses carried out in Tibet in 1268 and 1288 by the Mongol Emperors of China, and not directly under Sa skya pa administration (Petech 1977: 22).

Sculpture and Painting

The Wanla temple is three-storeyed and contains three niches for large standing sculptures at the back (south) and the sides. The tem-

⁴ Wanla inscription verses 36-39: *wa kha mkhar po che dang kan ji nam su ru // en sa a lci mang rgyu mnga' 'og mdzad // kha ce'i {line 14} yul du skyod nas khri dpon mnga' gsol byas // byang gyi ru ba bzhi nas khral thud mang du sdus //*

Currently it is still unclear to me if *nam* between *kan ji* and *su ru* is a place name in its own right or should be added to one of the two others given (*kan ji nam* or *nam su ru*).

⁵ It is rather unlikely that the regions closer to Ladakh (Dras or Kargil area) were already Muslim by that time (cf. Holzwarth 1997).

⁶ This designation refers to the early temples of Alchi, Mangyu and Sumda that share a particularly high quality and style. Of the several temples of this group the Alchi *gsum brtsegs* is the best known.

ple is entered via a veranda, the original construction and ornamentation of which is still preserved (Pl. 91). The second storey is an open gallery entered via a window-like door from the roof of the veranda. The third storey is a lightweight construction lantern simply placed on the ceiling of the temple's second storey. Although there is no apparent structural connection between the lantern and the remaining building, the style of the preserved paintings on the walls of the lantern as well as the reference in the inscription to three storeys in the temple's name (*Bkra shis gsum brtsegs*) prove that the lantern was added at a very early stage (for a more detailed description and plans of the architecture cf. Gerald Kozicz in this volume).⁷

The three niches contain three large standing clay sculptures with Avalokiteśvara in his eleven-headed form taking the central position (Pls. 93, 96). Today the Wanla temple is called "Bcu gcig zhal" after this approximately 5 m high image. An image of an originally silver-coloured Bodhisattva Maitreya (only in 1996 was this image repainted in white, Pl. 94) is placed inside the left-hand niche (to the proper right of the central image) and Śākyamuni in the right-hand niche (the side images are 3.40 m high, Pl. 95). A group of contemporary paper-mâché sculptures is placed on the gallery to either side of the main image. All three storeys including the niches are covered with largely contemporary murals, which to a large extent are hardly visible due to a thick coating of soot. In addition, the bookshelf flanking the altar in front of the main niche obscures a considerable section of the murals. It is for these reasons that it has not yet been possible to conduct a comprehensive survey of the murals.

The bases and capitals of the pillars, the brackets, as well as the veranda and the door are decorated with woodcarvings. The founding inscription is located immediately to the left of the Maitreya niche (left-hand niche, Pl. 94), while a donor assembly is depicted on the opposite sidewall (to the right of the Śākyamuni niche).

As apparent from the architecture and the name, the Wanla temple can to a considerable extent be understood as a reference to the Alchi monuments, particularly the *gsum brtsegs*. However, the architecture, the sculptures and paintings all display enormous technical and cultural divergences.

⁷ At the current stage of documentation it cannot be ascertained if the third storey was already part of the original design or a slightly later addition.

Iconography

In the sculptural programme at Wanla the central eleven-faced and eight-armed form of the 'Great Compassionate One' (Thugs rje chen po) is invoked for remedy of daily misery and can therefore be understood as acting in the present. Together with the flanking future and past Buddhas the sculptures simply signify the continuity or continuous accessibility (past, present and future) of the Buddha's teaching. Stylistically roughly contemporary with the clay images is a group of paper-mâché sculptures representing a Bka' brgyud pa lineage headed by Vajradhara (Pls. 96, 97). These sculptures were apparently made for flanking the heads of Avalokiteśvara in the gallery.

This rather simple and clear sculptural programme contrasts starkly with the intellectually conceived programme of the Alchi *gsum brtsegs* centring on Maitreya. As an inscription in the Maitreya niche notes, the three Bodhisattvas of the *gsum brtsegs*—Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Maitreya—are considered to be representations of body, speech and mind, and the three images are set up to help believers to attain *nirmāṇa-*, *sambhoga-*, and *dharmakāya* respectively (Denwood 1980: inscription 6). Although this interpretation, written probably slightly later than the construction of the temple by a monk named Grags ldan 'od, must be considered problematic it nevertheless proves the highly intellectual concept underlying the art of Alchi (cf. Goepper and Poncar 1996: 46-48). In fact, the whole decoration of the monument appears to follow an over-all concept, albeit in part inconsistently pursued.⁸

Like the sculptural decoration, the murals of Wanla, too, are evidence of a marked shift from earlier iconographic programmes such as those at Tabo or Alchi. The inscription mentions that all aspects of the Buddhist teachings of the time—'old and new'—are present in the decoration assembled in the extensive pantheon covering all the walls. Indeed, it is a mixture of deities that had been prominent in earlier western Himalayan monuments and deities of iconographic themes 'new' to the region, which characterises the decoration. For

⁸ I refer here to Rob Linrothe's first attempt at an analysis of the programme (Linrothe 1996).

the purpose of this article it is sufficient to prove this point with a few examples.⁹

Among the iconographic features already known from earlier monuments in the region, particularly from Alchi, the following are of note. As at Alchi, Mahākāla, flanked by protectresses, takes the position above the two doors (Pl. 32). Of the *maṇḍala* attributed to the *yoga*-Tantra class, the dominant class in the earlier art in the region, the Vajradhātumaṇḍala has a secondary position among the temple's paintings and also occurs as the root *maṇḍala* of the Sarvadharmapariśodhanatantra as described by Vajravarmaṇ. A more prominent position, to the right of the main niche behind the bookshelf, is given to the Dharmadhātuvāgīśvaramaṇjuśrīmaṇḍala, and the four-armed Maṇjuśrī, so common in Alchi, is also represented prominently on a side wall of the niche of Śākyamuni (Pl. 33). This distribution reflects the gradual shift from Vairocana to Maṇjuśrī as is apparent in the Alchi group of monuments and at Dunkar; at both sites there is a temple dedicated to Maṇjuśrī. In addition, already familiar themes are the Life of the Buddha, the Mahāsiddhas and several representations of Bka' brgyud pa lineages.¹⁰

The 'new' themes are largely well known from 13th century Central Tibetan painting and/or stem from the *anuttarayoga*-Tantras, which were apparently not represented in the western Himalayas until the thirteenth century. These themes are either represented as complete palace *maṇḍala*, as e.g. a Vajrayoginī-, a Cakrasaṃvara- (Pl. 34), and a Mahākāruṇikamaṇḍala, or in 'horizontal' fashion with a large central deity and the secondary deities placed around it. Among those depicted in the latter fashion are Amitāyus, other variants of Cakrasaṃvara, Hevajra and numerous fierce deities. Among other themes known from Central Tibetan 13th-14th-century thangka painting are the different Buddhas flanked by Bodhisattvas, Śākyamuni in the Bodhgayā temple, and Bodhisattvas with their secondary deities (Pl. 35). In addition, a large representation of Guru Rinpoche occupies a prominent position on the left-hand wall of the main niche.

⁹ At the current stage of documentation and due to the blackened condition of the paintings and the fact that they are obscured by furniture the complete programme of the temples decoration can not yet be ascertained.

¹⁰ On the introduction of the Mahāsiddhas and lineage representations in the latest phase at Alchi cf. Luczanits (1998).

Regarding the distribution of the different themes it can only be said to date that *anuttarayoga* themes tend to be found on the ground floor close to the main image, while paradise and assembly depictions are particularly frequent in the upper storeys.

In contrast to Alchi, the distribution of the themes identified so far seems not to follow an integrated iconographic programme for the whole temple. Besides the sculptures, only some of the main themes, such as the Life of the Buddha represented along the back of the temple, are represented in relation to the architecture and its layout. Most of the deities surrounded by secondary figures are placed in unevenly distributed squares next to each other covering the whole wall surface as if smaller and larger thangkas were placed side by side. This distribution of the iconographic themes is of course well known from the Alchi *lha khang so ma* and related temples.

Style

The Wanla inscription notes that the woodcarvings are 'as if made by Nepalis' but from the context of this statement in the inscription it appears to be doubtful that the paintings were also conceived after a Nepali model.¹¹ Instead, the phrase demonstrates that the founder had to rely on local workmanship and that this workmanship based itself on foreign models. This is exactly what appears to have happened at Wanla.

Stylistically the Wanla paintings are clearly no longer part of a western Himalayan tradition, but their style is based on Central Tibetan thangka painting attested from the 12th century onwards (cf. particularly Pl. 35). This school of painting is the result of a strong Central Tibetan influence, which can be observed throughout the region from the end of the 12th century at the earliest, and throughout the 13th century. The final shift in the painting tradition must have occurred sometime in the middle of the 13th century, when the paint-

¹¹ Verses 59-63: *skyes bu g.yas g.yon g#is dang ya them ma them dang || mchod pa'i {line 22} lha mo rnaṃs dang rin chen shar ru dang || rta babs chos kyi 'khor lo bkra shis brdzas brgyad rnaṃs || rkos dang 'bur ma lasogs hal po'i bzo' dang 'tshungs || 'og {line 23} gzhing bkod pa khyad 'pha[g]s gsar rnying lha 'tshogs bzhengs ||*

ers of Alchi where not available anymore and the central Tibetan Bka' rgyud schools became dominant in the west.¹²

In comparison to Central Tibetan examples and some thirteenth century examples in the western Himalaya,¹³ the Wanla paintings are of much simpler workmanship. This flat and rather naïve painting style is representative of similar Central Tibetan-derived local styles evidenced at several places, particularly but not exclusively in Lower Ladakh. To mention only those within the presumed territory of the Wanla kingdom: the *lha khang so ma* of Alchi and another *lha khang* at Alchi Shang rong,¹⁴ the Seng ge sngang at Lamayuru, and a small temple at Kanji.¹⁵ Although no date for any of these local styles has been established and an inner chronology for the Ladakhi monuments sharing this particular kind of painting has still to be established,¹⁶ Wanla appears to be an early representative of this local style.

School and Date

I have shown elsewhere (Luczanits 1998) that the latest phase of the early Alchi temples, i.e. the *stūpa* and temples attributable to the early 13th century, attests to a quite prominent Central Tibetan influence apparently brought to the region by the 'Bri gung pa school. Roughly at the same time the Ladakhi king Dngos grub mgon pa-

¹² For a more detailed discussion of this shift towards a new style cf. Luczanits (1998).

¹³ E.g. the renovation period paintings of the Tholing Main Temple and a number of *mchod rten* at Tabo (cf. Klimburg-Salter 1998: figs. 4-8), and various *mchod rten* in Ladakh (cf. Luczanits 1998).

¹⁴ At Alchi temples and *mchod rten* continued to be built throughout the 13th and 14th centuries, as evidenced by e.g. the alterations to the veranda of the 'du khang, the *lha khang so ma*, and a number of other *mchod rten* and monuments at different sites all over the village.

¹⁵ 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 magnificent *mchod rten* said to be at Nyoma in the upper Indus valley (cf. Francke 1914: 56-8) are to be considered as well. Variations of this style are also found in the Guru *lha khang* at Phyang and the cave above Saspol.

¹⁶ Béguin and Fournier (1986) have attempted such a chronology but did not gain access to all of the preserved temples. Of the early Ladakhi temples, the Bcu gcig zhal at Wanla appears to be most promising for achieving an absolute date for this painting style.

tronised 'Jig rten mgon po in 1215 and laid down "the rule that Ladakhi novices should go to dBus and gTsang for higher studies and ordinations." (Petech 1977: 166).

The Wanla inscription clearly sets the foundation and usage of the temple in a Bka' rgyud pa context by mentioning that among the decorations the Bka' rgyud pa *bla ma* are represented as being headed by Vajradhara.¹⁷ The inscription most probably refers to the sculptures presumed to sit on the gallery flanking Avalokiteśvara's heads. Among these paper-mâché sculptures only the first five figures, e.g. Marpa on Pl. 97, are clearly identifiable while the later *bla ma* show little differentiation. In painting the lineage is represented several times, two of them preserved completely. There the lineage consists of twelve (ground floor, Pl. 35) or thirteen figures (gallery, the beginning of the lineage is shown on Pl. 98).

In a second part of the inscription, the Bka' rgyud pa context is further narrowed down to the 'Bri gung pa. A *bla ma* named Shag kya rgyal mtshan, and with a partly illegible title, is invited to the place to deliver teachings.¹⁸ However, I have not yet been able to define the exact relationship of this second part of the inscription to the main part.

It is clear from the inscription that the Wanla temple was founded and decorated in a Bka' rgyud pa, but not necessarily only 'Bri gung pa, environment. In contrast to Alchi, where the first 'Bri gung pa influence is only recognisable by certain new iconographic themes represented (e.g. the depiction of the Mahāsiddhas and a lineage¹⁹), in Wanla the Bka' rgyud pa influence is visible in almost all parts of the decoration. Besides the numerous new iconographic themes the painting style and the composition (apparently partly deriving from thangka models) also show a strong dependence on Central Tibetan painting. It thus is to be expected that most of Wanla's decoration can be considered Bka' rgyud pa. However, this can only be proved when the various individual iconographic themes depicted are studied in detail.

¹⁷ V70-71: *rdo rje 'chang gis dbu' mdzad da ltar bzhugs {line 26} kyi bar || bka' rgyud bla ma rnam s kyi sku gzugs thog mar bzhugs ||*

¹⁸ V118-20: *o # dar dang 'o zer 'bum nyis pho rtsal phun sum tshogs || thu cungs shag kya rgyal tshan 'bri gung byon nas ni || chos rje'i zhabs pad blugs nas chos khrid mang du {line 44} zhus ||.*

¹⁹ Cf. n. 10.

From the information contained in the inscription and the artistic decoration of the Wanla Temple it is not yet possible to propose a precise date for its foundation. However, the range within which the temple could have been founded is relatively narrow. Considering the severe cultural shift and the lineage represented in the paintings the earliest possible date would be the end of the 13th century. On the other hand a considerable gap between the events mentioned in the inscription and the foundation of the kingdom of Ladakh in the early 15th century has to be expected, as none of these events narrated in the inscription is recorded in a historical text. Thus, the foundation of the Wanla temple most likely took place sometime during the first half of the fourteenth century.

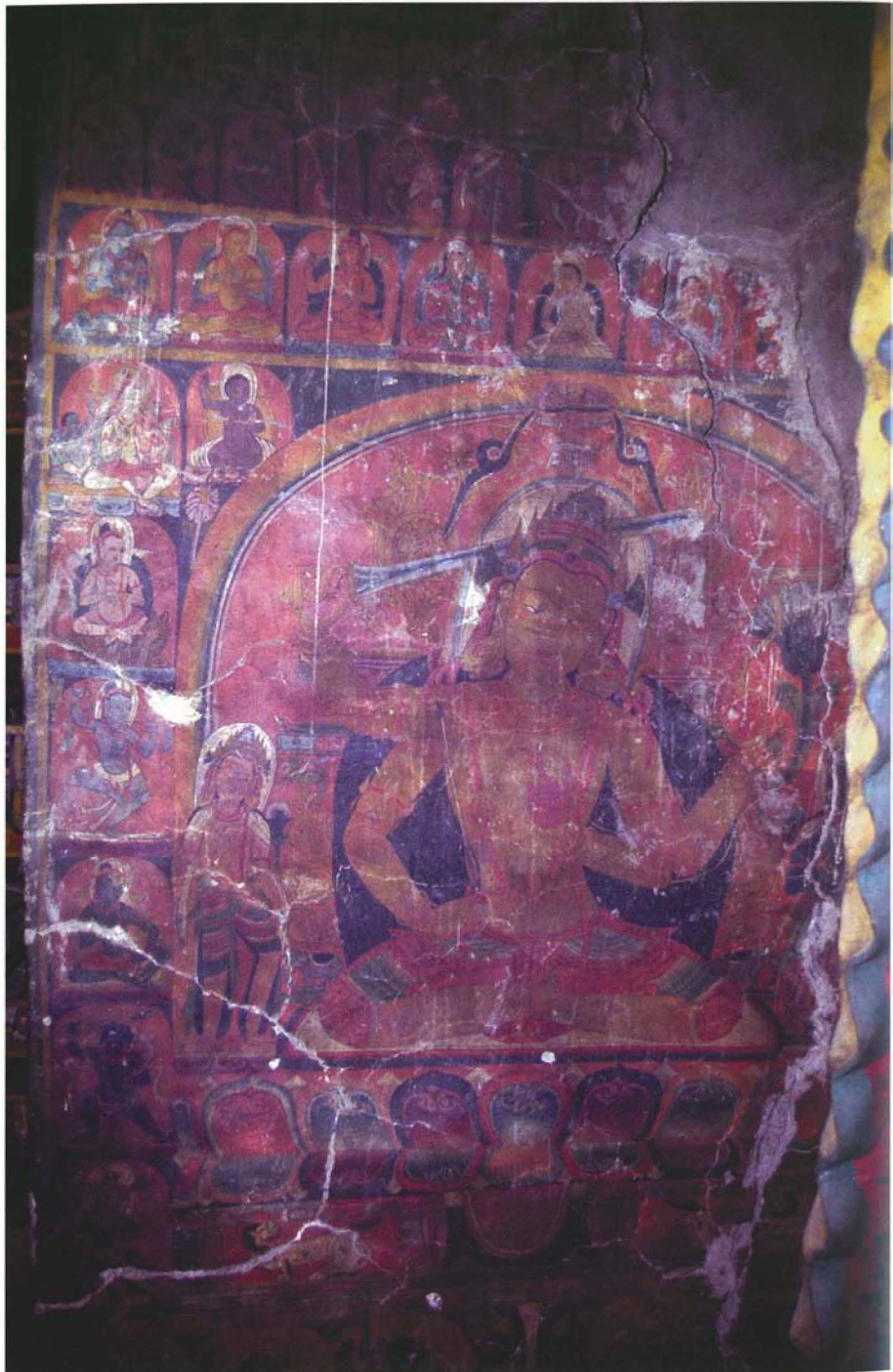
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32 Mahākāla flanked by riding goddesses above the door in the Wanla temple (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 73,12)



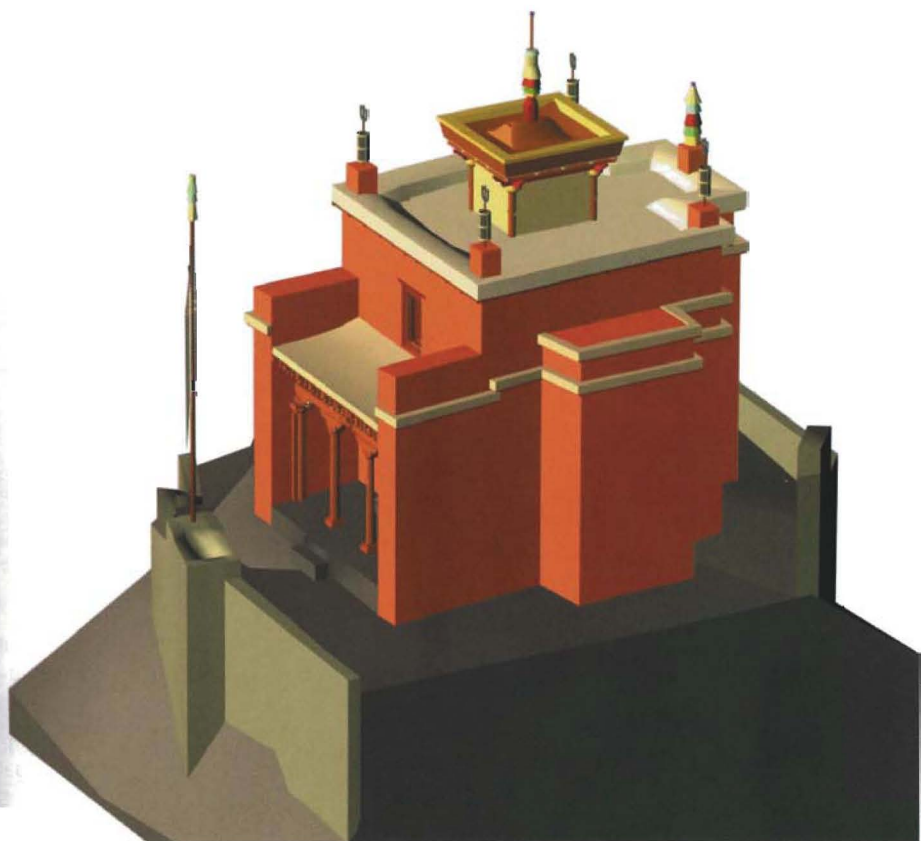
33 Four-armed Mañjuśrī in the Śākyamuni niche in the Wanla temple (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 72,5)



34 Cakrasamvaramandala in the Wanla temple (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 72,20)



35 A twelve-figure lineage above a panel dedicated to the four-armed Avalokiteśvara in the Wanla temple (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 72,40)



36 The Wanla temple (drawing Gerald Kozicz)



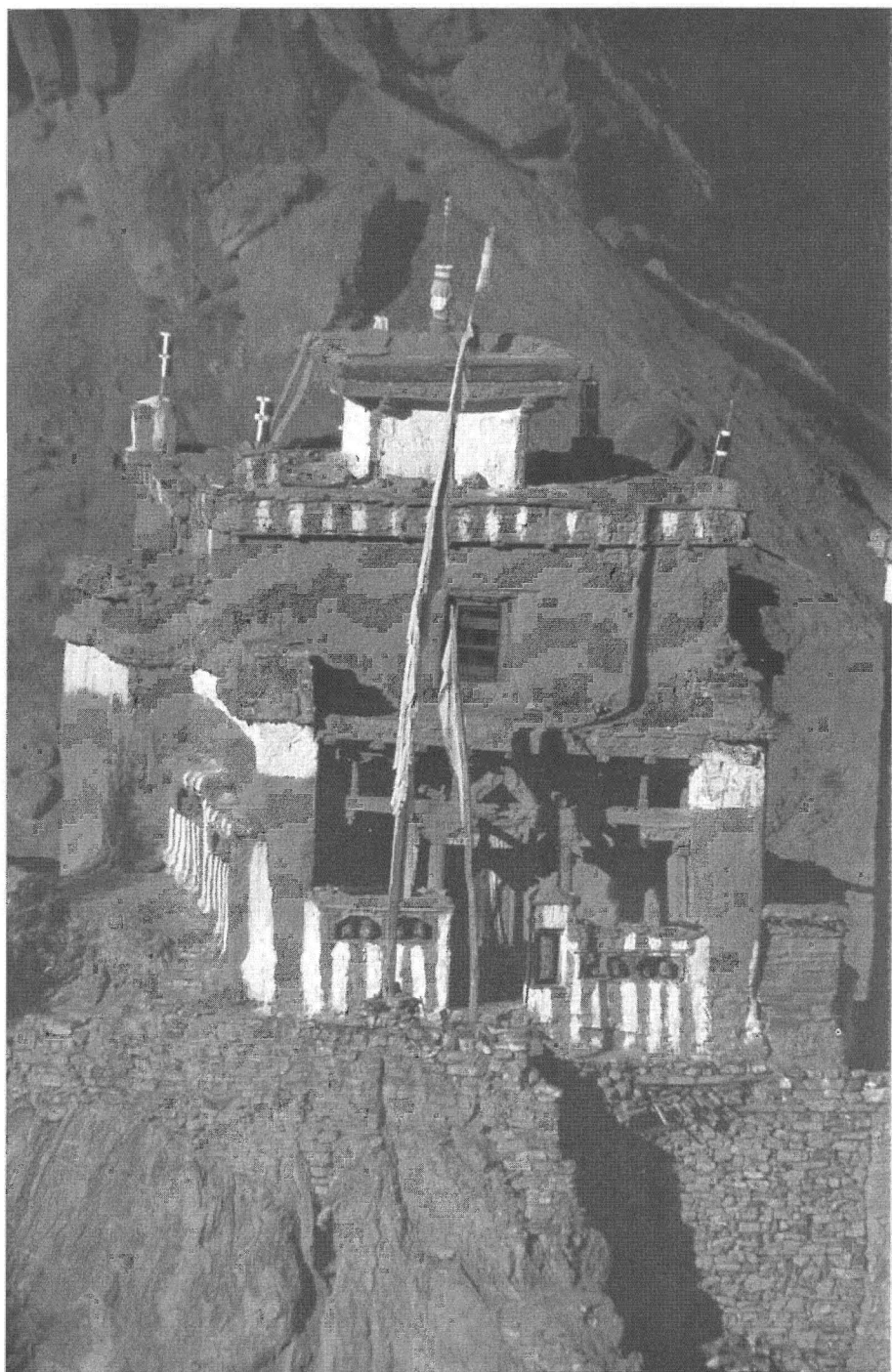
37 Cross section of the Wanla temple (drawing Gerald Kozicz)



89 The ruins of the Wanla castle with the Wanla temple in the centre (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 67,25)



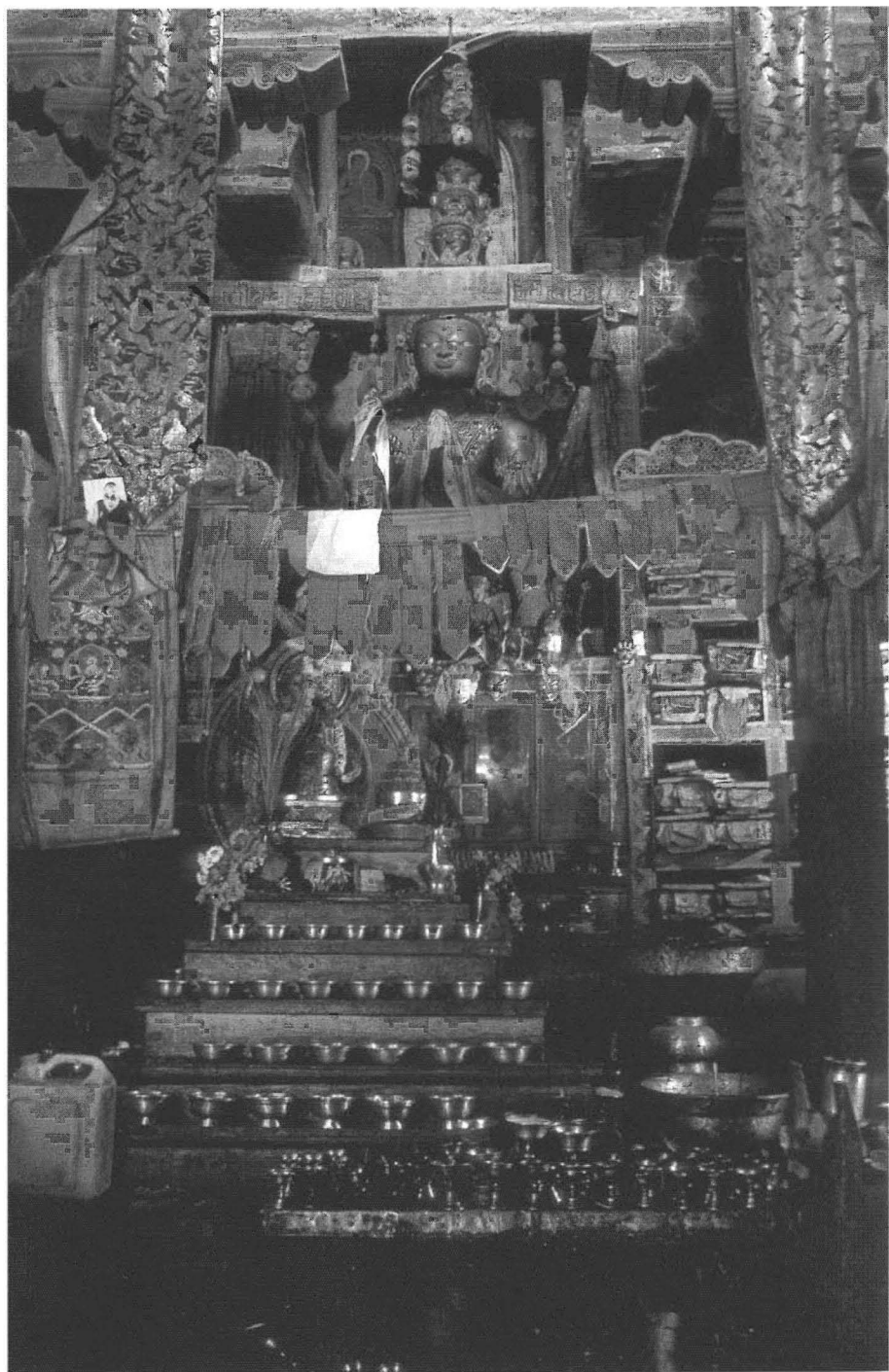
90 The fragmentary remains of woodcarvings on the Wanla castle tower (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 78,8)



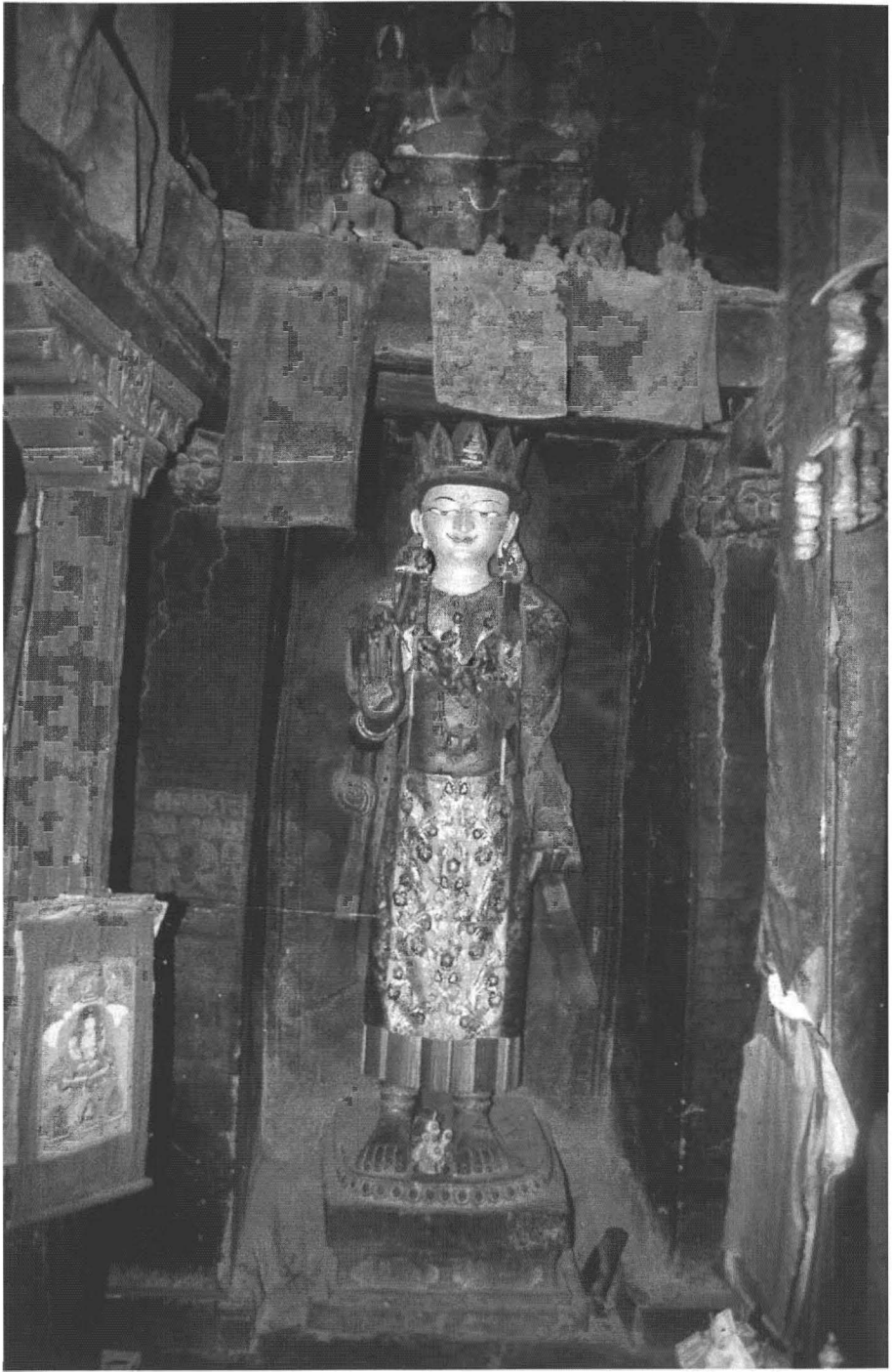
91 The front side of the Wanla temple (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 69,2)



92 The construction of the veranda in Wanla (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 69,3)



93 The eleven-headed and eight-armed main image of Avalokiteśvara behind the altar of the Wanla temple (photograph Jaroslav Poncar, 1990, WHAV)



94 Bodhisattva Maitreya in the left side niche of the Wanla temple (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 71,1)



95 The image of Śākyamuni in the side niche to the proper left of the main image of the Wanla temple (photograph Jaroslav Poncar, 1990, WHAV)



96 Lineage sculptures flank the heads of Avalokiteśvara on the gallery of the Wanla temple (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 74,3)



97 The paper-mâché sculpture of Mar pa in the Wanla temple (photograph Christian Luczants, WHAV CL94 35,7)



98 The beginning of the lineage on Wanla temple gallery (photograph Christian Luczanits, WHAV CL98 76,23)