

## ART-HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF DATING TIBETAN ART\*

Like much of Western art, Tibetan art was obviously not created so that future art historians could easily date it centuries later. No Tibetan artist – a figure who in any case hardly ever existed as an individual – ever intended to create a painting or sculpture clearly attributable to a certain time and region. If anyone wanted us to know about the creation of an artefact, it was the pious donor. However, he too was not interested in letting us know when and where the artefact was made; what counted for him was why he commissioned its execution. It is thus not surprising that few objects or even parts of a monument's decoration can be securely dated. In most cases, the dating of a portable object or the decoration of a monument has to rely largely on art-historical methods, i. e., on the iconography, composition, style and use of particular motifs.

Compared with art-historical studies of Western art, Tibetan art history is still in its infancy.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly obvious when dating an early Tibetan scroll painting (thangka) based purely on stylistic criteria. In such cases the dates proposed by different scholars quite frequently fluctuate by centuries. There are naturally many reasons for this, but the one I would like to stress is the difference in availability of comparable documentary material to different scholars. Each scholar in the field has assembled his own documentation over the years, but in very few cases does the quantity and quality of this documentation allow him to study an object in a detailed manner comparable to the standards of Western art history. Instead, conclusions pertaining to the dating of an object often have to be reached on the basis of a very small number of comparisons and

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- "Aspekte zur Datierung Tibetischer Kunst": Paper presented at a symposium on 'Dating Tibetan Art' organized by the Kunsthauus Lempertz, Cologne, 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> November 2001. This article derives from an invitation to the 10<sup>th</sup> Austrian 'Kunsthistorikertag', where I was asked to introduce the study of Tibetan art to art historians working on Western art (LUCZANITS 1999/2000), as also from a subsequent review article on Amy Heller's book *Tibetan Art* (LUCZANITS 2001). One example presented stems from my research work on the early Buddhist art of the western Himalayas while the other two are from the collection of Tibetan thangkas acquired by Giuseppe Tucci and now held in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale, Rome. I am indebted to D. E. Klimburg-Salter, whose critical comments have prompted considerable improvements. The presentation of the first example profited greatly from communication with Dan Martin on an early Central Tibetan thangka I am preparing for publication, as it provided me with some of the historical context utilized in this article, and from his comments on an earlier version of this article. I am also grateful to Rob Linrothe and Gene Smith for their suggestions and corrections. My research activities, on which these observations are based, have been generously funded by the Austrian 'Fonds zur Förderung wissenschaftlicher Forschung' and are currently being funded by an APART (Austrian Programme for Advanced Research and Technology) grant from the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale and its staff provided excellent working conditions for several weeks in the last years and the Istituto Austriaco di Cultura lodging for much of this time.

1 That at least is my conclusion in LUCZANITS 2001.

attributions of comparable objects in publications, the latter usually being published in a form that it is insufficient to verify the conclusion.<sup>2</sup>

Another aspect I would like to point out is the rather narrowly focused interest of the art market and museum curators with regard to an object of art. As shown by recent publications on Tibetan art, the main goal of initial research on an object is to date it, to identify the main subject and recently also to attribute a certain origin of workmanship to it.<sup>3</sup> However, the study of Tibetan art – if pursued in a methodologically correct manner – is extremely time-consuming and always remains a work in progress (i. e., it can always be further refined). It may suffice here to quote the marvellous description of this process by Panofsky (1955: 17–18):

He [the art historian] *knows* that his cultural equipment, such as it is, would not be in harmony with that of people in another land and of a different period. He tries, therefore, to make adjustments by learning as much as he possibly can of the circumstances under which the objects of his studies were created. Not only will he collect and verify all the available factual information as to medium, condition, age, authorship, destination, etc., but he will also compare the works with others of its class, and will examine such writings as reflect the aesthetic standards of its country and age, in order to achieve a more “objective” appraisal of its quality. He will read old books on theology or mythology in order to identify its subject matter, and he will further try to determine its historical locus, and to separate the individual contribution of its maker from that of forerunners and contemporaries. He will study the formal principles that control the rendering of the visible world, or, in architecture, the handling of what may be called the structural features, and thus build up a history of “motifs”. He will observe the interplay between the influences of literary sources and the effect of self-dependent representational traditions, in order to establish a history of iconographic formulae or “types”. And he will do his best to familiarise himself with the social, religious and philosophical attitudes of other periods and countries, in order to correct his own subjective feeling for content. But when he does all this, his aesthetic perception as such will change accordingly, and will more and more adapt itself to the original “intention” of the works. Thus, what the art historian, as opposed to the “naïve” art lover, does, is not to erect a rational superstructure on an irrational foundation, but to develop his re-creative experiences so as to conform with the results of his archaeological research, while continually checking the results of his archaeological research against the evidence of his re-creative experiences.

I may add here, as this seems particularly relevant for art-historical writing on Tibetan art, that in order to properly evaluate any scholarly study, it is very important to present in detail the methods used to reach a particular conclusion.

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2 The most serious problem in this regard is that usually inscriptions on an object are published either not at all or incompletely, making it impossible to verify the conclusions drawn from them. Furthermore, published pictures of an object alone can usually not be considered as adequate documentation, since the details are not reproduced comprehensively in them.

3 These points are discussed extensively in LUCZANITS 2001.

To date, comprehensive publications that treat many aspects of the complexities of collections of Tibetan thangkas or other art objects are fairly rare.<sup>4</sup> In this paper I intend to demonstrate by means of three examples the possibilities and restrictions of art-historical methods with regard to dating Tibetan art on the basis of the documentation available to me.

### Example One: Alchi and Its Relationship to Central-Tibetan Art

The most fascinating example demonstrating the possible results to be gained from art-historical methods, i. e., in this case an analysis of composition, style and iconography, is found in the early-13<sup>th</sup>-century paintings at Alchi monastery in Ladakh, India. This example also shows the interrelationship of completely different painting styles brought together by historical circumstances. The following observations completely support Roger Goepfer's dating of the Alchi monuments and actually prove – in my opinion beyond a doubt – that his attribution of the Alchi Sumtsek (*gSum brtsegs*) to the early 13<sup>th</sup> century is correct. As the following analysis will also show, this conclusion is also of major relevance for the history of Central Tibetan art in general, as it appears that the Alchi murals were executed at a turning point in the history of Tibetan art.

Goepfer's attribution of the Alchi Sumtsek is based on a lineage represented on the third floor of the temple. As he has shown, the last person depicted in the lineage and identified by inscription is the founder of the Drigungpa ('Bri-gung-pa) school, Jigten Gönpö ('Jig-rten-mgon-po 1143–1217), abbot of Drigung monastery from its foundation in 1179 to 1217, providing us with an approximate date for the painting of the lineage and its captions, which must have been completed by 1217. I have already noted in a previous article that the depiction of a teacher's lineage is a new subject in western Himalayan art,<sup>5</sup> but there is much more to say about it.

Looking at the lineage represented on the third floor of the Alchi Sumtsek, it is obvious that the teachers are depicted in an unusual way when compared to other lineage depictions of comparable age (Goepfer, Fig. 1, p. 16).<sup>6</sup> For example, the depictions of Marpa (Mar-pa 1012–1096) dressed in white robes with a red cape holding *vajra* and bell, as well as that of Milarepa (Mi-la-ras-pa 1040–1113) as a naked white *siddha* holding a

4 Among the most valuable recent efforts to publish Tibetan art objects in a more complete manner are in my opinion ESSEN and THINGO 1990; RHIE and THURMAN 1991, RHIE and THURMAN 1999 in connection with the website [www.himalayanart.org](http://www.himalayanart.org) and WILLSON and BRAUEN 2000. When talking to publishers or visiting exhibitions one gets the impression that such comprehensive efforts are largely considered boring or even superfluous for the general public. It is, however, also obvious that it is easier to make a publication or exhibition without carrying out or financing original research, as both are primarily judged by their commercial success (sales or attendance figures).

5 LUCZANITS 1998.

6 For overviews and large pictures, cf. GOEPPER 1990 and GOEPPER and PONCAR 1996, pp. 212 and 216f.

scarf, are unique. Considering the quality of the Sumtsek paintings, the detailing of the figures in the lineage appears unusually clumsy although the quality of the paint and the painting are essentially the same.

The depictions of the teachers following Milarepa cannot be considered as individualized, the last three teachers are depicted in Fig. 1 (= Goepper, Fig. 2, p. 17) and differ considerably from comparable portrayals at Alchi. These six teachers are white-skinned,<sup>7</sup> perform various gestures common to Buddha images (three of them teaching, i. e., displaying *dharmacakramudrā*), sit on cushions covered with animal skins and wear a two-piece patchwork monastic garment and a cape. The depiction of the clothing seems unusually clumsy, particularly with the awkwardly drawn cape placed flat behind the body forming two pointed ends at the sides (as if attempting to represent one cape placed above another). Capes like this are found neither on any comparable painting of this lineage nor anywhere else at Alchi.

If we compare these depictions to those of local teachers common at Alchi as found on the same wall just on the other side of the window (Fig. 2), it becomes clear that the pointed ends of the cape have been taken over from here. The local teachers, however, do not wear a cape, but a light, transparent garment wrapped around the body covering almost all of their white robes underneath. These teachers are flesh-coloured, often wear a characteristic hat, and sit cross-legged on cloth-covered cushions, their hands folded in meditation underneath the upper garment.

It would seem that the lineage depiction of the Sumtsek demonstrates the painters' problems in rendering a new subject in the absence of a proper visual model for it. They must, however, have received detailed instructions regarding the types of figures to be depicted, their individual characteristics and the parts comprising the teacher's clothing. The cape possibly posed a particular problem as the hands performing the various gestures were not meant to be covered.

Soon after the Sumtsek was built, two unusual *chörten* (*mchod rten*, skt. *stūpa*) were erected within the monastic complex of Alchi: the well known Great *Stūpa*<sup>8</sup>, and another, smaller *chörten*, which has remained largely unnoticed.<sup>9</sup> Both contain an inner *chörten* with its interior walls dedicated to the same four teachers, but while in the Great *Stūpa* only the teachers are shown, in the small *chörten* they are accompanied by secondary figures as well.<sup>10</sup> For this article only the so-called Rinchen Zangpo (Rin-chen-

7 Possibly to contrast them with Tilopa and Naropa, who are dark brown (GOEPPER and PONCAR 1996, p. 216).

8 SNELLGROVE and SKORUPSKI 1977, p. 77f., and the detailed study by GOEPPER 1993.

9 Only SNELLGROVE and SKORUPSKI 1977, p. 78, describe the *chörten* and also note that here the teachers represented in the inner *chörten* have a context.

10 I do not want to dwell here on the iconography of these teachers and their identity, but given the new historical context the Alchi monuments are to be seen in today, the identifications suggested by

*Fig. 1 The three last teachers of the Alchi Sumtsek lineage including Jigten Gönpo see Goepfer, Fig. 2, p. 17 in this volume*



*Fig. 2 Three local teachers, Alchi Sumtsek (photo: Western Himalayan Archives Vienna [WHAV], J. Poncar 1984)*

bzang-po), here shown in a detail from the small *chörten* (Fig. 3), is of interest.<sup>11</sup> While it is obvious that the painting style in general is still typical for Alchi, the way the figure is depicted clearly demonstrates that by now the painters have become familiar with the way a teacher is shown in contemporary Central Tibetan painting.<sup>12</sup> The painting of the teaching scholar portrayed here is generally much more harmonious and realistic. Note in particular the way the cape now envelopes the figure, partly overlapping the upper arms and the knees, around which it falls in an elegant curve and is then tucked under the crossed legs of the scholar. Possibly the Alchi painters had by this point seen a visual model for the way the teacher was to be depicted.

Again, this teacher is visually differentiated from the local teacher as found on the side-walls of the same stūpa (Fig. 5).<sup>13</sup> While both types retain their characteristic features as established for the Sumtsek paintings,<sup>14</sup> the local teacher now wears a monastic patchwork robe with hands and feet visible, but still distinct from that of Rinchen Zangpo.<sup>15</sup>

The new artistic influence on the early-13<sup>th</sup>-century monuments at Alchi is even more obvious when one considers the context in which the so-called Rinchen Zangpo is shown in the extremely informative small *chörten* (Fig. 4). The teacher is flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas (Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī) and two seated deities at the level of his head (Ṣaḍakṣaralokeśvara and Green Tārā). Above this another unusual early lineage of the Kagyüpa (bKa'-brgyud-pa) school is depicted, here ending with a *siddha* taking the place of the last teacher.<sup>16</sup> To either side are nine more *siddha*, while seven protective deities occupy the bottom of the composition.

Both the elements comprising this arrangement as well as their arrangement are clearly reminiscent of Central Tibetan thangka paintings of that time, although it is executed without the strict divisions that are characteristic for the latter paintings.

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SNELLGROVE and SKORUPSKI 1977 and followed by GOEPPER 1993 certainly need to be re-considered.

11 Cf. also SNELLGROVE and SKORUPSKI 1977, pl. 13; and GOEPPER 1993, fig. 14.

12 For the usual depiction of teachers during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, compare for example KOSSAK and SINGER 1998, nos. 5, 11, 17, 18, 19, 26, 30, and 51.

13 Compare also the teachers in the Great Stūpa in GOEPPER 1993, figs. 15 and 16.

14 For example teaching gesture versus meditation, white as opposed to flesh-coloured skin.

15 Now it is actually this type of dress that looks odd, as the patchwork pattern flattens the figure and the pointed ends at the sides no longer make sense. His patchwork dress differentiates him from the other monks depicted in the row below him, who wear the same dress as the teachers in the Sumtsek.

16 It could well be that this is meant to be the same *siddha* as the dark-skinned one represented as the main figure of the two *chörten* interiors depicted directly opposite the so-called Rinchen Zangpo and frontally. His identity is still a mystery and is crucial for a more precise understanding of the context in which these later Alchi paintings were executed. For a depiction of this *siddha*, who is usually identified with Nāropa, in the Great Stūpa cf. GOEPPER 1993, figs. 12 and 13. This *siddha*, usually depicted crouching and holding a twig and a flute, is also represented in a prominent position at the bottom of the *dhōtī* of Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī in the Alchi Sumtsek (GOEPPER and PONCAR 1996: 102, 109) and, as I discovered on my last visit, is also depicted in the niche of the Assembly Hall of Sumda Chung, a monument decorated by artists of the same painting school(s) as Alchi.

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However, if one compares this Alchi mural with dateable Central-Tibetan paintings, one arrives at the surprising conclusion that the painting in the small *chörten* actually is to be placed at the beginning of a new development taking place at the same time in Central Tibet. This can best be shown by an analysis of the representation of the central teacher. (Fig. 3) He is shown in 3/4 profile teaching and is flanked by Bodhisattvas. This composition makes it obvious that the teacher is himself to be understood as (equal to) a Buddha.<sup>17</sup> In this regard the Alchi mural is partly even more explicit than the usual teacher depictions on thangkas known from Central Tibet.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the elements comprising this arrangement, e. g., the central teacher (with or without flanking Bodhisattvas), the lineage, the *mahāsiddha*, the row of protectors, and the thangka-like composition, were not used earlier in western Himalayan paintings, where teachers are usually depicted in assemblies<sup>19</sup> or in a completely different setting, as is evident from the depiction of the local teachers on the sidewalls. (Fig. 5) There the teacher, instead of being depicted as a Buddha himself, is surrounded by the five *tathāgata* headed by Vairocana, while underneath him is a row of further local monastic figures.

Among others, there are two new concepts visible in the Alchi paintings previously unknown in the western Himalayas that are of interest to us here: the Indian-derived teaching tradition shown as a lineage and the notion of the teacher as (equal to) a Buddha. The foundation for the concept of an Indian-derived teaching tradition was, of course, already established towards the end of the eighth century at the famous debate at Samye (bSam-yas) and by the invitation of the famous Indian teachers to Tibet, foremost among them the eminent scholar Atiśa (956–1054), who visited West and Central Tibet in the middle of the eleventh century. The notion of the direct succession of a certain teaching tradition from person to person has its roots in the Tantric tradition, which prescribes initiation into a certain type of teaching. However, the systematic emphasis on such a derivation by means of a teacher's lineage appears to have become prominent in Tibet only during the 12<sup>th</sup> century within the new schools,<sup>20</sup> and became

17 "Such a painting would certainly seem to pay Rin-chen bzang-po full honours as an acknowledged Buddha-manifestation." See SNELGROVE and SKORUPSKI 1977.

18 Teacher representations flanked by standing Bodhisattvas are fairly rare in comparison. For example, of the ones in *Sacred Visions* referred to in note 12 only no. 17 has flanking Bodhisattvas. In terms of composition, too, this painting (now privately owned), which is executed in an entirely unique style, is the closest comparison to the Alchi depiction. Other examples with flanking Bodhisattvas are three paintings of the Taglung school from the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries: one in the Musée Guimet MA 6083; BÉGUIN 1995, pp. 482–84; SINGER 1997, fig. 43 identifies the main image as Önpö Lama (Sangs-rgyas dBon Grags-pa-dpal 1251–1296) and the others in private collections (ROSSI and ROSSI 1994, no. 10; SINGER 1997, fig. 41, again identified as Önpö Lama). This composition is also found in a thangka of uncertain context and in poor condition in the Koelz collection at the Museum of Anthropology at Ann Arbor, Michigan (COPELAND 1980: 98).

19 Compare for example KLJMBURG-SALTER 1997, pp. 220–25 and figs. 45, 139, 151, and 231.

20 An interesting question in this regard is when such teaching traditions were first noted in the literature. One of the earliest mentions may be a short text by Zhang g.Yu-brag-pa brTson-'grus-





*Fig. 3 The so-called Rinchen Zangpo of the Small Stūpa at Alchi (photo: WHAV 104,25, C. Luczanits 1998)*



*Fig. 4 In the Small Stūpa the teacher is represented as (equal to) a Buddha flanked by Bodhisattvas (photo: WHAV 104,23, C. Luczanits 1998)*



*Fig. 5 The wall to the proper left of the so-called Rinchen Zangpo with a local teacher in the centre (photo: WHAV 104,16, C. Luczanits 1998)*

extremely influential.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the social and political circumstances were that supported such a move, the need to justify a teaching by its link to the Indian tradition, thus demonstrating its authoritative derivation, is evidenced by the prominent position given to the lineage in the literature and painting of that time.

The perception of the contemporary Tibetan teacher as (equal to) a Buddha appears to have been established only in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in Central Tibet and mainly in a Kagyüpa (bKa'-brgyud-pa) context. An exceptional thangka painting today in the Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, is extremely interesting in this regard.<sup>22</sup> (Fig. 6) In this painting Mahāvairocana, the supreme Buddha of the Yogatantras, is surrounded by six Bodhisattvas; a lineage is represented above and a row of mainly protective figures appears at the bottom of the painting. The lineage at the top is the usual Kagyüpa lineage, but the last figure is depicted in the crown of Mahāvairocana, a position that is usually occupied by a spiritually superior manifestation. Accordingly, the teacher in the crown is depicted frontally and teaching like a Buddha. Given its position in the lineage, the figure must be identified as the famous teacher Phagmodrupa (Phag-mo-gru-pa 1110–1170; no. 7 on Fig. 6) from whom eight Kagyü schools derive, among them the Drigungpa ('Bri-gung-pa), Taglungpa (sTag-lung-pa) and the Yazangpa (g.Ya'-bzang-pa), each founded by one of his pupils,<sup>23</sup> and who is said to have proclaimed himself as Buddha of the present age.<sup>24</sup> The painting is, however, most likely to be posthumous, as is indicated by the presence of a practitioner, possibly a disciple of Phagmodrupa, to one side of Vairocana's lotus (no. 8 on Fig. 6). This extreme religious-political statement can therefore be attributed to the late 12<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest.

Another prominent protagonist in advertising the notion of the teacher as a Buddha is a disciple of Phagmodrupa and the founder of the Taglung school, Taglung Thangpa Chenpo or Trashipal (sTag-lung Thang-pa-chen-po or bKra-shis-dpal, 1142–1210;

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grags-pa (1123-1193); RGYUD PA SNA TSHOGS 1972. In a personal communication (July 18, 2001) Dan Martin, who pointed out this text to me in another context, called this text a proto-*gsan-yig*, that is a predecessor of the texts dedicated to the teaching traditions cf. below, Example 2. Zhang g.Yu-brag-pa brTson-'grus-grags-pa (1123–1193) himself, too, is depicted on a famous early tapestry in the Potala collection (DORJI, CHÁOGUÌ, and WANGCHU 1985, no. 62).

- 21 Although this is certainly an oversimplification, one can even suppose that the success of this concept ultimately led to a counter-development in the old schools, in particular to the 'Treasure' (*gter-ma*) tradition of the Nyingmapa (rNying-ma-pa).
- 22 After KOSSAK and SINGER 1998, no. 13. Compare also SINGER 1994; SINGER 1998 and; SINGER and DENWOOD 1997.
- 23 For a table of the different Kagyü schools, cf. for example TSERING GYALPO, HAZOD, and SØRENSEN 2000, p. 230.
- 24 ROERICH 1988r, p. 552. By contrast, from the story of his life as told in GYALTSEN 1990, pp. 205–63, it appears that his pupil Jigten Gönpö introduced this notion (cf. in particular p. 206). The latter also wrote a hagiography of his teacher. Gene Smith suggested looking in the collected writings (*gsung 'bum*) of Phagmodrupa for further clarification of his position in this regard.

abbot of sTag-lung 1180–1210). He is shown with unusual frequency in exalted positions and frontally.<sup>25</sup>

Seen in this light one can interpret the more usual 3/4-profile depiction, as was also used at Alchi for the so-called Rinchen Zangpo, as slightly undermining the explicit statement made by the composition with two flanking Bodhisattvas. While the Cleveland thangka remains unique, the composition of the Alchi mural with Bodhisattvas flanking the central teacher is occasionally taken up again.<sup>26</sup> As far as it has been possible to identify them to date, most of the relevant paintings depicting a lama at the centre of a composition like that at Alchi can be attributed to the Drigungpa, Taglungpa, Yazangpa<sup>27</sup> and Tshalpa<sup>28</sup> schools – the first three deriving from Phagmodrupa – and thus set in a Kagyüpa context.<sup>29</sup>

The extant evidence can be summarized as follows: both the mural in the small *chörten* at Alchi as well as the depiction on the Cleveland thangka can be read as rather explicit religious-political public statements: "the teacher is (equal to) a Buddha". In addition, the Cleveland thangka can be interpreted as documenting an experiment with this new subject. One may thus conclude that the Alchi and Cleveland paintings document the emergence of a new understanding of the teacher in Tibetan Buddhism, certainly within the Kagyüpa schools. The teacher is no longer only a pious donor and able practitioner, but an embodiment of the Buddha and his sacred teaching (the footprint on the paintings with Taglung Tashipal or the third Karmapa<sup>30</sup> can also be understood in this way). This shift in the meaning of a teacher, at least as a religious-political statement, most probably took place just at that time, i. e., in the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>31</sup>

Taking together the facts that the first relatively securely datable depictions of a teacher as Buddha are from the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>32</sup> that some of these examples

25 Cf. for example BÉGUIN 1990, no. 2 (MA 5176); KOSSAK and SINGER 1998, no. 18 and; SINGER 1994, 25; SINGER 1997, figs. 36, 37, 42 and 44. Kossak (1999/2000: 5) notes that the auspicious wheel on the sole of the feet of Taglung Thangpa Chenpo show that the lama is an enlightened being.

26 Cf. note 18.

27 Cf. MIGNUCCI 2001.

28 The above mentioned depiction of Zhang Rinpoche (n. 20).

29 Somewhat on the periphery of that context is the depiction of a gNyos hierarch, a secular teacher, on a well-known thangka in the Jucker collection, which is also to be attributed to around 1200 (ALLINGER 2001; 2002). A painting from the time of the third Karmapa with footprints has similar features, but is no longer nearly as explicit as it represents Buddhas a level (row) above the Karmapa lineage cf. SINGER 1994, fig. 32.

30 BÉGUIN 1990, no. 2 (MA 5176); JACKSON 1999, p. 76, fig. 1 (cf. also p. 78, pl. 1).

31 Dan Martin 2001, pp. 155f., mentions an interesting example demonstrating this shift in paintings recorded of sPyil-phu monastery. While the second abbot, Lha Lung-gi-dbang-phyug Byang-chub-rin-chen (1158–1232), was depicted along with his nephew to either side of an eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara, the third abbot, Lha 'Gro-ha'i-mgon-po was shown in the centre of the painting surrounded by the 16 Arhats.

32 I disregard here a thangka with a depiction of a teacher in the Metropolitan Museum of Art attributed to as early as the late 11<sup>th</sup> century (KOSSAK and SINGER 1998: no. 62) for two reasons: firstly the



*Fig. 6 Thangka in the Cleveland Museum of Art with Phagmodrupa (Phag-mo-gru-pa, 1110-1170; no. 7) in the crown of Vairocana (after Kossak, Steven M. & Jane Casey Singer [1998] Sacred Visions. Early paintings from Central Tibet. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art: no. 13)*

can be read as uniquely explicit religious-political statements, and that at the same time many new concepts become established in the old and new schools alike, one may even ask whether these early depictions were not produced on the threshold of a new development of Tibetan Buddhism in general.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, I think they were.<sup>34</sup>

### Example Two: A Series of Paintings Dedicated to Cakrasaṅghara or Khorlo Demchog ('Khor-lo-bde-mchog')<sup>35</sup>

H m v

In the previous examples the lineages, particularly the main lineage of the Kagyüpa school, played a major role in enabling us to date some of the paintings under discussion, at least approximately. The main function of these lineages has already been discussed, and from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards a huge variety of such lineages occurs in literature and painting. Already fifteen years ago David Jackson (1986; 1990) tried to make scholars aware that numerous teaching traditions represented in the paintings are recorded in the literature (the so called *gsan yig* or *thob yig*, "records of teachings"); however, this literature is only rarely consulted for identifying a lineage. Of course, in the absence of inscriptions naming the images, as is the case with those Jackson has studied, the effort of identifying such a lineage is a difficult and often fruitless task.

However, as the Indian derivation of a teaching was an important matter to the Tibetans from the late 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards up to at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the lineage depictions are relatively precise in the number of figures represented and thus often give a definitive clue for at least an approximate dating, even if the lineage cannot be identified completely. This is especially true if a thangka is not studied as an isolated painting, but as part of a larger series, which it often was. The following example presents such a case and furthermore shows that a careful study of the lineage also helps us to understand the possible original purpose of a thangka series, even if it is only fragmentarily preserved.

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inscription on which the dating is based and which reportedly is difficult to interpret (id. 64, n. 1) has not been published and thus cannot be verified, and secondly this teacher depiction need not be read as depicting the teacher as a Buddha, as he is only shown with two Bodhisattvas (Maitreya and Mañjuśrī) hovering in the sky above him.

- 33 This development can also be seen as preconditioning the establishment of the first reincarnation lineage after the second Karmapa (Kar-ma-pa) Karma Pakshi (Kar-ma pak-shi 1204–83) in the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century (cf. the fascinating account in KAPSTEIN 2000, particularly pp. 97–100).
- 34 The comparisons cited here are far from being complete. A more careful and detailed analysis of the teacher depictions and their interrelationship from an iconographical and iconological viewpoint would certainly enable one to differentiate different shades of (self?) representation and in this way also help to date comparable thangkas where the central figure can not be readily identified.
- 35 Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, no. 960; Measurements: h. 80 cm, w. 71 cm; region: Central Tibet, said to be from Sa-skya, gTsang (TUCCI 1973b: 234, fig. 207).

The paintings under consideration are: one painting already published by Tucci and formerly in the Robert Hatfield Ellsworth private collection (80 x 73.7 cm; Thangka 1; Fig. 7),<sup>36</sup> Thangka no. 960 in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome (80 x 71 cm; Thangka 2; Fig. 8),<sup>37</sup> and another painting in a private collection published in *Sacred Visions* (80 x 73 cm; Thangka 3; Fig. 9).<sup>38</sup> Despite the somewhat different appearance of each thangka in the respective publications, their dimensions, subject matter and extremely similar stylistic features allow the conclusion that these three paintings are part of a series executed by the same painting workshop or artist. All three paintings show the dominant central pair of Cakrasaṃvara ('Khor-lo-bde-mchog) embracing his partner Vajravārāhī (rDo-rje-phag-mo) surrounded by the 60 secondary deities of the maṇḍala as well as the six heroes (*dpa' bo* or *vīra*) on the left and six mothers (*ma mo* or *mātrkā*) on the right.<sup>39</sup>

The three paintings display the usual composition: the two main figures at the centre are surrounded by the secondary deities of their maṇḍala, in the upper part a lineage is represented and in the lowest row are some additional protective deities and a depiction of the practitioner.<sup>40</sup> When analyzed in detail, it emerges that the thangkas mainly differ from one another in the lineage represented in the upper part, which is of varying length. Furthermore, the iconography of the secondary figures varies slightly and the number of protective deities is reduced when the lineage at the top is more extensive. Here I concentrate solely on the lineages, as they are most relevant for dating the series, although a detailed study of the iconography may certainly refine our knowledge of the background of these paintings.

As already pointed out in earlier studies of these paintings, the choice and quality of the colours and the style indicate a Sakyapa (Sa-skyapa) context. This is further evidenced by the presence of three successive eminent Sakyapa masters who are often recognizable by their distinctive physical features and secular dress, namely Sa-chen Kun-dga'-snying-po (1092–1158), who is depicted as an elderly man in lay dress with a bald head and white side locks standing on end; bSod-nams-rtse-mo (1142–1182); and Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1147–1216), the latter two also dressed in layman's garments. In addition, Sa-skyapa Paṇḍita Kun-dga'-rgyal-mtshan (1182–1251) can be identified by

36 Published by TUCCI 1949, no. 186, pl. 220, p. 603, and again in *Wisdom and Compassion* (RHIE and THURMAN 1991, no. 69, pp. 216–19), where it is attributed on stylistic grounds to the late 14<sup>th</sup> or early 15<sup>th</sup> century. The thangka is today in another private collection.

37 A considerable section of this painting (the two bottom rows are cut off) has been published in TUCCI 1973a; 1973b, fig. 207.

38 KOSSAK and SINGER 1998, no. 43, p. 156f., where it is described by J. C. Singer and attributed to ca. 1400 following the date for Thangka 1 (RHIE and THURMAN 1991: no. 69, pp. 216–19).

39 On the iconography of Thangka 960, compare my description in the forthcoming catalogue of the Tucci collection in Rome.

40 On the practitioner (who can also be the donor) in the bottom section of a thangka painting cf. MARTIN 2001.

The following 3 Figures are mixed up <sup>v</sup>

Fig. 8

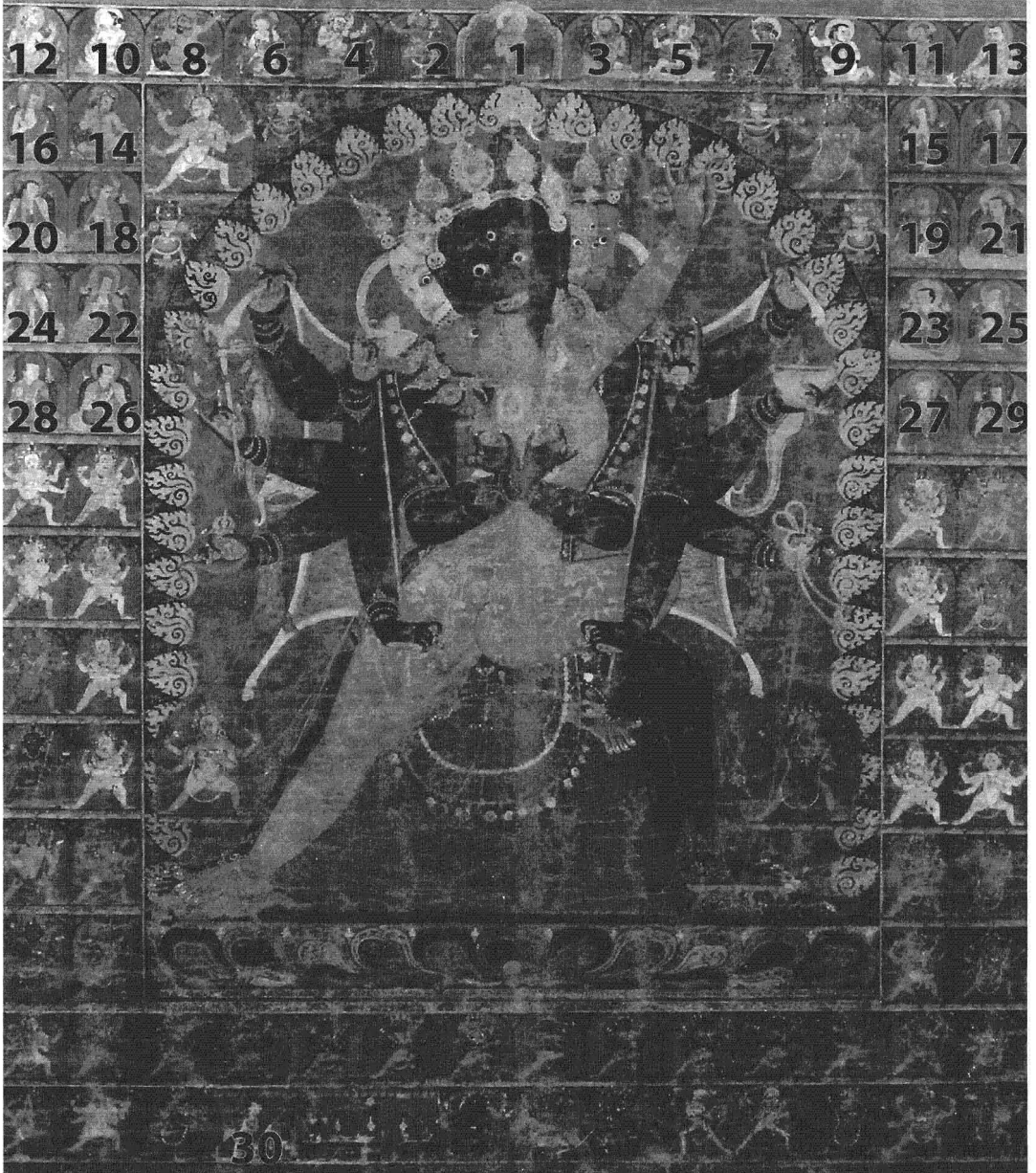


Fig. 7 The lineage of Thangka 1 also published by Tucci in *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, pl. 220  
(after Rhie, Marilyn M. & Robert A. F. Thurman [1991] *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet*.  
New York, Harry N. Abrams: no. 69)

Picture under Fig. 9



Fig. 3

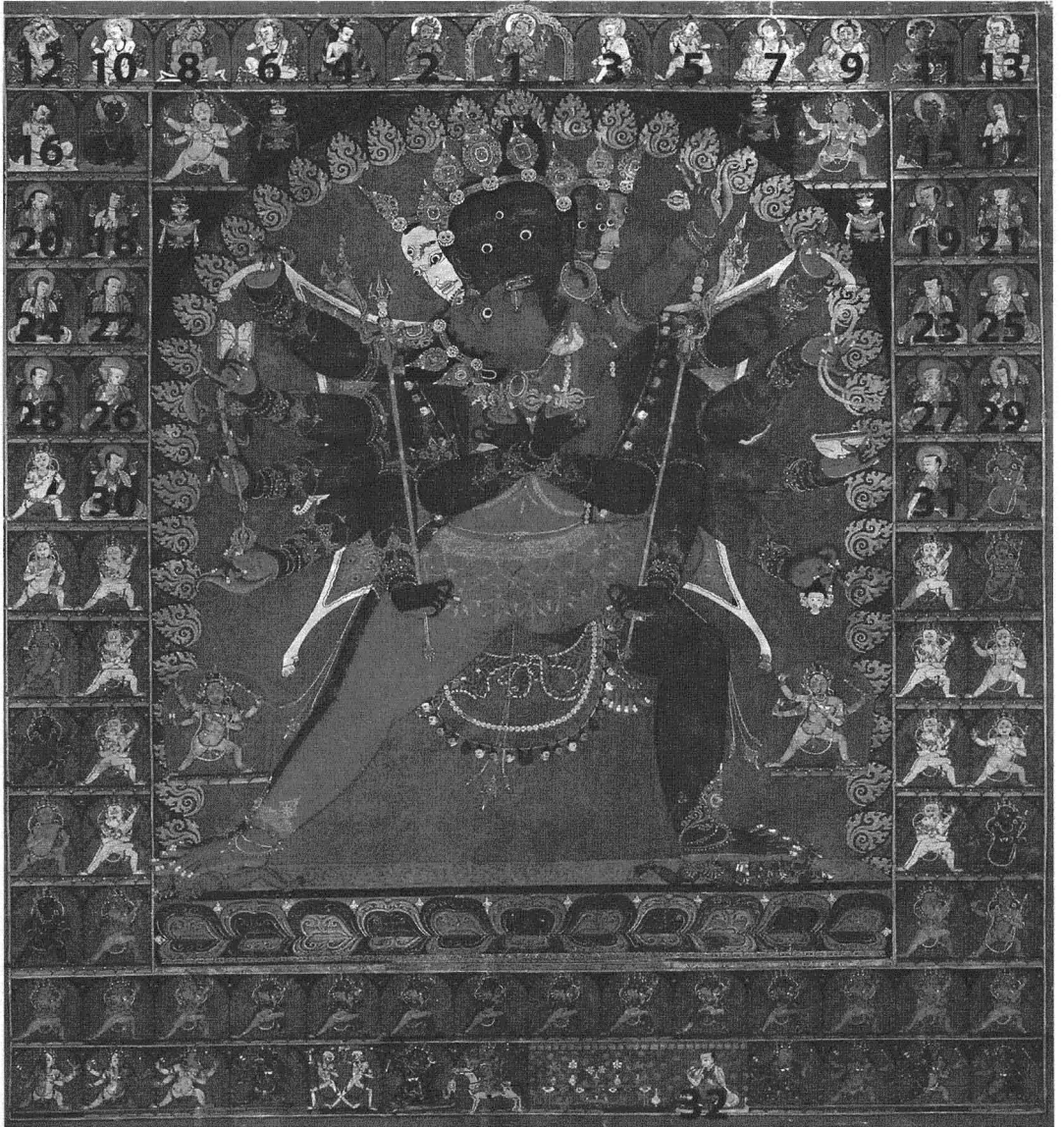


Fig. 8 The lineage of Thangka 2 (Thangka no. 960 in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, photo: WHAV)

Picture of Fig. 7

Fig. 7



Fig. 9 The lineage of Thangka 3 (after Kossak, Steven M. & Jane Casey Singer [1998] *Sacred Visions. Early Paintings from Central Tibet.* New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art: no. 43)

Picture of Fig 8.

his rounded red hat and the fact that he is holding stems of lotuses topped by sword and book, his regular attributes.

The teachings of Cakrasaṃvara were handed down from India to Tibet by Great Adepts (*mahāsiddha*). Tibetan literature<sup>41</sup> differentiates between three major teaching traditions named after the *siddha* who initially received the individual teachings. The lineage of *siddha* and teachers in the upper part of Thangka 2 represents a variant of one such tradition, that of Lūyipa. The other traditions are ascribed to Ghaṅṭapāda (Dril-bu-pa) and Kaṅha or Kṛṣṇacārin (Nag-po-spyod-pa) respectively. In addition, the Sakya tradition handed down numerous further variants as taught in different schools that vary the three principal maṅḍala.<sup>42</sup> For each of these traditions a lineage is handed down and for many of them a considerable number of variant lineages are differentiated, which are again named after a prominent teacher. In a text dedicated to the lineages of the extensive non-sectarian *Collection of All Tantras (rGyud sde kun btus)*,<sup>43</sup> more than 30 lineages (not including further variations of many of them) of teachings dedicated to different maṅḍala of Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī are listed, nine alone from the tradition attributed to Lūyipa, together with 12 lineages of different traditions dedicated to the 62-deity maṅḍala.<sup>44</sup>

The main differences between the maṅḍala of these three traditions, at least in the Sa-skyia context I surveyed, appear to be mainly: In Lūyipa's tradition the maṅḍala has 62 deities with the secondary deities being four-armed. According the Kaṅha or Kṛṣṇacārin (Nag-po-spyod-pa) tradition the maṅḍala is the same, but the secondary deities are two-armed instead of four-armed. The maṅḍala of Ghaṅṭapāda's (Dril-bu-pa) outer (*phyi*) tradition that is usually represented contains five deities only, the *ḍākiṅī* in the outer circles again having only two arms,<sup>45</sup> while an inner (*nang*) tradition differentiates another 62 deities.<sup>46</sup>

In all three paintings, the lineage commences at the centre of the top row reading from the inside outwards with the left-hand figure first, while the succession alters in the following rows (cf. Fig. 7, Fig. 8, and Fig. 9). None of the lineages in the texts used<sup>43</sup> are actually identical to those in the thangkas under discussion, but they provide enough information to identify most of the figures depicted and the principal teaching tradition involved. Thangka 1 appears to represent the inner or secret (*nang*) maṅḍala of the

41 I only consulted literature of the Sa-skyia school.

42 Cf. the maṅḍala nos. 62–74 of the Ngor collection in BSOD-NAMS-RGYA-MTSHO 1983; drawings in RAGHU VIRA and LOKESH CHANDRA 1995, pp. 62–75.

43 Full title: *rGyud sde rin po che kun las btus pa*.

44 RGYUD SDE KUN BTUS PA'1 THOB YIG 1971, pp. 107.1–139.4. The lineages have been compared with those in the THOB YIG RGYA MTSHO 1968, p. 50.2.3ff., of Ngor-chen Kun-dga'-bzang-po (1382–1456).

45 Cf. the maṅḍala nos. 62–64 of the Ngor collection (BSOD-NAMS-RGYA-MTSHO 1983; drawings in RAGHU VIRA and LOKESH CHANDRA 1995).

46 Cf. for example RGYUD SDE KUN BTUS 1971, vol. 12, text LXV,2.

Ghaṅṭapāda (Dril-bu-pa) tradition, with Ghaṅṭapāda identifiable as the first *siddha* in the lineage, as it is a 62-figure maṅḍala with two-armed secondary deities. Although the iconography of the *siddha* is not as expected, the number of *siddha* and teachers and the position of the identifiable Sa-skya hierarchs show that it is of the school of Sa-skya Paṅḍita Kun-dga'-rgyal-mtshan (1182–1251; hence called *Sa-lugs*).<sup>47</sup> Thangka 2, MNAO 960, is closest to the Lūyipa tradition handed down through lo-tsa-ba Mar-pa-do-ba Chos-kyi-dbang-phyug (1042–1136;<sup>48</sup> hence called *Mar-do-lugs*), while Thangka 3 is closest to the Kṛṣṇacārin (Nag-po-spyod-pa) tradition, again handed down by Sa-skya Paṅḍita Kun-dga'-rgyal-mtshan (1182–1251; *Sa-lugs*).<sup>49</sup>

	Thangka 1 <sup>50</sup>	Thangka 2 <sup>51</sup>	Thangka 3 <sup>52</sup>
	Ghaṅṭapāda (Dril-bu-pa), Sa-lugs (?)	Lūyipa, Mar-do-lugs	Kṛṣṇacārin (Nag-po-spyod-pa), Sa-lugs
1	Vajradhara (rDo-rje-'chang) Vajravārahī (rDo-rje-phag-mo)	Vajradhara (rDo-rje-'chang) Jñānaḍākiṇī (Ye-shes-mkha'-gro-ma)	Vajradhara (rDo-rje-'chang) Vajrasattva (rDo-rje-sems-dpa')
	Ghaṅṭapāda (Dril-bu-pa) <sup>54</sup> [Rus-sbal-zhabs <sup>55</sup>	<i>siddha</i> Lūyipa Deñ gipa <sup>56</sup>	Saraha <sup>53</sup> Nāgārjuna
5	Jālandhara ('Bar-ba-'dzin) Karnapa (Nag-po-spyod-pa) <sup>58</sup>	Lavapa Indrabhūti <sup>59</sup>	Śavaripa <sup>57</sup> Lūyipa
	Guhyapa rNam-rgyal-zhabs]	Katsatapa Ghaṅṭapāda (Dril-bu-pa)	Dārikapa <sup>60</sup> Ghaṅṭapāda (Dril-bu-pa)
	Tailopa	Rus-sbal-zhabs <sup>61</sup>	Rus-sbal-zhabs
10	Nāropa Pham-mthing-pa gcen 'Jigs-med-grags-pa	Lanka-ling-pa <sup>62</sup> Kṛṣṇacārin (Nag-po-spyod-pa)	Śrī Jālandhara ('Bar-ba-'dzin) Kṛṣṇacārin (Nag-po-spyod-pa)
	gcung Ngag-kyi-dbang-phyug	Kuśalanātha	Guhyapa <sup>63</sup>

47 The *sa-lugs* lineages of the inner and outer traditions are identical. TUCCI 1949, p. 603, identified the painting as representing Lūyipa's tradition, but there is no Lūyipa tradition lineage with Dril-bu-pa as first *siddha*, and in the Lūyipa tradition maṅḍala the secondary deities are four-armed.

48 TBRC: P3814.

49 This lineage is actually identical with that of the Lūyipa tradition, *sa-lugs*; the two can thus only be differentiated by the iconography of the maṅḍala.

50 Tucci 1949, TPS and *Wisdom and Compassion*.

51 MNAO 960.

52 *Sacred Visions* no 43.

53 Elderly, light-skinned *siddha* aiming an arrow.

54 The *siddha* in brackets cannot be considered as identified, as their iconography does not conform to their representation in the other two thangkas.

55 Here a dark-skinned *siddha* seated on a tiger skin and drinking from a skull-cup.

56 Depicted seated on a tiger and drinking from a *kapāla* as flombīheruka usually is.

57 Dancing, light-skinned *siddha* carrying a dog on his shoulder and holding bow and arrow.

58 Here light-skinned.

59 The *siddha* in royal robes seated on a throne.

60 Wearing the robes of a king.

61 He is not listed in the consulted lineage, but follows Ghaṅṭapāda (Dril-bu-pa) in the regular *sa-lugs* lineage, while in others he is immediately succeeded by Śrī Jālandhara ('Bar-ba-'dzin).

62 He is light-skinned and drinks from a horn.

63 = Bhadrapa.

	klog-skya Shes-rab-brtsegs	Tilopa	rNam-rgyal-zhabs
	Mal lo-tsä-ba Blo-gros-grags	Nāropa <sup>64</sup>	?
15	rje-chen yab-sras-gsum [Sa-chen Kun-dga'-snying-po (1092–1158)]		Tilopa
	slob-dpon bSod names-rtse-mo (1142–1182)		Nāropa
	rje-btsun Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1147–1216)		Bal-po Pham-mthing-pa [ <i>gcen</i> 'Jigs-med-grags-pa
	chos-rje Sa-skya paṇḍita (1182–1251)		Bal-po Pham-mthing-pa [ <i>gcung</i> Ngag-kyi-dbang-phyug]
	7 other teachers and the practitioner	Sa-chen Kun-dga'-snying-po (1092–1158)	Klog-skya Shes-rab-brtsegs
20		<i>slob-dpon rin-po-che</i> bSod-nams-rtse-mo (1142–1182)	Mal lo-tsä-ba Blo-gros-grags <sup>65</sup>
		<i>rje-btsun rin-po-che</i> Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1147–1216)	Sa-chen Kun-dga'-snying-po (1092–1158)
		<i>chos-rje</i> Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga'-rgyal-mtshan (1182–1251)	<i>rje-btsun sku-mched</i> [rje-btsun rin-po-che bSod-nams-rtse-mo (1142–1182)]
		7 other teachers and the practitioner <sup>66</sup>	[rje-btsun chen-po Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1182–1251)]
			<i>chos-rje khu-dpon</i> [Sa-skya Paṇḍita]
25			<sup>67</sup> [chos-rgyal Phags-pa]
			6 other teachers and the practitioner

With these three lineages from the same series, it is interesting to note the iconographic similarities and differences in the depiction of individual figures. Lūyipa is depicted drinking from a skull-cup (*kapāla*) in one case (Thangka 2; Fig. 10) his left arm resting on a stand. In two cases Ghaṇṭapāda (Dril-bu-pa) is performing his usual huge leap in the air, holding *vajra* and bell in his outstretched hands, but once (Thangka 3) he is seated with arms crossed over his breast and presumably holding his attributes. In all cases he is orange. Rus-sbal-zhabs is light-skinned and is seated on a tortoise (*rus sbal*); once he has one hand raised and one holding a *kapāla*, while in the other case he holds a *mālā* in both hands and appears rather elderly (Thangka 3). In Thangka 1, however, he is dark-skinned, sits on a tiger skin and drinks from a cup, indicating that in this thangka another variant of the lineage is represented. This is also suggested by the depictions of Kāṇhapa or Kṛṣṇācārin (Tib. Nag-po-spyod-pa), the dark *siddha*, who is twice depicted as dark grey and blowing a long black horn (Fig. 11), while in Thangka 1 he is light-

64 The remaining images in the following four rows are *bla-ma*, usually with *vajra* and bell in their hands or on lotuses at their sides. The identity of some of the figures following the last *siddha* (Nāropa) is still unclear as no perfect match for the depicted lineage has yet been found in the literature.

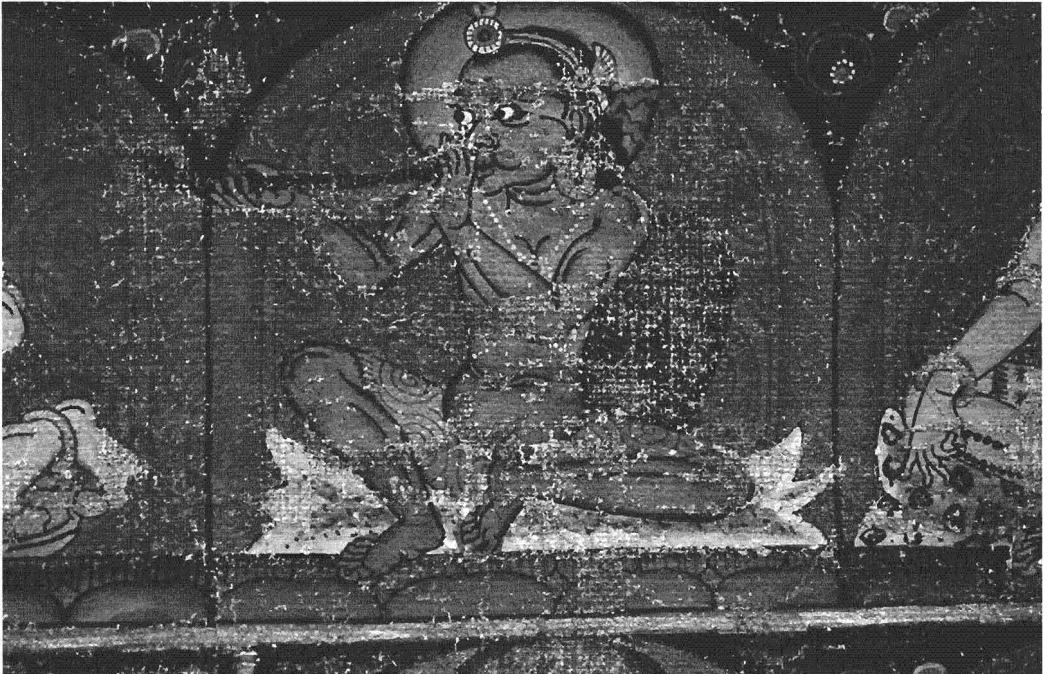
65 Long-haired, wearing secular dress.

66 I thank David Jackson for trying to identify these figures for me.

67 The identity of the following six figures cannot be verified, but it is quite certain that here it is not the lineage transmitted via Ngor-chen Kun-hzang that is depicted.



*Fig. 10 The siddha Lūyipa is atypically represented drinking from a skull-cup on Thangka 2 (Thangka no. 960 in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, photo: WHAV, C. Luczanits 1999)*



*Fig. 11 The siddha Kānhapa or Kṛṣṇācārin (tib. Nag-po-spyod-pa) on Thangka 2 (Thangka no. 960 in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, WHAV, C. Luczanits 1999)*



*Fig. 12 A highly distinctive, but hitherto unidentified Sakya teacher of c. 1400 with a black net attached to the front of his hat (Thangka no. 960 in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, photo: WHAV, C. Luczanits 1999)*

skinned and not individualized. In the case of Tilopa and Nāropa, one always holds a *mālā* with both hands, while the other holds a drinking horn or a *kapāla* as his attribute. In general the physical appearance of the same *siddha* often differs considerably from depiction to depiction and shows that only very few of them are actually individualized.<sup>68</sup>

Not surprisingly, among the Tibetan teachers following the *siddha* only few have distinctive recognizable features and that in all three thangkas none of the teachers following Sakya Paṇḍita can be identified with certainty. But clearly this set of paintings represents the different teaching traditions on Cakrasaṃvara within the Sakya (Sa-skyā) school that were handed down to the practitioner represented at the bottom of each painting. The latter was most probably also the commissioner of this series. It is further evident from the three extant paintings that the practitioner received two of these teaching traditions from the same teacher, a very distinctive lama with a net attached to the front of his pointed red hat (Fig. 12).<sup>69</sup>

Comparing the number of figures represented with those usually found in the written lineages and their dates, the paintings can be dated quite accurately. Accordingly, the practitioner represented at the bottom of each painting is a contemporary of Ngor-chen Kun-dga'-bzang-po (1382–1456; abbot 1429–1456) or of one of his pupils, and the paintings can therefore be attributed to the second quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest.<sup>70</sup> I believe that an iconographic analysis of this kind, even if it does not provide a solution to all the problems, allows the series to be dated much more precisely than would currently be possible by means of a purely stylistic analysis.<sup>71</sup>

### Example Three: A Stylistically Unique Painting of an 18-Deity Maṇḍala of Vajrapāṇi (Phyag-na-rdo-rje 'khor-lo-chen-po dkyil-'khor)<sup>72</sup>

In the third example neither the iconography nor the lineage helps to date the painting; here dating is completely dependent on style alone and demonstrates the limitations of such analysis if close comparisons are lacking. Thus, at the current stage of my research, I am not able to propose a narrow date range for this thangka depicting a maṇḍala of Phyag-na-rdo-rje 'khor-lo-chen-po or Vajrapāṇimahācakra (Museo

68 Cf. the discussion of the *siddha* depictions of the Alchi Sumtsek by LINROTHE 2001.

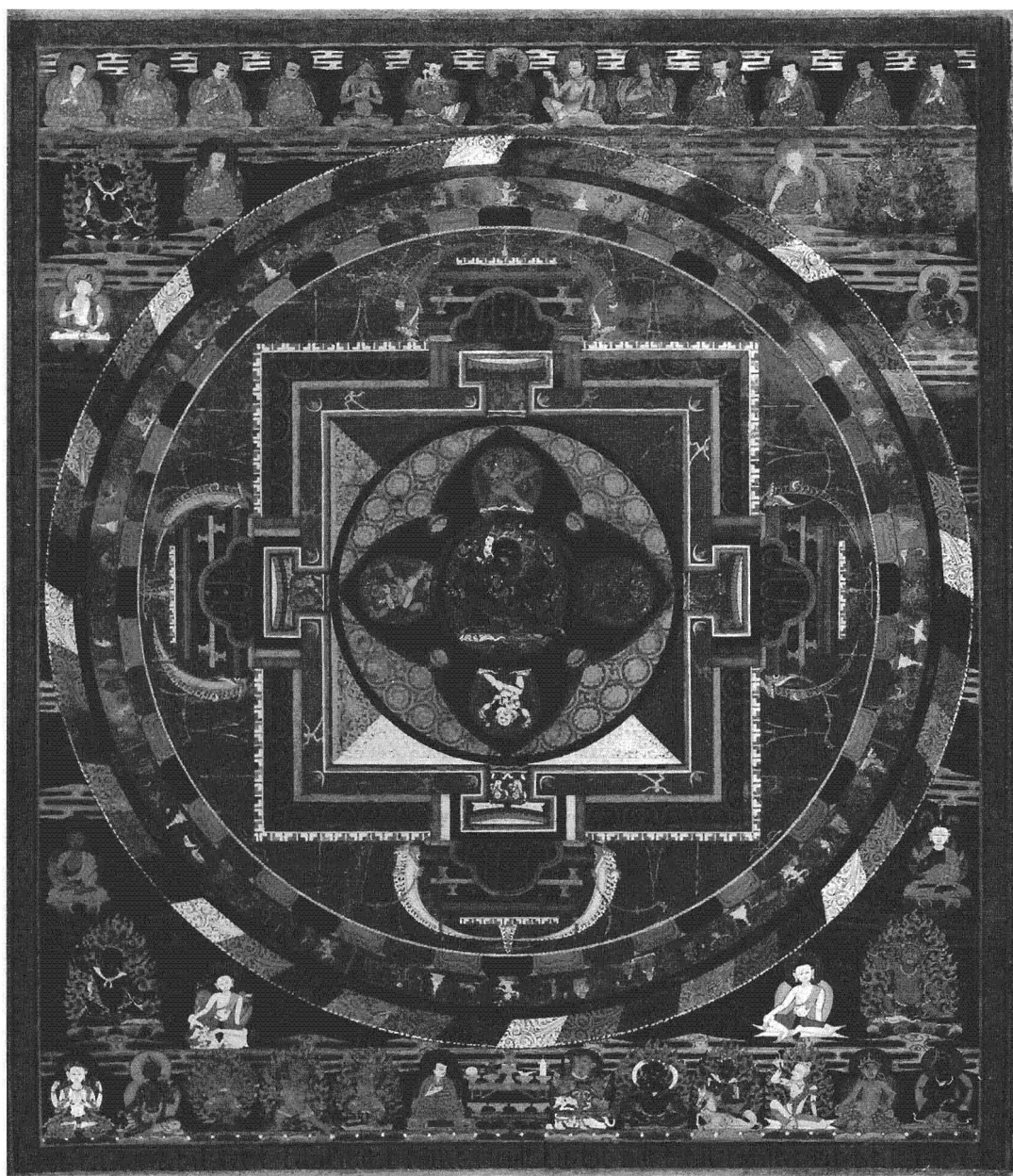
69 The other tradition he received from this teacher is the one represented in Thangka I. See RHIE and THURMAN 1991, no. 96, pp. 216–219.

70 Thus the attribution of the paintings to ca. 1400 in KOSSAK and SINGER 1998, no. 43, and in RHIE and THURMAN 1991, no. 96, pp. 216–219, appears a little too early.

71 Some of the stylistic features of this painting will be discussed in the forthcoming description in the Tucci thangka catalogue.

72 Measurements: h. 65 cm., w. 56 cm.; religious school: Sa-skyā-pa (?); published: LO BUE 1983, no. 8; TUCCI 1949, no. 184, pl. 218, p. 602f.





*Fig. 13 A maṇḍala of Vajrapāṇimahācakra (Phyag-na-rdo-rje 'khor-lo-chen-po )  
(Thangka no. 950 in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, photo: WHAV)*

Nazionale d'Arte Orientale no. 950; **Fig. 13**).<sup>73</sup> As is common with later paintings, the lineage depicted in the top row, beginning with Vajradhara (rDo-rje-'chang), the *dākiṇī* Sīṃhavaktrā (Seng-ge-gdong-ba-can), Śavaripa, Dza-ba-ri-pa, and the *paṇḍita* Devapūrṇamati, is abbreviated.<sup>74</sup>

This well-preserved and very fine thangka is particularly remarkable for its graphic qualities. The fresh colours, the strictly geometric composition as well as the use of finely decorated areas of contrasting colours make the painting not only unique in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale collection, but in a wider context as well. While gold and green predominate within the maṇḍala structure, a dark blue background dominates the surrounding area. The perfect symmetry of the maṇḍala contrasts with the fine decoration with repetitive scroll or flower patterns often painted in gold. While the bottom figures are placed on a common lotus ground, all other features are set off against an ornamented blue background (**Fig. 15**) horizontally structured by highly stylized flat clouds of varying colours (**Fig. 16**). The exceptional graphic quality of the painting reaches a climax in the miniature depictions of the eight cemeteries in the maṇḍala circle (**Fig. 14**); there the major iconographic elements are evenly spread over a bright blue background otherwise filled with a repetitive pattern of clouds.

Due to these rather unusual stylistic features there are hardly any clues for determining its date and place of manufacture. The strict layout and the exquisite decorative patterns are reminiscent of the paintings of the Ngor school and related schools of painting from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>75</sup> However, those paintings set the secondary figures around the maṇḍala in circular compartments and frames are used in the upper and lower sections. Even the palette of dominating green and blue tones differentiates this thangka from the earlier Ngor and Sakyapa paintings. The unified blue background placing the maṇḍala in space does occur in some of these paintings, but becomes much more dominant in a small number of later examples<sup>76</sup>; however, these paintings do not share such details as the large flowers within the blue pattern or the contrasts between the different patterns. The comparatively wide free expanses between the different elements of the

73 The maṇḍala has already been identified by TUCCI 1949, pp. 602–3, on the basis of a description of the maṇḍala in the *dPal phyag na rdo rje 'khor lo chen po'i dkyil chog srid 'dul byed* by the Tibetan scholar Tāranātha. In the *rgyud sde kun btus* there are two descriptions of the maṇḍala the second of which is again at least partly dependent on a description by Tāranātha (RGYUD SDE KUN BTUS 1971, vol. 8, XLVI, 1+2; cf. also SGRUB THABS KUN BTUS 1970, vol. 3, p. 251 f.). For other depictions of this maṇḍala cf. BSOD-NAMS-RGYA-MTSHO 1983, no. 46; or RAGHU VIRI and LOKESH CHANDRA 1995, no. 46.

74 If one counts the depicted figures one would only arrive at ca. 1300, approximately the time of BUSTON rin chen grub, 1290–1364, who is part of the lineage.

75 Cf. for example KOSSAK and SINGER 1998, nos. 45–47, or LEIDY and THURMAN 1997, nos. 21, 22, 24, 25 and 26.

76 Good examples for comparison in this respect include RHIE and THURMAN 1999, no. 171 (attributed to the second half of the 14th century!), no. 172 (attributed to the late 15th/early 16th century), and no. 173 (attributed to the first half of the 16th century) or KREIJGER 1999, nos. 63 and 64 (attributed to the late 16th and early 17th century, respectively).



*Fig. 14 Detail of the eastern cemetery with Indra as its protector at the centre (Thangka no. 950 in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, photo: C. Luczanits 1999)*



*Fig. 15 Avalokitasimhanāda (tib. Spyan-ras-gzigs Seng-ge-gra) seated in front of a beautiful ornamented blue background (Thangka no. 950 in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, photo: C. Luczanits 1999)*



*Fig. 16 Palden Lhamo (dPal-ldan-lha-mo) and Brāhmaṇarūpamahākāla (mGon-po-bram-ze-gzugs-can)  
(Thangka no. 950 in the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale in Rome, photo: C. Luczanits 1999)*

painting<sup>77</sup> together with the absence of any framing for the figures are further differentiating characteristics.<sup>78</sup>

In addition, there is absolutely no comparison (at least as far as my research to date has revealed) for the exquisite graphic quality described above, for the singular palette of colours or the use of the skilfully stylized horizontal cloud layers with their varying colours.<sup>79</sup> For Lo Bue (1983: pl. 8) this thangka documents the influence of Newar styles<sup>80</sup> in the later epoch and he attributes it to 18<sup>th</sup>-century Central-Southern Tibet, without however citing any convincing comparisons. Given the composition of the painting this would appear to be too late, but the different coloured clouds would tend to indicate a rather more recent date.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, as at present no conclusive comparisons can be cited for many aspects of the painting, only a very broad range (16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) can be suggested as a possible date for this thangka, with an earlier attribution being more likely.

## Summary

The last example shows on the one hand that when the extant documentation is insufficient not even an approximate proposal for a date can be made without a great deal of speculation. On the other hand its attribution to the 16<sup>th</sup> century or later is evident when one considers the development of Tibetan painting in general. Leaving aside copies of earlier painting, such a general development is as noticeable within Tibetan painting as it is within Western art. Although the different phases overlap, there is a development in Central Tibetan painting from less strictly organized paintings (often teaching scenes; to some extent Alchi can also be counted among these) to strictly organized paintings from the late 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries with the images set into compartments (Example 2). For me this is the visual expression of the Tibetan need to organize and systematize the various Buddhist teachings received from India. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the latest onwards, most likely under the influence of Chinese art, the concept of a single landscape setting for a thangka or wall painting is almost unanimously integrated in varying ways. A subtle version of this concept is evident in the third example.<sup>82</sup>

77 In this regard, painting no. 173 in RHIE and THURMAN 1999 is closest.

78 In the comparisons cited above the figures are at least set off against the background by a halo completely surrounding the figure.

79 The shape of these clouds is not found anywhere else, but compare best to some of the clouds in LO BUE 1983, no. 19 (attributed to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Bhutan), while different coloured clouds seem only to appear in the 18<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest. However, I have not made a specific survey in this regard.

80 I have not yet found anything in late Newar art that would support this notion, but I have only limited resources available to me in this regard.

81 Differently coloured clouds are, for example, prominent in the depictions of the Qianlong emperor on Tibetan style paintings attributable to the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (HENSS 2001).

82 The role and development of the landscape settings for the chronology of Tibetan art was discussed at the suggestion of D.E. Klimburg-Salter at a workshop meeting on the Tucci thangkas at the

When considering Tibetan art as a whole one must not forget that we are looking at a huge variety of traditions (supported by different schools, central and local) over a period of a thousand years. Only 20 years ago very little was known about the development of Tibetan art and almost all of current knowledge was based on Tucci's work of the 1930s to 1950s. In addition, many works of Tibetan art have only recently been made accessible to scholars through publication.<sup>83</sup>

The examples presented here also demonstrate that careful analysis of published paintings will never be possible on the basis of publications alone, as the iconographic details of the secondary images are barely visible and inscriptions identifying secondary images are often not published. Even less attention is given to other inscriptions, such as the consecration *mantra* on the back of a *thangka*. This is, of course, a great pity because it means that a huge amount of additional information on the painting is not made available. Certainly, such information is only of interest to the specialist, but its collection in an appendix would be entirely sufficient.<sup>84</sup> In addition, there are many early works, particularly less well-preserved ones, which have not yet been published and are unlikely ever to be published.

Only comprehensive and publicly accessible publication or documentation that enables the scholar to extract all possible information from a painting or object will allow the present limitations in dating Tibetan art to be overcome in the future. Only then can a comprehensible and much more detailed foundation for dating Tibetan art be established.<sup>85</sup> As many of the objects come onto the art market at some stage, it is to a large

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'Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin', December 2000. Klimburg-Salter is planning a discussion of this aspect in a section of the forthcoming Tucci *thangka* catalogue.

- 83 At least one third of the people studying Tibetan art in greater detail were present at the Lempertz Symposium. It is thus not surprising that even when the material for a detailed study is already available such analysis has not yet been carried out. For example, Jane Casey Singer has not yet been able to study the early central Tibetan paintings in sufficient detail to establish a basis for early Tibetan painting, and Roger Goepfer has not yet provided a detailed stylistic analysis of the early monuments at Alchi.
- 84 I am aware that in some cases the publisher or the design of a publication may not allow the author to provide this information to the specialists in an appendix. However, present-day media offer other low-cost forms of making this information available to those interested.
- 85 At Vienna University we have built up an archive concentrating on early Western Himalayan art which, thanks to the generosity of Jaroslav Poncar and Roger Goepfer, now also contains the Alchi documentation. Altogether approximately 40000 slides are now held in the Western Himalayan Archives Vienna (WHAV). Similarly focused, publicly accessible photographic archives on other regions or subjects, e.g., early *thangkas*, or Central Tibetan temples, would greatly facilitate the establishment of a proper art-historical basis for early Tibetan art. Another method of publishing the pictorial material in such a way that all the information is available has been successfully demonstrated by the website of the Rubin collection (<http://www.himalayanart.org/>). On this website *thangkas* from private collections are made available in an exceptionally comprehensive way by allowing one to zoom in on details such that even the captions are legible. In the same way the reverse of each *thangka* can be viewed. The site even offers other private collectors the possibility of having their paintings included. However, currently it is difficult, if not impossible, to find a secondary deity in this huge collection without going through hundreds of them. Similarly, there are

extent in the hands of the auction houses and galleries to make this information available to scholars and to accelerate the progress of our knowledge of Tibetan art and hence our ability to date Tibetan art more precisely.

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# Contributions to Tibetan Studies

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DR. LUDWIG REICHERT VERLAG

# Dating Tibetan Art

Essays on the Possibilities and Impossibilities of Chronology  
from the Lempertz Symposium, Cologne

edited by  
Ingrid Kreide-Damani

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DR. LUDWIG REICHERT VERLAG

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Fig. 1 Wall with window in the second upper storey of the Sumtsek. Sequence of nine priests ending with 'Bri-gang-pa in the panel left of the window (photo: J. Poncar)



Fig. 2 The bottom row in the sequence of nine priests. Figure to the left: 'Bri-gung-pa ('Jig-ri-en mgon-po, 1143-1217) (photo: J. Poncar)