

Alchi and the Drigungpa School of Tibetan Buddhism:
The Teacher Depiction in the Small Chörten at Alchi
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When Roger Goepper first published the discovery of an inscribed lineage depiction in the Three-storeyed Temple at Alchi,² thereby establishing a connection between the temple and the Drigungpa ('Bri-gung-pa) School, it came as a surprise. This depiction, which is located at the entry wall of the lantern and is therefore not accessible and barely visible to visitors on the temple's ground floor, terminates with the founder of the Drigungpa School, Jigten Gönpö ('Jig-rten-mgon-po 1143–1217). Drigungpa, as he is called in the caption, was a prominent pupil of the eminent Kagyüpa (bKa'-brgyud-pa) scholar Phagmodrupa (Phag-mo-gru-pa rDo-rje rgyal-po 1110–70). In addition, Drigungpa also founded the Drigung monastery in Central Tibet in 1179, and with it one of the eight lesser Kagyüpa branches established by pupils of Phagmodrupa. This lineage thus provides an approximate date for the finishing of the temple, namely the early 13th century.³

The surprise was two-fold. On the one hand, it was generally assumed that the Alchi Sumtsek (gSum-brtsegs), as the Three-storeyed Temple is commonly referred to, pre-dates the date implied by the depiction. On the other hand,

¹ I am grateful to Roger Goepper and Jaroslav Poncar for providing all their documentation on Alchi for my research as well as to Amy Heller for her continuous willingness to share some of her materials and ideas with me. The results, presented in this paper, were accumulated during a three-year research period, which was supported by a grant from the Austrian Academy of Sciences (APART), and during a six-months research period at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, which was supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Art History Fellowship. APART also supported the last field research in the area in Summer 2003. In addition, the Austrian Research Funds (FWF) generously supported my research in Ladakh and other regions of the Western Himalayas for more than a decade. Furthermore, an initial research trip to Alchi in spring 1994 was supported by a 'Stipendium für eine kurzfristige wissenschaftliche Arbeit im Ausland,' awarded by the University of Vienna, while another one in 1998 was privately funded by Edoardo Zentner (Achi Association; www.achiassociation.org). Color pictures complementing this article are found on www.univie.ac.at/ITBA/.

² Roger Goepper, "Clues for a Dating of the Three-Storeyed Temple (Sumtsek) in Alchi, Ladakh," *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Asienkunde / Études Asiatiques: Revue de la Société Suisse d'Études Asiatiques* 44, no. 2 (1990), 159–175.

³ The range of possible dates, which can be inferred from the lineage, depends on whether one assumes that Drigungpa was still alive when the painting was executed. In the case of many scroll-paintings (*thangkas*) it is more likely that they were executed posthumously, but there are definitely also cases where we can assume that the venerated was still alive, as in the case of the Rubin footprint drawing referred to below (note 15).

nobody expected that the temple would be connected to the Drigungpa School of Buddhism because none of the artifacts – including other inscriptions in the Sumtsek itself or in the earlier Assembly Hall⁴ – provided any clues for such a connection. Consequently, the suggested date for the temple remained disputed and the connection to a Central Tibetan school a puzzling issue. This did not change when Roger Goepper and Jaroslav Poncar published their groundbreaking study of this temple⁵ through which the unusual features of the lineage depiction within the corpus of the Alchi Sumtsek became even more apparent.

The critique most often expressed assumes that the lineage depiction, or at least its captioning, is a later addition.⁶ There is certainly some justification for this presumption as the people depicted in the lineage are represented somewhat graceless in comparison to all other figures in the temple. However, since the quality of both, the drawings and the materials, in this depiction is consistent with that of the other decorations,⁷ the reason for the clumsy depiction must be searched for elsewhere. I have focused on this point in a previous article⁸, where I have tried to demonstrate that the clumsiness of the depiction resulted from the painter's unfamiliarity with the depicted topic and its requirements. In general, it needs to be mentioned that a teaching lineage is a topic that has not been depicted earlier in Western Himalayan art.⁹

⁴ The historically most important inscriptions of the main temples in Alchi are recorded and translated in Philip Denwood, "Temple and Rock Inscriptions of Alchi," in *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh, 2: Zangskar and the Cave Temples of Ladakh*, ed. David L. Snellgrove and Tadeusz Skorupski (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1980).

⁵ Roger Goepper and Jaroslav Poncar, *Alchi. Ladakh's Hidden Buddhist Sanctuary. The Sumtsek* (London: Serindia, 1996).

⁶ Lionel Fournier has probably expressed the most outspoken critique in this regard. See Hwee Lie Bléhaut, "An Interview with Lionel Fournier," *Orientalism* 32, no. 1 (2001).

⁷ It needs to be noted here, that Goepper had the possibility to study the paintings in detail on the spot (see his remarks on the Alchi style Goepper and Poncar, *Alchi. The Sumtsek*, 265–68). Further, when the lantern was photographed, conservators were also able to examine it. For a contribution on the painting technology see Karl Ludwig Dasser, "Some Observations on the Technology of the Wall Paintings in the Sumtsek," in *Alchi. Ladakh's Hidden Buddhist Sanctuary. The Sumtsek*, ed. Roger Goepper and Jaroslav Poncar (London: Serindia, 1996).

⁸ Christian Luczanits, "Art-Historical Aspects of Dating Tibetan Art," in *Dating Tibetan Art. Essays on the Possibilities and Impossibilities of Chronology from the Lempertz Symposium, Cologne*, in *Contributions to Tibetan Studies*, ed. Ingrid Kreide-Damani. (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2003), Example One.

⁹ I have noted this fact already in an earlier article. Christian Luczanits, "On an Unusual Painting Style in Ladakh," in *The Inner Asian International Style 12th-14th Centuries. Papers Presented at a Panel of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*,

This initial unfamiliarity also partially explains why there is little in the decoration of the Alchi Sumtsek that resembles thirteenth-century Central Tibetan art and, thus, supports a Drigung-Kagyü association. Indeed, there are very few elements that may be attributed to the contact with Central Tibet, but the lineage is not the only one. Most noticeable, the topic of the 84 Mahasiddhas, represented on the *dhoti* of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, has no regional predecessor and is, like the lineage depiction itself, an expression of new themes gaining importance in Tibetan Art in general and in the Western Himalayas in particular.¹⁰

Soon after the lineage in the Sumtsek was painted, two *chörten* (*mchod-rten*) were erected within the sacred enclosure of Alchi monastery. Both *chörten* contain an identical group of four teachers on the interior walls of the interior *chörten*¹¹; a frontally depicted adept or *siddha*, two local teachers to his side, and a Central Tibetan teacher opposite the *siddha*. Roger Goepper has published a detailed study of the larger *chörten* (the Great Chörten).¹² I in turn have utilized the depictions of the teachers in both *chörten* to demonstrate that by the time they were decorated, the painters of Alchi had already seen a visual model for the depiction of the Central Tibetan teacher and, thus, were able to depict him in a manner reminiscent of Central Tibetan scroll paintings (fig.1).¹³ At that time, I hesitated to discuss the more elaborate surrounding of the teacher in the smaller *chörten* (henceforth called Small Chörten) and his identity in further detail, as I had too little conclusive evidence. In the meantime, I discovered iconographic markers that enable the identification of a number of early paintings made in the context of the Drigungpa School.¹⁴ Taking these as the main points of

Graz 1995, ed. Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter and Eva Allinger. (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998), 151–169.

¹⁰ The 84 Mahāsiddhas are in general a fairly new topic and their depiction alone refutes the attribution of the Sumtsek to a date prior to the 12th century. Even with the Sumtsek being attributed to the early 13th century, the depiction at Alchi remains the earliest example of this topic. In fact, it must be assumed that the notion of a group of 84 Mahāsiddhas, representing the esoteric canon received in Tibet, only developed around 1100 (see Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism : A Social History of the Tantric Movement* [New York: Columbia University Press, 2002], 303–9).

¹¹ For a plan of this type of *chörten* unique to Alchi and related monuments see Roger Goepper, “The ‘Great Stūpa’ at Alchi,” *Artibus Asiae* LIII (1/2) (1993), 111–43.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Luczanits, “Art-Historical Aspects of Dating Tibetan Art,” Example One.

¹⁴ Relevant paintings known to me so far are a number of footprint *thangkas*: one of them is in the Rubin Museum of Art, catalogued under the acc. #C2003.7.1 (*Himalayan Art* [website] (Shelly and Donald Rubin Foundation, 2004 [cited 30th September 2004])); available at

comparison, this tribute to Roger Goepper focuses on the composition and iconography of the depictions at Alchi and their relations as far as they are known to me to date.

Composition

Due to the unusual style and the open composition, one does not immediately recognize that the depiction in the Small Chörten at Alchi clearly derives from Central Tibetan scroll paintings, the so-called *thangkas*.¹⁵ Such compositions feature a central theme – in this case the teacher flanked by bodhisattvas, deities and adepts – a number of figures in the upper register who represent both the origin of the teaching as well as its authenticity, and a number of protective deities as well as deities of wealth at the bottom. In the Small Chörten, the central theme is a teacher who is depicted like a Buddha. Only his dress, which

<http://www.himalayanart.org/>, no. 65205; also Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, “Lama, *Yidam*, Protectors,” *Oriental Art* 35, no. 3 (2004): figs. 1-1f.); the other one is a footprint *thangka*, which chronologically dates two generations later and is in a private collection (Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, *The Silk Route and the Diamond Path: Esoteric Buddhist Art on the Trans-Himalayan Trade Routes* (Los Angeles: UCLA Art Council, 1982), pl. 111.; Klimburg-Salter, “Lama, *Yidam*, Protectors,” fig. 2, the two generation gap has not been recognized by the author) and two more unpublished ones. Other examples are teacher depictions: a *thangka* of the Pritzker collection (Steven M. Kossak and Jane Casey Singer, *Sacred Visions. Early Paintings from Central Tibet* [New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998], no. 17), one in a Swiss private collection (Pratapaditya Pal, *Himalayas. An Aesthetic Adventure* [Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago in association with the University of California Press and Mapin Publishing, 2003], no. 132), a *thangka* in fairly poor condition in the Koelz collection at the Museum of Anthropology at Ann Arbor, Michigan (Carolyn Copeland, *Tankas from the Koelz Collection*, vol. 18, *Michigan Papers on South and Southeast Asia* [Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1980], 98), a *thangka* in the collection of Navin Kumar (Pratapaditya Pal, *Tibet. Tradition and Change* [The Albuquerque Museum, 1997], 23), one in Tibet (Shuli Han, *Xizang Feng Ma Qi, Xizang Yi Shu Cong Shu* [Beijing: Ren min mei shu chu ban she, 1995], 295) and a repainted (cf. Rob Linrothe, Christian Luczanits, and Jeff Watt, “Turning a Blind Eye,” *Oriental Art* 35, no. 5 (2004)) *thangka* of Milarepa in the Rubin Museum of Art, acc. #C2002.24.5 (*Himalayan Art* [cited], no. 65121). A detailed analysis of this group of paintings and their interrelationship is in preparation.

¹⁵ It should be noted here, that there are no scroll paintings known so far which are painted in a style resembling that used in early Western Himalayan monuments, including Alchi. Apparently, at that time *thangkas* had not yet been made in the Western Himalayas. The earliest *thangkas* to be associated with the Western Himalayas are a pair of *thangkas* recently published from the Pritzker collection (Pal, *Himalayas*, 99 and 100, of these 100 seems earlier as it does not display any Central Tibetan elements yet) and a *thangka* formerly in the possession of Eugenio Ghersi, the Italian who accompanied Tucci to the Western Himalayas. See Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, “A *Thangka* Painting Tradition from the Spiti Valley,” *Oriental Art* 28, no. 10 (1997), 40–47.

is peculiar to Tibetan monks, his face, portrayed in a three-quarter profile view, and the absence of an *uṣṇīṣa* differentiate him from common depictions of Buddhas (Fig. 2). The way this figure is represented demonstrates that by now the Alchi painters have become familiar with the contemporary Central Tibetan depiction of teachers.¹⁶

The central teacher is flanked by two standing bodhisattvas, the white Avalokiteśvara who is holding a rosary and a lotus at its stem, and the orange Mañjuśrī who is holding the same attributes, except for a book placed on top of the lotus flower. Above them are the seated figures of Śaḍakṣaralokeśvara and Green Tārā. Both, the two bodhisattvas flanking a teacher¹⁷ as well as the two deities placed in the corners above them,¹⁸ are fairly common in Drigungpa paintings but are rarely seen in paintings not associated with this school.¹⁹

Lineage

The teaching lineage depicted in the upper row is again rather unusual. First of all, it is flanked by two Buddhas, Amitābha on the left, and a blue Buddha, who appears to be performing the gesture of argumentation (*vitarkamudrā*) with the right hand and holding a begging-bowl in the left just beneath the other hand, on the right. This Buddha may represent the Medicine Buddha (Bhaiṣajyaguru / sMan-bla) since it is this Buddha, who appears most often in this very position in comparative Drigungpa paintings.

¹⁶ For the usual depiction of Central Tibetan teachers in early Tibetan paintings see Kossak and Singer, *Sacred Visions*, nos. 5, 11, 17, 18, 19, 26, 30 & 51, or the teacher depictions referred to in note 15.

¹⁷ Among the teacher depictions of the Drigungpa School mentioned in note 15, only the unusual compositions of the Kumar *thangka* and the one in Tibet have no flanking bodhisattvas.

¹⁸ Among the teacher depictions of the Drigungpa School mentioned in note 15 none has the same two deities at that location. In fact, the deities depicted in this position vary considerably with forms of Avalokiteśvara being most frequently represented.

¹⁹ Among the Taglung (sTag-lung) School paintings, it seems that only those associated with Önpö Lama (Sangs-rgyas dBon Grags-pa-dpal 1251–1296) frequently have flanking bodhisattvas: e.g. Musée Guimet, MA 6083 (Gilles Béguin, *Les Peintures du Bouddhisme Tibétain* [Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1995], 482–84 and Jane Casey Singer, “Taklung Painting,” in *Tibetan Art. Towards a Definition of Style*, ed. Jane Casey Singer and Philip Denwood [London: Laurence King Publ., 1997], fig. 43); and others in private collections (Anna Maria Rossi and Fabio Rossi, *Selection 1994* [London: Rossi publications, 1994], no. 10; Singer, “Tibetan Art,” fig. 41) and in Tibet (Han, *Xizang Feng Ma Qi*, 317). Further, the position in the corners to the sides of the head of the main image is rather occupied by teachers and undifferentiated bodhisattvas.

The teaching lineage then commences with the portrayal of Vajrasattva, instead of the standard depiction of Vajradhara and the two *siddhas*, Tilopa and Naropa. Tilopa holds a fish and Naropa a skull cup. The iconography of these three figures largely conforms to their depictions in the Sumtsek lineage, where Tilopa holds a fish and a skull-cup, and Naropa holds a hand-drum (*damaru*) and a skull-cup.

The following four teachers in the lineage do not conform to any known depiction, not even that of the Sumtsek, because two of the teachers are shown as great adepts (*mahāsiddhas*), distinguished by their naked bodies which are only covered by a cape. Regardless of how one reads the lineage,²⁰ the last figure is one of the two *siddhas*. Thus, a *siddha* must be considered as the immediate teacher of the central image. It could well be that this *siddha* represents the same person as the dark-skinned *siddha*, who is the main figure in the two *chörten* interiors and is represented directly opposite from the Central Tibetan teacher.

More Siddhas

The central composition is flanked by two rows of *mahāsiddhas*, four on the left side and five on the right. In comparative examples, this group invariably consists of eight *siddhas*. Their number at Alchi is therefore highly unusual. The *siddhas* of the Alchi *chörten* also pose problems regarding their identification because neither their arrangement conforms to any of the other examples nor is their iconography distinguished enough to identify them in each case. This is even more surprising if one considers that in comparative Drigungpa paintings the *siddhas* are not only depicted in a consistent arrangement of distinctive groups in the upper corners but also their iconography is relatively consistent.²¹

One depiction, however, cannot only be identified with certainty, but also links this painting to the Drigungpa heritage. Among the comparative Drigungpa *thangkas*, the one in the Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) is decisive.²² This *thangka* is the only example which identifies the names of all figures in

²⁰ The central teacher could be following Naropa in the lineage, but he also could be seen as the last teacher in the lineage and immediately preceding the central figure, as is commonly the case in other Drigungpa and Taglungpa lineage depictions.

²¹ See Christian Luczanits, *forthcoming*. “The Eight Great Siddhas in Early Tibetan Painting from c. 1200 to c. 1350,” in *Holy Madness. Portraits of Tantric Siddhas*, edited by R. N. Linrothe. (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2005).

²² The *thangka* is readily available for research on the Himalayan Art website, which the Rubin Foundation has established in recent years (*Himalayan Art* [cited]).

captions, and, in the case of the *siddhas*, it even mentions the names of their attendants. In comparison to the RMA *thangka*, the triad in the upper right corner can be identified as that of the Buddha Śākyamuni with Nāgārjuna seated to his right (Fig. 3).²³ To the Buddha's left is Atiśa, the eminent Indian scholar who went to Tibet in the middle of the 11th century and had a wide-ranging influence on Buddhism there, wearing a pointed cap and a white robe. The triad most likely represents what is today called 'The Lineage of Profound View,' which passed from the Buddha Śākyamuni to Nāgārjuna and eventually entered Tibet with Atiśa.²⁴

Of the *siddhas* depicted to the left of the central teacher, the second and fourth ones can be identified with great certainty as Ḍombīheruka, who invariably sits on a pregnant tigress, and Kukkuripa, who has a dog as a companion. Although the animals of the two *siddhas* look very much alike in the Alchi depiction, the way the Kukkuripa's dog lies between the legs of this *siddha* – having his head turned around – compares well to other representations of this *siddha* (Fig. 4).

At the current stage of research the identities of the other *siddhas* cannot be confirmed with certainty, and the following identifications should be regarded as a working-hypothesis based on comparative depictions of the Drigungpa and Taglungpa Schools. The *siddha* in the upper right, dancing with a consort who is embracing him, is most likely Saraha (Fig. 5).²⁵ The figure depicted below the following Ḍombīheruka may be Virupa. I base the latter identification on the red disc depicted above the horn that may, in this case, be interpreted as a drinking horn.²⁶

²³ Sadly, Nāgārjuna is almost completely obscured by a splash of whitewash.

²⁴ The lineage of Profound View refers to the teaching of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of all phenomena. This sheds light on the fact that, at least within the Drigungpa School, among the Eight Great Adepts Nāgārjuna was not identified with the tantric *siddha* of the same name, but with the second century author of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*, an identification that subsequently became the predominant one. It may be worth noting that Drigungpa himself is considered an incarnation of Nāgārjuna.

²⁵ Saraha is most commonly shown dancing and being accompanied by two female attendants. Of course, the Alchi depiction lacks all his common attributes, particularly the bow.

²⁶ I have not come across a similar representation of this *siddha*, who is most commonly portrayed drinking from a skull-cup. However, the identification of one of the *siddhas* as Virupa would account for the ninth *siddha* being depicted because in common Drigungpa representations Virupa is represented as an attendant to Indrabhuti, a connection that still awaits clarification.

On the right side, underneath the triad of Śākyamuni and flanked by female attendants, is a seated *siddha*, possibly Indrabhuti, who is the only other *siddha* besides Saraha commonly represented with female attendants. The following three *siddhas* should represent Padmavajra, Lūyipa, and Ghaṇṭapāda (Dril-bu-pa) who is commonly depicted flying and holding a *vajra* and a bell in his hands. Bells are recognizable in the left hands of the lower two *siddhas* on this side.

Protectors

Seven protective deities occupy the bottom row. In spite of their unusual representations, a comparison with other examples of Drigungpa School paintings, most notably the inscribed RMA *thangka*, now allows for their identification.

In the right corner is a four-armed figure of Mahākāla, who is holding a sword and a trident (of which only the outlines remain) in the right hands and a skull-cup as well as a club (possibly a club with a skull on top or a tantric staff, called *khaṭvāṅga*) in the left hands (Fig. 6, left deity). This iconography diverges from the common one, the four-armed gnosis Mahākāla in the tradition of rGwa lo-tsa-ba (gZhon-nu-dpal, 12th century²⁷), by replacing the common knife with the trident.²⁸ Mahākāla is followed by the deity of wealth, Jambhala, who is shown holding a fruit in the right hand and the mongoose in the left (Fig. 6, right deity).

Following them are four deities, who are all brandishing a weapon in the right hand and performing the threatening gesture (*tarjanīmudrā*) with the left. The first of these deities is yellow, and the others are blue. The yellow fierce deity, brandishing a sword or stick with a *vajra* at its point, likely represents Aparājita / gZhan-gyis-mi-thub-pa. The blue fierce deity, standing on a bull and holding a club on the side, may represent Yamāntaka / gShin-rje-gshed, the fierce manifestation of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (Fig. 7, left deity). The next

²⁷ TBRC, *Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center* [website] (E. Gene Smith, Leonard van der Kuijp, David Lunsford, Derek Kolleeny, Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Michele Martin, Timothy J. McNeill, Shelley Rubin & Janet Gyatso, 2004 [cited 30.10.2004]; available at <http://tbrc.org/search/>).

²⁸ It is this form that is found on most Drigungpa *thangkas*. Curiously, on the Rubin *thangka* this protector is identified as Bya-ro-g-ma, strictly speaking a female form of the raven-headed Mahākāla Bya-ro-g-gdong-can. For the different forms of Mahākāla see Martin Willson and Martin Brauen, eds., *Deities of Tibetan Buddhism. The Zürich Paintings of the Icons Worthwhile to See (Bris Sku Mthong Ba Don Ldan)* (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2000), nos. 340–92.

deity depicted is apparently brandishing a *vajra* and can therefore be identified as the Guhyapati Vajrapāṇi / gSang-bdag Phyag-na-rdo-rje (Fig. 7, right deity). Finally, the wrathful deity brandishing a sword in his raised hand can be identified as Acala / Mi-g.yo-ba (Fig. 8, left deity). He tramples on Gaṇeśa, the personification of obstacles.

If one compares this group of deities to those on other Drigungpa paintings, it becomes obvious that these four deities serve as the protectors of the cardinal directions. However, as already indicated by the colors used for the deities, the attribution of the deities represented at Alchi to the four cardinal directions is problematic, especially, since the *vajra*-family of the east is clearly overrepresented.²⁹

Finally, another blue fierce deity who is brandishing a sword, holding a skull-cup, and sitting on a not clearly identifiable animal (Fig. 8, right deity), is represented in the right corner. In most comparative examples, Remati, brandishing a sword, holding a mongoose, and sitting on a horse, takes this position.³⁰ While holding the mongoose is characteristic of the yakṣa aspect of this goddess (gNod-spyin Re-ma-ti), the Alchi depiction emphasizes her being the head of the demons (bDud-mo Re-ma-ti).³¹

Alchi and the Drigungpa

Although the representation of the teacher in the Small Chörten shows a much greater familiarity with the way such depictions are composed and executed in contemporary Central Tibet, a close analysis of all its elements reveals that this familiarity does not extend beyond the main elements. On the one hand, it is clear that the depiction in the Alchi *chörten* finds its closest parallels in *thangkas* associated with the Drigungpa School. On the other hand, all the minor elements in the composition – the lineage, the *siddhas*, as well as the protectors – diverge considerably from those depictions, thereby making the Alchi painting unique and almost illegible.

A particular curiosity is the representation of *siddhas* in the lineage, thereby diverging from the common Kagyüpa lineages, including those of the Drigungpa

²⁹ It appears that the representation of this group of deities is less consistent on the earliest Drigungpa paintings such as those of Alchi and the RMA *thangka*, but becomes increasingly consistent on later ones.

³⁰ In the Rubin *thangka*, the goddess is four-armed, holding a sword and a *vajra*(?) in the right hands, the mongoose and a skull-cup(?) in the left hands, and is identified as Remati.

³¹ Willson and Brauen, eds., *The Zürich Paintings*, nos. 398 and 400.

School. The fact that the lineage – regardless of how it is read – presents a dark-skinned *siddha* as the immediate predecessor of the depicted teacher, reinforces the emphasis the two Alchi *chörten*, the Great Chörten and the Small Chörten, place on a dark skinned *siddha* holding a twig and a flute. This *siddha*, facing the central Tibetan teacher, is to be considered the main teacher portrayed in the compositions of the two *chörten* because he is the only figure depicted frontally. The identity of this *siddha* is key for the understanding of the latest phase of the early temples at Alchi, since he is not only depicted in the *chörten*, but also together with the 84 Mahāsiddhas on the *dhotī* of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī in the Sumtsek, as well as in the niche of the Assembly Hall in Sumda Chung. However, the identity of this *siddha* is still an enigma, even more so, because comparative paintings, in particular a small painting in the Jucker Collection showing such a *siddha* in a Kagyüpa context, have failed to shed light on this issue.

The nine *siddhas*, flanking the teacher in the Alchi *chörten*, are unusual, too. Not only is their number one more than usual, but it also appears that in several instances the painters of the Alchi *chörten* were not clear about their iconographical details. The fact that the tiger of Ḍombīheruka and the dog of Kukkuripa are not recognizable as such, but that Kukkuripa’s animal is depicted in a way that resembles other depictions, may indicate that the painters had a visual model to draw from, albeit one that was not completely clear to them (fig.4).

Similar observations apply to the protector deities depicted in the bottom row, particularly regarding the depiction of Remati and her vehicle (Fig. 8, right deity). Another interesting feature in this composition is the absence of Hayagrīva (rTa-mgrin), who invariably occurs in comparative images, and the prominent position of Yamāntaka on his vehicle, the bull (Fig. 7, left deity). In no other comparative examples does Yamāntaka appear in this form. However, given the centrality of this protector in this composition and the unusual clarity of his vehicle, it becomes obvious that it must have been a conscious choice to place this particular deity there.

Thus, although at first glance, the Small Chörten painting appears to depict a central Tibetan topic in an unusual style, this is only part of the story. Similar to the lineage depiction in the Sumtsek, the depiction in the Small Chörten indicates that the painters were not familiar with all aspects of the subject matter to be depicted, in spite of the fact that they had already accumulated the knowledge of how to depict the teacher and which elements to include in the composition. Therefore, the assumption that the Drigungpa elements were almost an afterthought to the Sumtsek and added in the last moment becomes

even more plausible. Furthermore, based on the evidence that Drigungpa's name is listed in the Sumtsek lineage and that the depiction of the teacher in the Small Chörten closely compares to paintings of his school, often depicting Drigungpa himself or his immediate successors, the teacher in the Alchi *chörten* can be identified as Drigungpa himself.³² Traditionally, the teacher was thought to represent Rinchen Zangpo (Rin-chen-bzang-po), the great West-Tibetan translator of the 11th century, to whom Alchi monastery is attributed today.

The Drigungpa School and its founder obviously were well known at Alchi when the Sumtsek and the *chörten* were built, and they were considered important enough being referred to in such a prominent manner. Nevertheless, given that also in the Small Chörten the Drigungpa influence is restricted, after all only one of the four panels in the interior *chörten* shows affiliations with the Drigungpa School and Central-Tibetan art, and not fully developed where it is visible, one can conclude that Alchi kept considerable independence throughout its early flourishing years, an independence that is also visible in the iconographic program of these monuments.

Having established this context, one is now able to also give the Alchi Translator's Temple (Lo-tsa-ba lHa-khang) a new meaning. The inscription there, which alludes to a person named Rin-chen (among others), may well be the reason for the association of this temple, and in extension the whole Alchi monastery, with this famous translator of the 11th century. However, Rin-chen can also refer to Drigungpa because his ordination name is Rin-chen-dpal (Magnificent Jewel), a name inscribed on the back of the Drigungpa *thangka*, which is in a private collection.³³ There, the name used is Ratna guru śrī, a phrase that translates into *Rin-chen bla-ma dpal*. The acrostic of the first line (four verses) in the Translator's Temple inscription, written in red ink instead of black, reads *bla-ma chös-rje Rin-chen bla-ma* and, thus, may well refer to Drigungpa.

This reading is further supported by the depiction of the teacher on the main wall of that temple which is to some extent similar to that in the Small Chörten. More decisively, however, the depiction conforms to a large degree to the

³² This identification has been suggested to me by Amy Heller in an e-mail on November 10, 2002 based on a *thangka* from a private collection which was published by P. Pal (mentioned in note 15) and for which Amy Heller deciphered the inscription. The identification of a group of paintings belonging to the Drigungpa School, most closely related to the Alchi depiction, now confirms her suggestion.

³³ Pal, *Himalayas*, 203, 91-92, no. 132. The inscription on the back of this *thangka* was deciphered by Amy Heller.

Drigungpa paintings used as comparisons for the Small Chörten depiction and, thus, also belongs to this group. A detailed analysis of the Translator's Temple, its iconographic program and its inscription is, however, another story.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

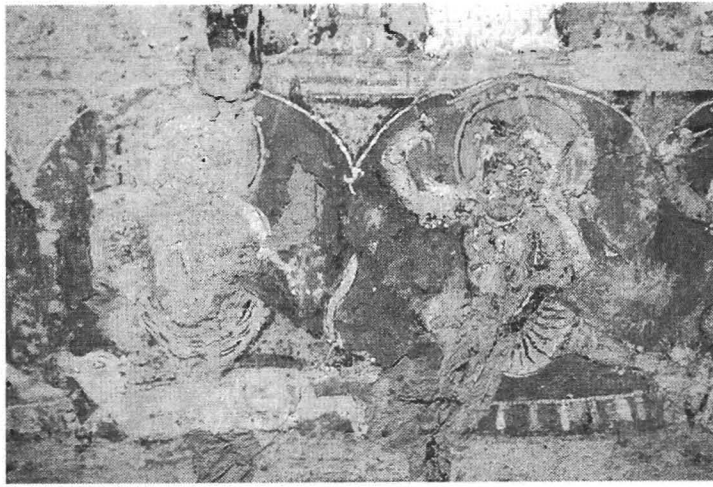


Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

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Long Life

寿眉

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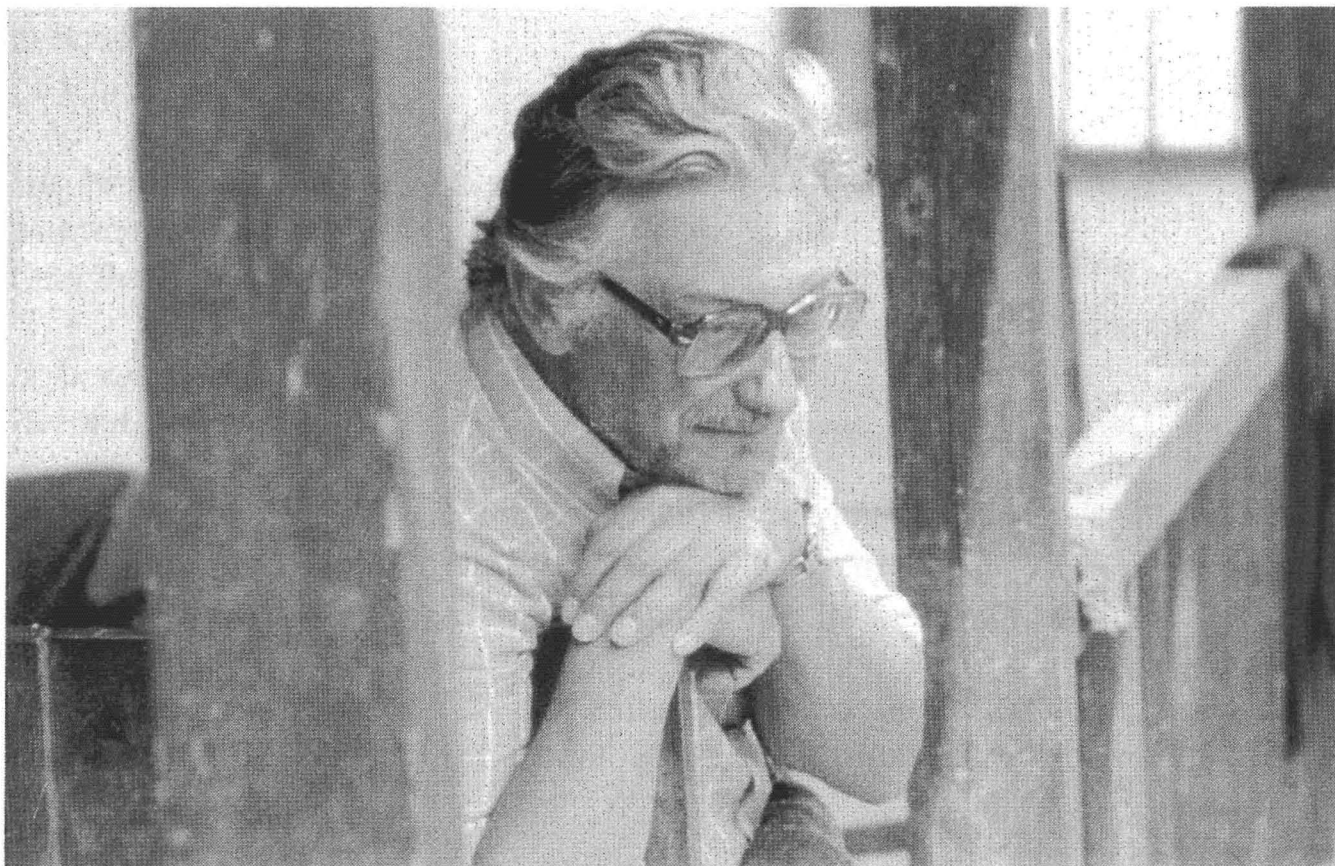
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Roger Goepper
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