

Oriental

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Search and Research: The Provenance of Longmen Images in the Freer Collection
Double Beauty: Qing Dynasty Couplets from the Lechangzai Xuan Collection
The Metamorphosis of the *Qin*, 500 BCE-CE 500
The Nako Preservation Project
The 12th Century Buddhist Monuments of Nako

Orientations

VOLUME 34 NUMBER 5 MAY 2003

The contents of this volume, the continued attendance at museum exhibitions and symposia, and the sustained patronage of galleries and fairs are reminders that research and interests in Asian art and culture prevail even in times of adversity. Chang Qing's search to identify Longmen sculptures in collections outside China has enabled him to verify the authenticity of thirteen examples in the Freer Gallery of Art. Harold Mok selected six calligraphic couplets from Harold Wong's collection, on view at the Art Gallery, Chinese University of Hong Kong, to illustrate how this unique genre became valued for its style and content during the Qing period. Following his examination of classical Chinese texts, Bo Lawergren attempts to provide a clearer understanding of the development of the *qin*. Articles by Deborah Klimburg-Salter and Christian Luczanits on the Buddhist temple of Nako, placed on the 100 Most Endangered Sites 2002 list, provide a comprehensive picture of its survival and demonstrate how the site is an invaluable source for the study and understanding of the early Tibetan Buddhist art and the culture and history of Himachal Pradesh.

Alfreda Murck and Steven Owyong review two recent exhibitions of Chinese paintings in Shanghai. Highlights of

gallery exhibitions in London during the month of June are previewed and, in this month's commentary,

John Sanday muses on the effects of tourism on Angkor.

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Cover: *Landscape No. 2*

By Li Huayi (b. 1948)

Ink and colour on paper

Height 182 cm, width 98 cm

'Lofty Mountains, Flowing Waters: An Invitational

Exhibition of Contemporary Landscape Painting'

Liu Haisu Art Museum, Shanghai

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The 12th Century Buddhist Monuments of Nako

Christian Luczanits

Historically, Nako was one of the key centres of Buddhism in the western Himalayas. Established in the early second millennium, the temple complex is among the oldest foundations extant in the area, and was once linked with neighbouring institutions including the major monasteries of Tholing to the east and Tabo to the west. The region also retains numerous minor foundations which can be dated to the 11th and 12th centuries, but only at Tabo is the original cultural heritage as well preserved as at Nako. Generally speaking, the religious complexes established in the western Himalayas between the 10th and 12th centuries were some of the most important centres to embrace the diverse Buddhist traditions of India. The evidence they provide not only of religious and art-historical trends but also of the sociology and culture of the period is enormous. It is often only as a result of such early evidence that the later development of Buddhist art and culture can be understood.

The aim of this article, then, is to examine the art preserved within the two oldest monuments at Nako in light of its value for research on the Buddhist art, culture and history of the region. Comparisons are restricted to the two principal and most widely published repositories of early Buddhist art in the western Himalayas, the Main Temple at Tabo (Klimburg-Salter, 1997) and the Main Temple and Three-storey Temple at Alchi (Pal and Fournier, 1982; Goepper and Poncar, 1996). The renovation of the former, which is fairly close to Nako in the Spiti valley, was completed by 1042, and gives a clear indication of the content, style and iconography of the art of the Purang-Guge kingdom (10th-12th century) at the height of its power and material means. The Alchi temples, by contrast, are located far away in lower Ladakh, and the Three-storey Temple or Sumtsek can not have been completed before 1200 (Goepper, 1990). As this author has shown elsewhere, the Sumtsek can be considered the last major monument in an independent early



(Fig. 1) Vajradhatu-mahamandala
Apse, Translator's Temple, Nako, Himachal Pradesh
Early 12th century
Mural painting and clay sculpture
WHAV CL98 30.2



(Fig. 2) Dharmadhatu-vagishvara-manjushri mandala
Left wall, Translator's Temple, Nako, Himachal Pradesh
Early 12th century
Mural painting
WHAV CL98 20,3

Buddhist artistic tradition in the western Himalayas, of which the Alchi monuments represent a branch (Luczanits, 1998 and forthcoming[a]).

The oldest monument at Nako, and also the largest, is the Main Temple (Tsuglagkhang) or Translator's Temple (Lotsaba lhakhang) (see the article by Deborah Klimburg-Salter in this issue, plan 1 and fig. 2). The latter name signifies that the temple is thought to have been founded by the Great Translator Rinchen Zangpo (958-1055), who is well known for the temples attributed to him as well as for his voluminous corpus of translations of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan. The Translator's Temple consists of a room measuring approximately 8 by 8.25 metres with an apse at the rear of around 2.7 by 4.4 metres (Fig. 1). At over 5 metres the ceiling is extremely high, allowing the mandala circles on the side walls to cover almost the entire surface (Fig. 2).

The apse is occupied by clay sculptures of the five Jinas (Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi), with Vairochana in the centre. These five Jinas represent the main deities in the Vajradhatu-mahamandala, the secondary deities of which have been painted around them. Like the murals, these sculptures and another of the female deity

Prajnaparamita on the wall to the left of the apse date to the founding of the temple, although both were considerably restored and repainted on various occasions; the jewellery on the sculptures, for example, has been completely replaced. Despite the repainting, the thrones of the main images, and in particular the fantastic depictions of sea monsters (Skt *makara*) resting on the upper crossbar of Vairochana's throne, evidence the high quality of the original workmanship. Highly fragmentary remains of a large text are also visible on the walls of the apse, while underneath the figure of Prajnaparamita an equally incomplete inscription of four stanzas accompanies an only vaguely discernible donor portrait.

Of the original paintings in the Translator's Temple, the one on the left or southwest wall is best preserved. The whole wall is taken up by a single mandala of an eight-armed Tantric form of the bodhisattva Manjushri, Dharmadhatu-vagishvara-manjushri (see Fig. 2). This representation at Nako is certainly the most detailed and expressive depiction of this mandala extant in the Himalayas.

The Dharmadhatu-vagishvara-manjushri mandala was apparently of crucial importance in 10th to 13th century Buddhist monuments of the western Himalayas as it is the most frequently represented mandala in the region besides the Vajradhatu mandala itself. It is centred on a white or yellow four-faced and eight-armed form of Manjushri, usually named Manjughosha in this context; at Nako this figure has been coarsely repainted in white (Fig. 2a). The main image is sur-



(Fig. 2a) Detail of Dharmadhatu-vagishvara-manjushri mandala showing Manjughosha surrounded by the eight Ushnishas
WHA V CL94 134,2

rounded by the eight Ushnishas, their name referring to one of the marks of a Buddha, the cranial protuberance. The four other principal deities of this mandala likewise have four heads and eight arms, and are surrounded by the sixteen Vajrabodhisattvas, which also occur in the Vajradhatu mandala. Together with the female counterparts of the main deities, placed in the intermediary directions, these depictions make up the central circle of the mandala.

Around the central circle in the corners of the inner square, the seven jewels of a world ruler (Skt *chakravartin*) are shown along with an eighth object that is no longer recognizable. Among these, the illustration of the Precious Queen (Tsunmo Rinpoche), dressed in an almost transparent white coat characteristic of the local area and wearing rows of necklaces, best demonstrates the aesthetic achievements of the Nako painters (Fig. 2b). The second square contains 48 female personifications of the stages (Skt *bhumi*), qualities or accomplishments of a bodhisattva, while the third square accommodates the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Age and a group of ten protectors. Each of these major spatial entities has four gates protected by gatekeepers.

An unusually large space is used to represent the outermost circle of the mandala, which at Nako is actually the area to the right and left of the circle surrounding the third square. Originally, an assembly of 156 deities was depicted here in thirteen rows. Besides the more common groups of the Four Great Kings and the Guardians of the Directions, various Hindu and pan-Indian deities as protectors of the mandala have been included, together with the planets and constellations. To the left, for example, the nine-headed Ravana (Fig. 2c) leads a group of demons (Skt *rakshasa*) forming the retinue of the Guardian of the Southwest, Nairrti. This section is a vivid example of the rich Indian heritage passed on to the Tibetans.

As a detailed study of this outermost circle has shown, at



(Fig. 2b) Detail of Dharmadhatu-vagishvara-manjushri mandala showing the Precious Queen
WHA V CL98 21,34



(Fig. 2c) Detail of Dharmadhatu-vagishvara-manjushri mandala showing Ravana
WHAV CL98 26,12

Nako more deities are depicted than is usually described in the texts, and thus some groups are yet to be identified (Luczanits, forthcoming[b]). Only in one of the caves at Dungkar near Tholing, which derive from the same cultural context as the Nako temples, is a comparable composition of this mandala known to have been preserved. (Some *rakshasa* and two personified constellations [Skt *nakshatra*] from the southwest corner of this mandala are shown in Pritzker, fig. 14).

The Nako mandalas are particularly remarkable for their gilded relief paintings. In the central circle of the mandala on the left wall, not only is all the jewellery painted in high relief and gilded, but also the haloes and other decorative elements (see Fig. 2a). Similarly, the flames of the mandala circle are ornamented with gilt (see Fig. 2c), and the garlands with Faces of Glory (Skt *kirtimukha*) along the mandala palace walls are virtually three-dimensional due to the use of this technique. Sadly, in many instances the gilding has been scratched off in want of gold.

The right or northeast wall is likewise covered by a single mandala. Although its central section was reworked during a later period, this painting can still be identified as a Durgatiparishodana mandala, which purifies from evil destinies. Closely related to the Vajradhatu mandala, it has a meditating four-headed Vairochana in its centre, the so-called Sarvavid Vairochana (*sarvavid* in Sanskrit means 'all-knowing'). Stylistically as well as technically, the extant original paintings on the right wall differ greatly from those on the left wall. In addition, there are considerable iconographic inconsistencies when the same deity is represented on both sides. This clearly indicates that the walls of the Translator's Temple were painted by two groups of artists from completely different artistic backgrounds.

Nevertheless, the mandala on the right wall is painted in a highly sophisticated manner, and gilded relief decoration is used extensively in the central square of this mandala as well. For example, both the jewellery and the attribute of the bodhisattva Sarvashokatamonirghatamati (one of the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Age) in the third circle are executed in relief (Fig. 3a). The fanciful ornamentation of the broad band of his halo should also be noted. A new feature in the art of the area is the complex, finely shaded scroll pattern between the deities of the fourth circle, as can be seen above and below the fierce red deity in the northern quarter of the mandala (Fig. 3b).

The mandala on the right wall is particularly remarkable for the expressive depictions of the lower realms in which a being can be reborn, painted in the top corners outside the mandala. In the upper left corner, the sorrowful world of hungry ghosts is illustrated in an especially animated manner; the stream or river of hot and icy water, the temperature indicated by red and blue whorls, is striking (Fig. 3c). In the upper right corner, the world of animals enabled the artist to represent all the creatures known to him, both real and imagined. There, the background divides the animals living on the land from those in the sea or



(Fig. 3a) Detail of Durgatiparishodana mandala showing Sarvashokatamonirghatamati
Right wall, Translator's Temple, Nako, Himachal Pradesh
Early 12th century
Mural painting
WHAV CL96 78,21



(Fig. 3b) Detail of Durgatiparishodana mandala showing fierce deity and scroll pattern
WHAV CL96 78,27



(Fig. 3c) Detail of Durgatiparishodana mandala showing the realm of hungry ghosts
WHAV CL98 35,08

water. In Figure 3d, a curious turtle-like creature is shown on the land just below a white elephant, while the water is dominated by a *makara*. The outline of a fish that remains unpainted is also visible. To this author's knowledge, this is the earliest representation of this topic throughout the Himalayas, as well as the most extensive.

On the right wall, too, protective Hindu and pan-Indian deities are pictured on the outer edge of the mandala. While the Guardians of the Directions and their hosts still form part of the mandala's circle, the planets and constellations are shown in vertical rows outside it. Among these is red Rahu, the eclipse, with a serpent's body and holding the sun and moon (Fig. 3e). This expressively and quickly drawn figure makes the stylistic differences to the left wall most apparent.

The entrance wall was almost completely replaced during a historic restoration, and only a few fragments of an original donor depiction to the left of the entrance remain. The other paintings on this wall are coarse and stem from different periods. Similarly, the roof was destroyed in an earthquake in 1975, and since then



(Fig. 3d) Detail of Durgatiparishodana mandala showing the animal realm
WHAV CL98 35,28



(Fig. 3e) Detail of Durgatiparishodana mandala showing Rahu
WHAV CL98 35,14

only a tin roof has covered the monument. Nevertheless, some of the original painted ceiling panels are extant, again evidencing the originality and innovative power of the painters who decorated the temple. Two of these are shown in Figure 4. On one panel, pairs of mythical beasts have been inserted into squares formed by textile-like strips with circles overlapping each other as if patched together, while on the other original panel a pattern composed of overlapping circles probably imitates a textile. Additionally, the capitals and brackets are painted with lotus blossoms or rows of lotus petals, thus complementing the overall effect.

The Upper Temple (Lhakhang gongma), locally also ascribed to the same founder as the Translator's Temple, is situated directly opposite it (see the article by Deborah Klimburg-Salter in this issue, plan 1). The Upper Temple is a small room measuring roughly 5.5 metres square, with a height of 4.6 metres. The structure is extremely fragile, with parts of the beams supporting the roof virtually on the edge of collapse. Despite its precarious condition, the temple retains much of its original interior decoration on all four walls. While the main wall is mainly covered with sculptures, the side and entrance walls are painted with murals.

The configuration of sculptures on the main wall is unique. The principal image, which has been crudely restored, can most likely be identified as Prajnaparamita, and is flanked by eight Buddhas (Fig. 5). While comparable mandalas of different iconographies exist, Nako is the only monument hitherto known where a female deity that forms the main image of a mandala composition is flanked only by Buddhas. The side walls are again covered by a single mandala each, both of them dedicated to forms of Vairochana. The paintings in the Upper Temple are executed with greater attention to detail than those in the Translator's Temple, and the artists tended to vary a



(Fig. 4) Ceiling
Translator's Temple, Nako, Himachal Pradesh
Outer panels: early 12th century
Mural painting
WHAV CL98 33,24



(Fig. 5) Prajnaparamita mandala
Main wall, Upper Temple, Nako, Himachal Pradesh
Mid-12th century
Mural painting and clay sculpture
WHA V CL98 13,02

theme, as is visible in the fanciful representations of the heavenly palaces painted in a row underneath the sculptures on the main wall. Occupied by a group of the eight bodhisattvas, all of which are severely damaged, the palaces flank an unusual depiction of Green Tara as Saviouress from the Eight Dangers, in fragmentary condition (Allinger, forthcoming). Another highlight of the murals in the Upper Temple is the colourful decorative scrolls and scarves filling larger, otherwise void sections of the mandalas. In the corners on the right wall, for instance, flower scrolls derive from a small vase (Fig. 6). Additionally, the entrance wall features a unique representation of a protective deity wearing Chinese or Central Asian armoured dress, which is also the earliest depiction of its kind in the region.

The murals in the Nako temples are clearly in the tradition of western Tibetan painting, of which the Tabo murals attributable to the renovation completed in 1042 are among the earliest known survivors. Compared to these, the Nako murals show numerous innovations and technical peculiarities. In contrast to Tabo, where only the main deities of a mandala are shown, painted side by side in 'horizontal' fashion, at Nako fully developed mandalas with gates and fire circle are represented as part of a temple's decoration for the first time in the

area, and probably in the whole of the Tibetan cultural region. The paintings in the Translator's Temple at Nako are also the most sophisticated example of the use of gilt relief throughout the Himalayas.

Iconographically, the decoration of the Translator's Temple documents the introduction of new topics as well as preserving extremely detailed and sophisticated versions of two major mandalas. The unusual prominence of the secondary Hindu and pan-Indian deities attending and protecting both mandalas is evidence of close ties to the Indian cultural heritage, while the Durgatiparishodana mandala on the right wall is the earliest depiction of this subject known so far. The representation of Prajnaparamita as a main image in a temple is not only an innovation, but she appears only to occur in such a position in the late 11th and 12th centuries.

While the style of the paintings in the Translator's Temple, or at least those in the apse and on the left wall, still shows close affinities to the Tabo renovation paintings, the major intellectual, iconographic and technical inventions indicate a temporal gap between the two monuments. Indeed, some of the compositions and the use of gilded relief painting are comparable to the Main Temple or Assembly Hall (Dukhang) and the Three-storey Temple at Alchi as well as other related sites in lower Ladakh. The Translator's Temple thus represents an intermedi-

ary stage between the Tabo Main Temple and the Alchi monuments, and may therefore be attributed to the first decades of the 12th century.

Considering the stylistic differences and the use of particular motifs, the Upper Temple at Nako cannot be contemporaneous with the Translator's Temple or painted by one of the two or more groups of artists that executed the murals there. A considerable shift towards a more detailed and refined painting style is discernible in the Upper Temple, which can also be seen at Alchi. There, too, later monuments, such as the Three-storey Temple, are much more refined and mannerist in their details than the earlier ones, especially the Assembly Hall. There is also no trace of gilded relief painting in the Upper Temple at Nako. The architectural frames found there still remind one of the heavenly palaces depicted in the Tabo renovation murals, but they are much more lofty and varied (see Klimburg-Salter, figs 124-27 and 277). A sizeable interlude between the construction of the two Nako temples is further supported by the differences in the technical and aesthetic quality of the sculptures, although the iconography of the two temples does not give any clue to chronology. As a working hypothesis, then, the Nako Upper Temple may be assigned to the mid-12th century.

The two oldest temples at Nako bear witness to a distinctive phase in the early development of western Tibetan Buddhism.



(Fig. 6) Detail of Vairochana mandala showing flower scrolls
Right wall, Upper Temple, Nako, Himachal Pradesh
Mid-12th century
Mural painting
WHAV CL98 16,02

If one accepts the proposed dates, they are the only monuments in the western Himalayas attributable to the first half of the 12th century, a period in which the Purang-Guge kingdom disintegrated into smaller dominions. It is only through the Nako murals (and to a lesser extent the sculptures at Lalung near Tabo) that it is possible to understand in greater detail the way in which the Tabo and Alchi murals are related, as well as their respective characteristics. The Nako murals also reveal the approximate time that fully developed mandalas were introduced into the decoration of a temple and how this was done. They show the shifts in the importance of particular deities for the Buddhist practice of the time, and shed light on the introduction of new practices. The two oldest Nako temples are thus an invaluable resource for the study and understanding of the early development of Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan culture in general.

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The author wishes to draw attention to the fact that this treasure of early western Himalayan art is faced with destruction unless countermeasures are adopted soon. Indeed, through the initiative of INTACH, Deborah Klimburg-Salter and this author, the Nako temples were nominated among the 100 Most Endangered Sites 2002 by World Monuments Watch (www.worldmonuments.org; India, Nako Temples; site no. 45).

All photographs are by the author and are in the Western Himalayan Archives Vienna (WHAV).

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