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A Vajradhātu Mandala in a Prajñāpāramitā Manuscript of Tabo Monastery*

In the introduction to his part of the *Catalogue of the Manuscript Collection of Tabo Monastery* Paul Harrison describes the unfortunate fate of the collection in considerable detail (see Harrison 2009: xii-iff.). In the course of its history this collection has been so often and severely disturbed, including incidents of burning, that less than 20 per cent of the original corpus remained.¹ In addition, Harrison (*ibid.*: xvii) notes that “The unusually small number of illustrated folios left at Tabo and the almost total absence of *gser yig* manuscripts remains strongly suggest that the collection has been picked over by travelers passing through the region.” It is thus not surprising that the few illustrated folios preserved in the collection belong to a number of different manuscripts. Among them, the illuminations of the deities of the Vajradhātu mandala, the focus of this article, are exceptional in this regard.

The Illustrated Manuscripts at Tabo

Even though the Prajñāpāramitā literature (the *yum mdo* section of the Tibetan canon), which most often contains illustrations, represents the main corpus of the texts preserved at Tabo, altogether only

* We would like to thank Gudrun Melzer, who not only generously shared her own observations with us, but also contributed her analyses of the diverse Prajñāpāramitā sources. Helmut Tauscher generously provided the photo documentation of the Tabo manuscripts. Documentation used in as comparison to develop the argument of this article has been provided by Carlo Cristi, Paul Harrison, Jaroslav Poncar, Tom Pritzker, and Helmut Tauscher among others.

The abbreviation WHAV refers to images housed at the Western Himalaya Archive Vienna.

¹ For earlier descriptions of the state of the Tabo manuscripts see, for example, Francke 1914, describing his visit in 1909, Tucci 1935; Tucci 1988 and Steinkellner 2001, all of which are also cited by Harrison.



53 of roughly 35,374 manuscript folios contain illuminations. Fortunately, more than half of the Tabo illustrations, namely 28 folios, come from a single manuscript, a *Pañcaviṃśatikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Fig. 1), while the remaining 25 illuminations come from nine different manuscripts. Statistically, the number of illustrated folios among

1. Tabo, *Pañcaviṃśatikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (RN 5), folios Kha-Na 96 und Ka-Na 19 (C. Luczanits, 1994).



2. Buddha with red robes on pink lotus performing the argumentation gesture (*vitarkamudrā*); Tabo, manuscript RN 6 (E. Allinger, 1994).



3. Buddha touching the earth; Tabo, manuscript RN 7 (C. Scherrer-Schaub, 1998; WHAV).

4. Blue, earth-touching Buddha in red robes; Tabo, manuscript RN 9 (E. Allinger, 1994).

5. White Buddha with red shading and green patchwork robe; Tabo, manuscript RN 13 (E. Allinger, 1994).

6. Red Buddha in pink patchwork dress; Tabo, manuscript RN 167 (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).



the latter group of manuscripts remains well below the average for the collection as a whole, indicating that picking of illustrated folios may well have contributed to the present state of the collection.²

Among the manuscript illuminations, 51 can stylistically be attributed to the earliest part of the collection.³ Usually such illuminations are representations of the Buddha with little or no direct connection to the text they are found in, but the Tabo manuscripts preserve some interesting other examples. A number of scenes preserved at Tabo illustrate the story of the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita and his quest for the Perfection of Wisdom, and thus directly relate to the texts they are found in (see Luczanits 2010 and below). The

² All statistics of Harrison 2009, in particular xvii–xviii and n. 17.

³ The earliest manuscripts of Tabo can be attributed to the 10th and 11th centuries, as corroborated by C-14 examples reported by Scherrer-Schaub and Bonani 2002. For a Tabo manuscript datable to the first half of the 11th century due to its historical information see Scherrer-Schaub 1999.

illuminations of the manuscript discussed in detail below, in contrast, illustrate a topic with no direct connection to the text's content, the deities of the Vajradhātu mandala.

To put this manuscript with the Vajradhātu assembly in context, we first summarise the other types of illuminations as preserved at Tabo. Five of the Tabo manuscripts contain depictions of seated Buddhas:

- Running No. 6: Harrison (2009: 45) records two folios of an *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript under Cat.No. 1.1.5.2, which contain stylistically quite different Buddha depictions. It is thus very likely that these folios stem from two different manuscripts, most probably Cat.No. 1.1.5.2 and Cat.No. 1.1.5.6 (Running No. 167, see below).⁴ Here we thus consider only one of the depictions to be part of RN 6, which shows a seated Buddha performing *vitarkamudrā* with his right hand and with his left hand at his side (Fig. 2).
- Running No. 7: Of the 57 preserved folios of another *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.2.16, Harrison 2009: 31f.) six preserve very similar Buddha depictions, each of them with the earth-touching gesture (*bhūmisparśamudrā*; Fig. 3).
- Running No. 9: Of the 86 folios of a *Ratnakūṭa* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.3.4, Harrison 2009: 95f.) three show a seated Buddha performing the earth-touching gesture (*bhūmisparśamudrā*; Fig. 4).
- Running No. 13: Of altogether 257 preserved folios of a *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.2.5, Harrison 2009: 23f.) one folio has three seated Buddhas on it and four folios contain a single Buddha each (Fig. 5).
- Running No. 167 (Cat.No. 1.1.5.6, Harrison 2009: 47, see RN 6) comprises only eight folios of an *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript. On folio Ka 85 a seated Buddha is depicted showing the gesture of fearlessness (*abhayamudrā*; Fig. 6).

All these illustrations are found at the end of a chapter or another marked section of the text (*le'u, bam po*). The quality of the illuminations varies, as do the Buddha depictions. Generally speaking, the five manuscripts represent three different types of Buddha depictions which likely also reflect a chronological range. Among them the Buddhas of Running No. 9 (short RN 9; Fig. 4) and RN 6 (Fig. 2) appear to be the earliest, as they represent Buddha types known from contemporaneous wall paintings in the region. Of these the

⁴ The two folios are the same size, but one has ten lines of text and the other only nine. The folio with nine lines (Ka 85) possibly fits to RN 167 (Cat. no. 1.1.5.6; Harrison 2009: 47). This manuscript is 20.5 x 66.5 cm (RN 6 is 20.5 x 66.4 cm) and also shares the large red circles. Further, folio Ka 85 is missing in RN 167.

Buddhas of RN 9 (Fig. 4) with the two-coloured edge of the robe and the fine rays in the halo reflect the Buddha depictions in the murals of the Tabo Main Temple (*gtsug lag khang*), but the excessive shading of the body is not found as such there, but appears to represent a further development from the latest phase of the Tabo paintings. The Buddhas of manuscript RN 13 in the list above also reflect the early western Himalayan type, but they also have numerous idiosyncratic features, such as a disproportionately small head, multicoloured halos with unusual decorations, and complex textile patterns (Fig. 5). In most cases the edge of the robe is still a different colour and the robe falls the same way as in early depictions, but its decoration and that of the halo are entirely different. This type is thus already considerably removed from the 11th century comparisons.

RN 7 then represents an entirely different Buddha type deriving from north-east India (Fig. 3). Everything about this Buddha's representation is atypical for the region and the Buddha is even seated on a cushion. New strands of art deriving from north-east Indian prototypes only become established in West Tibet in the course of the 13th century, the Buddhas of this type thus belong to a later phase of the Tabo manuscripts. The red Buddha, presumably belonging to RN 167, wears a pink patchwork robe (Fig. 6). Although largely following the early western Himalayan type in proportions its somewhat naïve rendering and the swallow-tail end of the robe over his left shoulder indicate that this illumination is not much earlier than those of RN 7. These Buddha depictions thus span approximately 300 years, but the formal appearance of the manuscripts they are found in has hardly changed from the earliest to the latest.

The illuminations of two other Tabo manuscripts clearly refer to the narrative of Sadāprarudita in search for the Perfection of Wisdom. This narrative is found at the end of three texts from the Prajñāpāramitā corpus, namely the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* and the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*.⁵

⁵ We would like to thank Gudrun Melzer for providing her research on the most common versions of the Kanjur: The number of chapters differs in the diverse editions of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Those of the Derge, Peking and Stog Kanjur end with only 72 chapters and do not contain the chapters dedicated to the Bodhisattvas Sadāprarudita und Dharmodgata. The Narthang edition has 75 chapters and includes those containing the story of Sadāprarudita and Dharmodgata. The Phugbrag and London editions have 77 chapters and differ somewhat from the Narthang version. Similar to a *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* from Tholing (see 'Phrin las mthar phyin 2001: 41) the Tabo manuscript RN 10 had 76 chapters (probably counting chapters 74 and 75 of the Phugbrag and London version as one chapter), and thus an equal number of chapters as the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. However, Tholing and Tabo (see e.g. Harrison 2007: 242–243, no. 11) also preserve other manuscripts in 77 chapters, which presumably are somewhat later than the manuscript in the focus of this article.



7. Buddha Śākyamuni and a Bodhisattva in conversation; Tabo, manuscript RN 10 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

8. A reflective Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita wearing the traditional dress of local West Tibetan youth; Tabo, manuscript RN 10 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

9. Bodhisattva Dharmodgata teaches Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita, the merchant's daughter and her maidens; Tabo, manuscript RN 10 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

- Running No. 10: A *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.1.23, Harrison 2009: 13f.) is preserved only through three beautifully illuminated folios:

Folio 312 (Tha-Nga 12) *recto* contains the last lines of chapter 73 and is further marked as the end of *dum bu 10* and *bam po 20*. With the upper left corner of the picture exactly at the end of the chapter, the large illumination is off centre to the right and towards the bottom of the page. It shows a teaching Buddha and a red Bodhisattva in 3/4 profile to his proper left facing the Buddha and obviously in conversation with him (Fig. 7).⁶ This depiction can not be identified exactly. It neither illustrates the conversation at the end of chapter 73, where the Buddha talks with the monk Subhūti, nor those of the

⁶ The illumination has previously been published in Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig. 225.



10. Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita, the merchant's daughter and her maidens prepare the seat for Bodhisattva Dharmodgata; Tabo, manuscript RN 11 (E. Allinger, 1994).



11. Indra fills the bowl of Sadāprarudita with Mandāra blossoms; Tabo, manuscript RN 11 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

12. Bodhisattva Dharmodgata teaches Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita, the merchant's daughter and her maidens; Tabo, manuscript RN 11 (E. Allinger, 1994).



13. One-eyed stūpa; Tabo, manuscript RN 153 (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).

14. Book topped by a flaming jewel; Tabo, manuscript RN 153 (E. Allinger, 1994).



beginning of chapter 74, where Maitreya and Śāriputra converse.

The text on Folio 320 (Tha-Nga 20) *recto* is from chapter 74 but marks the end of *dum bu* 10 and *bam po* 30.⁷ Just underneath the record of the *bam po* in the first line an illumination depicts the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita, wearing the traditional dress of the West Tibetan youth of the time and seated in a posture of reflection with the right hand raised towards his face (Fig. 8).⁸ It may well be that this depiction illustrates the textual content of this folio, which narrates

⁷ The beginning of the new *bam po* relates the Sadāprarudita episode. It roughly corresponds with the beginning of chapter 75 of the Phugbrag and London versions; however, the exact wording is different.

⁸ The exact posture of the hand is not clear, as much of the illumination has been effected by water. However, it does appear as if one finger is pointing towards the cheek, which would be a clear reference to representations of the Bodhisattvas Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara in reflective pose. Even if the actual sitting posture of Sadāprarudita differs from the usual *lalitāsana*, given the popularity of these Bodhisattva representations in the north-west, it is quite likely that this is an intended reference. This depiction has previously been published in Luczanits 2010: fig. 6.

how a voice from the sky suggests that he should proceed towards the east to find the Perfection of Wisdom.

Folio 349 (Tha-Nga 49) *verso* contains the end of chapter 75 in the fifth line. The corresponding illustration shows the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata teaching Sadāprarudita, the merchant's daughter and her maidens, who are shown kneeling to one side and wearing local West Tibetan dress (Fig. 9).⁹ Between them the book of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*) rests on a stand. As in the previous illustration, Sadāprarudita's removed hat is also represented. In fact, the end of chapter 75 and at the beginning of the following chapter 76 describe the teaching of Dharmodgata and how Sadāprarudita attains the Perfection of Wisdom.

- Running No. 11: Of the second manuscript only a single considerably damaged folio is preserved (Cat. No. 1.1.5.1, Harrison 2009: 45). It contains text of chapter 75 of a *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and unusually there is no other text section marker, such as *bam po* or *dum bu*, either.¹⁰ This folio contains three depictions directly illustrating the text found on these pages. In contrast to the depictions in RN 10, Sadāprarudita is shown as a Bodhisattva, and only the maidens are dressed in local fashion.

The single picture on the *recto* page depicts how Sadāprarudita, the merchant's daughter and her maidens offer the blood of their body to moisten the dusty floor in front of the throne they have prepared for the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata to teach the Perfection of Wisdom (Fig. 10). They have to resort to this method, as Māra has hidden the water to hinder their preparations.

The *verso* page contains two illustrations. In the first one Indra is filling Sadāprarudita's bowl with heavenly *mandāra* blossoms so that he can cover the seat of Dharmodgata with them (Fig. 11). In the second picture, the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata is teaching Sadāprarudita and his company (Fig. 12).

Stylistically the illustrations of RN 10 are very close to the Tabo re-

⁹ Previously published in Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig. 229.

¹⁰ As this damaged folio preserves neither a chapter marker nor a page number, it has been attributed to chapter 31 of an *Aṣṭasahasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Harrison 2009: 45). However, since the text of this folio diverges considerable from that of the *Aṣṭasahasrikā* and also the *Satasahasrikā* as found in the common Kanjur editions, it can be securely attributed to a *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. For example, the Tibetan rendering of the personal names differs among the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts; in the *Aṣṭasahasrikā* and the *Satasahasrikā* *Prajñāpāramitā* Sadāprarudita and Dharmodgata are referred to as *rTag tu ngu* and *Chos 'phags*, but in the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* their names are more fully given as *rTag par rab tu ngu ba* and *Chos kyis 'phags pa*. We would like to thank Gudrun Melzer for sharing these observations with us, and also for her analysis of the relationship of the text on the folios to the illustrations.

novation murals finished before 1042 CE and it is thus likely that they were made around the middle of the 11th century. In terms of the rendering of the hair, the teaching Buddha in one of the illustrations (Fig. 7) can be seen as direct predecessor to the Buddha in Fig. 3. The hairstyle of the Bodhisattva in this illustration and the main Bodhisattva in Fig. 9 is not found in the Tabo murals, and their jewellery is painted in gold. However, other details as well as the local dresses worn by the other figures depicted in this manuscript are consistent with the Tabo renovation phase.

The three illuminations of manuscript RN 11 found on the two sides of the same folio are of lesser material and artistic quality than those of RN 10 and also in a poorer state of preservation, but the proportions of the figures and the details of the scenes are still more reminiscent of the Tabo murals than of any other comparative monument. This manuscript may thus be attributed to the second half of the 11th century.

Another noteworthy manuscript from Tabo shows illustrations of a different type and relationship to the text:

- Running No. 153: From this *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.5.5, Harrison 2009: 46f.) two of the 40 preserved folios are illuminated.

At the end of the third chapter titled “Reverence for the receptacle of the perfections, which holds immeasurable good qualities” there is a picture of a stupa with a single eye on the dome (Fig. 13). The second picture marks the end of chapter five titled “The revolution of merit” and shows a book topped by flaming jewel (Fig. 14). Although not narrative, in both cases the illuminations actually illustrate the content of the preceding chapter. Chapter three describes the merit gained from building and venerating a stupa, and chapter five emphasises the merit accrued from copying the Perfection of Wisdom text.

With its high base, multiple cornered terraces and the almost circular dome, the stupa represents a type which on the basis of comparisons to stupa shapes in Ladakh can be attributed to the 13th century. The eye painted on the dome also supports an attribution to this time or even later. Eyes on stupa domes are not found in the earliest depictions from the western Himalayas, but appear in the course of the 13th century in monuments painted in a style derived from Central Tibet. It remains unclear so far whether this feature is also an expression of a Nepalese background.

Thus the Tabo manuscript illustrations of RN 10, 11, and 153 further expand the chronological range visible in the Buddha depictions. RN 10 is likely the earliest manuscript with an illustration preserved at Tabo, and RN 153 is possibly the youngest we have discussed so far. Now that we have surveyed the comparative illumi-

nated manuscripts found at the site, we can turn to the manuscript that preserves most of the illuminations.

The Vajradhātu Mandala Assembly

As mentioned above, Running No. 5, a *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Cat. No. 1.1.2.7, Harrison 2009: 25f.), preserves more illuminations than all the others together, namely 28. Of these, 26 are on fully preserved pages and two on fragments. The sequence of the depictions was established through the page and chapter numbers, but the iconographic relationship of the depictions has remained unstudied and is the subject here. This only became possible by the complete photo documentation of all the pages in their sequence by Helmut Tauscher¹¹ and the catalogue of the Tabo manuscripts by Paul Harrison (2009).

An analysis of the folios shows that the illuminations are always found at the end of a chapter, regardless of whether that is on the *recto* or *verso* page. Thus, we can assume that originally there were at least 76 illuminations, one for each chapter. Of the approximately 1100–1200 folios of the manuscript itself, 675 folios are preserved, which is considerably more than 50 per cent of the text. In contrast, the 28 illustrations represent less than 40 per cent of the original illuminations, a difference in ratio that may be accidental, but may also be another indication of selective picking.

In terms of their relationship to each other and to the text, the illuminations of this manuscript are exceptional for the Tabo corpus. In contrast to the manuscripts discussed so far, at least a part of the illuminations on this manuscript represents a theme not related to the text at all, namely the deities of the Vajradhātu mandala. Even before the exact relationship of the depictions was studied in detail, some of the deities could easily be recognised as belonging to this or a closely related mandala, even more so as captions written in cursive script at the bottom of most of the pages identify the deities. That this subject is found on a western Himalayan manuscript did not come as a surprise, as depictions of such deities have long been known from a few folios collected by Giuseppe Tucci from Tholing and now housed in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Inv. nos. M.81.90.6-17).¹² However, the captions underneath these illustrations remained puzzling,¹³ and a future article by Gudrun Melzer



15. Buddha Vairocana; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (E. Allinger, 1994).

¹¹ We would like to thank Helmut Tauscher for generously providing this material.

¹² These illustrations have been published several times, the most important among them being Tucci 1949: pls. C and D; Klimburg-Salter 1982: 183, pl. 101; and Pal 1990: pls. 1–2, figs. M1, b–f, h, i.

¹³ See Harrison 2007, in particular p. 236.



16. Bodhisattva Vajrarāja with a bird shaped *aṅkuśa*; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).



17. Bodhisattva Vajrarāja holding bow and arrow; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).



18. Bodhisattva Vajratejas holding a sun-disk; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

19. Bodhisattva Vajradharma holding a lotus to his side; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (E. Allinger, 1994).

20. Bodhisattva Vajradharma holding a lotus to his side; Alchi, Sumtsek (gSum brtsegs), left wall, left side mandala (J. Poncar, 1981; WHAV).



at the bottom of the page underneath the main text and in cursive script, a transcription and interpretation of this caption is provided as well. The order of illustrations and their relation to the chapter ends clarifies some characteristic features of this Vajradhātu mandala assembly.

1. Buddha Vairocana (Fig. 15)

The first illustrated folio preserved of this manuscript (Ka 25) contains the end of the first chapter in the first line of the *verso* page (*gleng bzi'i le'u*). Buddha Vairocana is depicted in the middle of this page. He is white, sits on a lion-throne, and is performing the gesture of highest enlightenment (*bodhyāgrimudrā*).

From the succeeding illuminations it is clear that the four goddesses surrounding Vairocana are not represented in this variant of the assembly. Instead, Vairocana at the end of chapter one was immediately followed by Buddha Akṣobhya at the end of chapter two, who then was followed by the Bodhisattvas that surround him on the eastern lotus. Chapter three accordingly ended with a representation of Bodhisattva Vajrasattva, who is not preserved either, whereas the following Bodhisattva is.

2. Bodhisattva Vajrarāja (Fig. 16)

Chapter four ends in the second line of the *verso* page numbered Ka-Na 19. In the centre of the page the Bodhisattva Vajrarāja is shown holding an *aṅkuśa*, the hook of which is shaped as a bird.

Caption: *rdoe rgyal po lag pa nya kyis lcags kyu mdog ser* = Vajrarāja [holding] and *aṅkuśa* with both(?) hands¹⁶ [and] yellow coloured.¹⁷

3. Bodhisattva Vajrarāja (Fig. 17)

Chapter five ends in the sixth line of the *recto* page numbered Ka-Na 39. The Bodhisattva Vajrarāja is shown at the lower centre of the page. He is red, holds an arrow pointing downwards in his right hand at his side and a bow in his left hand resting on his hip.

Caption: *rdoe chags pa dmar po lda' zhu*¹⁸ = Vajrarāja, red, [with]

will suggest an explanation for them. More recently, further folios of western Himalayan manuscripts with Vajradhātu mandala deities have turned up in publications¹⁴ and on the art market.¹⁵

In the following each illustration is listed in the order of its occurrence within the manuscript. Each deity is identified and briefly described. If there is a caption identifying the depiction, usually found

¹⁴ Pal 2009: fig. 4 contains up to seven relevant deities, one represented twice.

¹⁵ In particular Carlo Cristi, who in recent years had a number of folios with Vajradhātu related deities for sale, which will be referred to here in comparison.

¹⁶ While the reading of the Tibetan leaves no other choice, the meaning of *nya* in this context remains unclear. It would be tempting to read *bya* and thus “bird-hook” instead, but such a reading contradicts both the shape of the letter and the agentive particle *kyis* between the two words. We thus prefer to interpret the *nya* as an incomplete *nyi* for *gnyis*, as the attribute is indeed held in both hands and other captions sometimes specifically mention the hand an attribute is held with.

¹⁷ It is remarkable, that all yellow (*ser po*) deities (nos. 2, 7, 12, 14 and 18) in this manuscript have a strong orange hue.

¹⁸ Read *mda' gzhu*.

arrow and bow.

The order of these two Bodhisattvas surrounding Akṣobhya conforms to the usual enumeration. The last Bodhisattva of the eastern lotus would then be Vajrasādhu at the end of chapter six. Thus in the manuscript illustrations the Tathāgata of the respective direction is followed immediately by the four *vajra*-Bodhisattvas surrounding him, and only then the next Tathāgata is listed, which in the usual succession is Buddha Ratnasambhava, at the end of chapter seven, followed by the primary Bodhisattva of his direction, Vajraratna, at the end of chapter eight.

4. Bodhisattva Vajratejas (Fig. 18)

Chapter nine ends in the seventh line of the *recto* page Ka-Ma 34. In the lower centre of this page is the red-coloured Vajratejas holding a red sun in his hand.

Caption: *rdoe zi 'rjid nyi ma'i mdog cen g.yas na pad ma'i steng na nyi ma snam yon kur*¹⁹ = Vajratejas, sun-coloured, holding a sun on a lotus in his right [hand, and] his left at his side.

The following two Bodhisattvas of the southern assembly are missing, as is the Buddha following them, Amitābha, who should be represented at the end of chapter twelve. However, the next securely identifiable illumination is Vajratikṣṇa at the end of chapter thirteen, but in the usual order there is another Bodhisattva between Amitābha and Vajratikṣṇa, and it is this Bodhisattva who is represented on one of the fragmentary pages.

5. Bodhisattva Vajradharma (Fig. 19)

A fragmentary page with a chapter number between 10 and 19 (*le'u bcu* ...) in the seventh line preserves an image that can only represent the Bodhisattva Vajradharma, a form of Avalokiteśvara heading the Bodhisattvas in the west surrounding Amitābha. In the depiction the Bodhisattva is red (the texts are ambivalent concerning his colour) and holds a lotus in his right hand at his side. His second hand is on his hip. Usually, as is described for this deity, it is this hand that holds the stalk of the lotus, while the right hand opens the lotus at the heart. It is likely that this illustration is found at the end of chapter twelve, as also assumed by Harrison (2009: 26). Vajradharma is the main Bodhisattva of the western assembly.

This means that if every deity marks the end of a chapter, one deity between Vajratejas and Vajradharma is missing. Where that deity was represented is a matter of speculation, but it seems clear that a mistake was made in the arrangement of the deities. Another error is

¹⁹ In accordance with other captions of this manuscript, here we read *g.yon skur*.



illustrated through the following illumination.

6. Bodhisattva Vajratikṣṇa (Fig. 21)

The small depiction of this Bodhisattva at the end of chapter 13 is clearly an afterthought. The chapter ends in the eighth line on the *recto* page numbered Kha 82 (*rab 'byord kyi'u*). Unlike the other deities in the manuscript, the deity is not set in a picture space of his own. Instead, the illustration is only of the size available between the lines of text at the end of the chapter. Vajratikṣṇa is blue and brandishes a sword.

7. Bodhisattva Vajrahetu (Fig. 22)

Chapter 14 ends in the sixth line of the *recto* page numbered Kha-Na 1. In the centre of the page is the dark yellow coloured Vajrahetu. He holds a wheel at his side and his left hand rests on his hip.

Caption: *rdoe rgu ser po khor lo g.yon kur* = Vajrahetu/rDo rje



21. Bodhisattva Vajratikṣṇa brandishing a sword; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

22. Bodhisattva Vajrahetu, holding a wheel at his side; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

23. Bodhisattva Vajrahetu, holding a wheel at his side; Alchi, Sumtsek (J. Poncar, 1981; WHAV)

24. Bodhisattva Vajrabhāṣa, holding his (*vajra*-) tongue on a white lotus; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

25. Buddha Amoghasiddhi; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

26. Bodhisattva Vajrakarma seated in a palace; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

27. Bodhisattva Vajrarakṣa holding a mail shirt; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).

28. Bodhisattva Vajrayakṣa, holding his fangs; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

29. Bodhisattva Vajrayakṣa, holding his fangs; Nako, Lhakhang Gongma, Vajradhātu mandala on the right side wall (C. Luczanits, 1996; WHAV).



rgyu, yellow, [with] wheel [and] the left [hand] by his body.

8. Bodhisattva Vajrabhāṣa (Fig. 24)

Chapter 15 ends in the eighth line of the *verso* page numbered Kha-Na 15. In the lower right area of the page Vajrabhāṣa is shown along with a small square ornament reminiscent of a ritual mandala depiction. The Bodhisattva is red and at his side he holds a lotus that supports an elongated red object with a rounded top. Only the context makes it possible to identify this object as a (vajra-)tongue. His left hand rests on his hip.

9. Buddha Amoghasiddhi (Fig. 25)

Chapter 16 ends in the seventh line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 37. The Buddha is placed in the centre of the page. He is green and shows the gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya mudrā*), and his family attribute is not represented.

Caption: *don yod grub pa myi 'jig²⁰ sbyin gyon ku* = Amoghasiddhi, bestowing fearlessness [and] his left [hand] by his side.

The presence of Amoghasiddhi in this position is the final proof that the Buddhas are followed by their surrounding Bodhisattvas. Three of his Bodhisattva retinue are preserved in the manuscript, this group thus being the most complete.

10. Bodhisattva Vajrakarma (Fig. 26)

Chapter 17 ends in the second line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 47. The picture of Vajrakarma is slightly off centre to the right. The Bodhisattva is green and unusually is seated within a palace structure. He should hold a *viśvavajra* in his hand in front of his breast, but the attribute cannot be recognised on the available photographs. His left hand rests on his hip.

Caption: *rdoe las sna tshogs kyi mdog can sna tshogs due²¹* = Vajrakarma, of variegated colour [and holding] a *viśvavajra*.

The divergence in colour is the only clear case where the information in the caption differs substantially from the actual depiction. Of variegated colour means that different body parts are of different colours, just like the prongs of the crossed vajra (*viśvavajra*). While this feature is shown in a number of cases,²² most often deities of variegated colour are green.²³

11. Bodhisattva Vajrarakṣa (Fig. 27)

Chapter 18 ends in the seventh line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 59. Vajrarakṣa is shown in the middle of the page, he is yellow and holds a mail shirt with *vajra* ends in front of his breast.²⁴

Caption: *rdoe bsrung ba ser gyi mdog can go cha snams* =

²⁰ Read *mi 'jigs pa*.

²¹ The reading of the last syllable is uncertain. It should read *rdoe* for *rdo rje*, this can, however, not be read into the remaining traces.

²² In the Dharmadhātuvāgiśvaramaṇjuśrīmaṇḍala of Khartse the Bodhisattva Vajrakarma is of variegated colour.

²³ This is also the case on another depiction of this Bodhisattva in a manuscript illumination on the *recto* page of a *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript folio numbered Tha-Na 32 from Carlo Cristi, where he is represented at the end of chapter 41. Here the Bodhisattva holds a crossed vajra (*viśvavajra*) in front of his breast, while the second attribute cannot be recognised on the available pictures. See Pal 2009: fig. 4, top left corner. Green forms of this Bodhisattva are also found in the Nako Translator's temple and the Alchi group of monuments, while Vajradhātu sculptures in the Tabo Assembly Hall and Sumda are a dark greenish blue and pale white with bright blue shading.

²⁴ Vajrarakṣa is also depicted on the *recto* page of a *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript folio numbered #-Na (the upper letter uncertain) 30 from Carlo Cristi, where it is found at the end of chapter 24. See Pal 2009: fig. 4, bottom left corner.

Vajrarakṣa, yellow coloured [and] holding armour.

12. Bodhisattva Vajrayakṣa (Fig. 28)

Chapter 19 ends in the second line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 65. The somewhat damaged illustration of Vajrayakṣa is in the centre of the page. He is black and holds two long teeth in front of his breast.

Only Vajrasandhi, who was probably depicted at the end of chapter 20, is missing from the group of Bodhisattvas around Amoghasiddhi. With him the group of the five Buddhas with their surrounding Bodhisattvas is concluded.

The deities in the centre of the mandala are then followed by the eight offering goddesses.²⁵ In contrast to the previous deities, the goddesses are not shown frontally but off centre in three-quarter profile and facing the centre of the manuscript page. This conforms to their common depiction in mandalas and is certainly also a visual means of indicating their subsidiary role and position. The first five goddesses of this group are preserved in order, which conforms to the usual sequence.

13. Goddess Lāsya (Fig. 30)

Chapter 21 ends in the ninth line of the *recto* page Kha-Na 79. The picture of the offering goddess is at the bottom right corner of the page and is severely damaged. Lāsya is white and holds a *vajra* in her right hand on her hip; her left hand is not preserved. The caption is immediately underneath the depiction.

Caption: *sgeg mo kar mo lag mar rer #o de de*²⁶ *snaṃs*²⁷ = Lāsya, white, holding [a *vajra* in each hand].

14. Goddess Mālā (Fig. 31)

Chapter 22 ends in the second line of the *verso* page Kha-Na 96. The illustration is in the left area of the page. The goddess, facing the centre, is yellow and holds a garland of jewels with *vajra* ends in front of her.

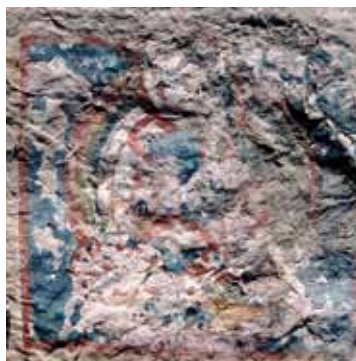
Caption: *'sreng*²⁸ *ba ma ser mo rin po che 'i breng ba snaṃ* = Mālā,

²⁵ These goddesses belong to the core deities of the Vajradhātu mandala, and thus to the inner assembly. However, in mandala depictions they are commonly represented in the corners of the two inner squares, four in the corners of the inner palace and four together with the 16 Bodhisattvas of the Bhadrakalpa.

²⁶ Although this reading is uncertain, the meaning can be concluded from the remains of the caption and the usual depiction of this goddess.

²⁷ Above this caption, another longer *dbu med* text can be recognised but it is no longer legible. The function of this text thus remains unclear.

²⁸ For *'phreng*; this actually looks like a copying mistake, or the writer did not know how to represent the *ph* in this script. The same issue is found again at the end of the line, although there in a different variant.



30. Offering goddess Lāsya; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).

31. Offering goddess Mālā, holding a jewel garland in both hands; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).

32. Offering goddess Mālā, holding a jewel garland in both hands; Phyi dbang cave, West Tibet (C. Luczanits, 2007).

33. Offering goddess Gitā, not playing her *vīṇā*; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (E. Allinger, 1994).

34. Offering goddess Gitā, not playing her *vīṇā*; Alchi, Sumtsek, gallery floor, main wall, right mandala (J. Poncar, 1989; WHAV).

35. Offering goddess Nṛtyā raising both hands; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).

36. Offering goddess Dhūpā, dancing with an incense burner; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).



37. Gatekeeper Vajrapāśa, holding a noose; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

38. Gatekeeper Vajrāveśa, holding a bell with both hands; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

39. Bodhisattva Bhadrāpāla, holding a lotus with a triple jewel; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (E. Allinger, 1994).

yellow [and] holding a jewel garland.

15. Goddess Gītā (Fig. 33)

Chapter 23 ends in the sixth line of the *recto* page Kha-Ma 17 (*brgya byin gyi le'u*). The goddess of song, Gītā is shown in the right-hand part of the page and facing the centre. She is red and holds a bow and *vīṇā* at her sides, not playing the instrument.

Caption: *glu ma dmar skya bi bang*²⁹ *sname* = Gītā, bright red [and] holding a *vīṇā*.

16. Goddess Nṛtyā (Fig. 35)

Chapter 24 ends in the third line of the *recto* page of Kha-Ma 38 (*yongs su sngo ba'i le'u*). Nṛtyā, the goddess of dance is shown in the centre of the page but facing the right. She is green with her hands raised to the sides of her head.

Caption: *g # # ljang gu gar byed ba'i tshul* = [Nṛtyā], green [and]

²⁹ Read *pi wang*.

in the manner of performing a dance.

It is interesting to note that the dance posture of Nṛtyā, with both feet on the ground and only her arms shown as moving, may well reflect the local dance style, in which the hands do most of the rhythmic movement, while the legs move in a comparatively slow and restrained way.³⁰

17. Goddess Dhūpā (Fig. 36)

The goddess of incense, Dhūpā, is presumably depicted at the end of chapter 25. Only the fragment of this page containing the illumination is preserved. The goddess is presumably represented on the right of the central text area and faces left. She stands in a dance pose and holds an incense burner.

Caption: *dug*³¹ *pa ma kar mo s s n b ng*³² *sname* = Dhūpā, white [and] holding ...

The remaining offering goddesses, presumably depicted at the ends of chapters 26 to 28, are missing. Two of the following four gatekeepers, depicted in the usual succession at the end of chapters 29 to 32, two are preserved. Like the offering goddesses, they are shown standing and facing the centre of the manuscript page.

18. Gatekeeper Vajrapāśa (Fig. 37)

Chapter 30 ends in the second line of the *recto* page Ga 42. The picture with the Vajrapāśa is in the centre of the page. The gatekeeper is orange and holds a noose in both hands in front of him, its vajra ends dangling from his hands. He is the protector of the south.

Caption: *sgo ba zhags pa ser po zhags pa snams* = gatekeeper Pāśa, yellow [and] holding a noose

19. Gatekeeper Vajrāveśa (Fig. 38)

Chapter 32 ends in the fourth line of the *recto* page Ga 71. Vajrāveśa is shown in the centre of the page facing left. He is green and holds a bell in with both hands in front of his breast. He is the protector of the north.³³

³⁰ Vajranṛtyā is also represented on the *recto* page of a manuscript folio numbered Ja-Nga 23 from Carlo Cristi, where she is seated and only moves her arms. See Pal 2009: fig. 4, second row left and bottom centre illustration (shown twice). This illumination is remarkable for its frame.

³¹ Read *bdug*.

³² The resolution of the available picture is too low for this part of the text to be readable. What is recognisable differs too much from the expected *spos snod*.

³³ The same gatekeeper is found at the end of chapter (*le'u*) 47 on a *verso* page of a *Satasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript folio numbered Tha-Ma 26 owned by Carlo Cristi. See Pal 2009: fig. 4, middle image in the second row. In this

Caption: *sgo ba 'bebs pa ljang ku rdo rje*³⁴ = gatekeeper Āveśa, green [and with] vajra

The gatekeepers are followed by the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Aeon (*bhadrakalpa*), which end chapters 33 to 48. However, only one of this large group is preserved, which indicates that this group is again shown frontally and seated.

20. Bodhisattva Bhadrapāla (Fig. 39)

Chapter 43 ends in the fifth line of the *recto* page Ga-Na 89 (*gang 'ga'i lha mo'i le'u*). Bhadrapāla is shown somewhat off centre to the right (in the right third of the page). He is white and holds a red lotus carrying a large triple jewel.

Caption: *bzang skyong kar pad ma'i steng na rin po che* = Bhadrapāla, white [and with] a jewel on a lotus

It is a shame that only one deity of this large group is preserved. There are different versions of this group both in texts and illustrations, and the order of these Bodhisattvas might have been particularly telling.

The representation of the main deities of the Vajradhātu mandala assembly is concluded with the Sixteen Bodhisattvas of the Fortunate Aeon. Theoretically the gatekeepers could be repeated here, as is the case in some mandala depictions, but this appears rather unlikely, as in this case the inner gatekeepers are commonly represented as peaceful or even female.

The following chapters of the text are then illustrated mostly with unidentified Buddha representations.

21. Buddha (Fig. 40)

The Buddha at the end of chapter 54 is centred on the page, the chapter ends in the seventh line of the *recto* page (Nga 52). His original depiction has largely been smudged and was replaced by a – presumably rather recent – line drawing. This Buddha has his hands joined in front of his breast in a way that only the tips of the fingers are touching each other.

22. Buddha (Fig. 48)

Chapter 55 ends in the first line of the *verso* page Nga 56 (*'og ma*). The Buddha is seated in meditation (*dhyānamudrā*) and wears a green robe that covers both shoulders.

23. Buddha (Fig. 41)

case the deity holds both vajra and bell side by side in front of his breast.

³⁴ If this reading is correct, then the verb is missing. The word *snam* or one of its variants used in these captions for “holding” is unreadable in this case.



40. Teaching(?) Buddha redrawn; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (D. E. Klimburg-Salter, 1994; WHAV).

41. Yellow teaching Buddha; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (E. Allinger, 1994).

42. Kneeling Buddha; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (E. Allinger, 1994).

43. Bodhisattva meditating in palace; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (E. Allinger, 1994).

Chapter 59 ends in the third line of the *verso* page Nga 93. The Buddha is yellow and has his hands in a strongly simplified variant of the teaching gesture (*dharmacakramudrā*) in front of the breast. He wears a red robe with the right shoulder covered from behind.

24. Buddha (Fig. 53)

Chapter 60 ends in the fifth line of the *recto* page (Nga-Na 12). The Buddha is orange-yellow with green shading, performing the gesture of touching the earth (*bhūmisparśamudrā*) and has his left hand in front of his breast. He wears a red patchwork robe leaving the right shoulder exposed.

25. Buddha

Chapter 66 ends in the third line of the *recto* page (Nga-Ma 7). The Buddha is yellow, holds his hands in the teaching gesture in front of his breast and wears a green robe leaving the right shoulder exposed.

26. Kneeling Buddha (Fig. 42)

Chapter 68 ends in the eighth line of the *verso* page (Nga-Ma 20). Unusually, this Buddha is represented kneeling sideways. The page is torn on the right and the small depiction partly lost. The figure has his hands raised in what is to be interpreted as the veneration gesture (*namaskāramudrā*) towards the right. He wears green robes and his right shoulder is covered from behind. As the illumination is cut off on the right it remains unclear whether the Buddha is facing some other representation to his side.

27. Buddha

Chapter 69 ends in the fifth line of the *verso* page (Nga-Ma 26). The Buddha is yellow, is performing *dharmacakramudrā* and wears a red patchwork robe with the right shoulder covered from behind.

Remarkably, the last chapters of this manuscript were probably accompanied by illustrations of the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita's quest for the Perfection of Wisdom, although this identification cannot be considered entirely certain.

28. Meditating Bodhisattva (Fig. 43)

A meditating Bodhisattva is depicted at the end of chapter 74, the chapter of Sadāprarudita (*rtag par rab tu ngu ba'i le'u*) as in line nine of the *recto* page (Nga-Ma 62), this time seated in an architectural frame. The Bodhisattva is red, wears rich jewellery and a yellow cape covering the shoulders from behind.

Given the place in the manuscript where this illustration is found, it is very likely that this scene illustrates the story of the Bodhisattva Sadāprarudita in search for the perfection of wisdom, possibly representing the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata meditating in the city of Gandhavatī. After their first meeting the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata went into his house, where he "remained for seven years immersed in one uninterrupted state of trance, and he dwelt in countless thousands of concentrations, peculiar to Bodhisattvas, issued from perfection of wisdom and skill in means." (Conze 1958: 220). As we have seen, Dharmodgata can be shown in red (Fig. 9) as well as white (Fig. 12).

This manuscript is remarkable for a number of reasons. First of all, its illuminations (likely) show three different, unrelated themes, namely the deities of the Vajradhātu mandala, repeated Buddhas and (possibly) the narrative of Sadāprarudita. As we have seen above, the two latter themes occur in other Tabo manuscripts as well, and the narrative at the end has a direct relationship to the text's content. Due to these three themes, but also within them, the manuscript has an unusual variety of illustrations, which appear both intentional,

such as setting the Bodhisattva Dharmodgata within an architectural frame, and unintentional, such as the miniature representation of Vajratīkṣṇa.

Also the direct relationship of the illustrations to the text is noteworthy. Not only are the illuminations always found at that side of the folio where the chapter actually ends, but at least some of its locations are chosen in direct relation to the end of the chapters. Consequently, the placement of the pictures on the page appears random. Even more remarkable, with the Vajradhātu deities the placing of the illustration also considers their iconography and usual depiction within a mandala. To our knowledge, such relationships are not found in Indian manuscripts such as the "Manuscript in Five Collections".³⁵ Finally, the representations of the Vajradhātu mandala deities in this manuscript offer the possibility to compare them with the same deities in roughly contemporaneous murals of the same region.

Iconographic Comparisons

There is no direct relationship between the Vajradhātu mandala and the Prajñāpāramitā literature, but both were extremely prominent in early western Himalayan Buddhism. In fact, diverse topics of teachings traditionally classified as yoga tantra are found throughout the early monuments of the western Himalayas. In most cases, the Vajradhātu mandala represents the main theme and complementary topics cover the other walls, partly featuring the same groups of deities.³⁶ Much less is preserved in Central Tibet, but it can be assumed that there yoga tantra topics, and particularly the Vajradhātu mandala, were of equal importance and thus were also frequently depicted. However, only few of these representations are preserved today.³⁷

In contrast to later canonised versions of mandala assemblies, these early representations and in particular the yoga tantra topics are represented in many variants distinguished by composition, the number of deities and their relationship, as well as the iconography of individual deities, providing the possibility that the Tabo manuscript deities can actually be related to a particular place and time. Given that the manuscript is found at Tabo, the Vajradhātu mandala as preserved in the Tabo Assembly Hall (*'du khang*) is of course the first reference comparison, but comparative examples are utilised from all the western Himalayan region and beyond.

³⁵ See Allinger 2008.

³⁶ On the most important topics in the early western Himalayan monuments, see Luczanits 2004: 201–223.

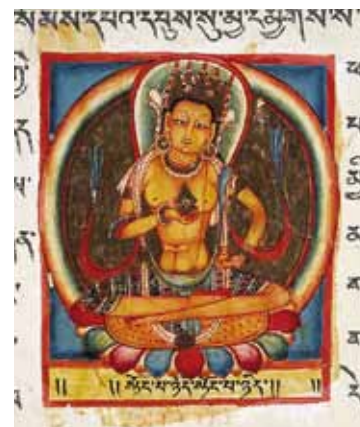
³⁷ Besides the monuments cited below, see also the temples centred on Vairocana mentioned in Richardson 1990.

As mentioned above, the Tabo manuscript is also part of a small group of illuminations depicting the Vajradhātu deities. The most important and most well-known among these are the above-mentioned manuscript leaves originally brought by Giuseppe Tucci from Tholing and now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (M.81.90.6-17).³⁸ These, and some additional ones that turned up on the art market in recent years, offer an additional body of comparison. As they lack context, these comparisons are only of secondary importance and mainly serve to demonstrate that the typological and possibly also chronological range of such depictions is broader than it appears from the market.³⁸

Sadly, the title page of the manuscript is not preserved and it remains unclear what might have been represented there. Obviously, the goddess Prajñāpāramitā is a likely candidate, but in the only comparison in this respect, the LACMA manuscript fragments, the goddess is actually at the end of a manuscript, and is not the same one as is shown with the Vajradhātu deities.³⁹ Interestingly, this page has a verse dedicated to Sudhana or Norzang (Nor bzang), the hero of the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* added to it.⁴⁰ Another possibility is a Buddha representation and an interlocutor represented on the sides of the folio, as frequently occurs in other manuscripts.⁴¹

In the Tabo manuscript, Buddha Vairocana (Fig. 15) is white and has his hands joined in front of his breast in what probably represents a variant of the gesture of highest enlightenment (*bodhyāgrimudrā*). Although our picture is not entirely clear, it appears that his right hand turned towards himself – and thus with the back towards the viewer – covering almost all his left hand. Further the mandorla is smaller than the figure and the lions are squeezed underneath the lotus seat of the deity. The Vairocana sculpture of Tabo has its hands in exactly the reverse positions. Instead the closest comparisons are found in the Alchi group of monuments, with those depicted in two mandalas of the Sumtsek (gSum brtsegs) gallery floor being the closest.⁴²

From the illuminations succeeding Vairocana it is clear that four



44. Offering goddess Mālā, holding a noose like garland; Tholing, north-western *mchod rten* (after Namgyal 2001: 131).

45. Bodhisattva Vajraratna, from Tholing (photo courtesy of Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M81.90.7).

46. Bodhisattva Mahābala; Tabo, *gtsug lag khang*, ambulatory, north wall, lower register (J. Poncar, 1984; WHAV).

47. Buddha Padma, the 97th Buddha of the Bhadrakalpa, yellow and in green robes; Tabo, *gtsug lag khang*, ambulatory, inner wall west (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).

48. Meditating Buddha in green robes; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).

goddesses of the core assembly of the mandala are not represented in the manuscript. There is neither space for four goddesses surrounding Vairocana, as they are shown in the earliest depictions, nor for the four consorts of the surrounding Buddhas shown in later versions of the mandala. This is immediately reminiscent of the Tabo Assembly Hall, where the four goddesses are also missing, but there they could be reconstructed as once having been present at the corners of Vairocana's throne.⁴³

The Bodhisattva Vajrarāja holds an unusually shaped elephant goad (*aṅkuśa*), with the hook in the shape of a bird (Fig. 16). In the earliest West Tibetan monuments, as in the Tabo Assembly Hall or the Alchi monuments, the *aṅkuśa* is consistently shaped as the head of a *makara*, his trunk forming the hook. Besides the attribute itself, the way it is held across the body with two hands can also be com-

³⁸ Traditionally any West Tibetan illumination is attributed to the 11th century.

³⁹ Harrison 2007: 238–40 (no. 8).

⁴⁰ Translated in Harrison 2007: 239.

⁴¹ See, for example, the many examples in Heller 2009, likely following an earlier convention, as also demonstrated by the depiction in the Tabo ambulatory of the Bodhisattva Pramuditārāja requesting the Buddha Śākyamuni to teach the *Bhadrakalpikasūtra* (Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig. 161). A similar pair, both appearing to be Buddhas, occurs in a folio offered by Carlo Cristi, but these are not at the beginning of the text but mark the end of the first *bam po*.

⁴² See Goepper and Poncar 1996: 189.

⁴³ See Luczanits 2004: 46–51 and fig. 40.

pared. In this case the depictions in the oldest temples of Alchi, Nako and Sumda Chung conform to that on the manuscript, the closest in terms of hand positions being that of the Alchi Assembly Hall.

The Bodhisattva Vajrarāga (Fig. 17) has his bow and arrow in an inactive position, the arrow head pointing downwards and the bow at his hip. This contrasts with the active shooting position found in most of the early western Himalayan depictions, including the Tabo Assembly Hall. In fact, so far only a single comparison to the passive depiction in the manuscript has been found, namely in the Vajradhātu mandalas in the recently discovered Khartse cave.⁴⁴

Little can be deduced from the depiction of the following Bodhisattva, Vajratejas (Fig. 18), who is shown in most comparative examples alike, but the representation of Vajradharma is again rather unusual (Fig. 19). The red Bodhisattva holds a lotus in his right hand, but it is held at his side and the second hand does not “open it at the heart” as described⁴⁵ and commonly pictured. The illustration in the manuscript, in contrast, is found in several instances among the Alchi monuments, in the wrathful depiction of this Bodhisattva in the Alchi Dukhang (‘Du khang) and two other ones in the Alchi Sumtsek (gallery, both mandalas on the right side wall; Fig. 20).⁴⁶ While this comparison is important, it needs to be noted that the last three Bodhisattvas of the Tabo manuscript are practically identical in their posture and the location of their arms.

Bodhisattva Vajratikṣṇa, painted as an afterthought in-between the text lines, brandishes a sword, but does not hold a book in his left hand (Fig. 21), as certainly was the case in the Tabo Assembly Hall. However, he is too varied in the comparative depictions – in colour (blue and yellow), posture (brandishing the sword or holding it upright in front of his breast), and attribute (holding a book or not) – for any meaningful conclusions to be drawn from them.

In the case of the Bodhisattva Vajrahetu, the only telling detail is the shape of the wheel he holds at his side, which is shaped like a yellow blossom with five petals (Fig. 22). Again the depictions of the deity and the way the attribute is held, if it is shown at all, vary across the western Himalayas, but the depiction in the manuscript again has its best comparisons again in the Alchi Sumtsek, where even the attribute is a similar shape (Fig. 23).

⁴⁴ We owe the documentation of this cave to the Pritzker family. The cave is also the subject of Tshering rgyal po et al. 2009.

⁴⁵ For a summary of the relevant details in the iconographic description of Ānandagarbha see Luczanits 2004: 296–99. Unless otherwise noted, it is this description we refer to.

⁴⁶ For the full mandala and details of some of its deities see Goepper and Poncar 1996: 186–99.

The Bodhisattva Vajrabhāṣa is again very distinctive. Instead of holding the (vajra-) tongue in his hand, it is placed on a white lotus at his side, standing upright on it as if it were the red stigma of the lotus pistil (Fig. 24). This attribute has always been very difficult to depict, even more so as it has the same colour as the Bodhisattva, and there are consequently many variants in its representation. In most cases it is clear that the attempt has been made to depict an actual physical tongue, a red often slightly bent object, and occasionally a vajra head is added on one side. Although in most depictions the tongue is at the side of the body, none of the comparisons uses a lotus base for the attribute.

Following Buddha Amoghasiddhi (Fig. 25), the only other of the five Buddhas besides Vairocana preserved in this manuscript is the primary Bodhisattva of his family, Vajrakarma (Fig. 26). The photos available to us are too blurred to verify his attribute, the *viśvavajra*, and the posture alone varies quite considerably in other depictions of this deity. What is interesting though, is the architectural frame around the Bodhisattva, the palace within which he is shown. Supported by two pillars, it has a raised central section with corner finials and each of the two platforms is topped by a structure similar to the one-eyed *stūpa* from another Tabo manuscript discussed above (RN 153, Fig. 13). More decisive, however, is that in the wall paintings such more architecture-oriented frames only occur in the course of the 12th century.⁴⁷ Comparative frames, although not with this peculiar stupa-like shape are found in Lalung and the Alchi group of monuments.

As usual, Bodhisattva Vajrarakṣa holds a mail shirt in front of his breast, the vajra- heads on both sides clearly visible (Fig. 27). More interesting is the black Vajrayakṣa, who holds two long silver fangs (Fig. 28). The latter is interesting, since he is described as a black wrathful figure, but in depictions he is rarely shown this way, and often even the colour is brighter. The Tabo manuscript depiction most closely compares to those at Nako, in particular his two representations in the side wall mandalas of the Lhakhang Gongma (Fig. 29).

While the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas discussed so far demand more hieratic and static representations, there is considerable freedom with the offering goddesses. In fact, in the Tabo manuscript these are shown with agitated movements and exaggerated postures. This can best be demonstrated by the representation of Lāsyā (Fig. 30), which is so far the only representation of this goddess that is shown so much in profile that her two hands are joined at hip level at the side she is looking towards. Usually the hands are on both sides regardless of whether she is represented frontally or looking

⁴⁷ See Luczanits 2004: 249–56.

sideways.

The Goddess Mālā faces to the right, but her body is twisted in such an extreme way that her breasts face the left (Fig. 31). She holds a garland with hanging jewels and vajra ends, which corresponds most closely to representations in the Alchi Dukhang and the Khartse cave. A similar but much less pronounced body posture, in contrast, is only found in a Phyang (Phyi dbang) cave (Fig. 32). Gītā, the goddess of song, is shown in a similar extreme posture and holds her instrument, the bow and the *vīṇā* passively at her sides (Fig. 33). With the exception of one depiction of the Alchi Sumtsek (Fig. 34) in all other depictions available to us the goddess is actually playing the *vīṇā* or has her right hand very close to the instrument.

With Nṛtyā, the goddess of dance, the movement is expected, but it is unusual that she raises both her hands (Fig. 35). Most commonly the goddess raises one hand above her head, but occasionally she may have both hands raised, usually holding the ends of a scarf that falls behind her body. Of these, the portrayal in the Nako Lhakhang Gongma and one Alchi Sumtsek depiction, from the same mandala as the comparison for Gītā, are closest to the one in the manuscript. In terms of movement, the most extreme depiction on the manuscript is certainly that of the goddess Dhūpā (Fig. 36). Her motion is so exaggerated that her breast projects underneath her arm. The shape of the incense burner she is holding is very distinctive and we have not yet found it elsewhere.

The two gatekeepers, Vajrapāśa (Fig. 37) and Vajrāveśa (Fig. 38) do not provide much additional information, their depictions are too varied to be significant. In the case of Vajrāveśa – also called Vajraghaṇṭā in reference to his main attribute, the bell – the holding of the bell with both hands in front of his breast is shared by depictions in the Nako Translator's temple (Lotsāba *lha khang*) and the Khartse cave temple, and another manuscript illumination that has recently been on the market is very similar to it.

The iconography of the sixteen Bodhisattvas of the fortunate aeon (*bhadrakalpa*) included in the yoga tantra mandalas is too varied to allow for a similar comparison in case of the Bodhisattva Bhadrāpāla (Fig. 39). The two groups of sixteen Bodhisattva are even inscribed in the ambulatory of the Tabo Main Temple, but as the example of Bhadrāpāla there makes clear it is far from certain that these captions are actually correct.⁴⁸ In any case, the iconography of this Bodhisattva on the manuscript, white with a triple jewel on a lotus, conforms to one of his description, and the triple jewel is his

common attribute.⁴⁹

Although these iconographic comparisons relate the Tabo manuscript depictions of the Vajradhātu deities to most of the western Himalayan monuments, there are a few general observations that can be made from them. The variations in the depictions of the Vajradhātu deities found throughout the western Himalayas are an indication of numerous parallel traditions on this topic in both religious and artistic terms. There are also indications of substantial variations in the depictions of individual deities even if their iconography is firmly established. While found at Tabo, the illuminations of the manuscript do not compare well to the Tabo Main Temple. Instead the closest comparisons are found at sites such as Nako and Alchi, and there is a general trend for comparisons to monuments most likely dating to the 12th century, or even its second half.

Stylistic Observations

As we have seen from the discussion of the Buddha depictions, the Tabo manuscript illuminations reflect the stylistic development of western Himalayan painting from the 11th to the 13th century. It is thus possible to relate the murals to the book illuminations, and it is generally assumed that the same artists that worked on the large mural programmes also participated in the creation of manuscript illuminations. However, the situation would seem to be more complex, in that the manuscript illuminations are only rarely of the same quality as the murals. In the following section we will attempt to outline a stylistic development of western Himalayan art that also takes these qualitative differences into account.

The oldest comparative paintings in the region probably date to the first half of the 11th century, and were rediscovered in the northwest chörten (*mchod rten*) at Tholing, one of two such partly preserved structures in the vicinity of the temple of Ye shes 'od (also referred to as brGya rtsa).⁵⁰ This chörten once contained three sculptures housed in niches and flanked by secondary painted deities. As many of the physical features in these paintings are also found on more or less contemporaneous Kashmiri bronzes, they are generally assigned to the Kashmiri tradition.⁵¹ Since virtually no Kashmiri paintings have been preserved, the question of how these paintings came to be executed at Tholing remains a matter of speculation. The figures in the chörten are painted in an extremely hard linear style (Fig. 44). The body is modelled with a thick application of pigment that creates

⁴⁹ de Mallmann 1986: 116.

⁵⁰ See Namgyal 2001: 126–31, and Heller 2010.

⁵¹ See, for example, Luczanits 2004: 226–28 and Heller 2010.

⁴⁸ See Luczanits 1999: 151.



49. Four-armed Green Tārā; Alchi, Sumtsek, left side wall of the Avalokiteśvara niche (J. Poncar, 1981; WHAV).



50. A *pratyekabuddha* of a Sarvadurgatipariśodhana mandala; Alchi, Dukhang, right side wall (J. Poncar, 1989; WHAV).

51. Buddha Ratnasambhava; Nako, Translator's Temple, Dharmadhātuvāgiśvaramaṇjuśrī mandala (C. Luczanits, 1998; WHAV).

52. Goddess Cuṇḍā with 18 arms; Pooh, Prajñāpāramitā Manuscript, folio 2 (C. Luczanits, 1993; WHAV).



an almost pattern-like effect but does not result in the impression of depth or plasticity. All details, such as the opulent jewellery and the textile patterns, are painted with precision. The superb quality of these paintings makes it likely that the artists were brought in from an important cultural centre, at that time probably Kashmir.



The same artists may have been responsible for the Tholing manuscript paintings of Vajradhātu deities held at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Fig. 45). However, there are a number of deviations from the harsh linearity of the Tholing murals. While the facial features are the same – with the small elongated eyes, the projection of the further eye in three-quarter profile, prominent nose, small mouth and the marked chin, and the bodies have similar proportions – the overall impression is softer and more playful, as evinced by the narrow diaphanous scarves around their shoulders. The only modelling occurs as shading along the outlines.

The paintings in the ambulatory of the Tabo Main Temple, which can be securely attributed to the mid-11th century, are very similar to those of the Tholing manuscript (Fig. 46).⁵² There is the same faint shading along the outlines of the body, although there is considerable variation here depending on the base colour,⁵³ and while the heads are somewhat broader and the shape of the mouth a little narrower, the facial features are similar. At Tabo there is occasional slight modelling of the face, making the figures more sensual than those of the Tholing manuscript. Due to their large size, the Tabo depictions are exceptional in terms of their detailed and varied representation of jewellery, textile patterns and attributes.

While the Buddha depictions of the Tabo manuscript RN 9 (Fig. 4) exhibit similarities to the style of the Tabo Ambulatory paintings, they are clearly of far inferior quality. In this respect the depictions of the Thousand Buddhas in the same ambulatory offer a better basis for comparison, especially those on the inner wall, which while refined are still of lesser quality than those on the outer wall (Fig. 47).⁵⁴ The way the body and dress are drawn is similar, in particular the bi-coloured edge of the robe. The rays drawn within the nimbus are actually finer in the manuscript than in the murals. The modelling of the body is still rather harsh, which compares well to some of the Tholing manuscript illuminations.⁵⁵

In their treatment of the hieratic figures, the narrative depictions

⁵² See also Klimburg-Salter 1997: 154–71, in particular figs. 163–80; the Bodhisattvas belong to her Period IIA (see Klimburg-Salter 1997: 49ff).

⁵³ In the Tabo ambulatory the blue and green Bodhisattvas have considerably more shading than those with white and red complexions.

⁵⁴ See also Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig. 162.

⁵⁵ This representation of the Buddha in the Tabo ambulatory is essentially the same type as one of the Buddhas of manuscript RN 5 (Fig. 48). Nonetheless, if we compare these Buddhas, we notice that despite the similar appearance some crucial features in the depictions have changed: the bodily proportions, in particular the body-head ratio, are different; in the manuscript illuminations, the body is revealed through the dress, which has a hem of only one colour, and the way the dress falls at the legs as well as the halo are completely different.

at Tabo exhibit a number of similarities to the style of the paintings in the ambulatory. By and large, however, the depictions are of a wholly different character: the figures are conceived in purely graphic terms and lack any kind of corporeality. The focus of interest here is the rendering of motion and the interplay between the figures.⁵⁶ The same profane characteristics are also found in the paintings illustrating the *Sādāpararudita* chapters in manuscripts RN 10 and RN 11. Here too it is the graphic manner of representation that is important and not the corporeality of the figures.

The style of the Tholing chörten continued to exert an influence, as can be seen from the early 13th-century paintings of the Alchi Sumtsek (Fig. 49).⁵⁷ The crisp outlines of the body are further enhanced through the contrasting colour of the background. Here the modelling of the body is no longer pattern-like, instead clearly emphasising its plasticity. The shading is frequently executed in contrasting colours. The facial features are similar to those of Tholing and Tabo, while the head is relatively small in relation to the body. The jewellery and opulently decorated dress are even more richly depicted than at Tabo, both conveying a sense of luxury.

The same elements are already present in the earlier Alchi Dukhang. The depiction of a Buddha from this temple (Fig. 50) shares the same proportions and modelling, and with his richly patterned patchwork robes can be compared to the Buddhas of the Tabo manuscript RN 13 (Fig. 5). Despite the substantial difference in size, both Buddhas wear rich robes, their heads are relatively small and the bodies exhibit modelling, albeit of a considerably more schematic nature than that in the Tabo manuscript illuminations.

If one compares the hard linear style of the Tholing chörten and its modifications in Tabo and Alchi with the 12th-century murals of the Translator's Temple at Nako⁵⁸ it is evident that the latter has a very different, painterly style, even though a number of the motives are similar (Fig. 51). The outlines of the body are considerably softer than in the linear style; lacking the tension of the graphic lines, the bodies give a looser, more "relaxed" impression. In contrast to Alchi, where the bodies seem almost like jointed dolls, at Nako the various parts of the body flow organically into one another. Furthermore, the modelling does not follow the contours of the body more or less schematically, that is from the outline to the centre of the respective part of the body, but is adjusted individually for each part



53. Dark yellow earth-touching Buddha with green shading; Tabo, manuscript RN 5 (C. Luczanits, 1994; WHAV).



54. Green teaching Buddha; Pooh, *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript, folio 92 (C. Kalantari, 2009).

and appears to have been finely smudged with the ball of the thumb in order to allow parts of the body to stand out independently of the outlines. The colours are not as strong and hardly contrast with one another, while neither dress nor jewellery are emphasised to any great extent.

This more painterly style also occurs in manuscript illuminations, most clearly on the title page and in the first group of illuminations of the first volume of a *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript from Pooh village in Upper Kinnaur (Fig. 52).⁵⁹ The shading is here barely visible. Illuminations further on in the manuscript are much more schematic and of inferior quality, and may thus be the work of pupils. However, a number of leaves from this manuscript offer good opportunities for comparisons with the Tabo manuscript featuring the Vajradhātu mandala (RN 5; compare Fig. 53 with Fig. 54). While there are major differences in the appearance of the Buddhas, the details of their dress, the lotuses and even the halos all share a similar schematic approach in the execution. The comparison also demonstrates how crudely the Tabo depictions were executed.

The illuminations in the Tabo manuscript RN 5 are obviously not painted by one of the main artists – one of the latter would probably have been commissioned with the title page, which has not been preserved – but by pupils, as can be seen from the clumsiness of many of the details. A telling example is the representation of the breasts of female deities in three-quarter profile. In more sophisticated depictions, as for example from Phyi dbang cave, West Tibet (Fig. 32), the countermovement of the breasts is used to suggest the elegant flexure of the body, but in the manuscript this feature has

⁵⁶ See Klimburg-Salter 1997: fig. 128.

⁵⁷ See also the diverse forms of Green Tārā on the left-hand wall of the Avalokiteśvara niche and the Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā ar gallery level (Goepper and Poncar 1996: 72ff, 159).

⁵⁸ On the date of Nako see Luczanits 2004: 85.

⁵⁹ On the different styles and hands in this manuscript see Allinger 2006. We would like to thank Christiane Kalantari for the identification of this goddess as Cuṇḍā.

been executed in an extreme, almost grotesque manner. (Fig. 35).

The figures in the paintings of Tabo RN 5 also have minimal shading but exhibit the same soft lines as in the Nako murals. In the latter, the Pooh manuscript and RN 5 the heads tend to be broad, while the mouth is of normal size, or at least not as thin as in the linear style, and the eyes are almond-shaped, with the exception of the Pooh manuscript, where they are very narrow or almost slit-like.

While these stylistic comparisons are not conclusive, they help to locate the Tabo manuscripts in time and place. Despite the striking differences in quality, the style of Tabo manuscript RN 5 can probably best be compared to the paintings of the Nako Translator's Temple.

Attribution and Context

It is very fortunate that two of the themes preserved in the few illustrated folios of the Tabo manuscripts are also depicted in the Tabo Main Temple: the Vajradhātu mandala in the Assembly Hall and the story of Sadāprarudita's quest for the Perfection of Wisdom in the ambulatory. Both themes belong to the renovation of the Tabo Main Temple likely concluded in 1042 CE. However, this fact should not lead us to assume that the manuscript illuminations are all from the same period. As we have already seen, the Buddha depictions of the manuscripts cover a wide chronological range, while those of the Sadāprarudita narrative are roughly contemporaneous (RN 10 and 11) and slightly later than the Tabo mural depiction. It is thus clear that we should not generally assume that all distinctively early western Himalayan (or Purang-Guge) manuscript depictions are of the 11th century.

If the chronology of western Himalayan temples as suggested in Luczanits 2004 is taken as a base,⁶⁰ the closest comparisons to the Tabo Vajradhātu manuscript RN 5 in both stylistic and iconographic terms are found in 12th-century monuments. Stylistically, the manuscript most closely resembles the Nako murals, but this association is not close enough to establish an origin for the painters. However, as artists and workshops have been working at different sites throughout the region, usually the origin of the painters cannot be established for most of the manuscripts. The itinerant background of the artists is one possible explanation why the iconographic comparisons are spread over a wide geographic region and time scale. Some of the iconographic comparisons are exclusively from the Alchi Sumtsek, which is datable to the early 13th century.

Thus, despite depicting the Vajradhātu mandala and likely also

the Sādāprarudita episode, the Tabo manuscript dates to the mid 12th century at the earliest. Such a date and a local, itinerant workshop setting would also explain some of the idiosyncrasies found in this manuscript, especially some of the more grotesque figures, the type of architectural frame found in one depiction (Fig. 26) and the flame-shaped *ūṣṇīṣa* of the Buddhas along with characteristics that clearly continue from the Tabo mural paintings.

In conclusion, we hope that this analysis of the Tabo manuscript illuminations suffices to establish a number of important points:

- Similarly to the monuments found throughout the region, western Himalayan manuscript illumination is not restricted to the 11th century but actually has a long and complex history, which includes changes in the subjects the manuscript illumination depict and the relationship of text and illuminations. In this respect, a larger body of evidence may make it possible to work out how western Himalayan manuscript illumination has developed in terms of style and the subjects depicted.
- Once a more detailed chronology of manuscript illuminations has been established, it may help to refine the chronology for early Western Himalayan manuscripts as well.
- The Vajradhātu mandala assembly is an important topic among the early manuscript illuminations, and the iconography of the deities depicted has the potential to establish relationships to monuments in the region.

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⁶⁰ While this chronology has not been accepted by a number of senior scholars, it also has not been challenged seriously in terms of the arguments it presents.

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