

Asianart.com offers pdf versions of some article for the convenience of our visitors and readers. These files should be printed for personal use only. Note that when you view the pdf on your computer in Adobe reader, the links to main image pages will be active: if clicked, the linked page will open in your browser. This article can be viewed online at: <http://asianart.com/articles/mueller>

[HOME](#) | [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#) | [INTRODUCTION](#) | [ABSTRACTS](#)

Representing Prajñāpāramitā in Tibet and the Indian Himalayas. The iconographic concept in the Temples of Nako, rKyang bu and Zha lu

by Petra Müller, Vienna[1]

(click on the small image for full screen image with captions)

INTRODUCTION

The paper will discuss different iconographic models of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā which prevailed specifically in the Indian Himalayas and Tibet of the 11th to 12th century.

The goddess of Wisdom Prajñāpāramitā (Tib. Yum chen mo) is the personification of the most important text of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*. Even though depictions of the goddess prior to the 11th century exist, these early mediaeval images are not preserved within their original contexts. This article focuses especially on images of Prajñāpāramitā that still can be analysed within their original architectural contexts. Furthermore, the chosen monuments are rare examples in which the remains of original statues exist or if it was destroyed, a rich photographic documentation from the time before the destruction is available, as in the case of the temple of rKyang bu in Southern Tibet. Up to now only few research studies focus on this topic. The preliminary investigation that follows is part of an ongoing study.



Fig. 1

These representations of Prajñāpāramitā produced in the Indian Himalayas and Tibet of the 11th to 12th century will be studied predominantly from an art historical viewpoint. A careful analysis and a systematic comparative investigation of images and texts will enable a better understanding of particular modes of representation of the goddess, her "cult" and her specific Tibetan iconography. Special attention will be devoted to the configuration of Prajñāpāramitā and her retinue as seen in three monuments - Nako (Himachal Pradesh, Indian Himalaya), rKyang bu (Southern Tibet, gTsang), and Zha lu (Southern Tibet, gTsang) - which show Prajñāpāramitā within an iconographic context. The position of the goddess in the overall iconographic program will be analyzed and possible iconographic types and primary sources briefly discussed. Different types representing the iconographic context, in which Prajñāpāramitā is represented, are introduced. Taking these above mentioned monuments together with written primary sources and an analysis of the images into consideration will aid

in deciphering the specific Tibetan iconography.

TEMPLES

The temples of Nako (Himachal Pradesh, Indian Himalaya) and Zha lu (Southern Tibet, gTsang) still contain some of their ancient and original decoration. Despite the destruction of the temple of rKyang bu (southern Tibet, gTsang) during the Cultural Revolution, thanks to the work of Tucci and Maraini, there is detailed photographic documentation prior to the destruction.[2] At all three sites, the monumental images depicting Prajñāpāramitā are of central importance.

ZHA LU (Southern Tibet, gTsang)

Today the only temple in Tibet that contains a Yum chen mo lha khang, a chapel dedicated to Prajñāpāramitā, is Zha lu (Figs 1-2). Zha lu is situated some 17 km southeast of gZhis khar in Southern Tibet, gTsang. Although little of the original structure has remained due to renovations and enlargements, the current Yum chen mo lha khang goes back to the original conception and is said to have been consecrated by the great Indian scholar Atiśa in possibly 1045.[3] According to the *Genealogies of Zha lu*, the whole temple was founded in a hare year by lCe btsun Shes rab 'byung gnas.[4] In its original conception, it appears to have been comprised of the Lha khang lo ma, the Lha khang byang ma (dating to the earliest phase, the founding, around 1027-1045)[5] to the west (Fig. 3, nos 3-4), and the eastern part of the Yum chen mo lha



Fig. 2

khang (renovated by Grag pa rgyal msthan in the 14th century) to the east (Fig. 4, no. 1B)[6]. The *Genealogies of Zha lu* state that lCe btsun Shes rab 'byung gnas first built these three chapels.[7] Vitali (1990: 93) suggests, however, that the founder of the temple built the Yum chen mo lha khang somewhat later than the other two chapels after returning from his visit to Bodh Gayā.[8]

Yum chen mo lha khang

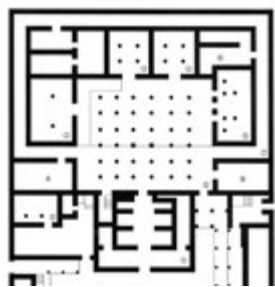


Fig. 3

To the east on top of the mGon khang (Protectors chapel, as it is called today, originally an ambulatory, Fig. 3, no. 1), the Yum chen mo lha khang is located on the first floor.[9] The *Genealogies of Zha lu* already mention this upper part of the building as being dedicated to Prajñāpāramitā.[10] An ambulatory (Tib. *skor lam*, Fig. 4, no. 1A) with paintings dating to the 14th century surround the Yum chen mo lha khang.[11] On the lintel of the door leading to this chapel the five Jinas are shown with Vairocana in the centre (Fig. 15). Based on their stylistic features, these depictions are possibly the only original preserved paintings outside of the chapel created possibly prior to the 14th century.

The decoration of the clay statues as it exists today in the Yum chen mo lha khang has been completely restored (Figs 5-9).[12] Only the original murals (Figs 13-14) in the chapel remain in its original setting, which renders accurate identifications challenging, as than are obscured on the north, east,

west and south walls by the statues. The first renovation took place in the 14th century by Grag pa rgyal msthan (mentioned previously).[13] The latest recently finished in 2008. According to Heller (1999: 123) and Neumann (2001: 323), damages occurred in the 1960s and 1970s and no older sculptures have been preserved in the early chapels. Photographic material of condition prior to these damages is available from Maraini 1937, Tucci in 1988 [1941] and Su around 1962 (Fig. 10).

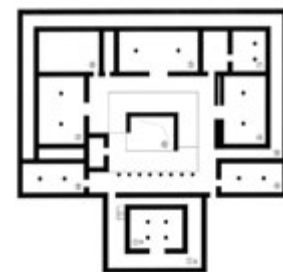


Fig. 4

The Yum chen mo lha khang currently contains a golden four-armed clay statue of Prajñāpāramitā (Figs 2, 5). In the centre of the west wall the goddess is shown seated in *vajraparyāṅkāśana* on a lion throne surrounded by monumental seated images representing the ten directional Buddhas (Figs 6-9). To each side (along the north and south walls) three Buddha images are placed (Figs 6-7). On the entrance wall (east wall) two more sculptures of the same type are seated (next to the entrance) and further two images are located on both sides next to Prajñāpāramitā on the west wall.



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

Not much is known about the original iconographic configuration of the sculptures.[14] As already mentioned the *Genealogies of Zha lu* refer to the dedication of the upper part to Yum chen mo,[15] and Ruegg (1966: 91) refers in his translation of the *Bu ston rNam thar* to the depiction of an image of Prajñāpāramitā. Little research on the Yum chen mo lha khang had been conducted so far.[16] Wang (1960: 52-65) states that a statue of Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi was formerly the main image of the Yum chen mo lha khang in Zha lu. Vitali (1990: 106) describes the configuration of the 14th century as housing a four-armed image of Prajñāpāramitā surrounded by the Bodhisattvas [sic] of the ten directions. However, Rhie (1997: 38-51) was, moreover, not aware of the clay images for the Yum chen mo lha khang in Zha lu. Kreijger (1996: 108) refers to huge stucco figures of Bodhisattvas [sic] and Dvarapalas flanking the central figure of Prajñāpāramitā. He compares the remaining halos of the statues of the Yum chen mo lha khang with those already destroyed from the Lha khang lo ma and Lha khang byang ma and attributes these chapels therefore to the original configuration (early phase). The halos and animal thrones originally thought to have framed all of the images are lost today (Figs 6, 10), but some remains were still in situ before the latest restoration (Figs 11-12).[17] Fournier's photographs show the state of preservation in 1994 and possibly the original mandorla of the Prajñāpāramitā which is gilded and decorated with roundels. The only preserved fragments of the animal throne at that time were a horizontal beam supporting the additional structure and a *garuḍa* on top of the construction.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Part of the original concept of the Yum chen mo lha khang are the remaining parts of the still visible Pāla-style paintings (Figs 13-14). These murals are placed to both sides of entrance, three images in a vertical row one above the other, and on both sides of the corners in the west. Additional murals decorate the upper walls and ceiling. Chayet (1994: 205) describes the style of the murals as a combination of Pāla elements with Central Asian influences.[18] Stoddard (1996: 35) claims that Zha lu together with Grva thang (Central Tibet, dBu) refer to an "early syncretic stage of Tibetan art" dealing with a lot of cultural influences.



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

Related to stylistic issues of the statues we can identify at least three phases; in the original, now lost, images existed.[19] The second phase is dated to the modifications performed during the 14th century renovation work[20] and the third phase covers all other renovation work phases later. Heller (1999: 123-124) describes the style of the sculptures as visible in the photograph of Su around 1962 (Fig. 10) as follows:

"We find another clear example of Tibetan adaptation of a foreign motif in the Prajñāpāramitā chapel of Shalu [...] The Buddhas' faces were modeled according to Indian techniques and physiognomy, [...] The facial features and body proportions follow Indian models, but the deities are dressed in Tibetan robes of medallion fabrics or in robes of flowing silks with narrow pleats. [...] The thrones follow models found in eleventh century Nepalese manuscripts (Pal and Meech-Pekarik 1988: fig. 37).[21] [...] Certainly this too reflects the international nature of the esthetics then popular in Tibet, as well as a marked tendency towards archaism."
(Heller 1999: 123-124)

The statues of Prajñāpāramitā and the Buddhas seen in the chapel in 2009 wear robes embellished with medallions similar to those used as throne decoration elements before the recent renovation (Figs 9, 10).

The goddess and her retinue



Fig. 15

Due to the relatively poor knowledge about the original configuration and the completely restored images in the case of Zha lu we have to rely on the information given in textual sources. The *Genealogies of Zha lu* refer to the Yum chen mo lha khang as dedicated to Prajñāpāramitā (see note 10) and Ruegg (1966: 91) refers in his translation of the Bu ston rNam thar to the depiction of an image of this goddess. The statue of Yum chen mo is surrounded by the Bodhisattvas [sic] of the ten directions (Vitali 1990: 61).[22] A relation between the configuration of the Yum chen mo lha khang and the remains of paintings depicting the five Jinas on the lintel above the entrance door is evident (Fig. 15). The Jinas visually frame the image inside.

In order to attempt a comparison of images that no longer exist in their original conception, the iconographic context and literary sources become especially important. In this case, not only the main wall but also the related statues and paintings (iconographic configuration) of the depictions on the other walls need to be taken in consideration.

Ricca & Fournier (1996: 353) identify the paintings of the 14th century renovation phase in the mGon khang of Zha lu (ground floor,

underneath the Yum chen mo lha khang, Fig. 3, no. 1) as related to the *dharmadhātuvagisvara maṇḍala* and the *durgatiparisodhana maṇḍala*. [23]

Representation mode - Type I

The temple of Zha lu can be identified as a possible type I mode of representation showing Prajñāpāramitā surrounded by the Buddhas of the ten directions. Later on in the Lo tsa ba lha khang temple of Nako *maṇḍala* depictions such as the *durgatiparisodhana maṇḍala* and the *dharmadhātuvagisvaramaṇḍala* play an important role and are visible next to the statue of the goddess on the north and south walls. In the case of Zha lu such references can be found in the 14th century renovation phase. There the *dharmadhātuvagisvara maṇḍala* and the *durgatiparisodhana maṇḍala* are depicted in the mGon khang located underneath the Yum chen mo lha khang.

NAKO

The representation of Prajñāpāramitā surrounded by Buddha images is found not only in South Tibet but also in the Indian Himalayas. Nako was visited by Francke in 1909 and by Tucci in 1933. [24] In the Buddhist compound of Nako (Fig. 16), two of the four temples, the Lha khang gong ma and the Lo tsa ba lha khang, still contain paintings and sculptures preserved from the period of their founding and largely dated to the late 11th or 12th century. [25] Both temples display monumental images of female deities (Figs 17- 20).



Fig. 16

Nako, Lha khang gong ma

The crudely restored image of the goddess in the Lha khang gong ma temple (which lies opposite the Lo tsa ba lha khang temple, Fig. 16) was identified as Prajñāpāramitā (Figs 17-18) by Luczanits (2004: 84, 215), [26] and furthermore as the central part of the *prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala*. Luczanits (2004: 85) identified the iconography as: "an unusual variant of the *prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala*". In this case Prajñāpāramitā seemingly becomes the centre of the *maṇḍala*. Today no original attributes of the image exist; the right hand performs *vitarkamudrā*, while the left hand rests on the knee of the figure in *varadamudrā*.



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

Very few textual sources that describe the *prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala* have been documented and investigated so far. Previous research efforts have largely failed to identify the iconographic and literary sources for this configuration showing the *maṇḍala* of Prajñāpāramitā, where she is shown as the central image surrounded by Buddhas. Iconographic sources such as the *Niṣpannayogāvali* do not mention this specific *maṇḍala*. Silk (1994: 29) refers to a commentary Text written by the master Dārikapāda, that describes the *maṇḍala* of Prajñāpāramitā: the goddess is surrounded by the Buddhas of the directions, and its conception is said to date back as early as at the time of Padmasambhava. [27] The *Dhāraṇīsamuccaya* No. 33, which was already developed in the 7th century (before 625, Conze 1960: 14, 88), comprises the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayasūtra*, which is said to include the first description of the Prajñāpāramitā and the *prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala*. According to Luczanits (2004: 216) this *maṇḍala* is characteristic for the late 11th to 12th century monuments of Tibetan Buddhism in general, and therefore he refers to the temples of rKyang bu and Nako. [28]

Representation mode - Type I

As possibly visible in Zha lu, the Lha khang gong ma shows the already familiar iconographic concept of representing Prajñāpāramitā surrounded by (eight) Buddhas. In case of the Lha khang gong ma temple in Nako these eight statues are arranged on both sides of Prajñāpāramitā (Fig. 17), four on each side. All of these clay sculptures are placed on the same wall.

This mode of representation is seemingly related to type I and furthermore to primary sources dealing with the *prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala*.

Nako, Lo tsa ba lha khang



Fig. 21

The clay sculpture in the Lo tsa ba lha khang temple (Figs 19-20) was first identified as Prajñāpāramitā by Tucci in 1934 (Tucci & Ghersi 1934: 146). Previously Francke (1972 [1914]: 32-33) had identified the sculpture in 1914 as Vairocana (Tib. rNam par snang mdzad) or Ratnasambhava (Tib. Rin chen 'byung ldan). The earliest existing photograph dates back to the time when Francke visited the site in 1909. The two-armed goddess of original golden colour[29] is found on the north side of the apse. She is seated in *vajraparyāṅkāśana* on a lotus throne, and the hands are shown in *dharmacakramudrā*.

In contrast to other statues depicting Prajñāpāramitā, the female goddess of Nako Lo tsa ba lha khang clearly shows a shift in the iconographic development of representing Prajñāpāramitā as a Buddha instead of depicting the goddess as a female Bodhisattva. This is clearly visible in these clay sculptures with *buddhalakṣaṇas* such as an *urṇā* and *uṣṇīṣa*. Moreover the image in the Lo tsa ba lha khang bears a strong resemblance to the five clay Jinās installed in the apse of the temple (Figs 21-22)[30]. The sculptures of Prajñāpāramitā and the five Jinās are

similar in style, size and position, and they are also made of the same material and using the same construction mode.

The Lo tsa ba lha khang Prajñāpāramitā is related to the depiction of the five Jinās, and therefore possibly to the *vajradhātu maṇḍala*. Within this *maṇḍala* the ten Pāramitā goddesses representing different stages of enlightenment have an important place. Prajñāpāramitā is their uppermost deity shown on the 7th or 10th level.[31] De Mallmann (1986 [1975]: 57) describes the Pāramitās in the southeast of the *kāya maṇḍala* (*Mahāvairocanasūtra*) or *mahāvairocana maṇḍala*. This (southeastern) position is also occupied by Prajñāpāramitā in this temple.

In Nako, as in Zha lu (*dharmadhātuvagisvara maṇḍala*, and *durgatiparisodhana maṇḍala*, see previously), similar *maṇḍalas* are depicted. The murals on the south and north walls of the Lo tsa ba lha khang show the *dharmadhātuvagisvaramañjusri maṇḍala*, and the *durgatiparisodhana maṇḍala*, respectively.[32]



Fig. 22

The iconographic program therefore seems (possibly) to follow textual descriptions as given in the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa*. In this primary source, Prajñāpāramitā is described as being situated to the left of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (depicted in the mural on the south wall, in his emanation as Mañjughoṣa).[33] This textual description also corresponds to the position of the statue of Prajñāpāramitā in the Lo tsa ba lha khang, which is located to the left of Mañjuśrī on the southern side of the west wall. Also the later paintings of the skor lam Yum chen mo in Zha lu appear to refer to the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa*. [34]

Representation mode - Type II

The representation of the goddess of wisdom in the Lo tsa ba lha khang, follows a different model than that in the Lha khang gong ma, where she is surrounded by Buddhas. Here Prajñāpāramitā is related to the depiction of the five Jinās, and primary sources such as the *vajradhātu maṇḍala*, the *dharmadhātuvagisvaramañjusri maṇḍala*, and the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa*. [35]

The goddess and her retinue

The mode of representation in Nako described above represents on the one hand type I (Lha khang gong ma) and on the other hand type II (Lo tsa ba lha khang). The main walls of both temples of the sacred compound show monumental images of Prajñāpāramitā. In the Lha khang gong ma the central image is surrounded by Buddhas within the context of the *prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala* (type I); in the Lo tsa ba lha khang the Prajñāpāramitā is shown together with the five Jinās and formally integrated into the *vajradhātu maṇḍala* (type II).

Representation mode - related twofold depiction (Type I & Type II)

Taking both temples of the sacred compound into consideration, a related twofold depiction of type I and type II is visible. In addition, in both temples Prajñāpāramitā is shown integrated in a similar iconographic setting. Both images are enclosed by a three-dimensional frame depicting a mythical animal throne and shown together with a set of Buddhas (Figs 17-20). In case of the Lo tsa ba lha khang Prajñāpāramitā, the statue is linked to the remains of four Buddhas painted below the sculpture. The original Prajñāpāramitā image from the Lha khang gong ma is thought to have been similar in size to the Prajñāpāramitā image of the Lo tsa ba lha khang since the fragments of originally painted mandorlas are of comparable dimensions (about 90 cm in height). Additional murals belonging to this scene depict a somewhat smaller image of green Tārā[36] and relate it to a donor depiction underneath the statue of the main goddess. The murals can be attributed to the original decoration of the temples due to stylistic features visible in both temples.

The description of the goddess shown above Tārā (as seen in Nako) can be only found in context of the early tantric text of the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa* and is related to the creation of a *maṇḍala*. Śākyamuni is shown seated on a lion throne teaching the *dharma* and is surrounded by Pratyekabuddhas, his students, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Prajñāpāramitā above Tārā, sixteen Bodhisattvas, the ten Pāramitā goddesses, eight Uṣṇīṣas and other deities (Snellgrove, 2002 [1987]: 193-194).[37] Therefore the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa* could possibly be a source for the iconographic program in these temples. The clear similarities in the iconographic configuration (Prajñāpāramitā in relation to Tārā, donor depictions, etc.) in both of the discussed temples of Nako clearly refer to a related twofold depiction.

The specific twofold form might also have been represented in rKyang bu, where - like in Nako - two goddesses identified as possibly

Prajñāpāramitā can be found in the photographic material.

rKYANG BU

The temple of rKyang bu, also known as Samada, is situated 90 km south of Zha lu, and 1,5 km west of gYe mar (also known as l wang) in Southern Tibet, gTsang.[38] The *Myang chos' byung* (following Tucci 1988 [1941]: 91, 104-105, 121) attributes the foundation of rKyang bu to rKyang bu Chos kyi blo gros, a direct disciple of Rin chen bzang po (958-1055) and therefore to the 11th century. Vitali (1990: 57-58) dates the monument prior to 1076. Rhie (1997: 43) attributes rKyang bu, together with gYe mar, to the early 11th century. rKyang bu was completely destroyed in the 1960s by the red guards, but according to photographs by Western scholars and pioneers, the original configuration and decoration of the 11th century temple must have been particularly remarkable. The earliest photographic material dates back to 1937 when Maraini visited the site, and Tucci and Govinda documented the temple in the 1940s. Tucci (1988 [1941]: 94) describes that at the time of his visit nothing of the original oldest sanctuary remained. Therefore, the photographs of Maraini from 1937 published in different scholarly literature are even more important.[39]

According to Tucci (1988 [1941]: 121) and Vitali (1990: 50), the two-storied building consisted of four chapels on the lower floor and two chapels on the upper floor.[40] One of the upper chapels was dedicated to Yum chen mo.[41] The old photographs from rKyang bu (Figs 23, 26), show two goddesses, which are possibly Prajñāpāramitā. One is made of brass and depicts a two-armed standing goddess, while the second image shows a four-armed seated clay statue.

Standing Image



Fig. 23

The first female deity in rKyang bu is a four-armed goddess standing in *ābhaṅga* (Fig. 23).[42] The brass image is cast in one piece (hollow cast) and is 80 cm in height. Tucci 1988 [1941] does not mention this image. Lo Bue (1998: 32) published the sculpture as "la dea che personifica la Perfezione della Saggezza", "the goddess that personifies the Perfection of Wisdom". Von Schroeder (2001: 81) identifies the image as "possibly Prajñāpāramitā". A clear identification, however, is still lacking.

The earliest existing statue of Prajñāpāramitā known so far could be extremely valuable to identify this deity and to decipher its possible context. The bronze image from Gilgit published and analysed by von Hinüber (2007: 39-42) shows some similar iconographic features (Fig. 25) and can be identified due to an inscription as Prajñāpāramitā. Another inscription also dates the image to the 7th century and reveals it being a donation by Queen Śrī Maṅgalaḥaṃsikā, the wife of the first Patola Śāhi Vajrādityanandi.[43] The sculpture stands on a *viśvapadma*, her right hand is shown in *vitarkamudrā* and she holds a manuscript with her left. The similarities of

this Gilgit image with the standing brass statue of rKyang bu (Fig. 23) showing a goddess holding a manuscript in her left hand are evident.

The monumental standing sculpture of rKyang bu, possibly depicting Prajñāpāramitā, is shown in connection with the wooden pillar. This pillar could depict the cosmic axis mundi, and would iconographically refer to Prajñāpāramitā in the centre of the universe surrounded by the ten Buddhas of the cardinal directions, which would relate to the type I mode of representation.

Seated Image

The four-armed image is seated in *vajraparyāṅkāśana* on an elaborate lotus throne. Her primary left hand holds a bowl, her primary right hand is raised in *varadamudrā*. Both of the other two hands are shown in *vitarkamudrā*. According to description of Tucci (1988 [1941]: 120) and Vitali (1990: 50) Prajñāpāramitā was in this case formerly surrounded by ten standing Buddhas (Fig. 24) representing the cardinal directions. The animal throne of the statue of Prajñāpāramitā is shown (Fig. 26) surrounded by painted scrollwork of flowers. In Nako the statues are also related to mural depictions of the same phase as the statues, respectively.



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27

Although the seated goddess (Fig. 26) is not located in the same chapel as a set of Jinas, her image is comparable to these sculptures.[44] The four-armed goddess shows certain stylistic similarities to the five Jinas (Fig. 27) that were placed in the second chapel, dedicated to Vairocana, on the upper floor of rKyang bu. Several other sculptures, mostly representing minor deities, were

part of this iconographic configuration. Each Jina wears a *dhoti* decorated with roundels and can be related to depictions of the Buddhas in gYe mar.

The goddess and her retinue

The original iconographic configuration of rKyang bu is not clearly identified, but some similarities to Nako in the iconographic modes of representation can be noticed. In both temples two images possibly depicting Prajñāpāramitā are shown. In addition, similarities in style and technique of the statues of the goddess to the five Jinas can be seen.

For rKyang bu, as for Zha lu, very little research has been conducted so far. No relation to *maṇḍala* configurations such as the *dharmadhātuvagisvaramaṇjusri maṇḍala* and the *durgatiparisodhana maṇḍala* have yet be identified.

Tucci (1988 [1941]: 119-120) mentions the *vajradhātu maṇḍala* for the content of the upper floor, and Luczanits (2004: 216) refers to the depiction of the *prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala* for the temples of rKyang bu and Nako (see previously).

Representation mode - related twofold depiction (Type I & Type II)

While there is no clear evidence that the decoration of the Yum chen mo chapel and the Jinas of the Vairocana chapel or the single brass image of Prajñāpāramitā belong to the same overall iconographic program, the existing photographic material and the two images of the goddess suggest a possibly related twofold depiction of type I and type II as visible in Nako.

CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration all the references analyzed in this paper, three different modes of representing Prajñāpāramitā can be identified. Prajñāpāramitā shown at the centre of the *maṇḍala* surrounded by Buddha images (mainly those of the ten cardinal directions, Tib. Phyogs bcu sangs rgyas), can be identified as type I, and Prajñāpāramitā depicted together with the five Jinas as type II. The related twofold depiction combines both forms. Furthermore the first type is related to the *prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala* and the second type mainly to the *vajradhātu maṇḍala*. These iconographic models seem to be specifically Tibetan into the iconography and allow several insights in the development of representing Prajñāpāramitā in Tibet and the Indian Himalayas.[45]

In the temple of Zha lu (here the goddess is surrounded by the ten Buddhas of the cardinal directions) und the Lha khang gong ma of Nako (the goddess is surrounded by Buddhas only) type I is shown, and in the Lo tsa ba lha khang temple in Nako type II. As a result in Nako there is a related twofold depiction of type I and type II showing the goddess in both of the modes of representation within the architectural content. This may possibly be also the case for the former temple of rKyang which demonstrates strong similarities with the iconographic configuration of Nako.

The development of type I begins with the possible representation in Zha lu but is clearly visible for the first time in the Lha khang gong ma of Nako. Luczanits (2004: 84) identified the configuration as related to the *prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala*. In rKyang bu the standing brass image seems to refer to the same type and date back to the possibly earliest stage of the Prajñāpāramitā depictions due to the comparison with the Gilgit image dated to the 7th century by an inscription (see previously, Figs 23, 25). Prajñāpāramitā appears in the centre of the universe as the mother of all beings and the personification of the most important text of that time, which makes the relation to early textual sources such as the *Dhāranisamuccaya* No. 33 and the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa*, as mentioned in the paper, most likely and a relation to the the type I mode of representation becomes evident.

The development of type II is clearly visible in the Lo tsa ba lha khang. Nako also contains the related twofold depiction with its two images of Prajñāpāramitā within the sacred compound, like also possibly depicted in rKyang bu.

Aside from these iconographic similarities, the Prajñāpāramitā images in all three temples presented in this paper are shown within a three-dimensional mythical animal frame (except for the standing image of rKyang bu). In addition, they are golden (Skt. *kanaka*) in colour, seemingly depicting the goddess as Kanakaprajñāpāramitā. The texts of the *Niṣpannayogāvali* and *Sādhnamālā* (NSP 21, SM 156)[46] describe Kanakaprajñāpāramitā as a four-armed image.[47] This type is visible in Zha lu and rKyang bu (seated image). As these literary sources do not predate most of the sites discussed and Tibetan Art often differs from the literary description, a clear identification is difficult. A very early commentary text to the *Ninnō* No. 34 describes a golden, two-armed Prajñāpāramitā. Conze (1960: 14, 88) refers to this commentary text ascribed to the 8th century (around 750) and translated of Amoghavajra as including the first description of a tantric Prajñāpāramitā image. In this primary text Prajñāpāramitā is described as having a golden colour, and as bejewelled image seated on a white lotus holding the book in her left hand. The other hand performs *vitarkamudrā*. Similarities (except for the description as a seated image) are visible in the standing images of rKyang bu and Gilgit (Figs 23, 25).

The analysis and systematic comparative investigation of images and possible early (tantric) textual sources such as the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa* verify the modes of representation of type I and type II as a specifically Tibetan iconography. This is only a first step to gain a better understanding of the "cult" of Prajñāpāramitā and its complexity. It seems that this model is especially related to the early development as visible in the comparison of the standing images of the goddess from rKyang bu with the Gilgit Prajñāpāramitā discussed by von Hinüber (2007: 39-42). The early textual sources and the iconographic configuration of the three monuments presented here verify the identification of two main modes of representing Prajñāpāramitā in the Indian Himalayas and Tibet and a third mode as a combined depiction.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Genealogies of Zha lu, translation by Tucci 1999 [1949]

Zhalu documents, translation by Tucci 1999 [1949]

SECONDARY SOURCES

ṣṭamahābhaya Tārā in Nako/Himachal Pradesh as Compared with Other Representations of the Same Tārā in the Western Himalaya. In C. Jarigge & V. Lefèvre (eds) *Historical Archaeology and Art History. South Asian Archaeology 2001: Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, Paris 2001*, vol. 2. Paris, 355-361.

Bhattacharyya, B. 1949 *Niṣpannayogavali of Mahāpaṇḍita Abhayākara Gupta*. Baroda.

Bhattacharyya, D.C. 1978 *Studies in Buddhist Iconography*. New Delhi.

Chayet, A. 1994 *Art et Archéologie du Tibet*. Paris.

Chan, V. 1994 *Tibet Handbook*. Chico.

Conze, E. 1960 *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature*. Gravenhagen.

Denwood, P. 1997 Architectural Style at Shalu. In J.C. Singer & P. Denwood (eds) *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style*. London, 220-239.

Dowman, K. 1988 *The Power-Places of Central Tibet*. London. New York.

Ferrari, A. (ed.) 1958 *mK'yen brtse's Guide to the Holy Places of Central Tibet*. Rome.

Francke, A.H. 1972 [1914] *Antiquities of Indian Tibet, part I: Personal Narrative*. Calcutta. New Delhi.

Goepper, R. & J. Poncar 1996 *Alchi. Ladakh's hidden Buddhist Sanctuary: The Sumtsek*. London.

Govinda, L.G. 1979 *Tibet in Pictures, vol. 2: Expedition to Central Tibet*. Berkeley.

'Gyur med rdo rje 2009 [1996] *Tibet Handbook*. Bath.

Heller, A. 1999 *Tibetan Art. Tracing the Development of Spiritual Ideals and Art in Tibet 600-2000 A.D.* Milan.

--- 2002a Did Atiśa visit Zha lu Monastery? Tracing Atiśa's Influence on Tibetan Iconography. In D.E. Klimburg-Salter & E. Allinger (eds) *Buddhist Art and Tibetan Patronage Ninth to Fourteenth Centuries. PIATS 2000: Proceedings of 18/21 the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2003*, vol. 2. Leiden, 45-58.

--- 2002b The Paintings of Grva thang: History and Iconography of an 11th Century Tibetan temple. *Tibet Journal* XXVII (1&2), 37-70.
ästhetischer Elemente in der tibetischen Skulptur - Eine Spurensuche. In J. Lee-Kalisch (ed.) *Klöster öffnen ihre Schatzkammern*. München, 80-89.

von Hinüber, O. 2007 Three New Bronzes from Gilgit. *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2006*. Tokyo, 39-43.

Jackson, D. 2010 *The Nepalese Legacy in Tibetan Painting*. New York. Seattle. Washington.

Kavasaki, K. 2001 *The Mural of the Durgatipariśodhana-maṇḍalas at Sha-lu*. *Mikkyo Bunka* 207, 41-56.

Klimburg-Salter, D. E. 1999 The Dharmadhātu-vāgīśvara-mañjuśrī-maṇḍala. Tabo 'Du khañ. In C. Scherrer-Schaub & E. Steinkellner (eds) *Tabo Studies II: Manuscripts, Texts, Inscriptions, and the Arts*. Rome, 299-320.

--- 2003 The Nako Preservation Project. *Orientalia* 34/5, 39-45.

Kreijger, H. 1996 Shalu: An Art Historical Treasure House. *Arts of Asia* 26(2), 104-111.

--- 1997 Mural Styles at Shalu. In J.C. Singer & P. Denwood (eds) *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style*. London, 170-177.

Lalou, M. 1930 *Iconographie des Étoffes Peintes dans les Manjusrimulakalpa*. Paris.

Linrothe, R. 1999 *Ruthless Compassion: Wrathful Deities in Early Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist art*. London.

Lo Bue, E. 1998 *Tibet, Templi scomparsi fotografati da Fosco Maraini*. Torino.

- Luczanits, C. 2003 The 12th Century Buddhist Monuments of Nako. *Orientalia* 34(5), 46-53.
 --- 2004 *Buddhist Sculpture in Clay*. Chicago.
- de Mallmann, M. 1986 [1975] *Introduction a l'Iconographie du Tāntrisme Bouddhique*. Paris.
- Maraini, F. 1990 *Prima della tempesta*. Tibet 1937 e 1948. Arcidosso.
 --- 1993 [1952] *Secret Tibet*. New Delhi.
- Müller, P. (2008) *Eine kritische Analyse der zentralen Bedeutung weiblicher Gottheiten in Nako, Himachal Pradesh: insbesondere der Prajñāpāramitā des Lo tsa ba lha khang*. Master Thesis. Wien. http://othes.univie.ac.at/2125/1/2008-10-24_9603363.pdf.
- Neumann, H. 2001 Shalu's Hidden Treasures: The Paintings of the Shadakshari Chapel. *Orientalia* 32(10), 33-43.
- Pal, P. & J. Meech-Pekarik 1988 *Buddhist Book Illuminations*. Hong Kong.
- Papa-Kalantari, C. 2007a From Textile Dress to Vault of Heaven: Some Observations on the Function and Symbolism of Ceiling Decorations in the Western Himalaya Temples of Nako, Himachal Pradesh, India. In A. Hardy (ed.) *South Asian Archaeology: The Temple in South Asia. Proceedings of the Eighteenth International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, London 2005*, vol. 2. London, 149-178.
 --- 2007b The Art of the Court: Some Remarks on the Historical Stratigraphy of Eastern Iranian Elements in Early Buddhist Painting of Alchi, Ladakh. In D.E. Klimburg-Salter, K. Tropper & C. Jahoda (eds) *Text, Image and Song in Transdisciplinary Dialogue. PIATS 2003: Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford 2003*. Leiden. Boston, 167- 228.
- Rhie, M. 1997 Eleventh-century monumental sculpture in the Tsang region. In J.C. Singer & P. Denwood (eds) *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style*. London, 38-51.
- Ricca, F. & L. Fournier 1996 Notes Concerning the mgon-khan of Źwa-lu. *Artibus Asiae* LVI, 343-363.
 --- (2001) The Paintings in the Zhwa lu sGo gsum lha khang and bSe sgo ma lha khang: Stylistic Differences. *Tibet Journal* XXVI, 103-148.
- Richardson, H. 1996 Monuments of the Yarlung Dynasty. In P. Pal (ed.) *On the Path to Void*. Bombay, 26-45.
- Roerich, G. 1988 [1949] *The Blue Annals*. New Delhi.
- Ruegg, D.S. 1966 *The Life of Bu ston Rin po che*. Rome.
- von Schroeder, U. 2001 *Buddhist Sculptures in Tibet*. Hong Kong.
- Silk, J. 1994 *The Heart Sūtra in Tibetan. A Critical Edition of the two Recensions contained in the Kanjur*. Vienna.
- Snellgrove, D.L. 2002 [1987] *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan Successors*. Boston.
- Stoddard, H. 1996 Early Tibetan Paintings: Sources and Styles (Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries A.D.). *Archives of Asian Art* XLIX, 26-50.
- Su, B. 1996 *Zang chuan fo jiao si yuan kao gu* (Archaeological Studies on Monasteries of the Tibetan Buddhism). Beijing.
- Tucci, G. 1973 *Transhimalaya. Ancient Civilizations*. London.
 --- 1988 [1935] *Indo-Tibetica, vol. 1: The Temples of Western Tibet and their Artistic Symbolism, part 1: The Monasteries of Spiti and Kunavar*, translated by L. Chandra. New Delhi.
 --- 1988 [1941] *Indo-Tibetica, vol. 4: Gyantse and its monasteries, part I: General description of the Temples*, translated by L. Chandra. New Delhi.
 --- 1999 [1949] *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*. Roma.
- Tucci, G. & E. Ghersi 1934 *Cronaca della Missione Scientifica Tucci nel Tibet Occidentale* (1933). Roma.
 --- 1996 [1935] *Secrets of Tibet*. New Delhi.
- Vitali, R. 1990 *Early Temples of Central Tibet*. London.
- Wang, Y. 1960 Xizang wenwu jianwen ji (Report on the Cultural Relics of Tibet, part 2: Shigatse region, Tashilunpo, Narthang, Shalu, Sakya). *Wenwu* 8, 52-65.
- Xie, B. 2005 *Xizang xialusi jianzhu ji bihua yishu* (Architecture and Mural Paintings from Shalu Monastery in Tibet). Beijing.

1. I am grateful to Deborah Klimburg-Salter, Verena Widorn, Eva Allinger, Amy Heller, Kerstin Schödl and Raffaella Fuß for their help and support. My thanks are also due to Sarah Teetor and Birgit Braun for correcting my English and Lionel Fournier for kindly allowing me to use his photographs. Thanks are also due to Uwe Niebuhr, Verena Ziegler, and Monica Strinu. The research upon which this paper is based was made possible by FWF/NFN S98, CHWH National Research Network "The Cultural History of the Western Himalaya from the 8th century" and the FWF/FSP S87 Interdisciplinary Research Unit: "The Cultural History of the Western Himalaya" both directed by Deborah Klimburg-Salter and funded by the Austrian Science Fund.
2. Tucci 1988 [1941], Maraini 1993 [1952]. Tucci and Maraini visited rKyang bu together in 1937.
3. For the history of the foundation of Zha lu and possible dating see the *Genealogies of Zha lu*, the *Zhalu documents*, and its translation by Tucci 1999 [1949]: 656-662, and 670-673. For further references on the proposed date of the consecration see Roerich 1988 [1949]: 254-256, Tucci 1999 [1949]: 657, Ruegg 1966: 90, Vitali 1990: 91-94, Denwood 1997: 220-223, and Heller 2002a: 46-48. Denwood 1997: 223 assumes in his article dealing with the architecture of Zha lu the Yum chen mo lha khang to belong to the original phase.
4. *Genealogies of Zha lu*, translation by Tucci 1999 [1949]: 657.
5. See note 3. For a photograph of the clay halos and mural paintings of these chapels, see Heller 2002b: Fig. 14.
6. For the renovation by Grag pa rgyal msthan see Tucci 1999 [1949]: 177, Ruegg 1966: 90, Vitali 1990: 106, and Ricca & Fournier 2001: 106.
7. *Genealogies of Zha lu*, translation by Tucci 1999 [1949]: 657.
8. Stoddard 1996: 36 and Kreijger 1996: 108 follow this assumption.
9. For latest plans of Zha lu monastery (Figs 3-4) see Xie 2005: 69, 125.
10. *Genealogies of Zha lu*, translation by Tucci 1999 [1949]: 657, and Tucci 1999 [1949]: 177.
11. Hongjiao Yang of Beijing University is currently researching these paintings as part of her PhD; a joint article is in preparation. Also see the article by Ziegler in this volume.
12. Here the images of the Yum chen mo lha khang seen in the chapel in 2009 (Fig. 6) can be compared to the state of preservation around 1962 (Fig. 10).
13. See note 6. Kreijger 1997: 177 states that Grag pa rgyal msthan probably did not touch the Yum chen mo lha khang.
14. The statue of Prajñāpāramitā located in the chapel is said to contain the original clay figure and to represent the original iconographic concept according to the local monk (in 2009).
15. *Genealogies of Zha lu*, see note 10.
16. Most scholars refer to the Yum chen mo lha khang simply as part of the temple without any further description. For example see Chan 1994: 400, and 'Gyur med rdo rje 2009 [1996]: 274.
17. Jackson 2010: 84 compares the elaborate throne backs of the Zha lu Yum chen mo lha khang with those from gYe mar, rKyang bu, and Grva thang. See also Heller 2006: 86.
18. See also Kreijger 1997: 172, and Heller 1999: 123. Heller 2002b: 43 compares the murals of Grva thang to Zha lu and refers to the paintings of medallions on the ceiling of the Yum chen mo lha khang. Papa-Kalantari 2007a: 163 relates the lotus buds and blossoms depicted here (ceiling of the Yum chen mo lha khang) to the so-called *karahana* motif (lotus medallion) on High Tang silks from China. See also Papa-Kalantari 2007b: note 37.
19. Ruegg 1966: 61. Kreijger refers in the *Conference of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies 2000* to some black and white photographs showing fragments of the original clay sculptures from the Yum chen mo lha khang of Zha lu. Unfortunately, he gives no reference except for a depiction in an unnamed Chinese journal. See Kreijgers abstract: The Yum chen mo chapel of Zha lu (ca 1040-1045). *Book of Abstracts. PIATS 2000: Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, 24th-30th June 2000, Leiden: Institute for Asian Studies Leiden* (not published); article unfortunately not yet published.
20. See note 13. For another clay sculpture from the 13th or 14th century from Zha lu see Tucci 1999 [1949]: Fig. 21, and Tucci 1973: Fig. 201.
21. For possible early Newār influences in Zha lu see Heller 2002a: 47-48.
22. Vitali 1990: 106.
23. Ricca & Fournier 1996: 353. For another representation of the *durgatiparisodhana maṇḍala* in Zha lu see Kawasaki 2001.

24. For references related to this monument see Francke 1972 [1914]: 32-34, 276, Tucci & Gherzi 1934: 140-146, Tucci & Gherzi 1996 [1935]: 71, and Tucci 1988 [1935]: 141-168.
25. See note 24 (attributed to Rin chen bzang po). Also see Klimburg-Salter 2003: 39-45, Luczanits 2003: 46-53, Luczanits 2004: 77-88, and Müller 2008: 87-89.
26. Luczanits 2004: 215 mentions that the identification of the female deities as Prajñāpāramitā in both Nako temples is somewhat problematic but is very likely due to colour, *mudrā* in the Lo tsa ba lha khang and the depiction of the eight Buddhas surrounding the goddess in the Lha khang gong ma.
27. This commentary text is also said to date to the time of the great tantric master Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche, Tib. Padma 'byung gnas), who according to legend brought Buddhism to the region of Himachal Pradesh in the 8th century travelling from Uḍḍiyāna (North Pakistan) to Tibet. (Klimburg-Salter 2003: 39). Therefore, a relation of the type I representation mode to images focused on Uḍḍiyāna, located next to ancient Gilgit (Fig. 25) is possible but this is the focus of ongoing research.
28. In this context Luczanits 2004: 215-216 also mentions the site of lHa lung in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India.
29. The original golden colour of the statue was revealed during conservation work conducted in 2004 by the Nako Research and Preservation Project (NRPP, of which the author is a member, <http://athene.geo.univie.ac.at/project/nako/?id=61>) of the University of Applied Arts Vienna (directed by Gabriela Krist, conservation by Susanne Beseler, etc., see Müller 2008: 25-27, Figs 33-34).
30. For revised identification of Fig. 22 see Müller 2008: 18-21.
31. See Müller 2008: 38-40. Some other Prajñāpāramitā depictions in manuscripts seem to be related to this iconographic context; showing Prajñāpāramitā together with the Pāramitā goddesses (see for example the 11th century cover of Ms. Sansk.a.7 (R) of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, or the Nepalese cover from the Alice Heeramanek Collection M.72-1, 19c-d).
32. Luczanits 2003: 49.
33. Lalou 1930: Pl. VII a.
34. I am thankful to Hongjiao Yang for the observation related to her PhD thesis discussed in Vienna in July 2010.
35. See Müller 2008: 65-69.
36. For these forms of representation see Goepper & Poncar 1996: 72, 159, 169, 171, 220, Linrothe 1999: note 194, Luczanits 2004: 216, note 550, Papa-Kalantari 2007b: note 59, and Müller 2008: 60-61. See Allinger 2006: 355-362 for the depiction of the Lha khang gong ma Tārā.
37. Another source for the description of the early tantric Prajñāpāramitā image is mentioned in context of the *garbadhātu maṇḍala*, see Conze 1960: 29-30, 89, and Bhattacharyya 1978: 57). For the iconographic configuration of Nako and a possible relation to this *maṇḍala* see Klimburg-Salter 1999: 316. In both literary sources, the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa* and the *garbadhātu maṇḍala*, Prajñāpāramitā is described as a secondary deity. These textual sources seem to be mainly important for the type II mode of representation.
38. Tucci 1988 [1941]: 104. Myaṅ was the former name of rKyang bu.
39. For photographic material of rKyang bu see Tucci 1988 [1941]: Figs 1-32, Tucci 1973: Figs 74, 88 (porch of temple), Maraini 1993 [1952]: Fig. 4 (photograph of temple before destruction), Govinda 1979: 39-43, Maraini 1990: Pl. 75, Lo Bue 1998: Figs 12, 14-15, 19-21, 23, 48-50, and von Schroeder 2001: Figs II-12, XIII 14-25.
40. A ground plan for rKyangbu is not available.
41. Tucci 1988 [1941]: 120, and Vitali 1990: 50. Another monument housing a Yum chem mo lha khang is mentioned by Tucci 1988 [1941]: 201. He states that the most ancient temple of Central Tibet, gTsis gNas gsar (25 km south of rGyan tse, today destroyed) once comprised two main chapels; one dedicated to Kunrik (Vairocana) surrounded by his cycle on both sides and another showing a monumental enthroned stucco figure of Prajñāpāramitā surrounded by the Buddhas of the directions. Interestingly Vitali 1990: 51 discusses the temple of gTsis gNas gsar as following: "The temple contained statues of Yum chen mo surrounded by the Buddhas of the directions." Vitali 1990: 51 referring to "statues" instead of "statue". For the Yum chen mo lha khang of gTsis gNas gsar see also Tucci 1999 [1949]: 201, Ferrari 1958: 59, note 419, Ruegg 1966: note 419, Dowman 1988: 271, Richardson 1996: 39, 'Gyur med rdo rje 2009 [1996]: 329, and von Schroeder 2001: 840.
42. For further images see Lo Bue 1998: fig. 12, and von Schroeder 2001: fig. II.12.
43. von Hinüber 2007: 42.
44. Vitali 1990: 50.
45. The aim of further research is to verify this model in other media, such as manuscript illuminations.

46. Bhattacharyya 1949: 65: " ... prajñāpāramitā ... kanaka ..." .

47. Bhattacharyya 1978: 41. Bhattacharyya 1978: 38, 40 remarks for the *SM* 152 and *SM* 158 (description of two-armed Prajñāpāramitā with white or yellow body colour) that the colophon refers to them as *Kanakavarṇāprajñāpāramitāsādhana*s.

[HOME](#) | [TABLE OF CONTENTS](#) | [INTRODUCTION](#) | [ABSTRACTS](#)

[asianart.com](#) | [articles](#)