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Hārītī and Pāñcika at Tabo: On the Metamorphosis of the Protective Couple in Early West Tibetan Buddhist Temples*

This study discusses a recently uncovered wall painting at Tabo monastery in Spiti (Himachal Pradesh, India) featuring an impressive monumental depiction of Hārītī ('Phrog ma) and Pāñcika (lNga[s] rtsen), situated in the *sgo khang* (entrance hall) of the Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (Figs. 1–2). It constitutes a divine conjugal image comparable to the typology found South Asia (Pakistan, Kashmir and India) and in Central Asia (Afghanistan). It attempts a reconstruction of the iconographic and artistic context of this image dating from the earliest phase (ca. end of the 10th century) of Buddhism in historical Western Tibet (mNga' ris skor gsum). Moreover, based on depictions of the couple found in other places (such as Khartse,¹ Dungkar,² both in the Tsamda District³ and the Ngari (mNga' ris

Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region, PR China, as well as in Nako (Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh) and Alchi (Al Ici; Ladakh), it investigates the development of its function in the overall spiritual programme of the temples and in particular of its prominent role as guardian of the portal (*sgo b/srungs*), partly in ensembles with Hindu gods and Indic protectors, local territorial deities and paintings of the patrons. This includes the question of the Tibetan sacred ordering of the natural environment and in particular the issue of the symbiosis of Buddhism with Brahmanism/Hinduism, which was discussed by David Seyfourt Ruegg (2008). In this context the concepts of *laukika* (mundane) and *lokottara* (transmundane) relevant in this process of shaping and protecting sacred space will be analysed with regard of their validity in the context of Western Himalayan and in particular West Tibetan art and architecture.

This preliminary study focuses on following aspects:

1. Classification of the iconographic elements and various different figural typologies of Hārītī, depicted with her husband Pāñcika, or as a single image found in West Tibetan art from the 10th to 13th centuries.

2. Analysis of the spatial position, function in the overall programme and the hierarchy of iconographic themes in the entrance hall in which the couple is embedded and the transformation/metamorphosis of their form and function in later temples

3. An attempt at an interpretation of the ideology associated with this class of protectors, and images of the popular female goddess Hārītī in particular, in early West Tibetan temples and the political and religious conditions that may have furthered the popularity of this type of guardian figure in 10th/11th century Western Tibet.

4. Analysis of the form, function and symbolism of the entrance hall within the characteristic tripartite spatial layout of *vihāra*-like

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¹ Throughout the text the modern popular spelling Khartse (mKhar rtse) is used as a convention. Older spellings in Tibetan, as they appear for example in various versions of *lo chen Rin chen bzang po*'s medium-length hagiography (*rnam thar 'bring po*), are Kha che, Kha tse, Kha rtse, Khwa tse (see also Jahoda, "The foundation of the Nyarma *gtsug lag khang*, Ladakh", this volume, n. 4, pp. 279–280).

² Tibetan *Dung dkar*, also *Dun bkar*, *Dun mkhar*, etc. (cf. Vitali 1996: 631).

³ Tibetan *rTsa mda' rdzong* (see Tsering Gyalpo 2006: 173).



1. Wall paintings of Hārītī and Pāñcika above the portal of the *sgo khang*, Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

temple structures in the region also reflecting the organisation of worship.⁴

Introduction

Although the *sgo khang* of the Tabo *gtsug lag khang*⁵ (ca. end of 10th

⁴ The layout contrasts to mandalic centralised structures from the end of the 10th century such as the Tholing Gyatsa (brGya rtsa)—sometimes also referred to as Ye shes 'od lha khang—which was perhaps not intended for a wider public (Luczanits 2004: 285); for ground-plans of Tholing monastery (see http://archresearch.tugraz.at/results/Tholing/Plaene_Pdf/tholing_monastic_complex.pdf (accessed 17 June 2013)).

⁵ The temple referred to as *gtsug lag khang* consists of a narrow *sgo khang*, the *'du khang* erected on a rectangular ground plan and a cella (*dri gtsang khang*) with a circumambulation path (*skor lam*) (see also Luczanits 2004: 34). See Jahoda ("The foundation of the Nyarma *gtsug lag khang*, Ladakh", this volume) for a discussion of the temple's classification in various historical sources.

century), the earliest Buddhist temple in historical Western Tibet with an almost intact artistic programme is singular in the evolutionary history of iconography, political theology, style and architecture in the region the sacred space of the temple has hitherto received little attention. Some aspects of the *sgo khang's* religio-artistic programme at Tabo have been discussed by Tucci 1988: 25, Klimburg-Salter et al. 1997: 77–89, Luczanits 2004: 35, and Papa-Kalantari 2007b. The lack of detailed research with regard to this sacred space can be explained by the fact that large sections of its paintings only became visible again and were thus rediscovered during the last three decades due to the cleaning campaigns by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).⁶ In addition a significant feature of the pictorial ensemble depicted above the portal, which is the focus of this study, has been uncovered as recently as 2009 (Fig. 1).

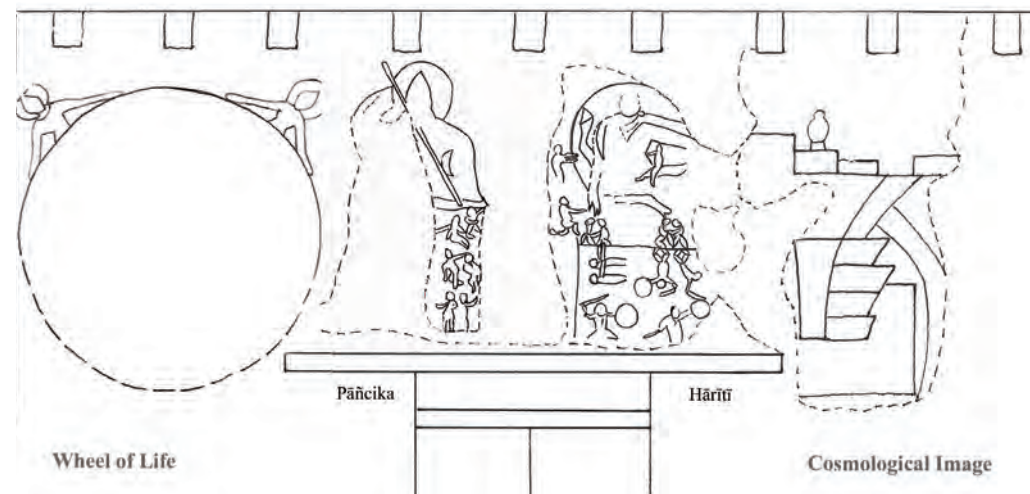
During field research in a multidisciplinary team directed by Christian Jahoda at Tabo in late summer 2009 the author documented together with Patrick Sutherland the newly cleaned—but unfortunately (partly) massively retouched—wall paintings above the entrance portal to the *sgo khang*, representing a key element of its programme. Despite the poor and to some degree hypothetical reconstruction work it is still possible to get an idea of the original shape of the paintings, which feature an impressive monumental Hārītī together with her husband Pāñcika enthroned like a royal couple. The tutelary couple reflects an independent iconographic theme at Tabo and occupies a prominent position above the portal. The space dedicated to its representation is precisely defined by the width of the door. This may indicate traditions of devotion such as the ritual walk below images or sculptures—as observable in the assembly hall of this temple—as signs of veneration as well as associated with the devotee's hope of receiving blessings from these images. Very different types and positions of the couple appear in the cave temples at Khartse and Dungkar and in the Buddhist monuments at Sumda (gSum mda' chung) and Alchi (in Ladakh), where they are integrated in different iconographic ensembles. The important and hitherto unpublished image of the couple in the *sgo khang* of the Tabo *gtsug lag khang* is the earliest example of this tradition and thus the starting point of a comparative study of form and idea of this theme in a wider regional context.⁷

⁶ Since 1992 the ASI has been conducting cleaning campaigns of the wall paintings; these revealed fragments of the early phase of paintings in the *skor lam* (for the sequence of cleaning phases see also Klimburg-Salter 1994: 21ff.).

⁷ This contribution continues to discuss the issue of Hindu and pan-Indian deities appearing in the pantheon of West Tibetan Buddhist temples (see, for example, Luczanits 2008 who was among the first to address this topic) although from a wider regional and comparative perspective.

The painting programme of the *sgo khang*, in contrast to that in the *'du khang*, is difficult to read due to the lack of primary sources of its iconography. So far it has perhaps also not been investigated adequately due to its seemingly lack of refinement, at first sight representing a graphic style that uses sober colours, in contrast to the brilliant palette of the later *'du khang*'s programme featuring a three-dimensional Vajradhātu *maṇḍala* reflecting Kashmiri-style aesthetics around the late 30s/early 40s of the 11th century, executed ca. 40 years later than the *sgo khang* paintings, also based upon the so-called Renovation Inscription (Steinkellner and Luczanits 1999). The characteristic features of this later style include the ample use of expensive, bright pigments and unified pictorial programmes representing *maṇḍalas* of different classes in which individual deities reside in sacred spaces defined by celestial abodes filled with light or by idealised architectonic settings. However, the painting style in the *sgo khang* deserves more attention and a closer examination. Also the investigations of local variations and internal relationships between the early (8th–10th centuries) Buddhist artefacts in Western Tibet have not advanced very far as yet.

As has been shown elsewhere (cf. Jahoda and Papa-Kalantari 2009, and Jahoda and Kalantari, "Power and religion in pre-modern Western Tibet: The monumental Avalokiteśvara stela in Cogro, Purang", this volume, p. 38) the archaic features, among them the hieratic strictness, a dominance of ornamental details and the pictorial density of the composition of the paintings in the *sgo khang*, with seemingly monotonous rows of donor figures, are features of a distinctive, stylistically influential artistic idiom, endowing these paintings with their quality and originality. These characteristics recall the ceremonial hieratic style of early Tibetan art, an artistic trend which developed in interaction with Tibetan art in Central Asia during the Yar lung dynasty and was prevalent in the region at the end of the 10th century in the medium of painting and sculpture. While the rows of minor protectors on the side walls of the *sgo khang* draw on an early local Kashmir-inspired style, the monumental protective couple shows affinities with highly refined artwork from the thriving Buddhist centres in Bihar and Bengal, as will be shown. This early multifaceted artistic phase was later followed by another idiom associated with Kashmir-style aesthetics as found in the programme of the *'du khang*, executed during the renovation phase (ca. 1042). These two stylistically distinct painting phases in the Tabo *gtsug lag khang* represent a fascinating conceptual whole, which is significant for the interpretation of the political theology of the time. A key element in the *sgo khang*'s religio-artistic programme are representations of male and female donors on the side walls, with a portrait of Ye shes 'od, the temple's founder (according to

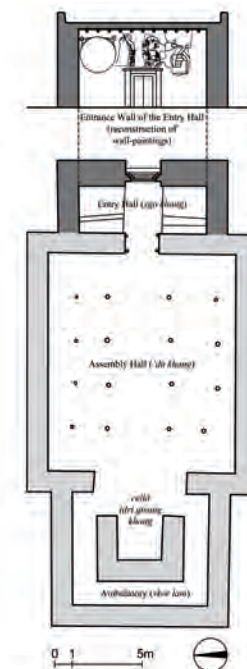


the Renovation Inscription), who—perhaps together with *lo chen Rin chen bzang po*—was the principal personality responsible for the re-establishment of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Western Tibet from the late 10th century onward (a period which later became known as *bstan pa phyi dar* or "Later Diffusion of Buddhism"). Ye shes 'od is depicted with his two sons among monks and lay personalities on the south wall of the *sgo khang*, while the noble elite and nuns are shown on the opposite and less prestigious north wall. The maintenance of the older paintings in the *sgo khang*, which do not seem to have been affected by the restoration, reflects not only the important role of this earlier historic personality in the self-representation of the ruling elite in the 11th century but also signals the conscious demonstration of legitimacy based on the continuity of a tradition.

The Tutelary Couple in the Tabo *sgo khang*: A Singular Iconographic Type in the Evolutionary History of Early West Tibetan Temples' Decorative Programmes

Hārītī and Pāñcika are on the entrance wall (east wall) of the *sgo khang* of the Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (cf. Figs. 1-2). This temple shows a characteristic *vihāra*-like tripartite layout (Fig. 3), comparable to the Khorchag Jo khang, the Alchi 'Du khang and the Nyarma *gtsug lag khang* consisting of a *sgo khang* (or veranda), *'du khang* (main hall) and cella (*dri gtsang khang*) or niche, typically also displaying different forms of realisation of the idea of the interior and exterior ambulatories. Tabo is important as it is the only example in these temples that provides an insight into the original spiritual programme of the *sgo khang*. The latter is a narrow space, rectangular in ground plan with two platforms positioned on the west wall leading to the *'du khang*. The east wall is ca. 7 m long and 4 m high and shows

2. Sketch of wall paintings on entrance wall of the *sgo khang* (east wall), Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (drawing: C. Kalantari, 2010).



3. Ground plan: Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (drawing: H. Feiglstorfer, 2011; with sketch of the wall paintings, *sgo khang* [east wall] by C. Kalantari, 2010).



4. Detail of *samsāracakra*: entrance wall, *sgo khang*, Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

5. Detail of cosmological imagery: entrance wall, *sgo khang*, Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).



a composition with three linked themes: a *samsāracakra*—"Wheel of Rebirths" (or *bhavacakra/srid pa'i 'khor lo*)⁸—is shown to the left of the divine couple, representing the different forms of existence (Fig. 4), while on the right there is a cosmological image (reflecting myths of the creation of the universe and cosmogony) (Fig. 5). The latter shows Sumeru as *axis mundi* in the centre of the universe represented as stepped pyramid around which sun and moon revolve. On the top of the mount Indra's palace is visible, indicating his paradise, which is

⁸ Concerning the terminology used for the wheel in the *Vinaya*, only the simple designation "five-part wheel" is used. The term mainly used in the Tibetan sphere is *srid pa'i 'khor lo*, which stands for *bhavacakra* in Sanskrit ("Wheel of Existences"). However, I have chosen to use the term *samsāracakra*/ Wheel of Rebirths following research by Schlingloff and Zin. The authors pointed out that the equation of the water-wheel alluding to it being driven by a higher power used as metaphor for the circle of rebirths and *samsāra* is a constant feature in Indian religious literature (Zin and Schlingloff 2007: 4). I also follow her terminology due to the fact that the visual material on which Zin's analysis is based are the cave temples at Ajanta (Ajantā) which share comparable decorative schemes in the entrance hall with Tabo. I wish to thank Gudrun Melzer for these leads.

also known as the Heaven of the "Thirty-Three" (Gods) (*trāyastriṃśa*).⁹ Sumeru is symbolically equated with Mount Kailas, surrounded by seven oceans and mountains in which different classes of deities and lower beings dwell. In the upper part the different heavens are represented. Such images were understood as meditative aids and symbolic offerings to the gods in the *mgon khang* (Essen and Thingo 1989: 248). Cosmological imagery is also important as it reflects the idea of cosmogony as the basis of the emergence/appearance of the Buddha as well the origin of the lineage of Śākyamuni's clan and of kingship in general (see Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po and Kalantari, "Guge kingdom-period murals in the Zhag grotto in mNga' ris, Western Tibet", this volume, p. 424). The programme on the entrance wall represents a cosmological order according to the matrix of Buddhist world-view, with the ideal pair or primordial parents in its centre. It also brings a core element of Buddhist teaching to the mind of the devotee, namely the concept of dependent origination, best expressed in the Wheel of Rebirths. The co-presence of the Wheel of Rebirths and Hārītī perhaps enhances the idea of the reform of the demonic behaviour of Hārītī and her transformation into a goddess during various life-cycles, demonstrating the possibility of a more favourable rebirth due to moral behaviour. The idea of birth and creation—as will be proposed—is presumably another aspect of the symbolism of this type of image in the context of an ensemble with cosmological imagery.¹⁰ The composition on the entrance walls recalls ensembles featuring the Wheel of Rebirths, a didactic inscription and tutelary deities depicted in the veranda of Cave XVII at Ajanta, representing an early example of a *vihāra*-type monastery with a tri-partite structure as also found at Tabo.¹¹ The function of this iconographic ensemble, decisive for the interpretation of the iconology and function of the entrance hall, will be discussed below.

In the lower sphere on the two bordering walls to the left and right (Figs. 6–7) there are donor depictions and founders with

⁹ According to several texts, after his enlightenment, the Buddha Śākyamuni visited the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods to preach to his mother and the other inhabitants, who had passed away without the benefit of hearing the doctrine.

¹⁰ The pair of cosmic diagrams is also depicted in the porch of the *du khang* of the Gyatsa at Tholing and Samye (bSam yas) (Klimburg-Salter et al. 1997: 81) as well as in a position to the right of the portal to the *du khang* at Shalu (Zhwa lu). The latter publication contains also a description of the Wheel of Rebirths at Tabo.

¹¹ Depictions in the vestibule of the Great Temple (*gtsug lag khang*) in the Jo khang of Lhasa (which is also based on a tri-partite structure of vestibule, main hall and sanctum) show comparable iconographic elements and protector divinities. However, the vestibule stems from a period from the 11th century onwards. The chapels of mundane "spirits" were originally perhaps positioned once in the niches flanking the portal.



eminent historic personages seated on thrones at the centre, and dignified by honorific textiles above them alluding to luxury art in Central Asia. Religious dignitaries partly sit on carpets defining their religious space. In the centre of the uppermost register of donor imagery on the south wall the Royal Lama (*lha bla ma*) Ye shes 'od is shown, "possibly on the occasion of a public ceremony connected with the foundation or consecration of the temple" as first proposed by Luczanits (2004: 34). In addition, the iconographic ensemble of donors with a group of eight water spirits (Skt. *nāga*, Tib. *klu*) in its vicinity suggests a depiction of specific rituals associated with the erection of temples as described in relevant texts (see see Gu ge Tshering rgyal po and Kalantari, "Guge kingdom-period murals in the Zhag grotto in mNga' ris, Western Tibet", this volume, pp. 413–414). The sitting positions and specific seats (thrones and carpets)—enhanced by a subtle language of sitting modes and hand gestures—define a strict social order. The figures are integrated in a simple grid-system, with a central axis drawn in red lines. To the left of the middle axis are lay people, while religious personalities dwell to the right side.

Both groups face this middle axis, alluding to a space in which two rows of people sit facing each other. Ye she 'od is enthroned in the topmost zone on a high wooden seat, while other monks are on lower seats covered with carpets. Most of the lay people on the lower registers in the left section of both north and south walls are shown kneeling (Fig. 7) and are slightly smaller.¹² Typically of donor depictions of the region, female members of the noble family are shown subordinated to the patron, in a less prestigious position in the seating order and shown in profile. It is significant to note that Ye shes 'od's son De ba ra dza (*Devarāja) is shown in the right-hand section representing the religious world, thus acting like a bond or mediator between the religious sphere and the lay world.¹³ The strict

6. Rows of donors and protectors above: *sgo khang* (south wall), Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

7. Rows of donors, nuns and protectors above: *sgo khang* (north wall), Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

¹² In the newly cleaned wall paintings of donor images at the north wall the lay people in the lower zone are also shown kneeling and facing the main wall as if shown in a procession to the *gtsug lag khang*.

¹³ Klimburg-Salter 1994: 29 suggested that he may have been the abbot of the Tabo community.



8. Wall in the entrance hall (*sgo khang*) leading to the 'du khang: Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

9. *Srung ma (sman chen mo)* Wi nyu myin (lost) riding on deer flanked by female devotees (?) in local costumes: *sgo khang* (above portal to 'du khang), Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

hierarchy in such ceremonies is a constant feature in Tibetan culture, defining and shaping sacred space and reflecting the social order up to the present day. Accordingly, the images at Tabo perhaps reflect historical ceremonies in ephemeral spaces made of tents and baldachins outside the temple.

It is a characteristic feature of West Tibetan art that donors occupy a prominent position in the pictorial programmes of various media, including in illuminated manuscripts (Allinger, Tsering Gyalpo and Kalantari 2012). A later donor painting accompanying the Renovation Inscription in the 'du khang features the enthroned Lord-Ruler Royal Monk Byang chub 'od (*rje rgyal lha btsun*)¹⁴ shown in a condensed group portrait in the midst of the religious and lay elite. The composition shows a condensed formulation of the same theme in the *sgo khang*, but here the royal monk is commemorated in an idealised portrait and in a setting borrowed from religious imagery such as the First Sermon of the Buddha (Papa-Kalantari

¹⁴ In the Renovation Inscription Byang chub 'od is referred to as *lha btsun pa, rje rgyal lha btsun* (*rgyal* being an uncertain reading) and *chos rgyal rje btsun* (cf. Steinkellner and Luczanits 1999: 16–18). These titles express the joint religious and secular functions he seems to have occupied at the same time. See also Jahoda and Kalantari 2016: 99,

2008: fig. 186, 187; see also Jahoda and Kalantari 2016: 98–101). In addition, the throne adorned with wheels alluding to the wheel of the *dharma* as well as a chariot—usually reserved for religious images—clearly signals his elevated spiritual status. In this system of a sacredly ordered world the aristocratic elite is shown not only as a protector of the Buddhist law (which is a main factor of social cohesion in this period) and as a link between the religious order and worldly power but as mediators between the mundane sphere and the realm of the Buddha. The ruling elite in the *sgo khang* is shown in pictorial ensembles with protectors emphasising the aspect of the rulers as protectors of society. The “granting of protection” is a common image of kingship which was established in early Tibetan period. The ruler as “protection-giver” is also a component of self-representation in the old *mgon khang* of Shalu Monastery in Central Tibet. There the demonstration of the ethos of sovereignty also includes the demonstration of military prowess, equestrian culture and arms and armour.

Above the assembly of dignitaries on the south wall of the *sgo khang* at Tabo there is an ensemble of 'dii minores' included in the Buddhist pantheon: great Hindu and Indic gods, protector divinities, lower spirits and guardian figures, again recalling a comparable configuration in the old *sgo khang* of Shalu (ca. 1030); (cf. Diagrams 2–6 by Luczanits in Klimburg-Salter 1997). Ricca and Fournier (1996: 345ff. and 355) were among the first to connect several groups of gods depicted there with the outer spheres of different *maṇḍalas* of the Yoga Tantra class. On the opposite side of the protector couple, positioned on the wall leading to the 'du khang is the *srung ma* Wi nyu myin with a group of attendant figures flanking her (Jahoda 2006, Rathje 2007, Jahoda and Papa-Kalantari 2009) in front of a ritual cloth decorated with simple stripes (Figs. 8–9). The nine female figures on each side of the (lost) protectress are shown in a slight movement and orientation towards the central figure atypical for divine imagery in this period. Thus—in contrast to suggestions in previous research, such as by Klimburg-Salter (1997: 78)—they most likely do not represent goddesses. The scene rather seems to commemorate a ritual in which the local female elite (notably no men are shown) is engaged, richly attired with local costumes and jewellery of the time.¹⁵ The panel with the female protective deity at Tabo, reminiscent of a more archaic belief system associated with specific locales and with the protection of the main hall—as indicated in the accompanying inscription below—is shown as subordinated to two large, terrifying, almost life-size gate-protectors (*dvārapāla, sgo b/srungs*) in clay in front of flames.

¹⁵ I am grateful for discussions and suggestions on this topic by Christian Jahoda.



The typology and style of the royal couple (Figs. 10–11) represents a figural convention typical of higher divinities in India, perhaps reflecting Pāla-stylistic features (see below) and the image is elaborately rendered. In contrast, Indic and Hindu divinities on the west, south and north walls are smaller in scale, in a graphic idiom with simply drawn outlines of bodily features, shading along the contours and little interest in naturalistic representation of the physique. Paintings from the same period in and around the *dri gtsang khang* show shared stylistic features. In contrast, lay and monastic personalities and the group image with the *srung ma* depicted on the wall above the door leading into the *'du khang* reflect a more local style, using a restricted palette and simple graphic outlines resulting in rather planar figural representations. The category of lay imagery reflects specific “local” features endowing the figures with certain individualised elements: this notion is reflected in the dress convention (long, patterned lower robes and heavy long capes above, multiple rows of necklaces and head jewellery), but also in schematised facial features such as long faces, short foreheads, large, protuberant eyes. Again, similar stylistic features of lay imagery and above all the differentiation of specific categories of treatment of the bodily features contrasting with high divinities, Indic gods and donors/royal elite can also be found in the old *sgo khang* of Shalu in Central Tibet. The conscious representation of diverse stylistic idioms including conventionalised individual or portrait-like features in lay imagery—which also play a dominant role in religious compositions of various types—are a significant feature in the artistic production in West Tibetan temples. It is also



10. Hārītī, *sgo khang* (entrance wall), Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

11. Pāñcika, *sgo khang* (entrance wall), Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

an important element in the programme of the Khartse cave temple (*Nyag lha khang*) (Tshe ring rgyal po and Papa-Kalantari 2009: fig. 20). The stylistic groups of Indic deities and lay imagery at Tabo in particular feature figures that are typically shown in a static mode or in a hieratic frontality, with shovel-shaped faces adorned with high crowns. In general, sober pigments and contrasting colours are used. The simple outlines of the figures form an appealing contrast to the richness of decorative elements such as costumes, jewels and elements of material culture like luxury textiles. These characteristics recall the 10th-century Avalokiteśvara sculpture at ICog ro in Purang County, representing an early Tibetan style strongly linked to the early Tibetan art that emerged in the 9th century in Central Asia and

Central Tibet and was continued up to the 10th century in Western Tibet (mNga' ris skor gsum. Cf. Papa-Kalantari and Jahoda 2010, and Jahoda and Kalantari, "Power and religion in pre-modern Western Tibet", this volume, pp. 25–60.

The tutelary pair Hārītī and Pāñcika in the *sgo khang* at Tabo adds an important new Indic stylistic trend to the corpus of early Tibetan art, with features that differ from the Kashmir-style aesthetics in the 'du khang. Significantly, in no other hitherto known temple in the region is the couple shown as an independent monumental configuration in the overall iconographic programme, featuring a royal couple in regal attire: there is a crowned Pāñcika above the entrance portal enthroned with arms (lance) held like a sceptre with his wife Hārītī, both characterised by marked ceremonially solemn frontality. This autonomous depiction of each of the gods contrasts with the purely Indic divine pairs shown as a compositional unity, such as Kubera lovingly embracing his spouse sitting on his leg in a *maṇḍala* depiction at Nako (Lotsāba *lha khang*) as already identified by Luczanits (2008).¹⁶ What the latter unifies is the idea of erotic attraction as an indication of divine grace, absent in the representation of the protective pair at Tabo. Hārītī at Tabo is shown enthroned in sumptuous clothes and richly bejewelled with a child in her arms signalling motherhood. A large group of children—only male offspring—(according to the legend more than 500) is placed around and below the couple,¹⁷ shown in complex postures with only the upper part of the body covered, mainly engaged in playful fights with swords and shields, partly while hanging by their feet from a rope.¹⁸ They appear to be testing and exercising their martial virtues, which possibly enhances the protective idea of their parents enthroned above. In the composition they function like clamps linking the horizontal upper border of the portal with the seated couple. The poles on which the rope is fixed and which stand on this portal appear like a light architectural structure supporting the whole configuration. With regard to the dating, the stylistic features and

¹⁶ Cf. the diagrams figs. 44.1–44.2, pp. 495–96 in Luczanits 2008 illustrating the spatial organization of the deities in the *maṇḍala* in this publication. Interestingly the spouse is shown in Tibetan attire and jewellery also found in donor depictions in the temple, while her partner is shown with a crown and *dhotī* in Indian fashion.

¹⁷ According to Shaw 2006: 122, typically eight children are shown in Gandhāran imagery.

¹⁸ A short first description is by Klimburg-Salter who (mis)interpreted the children below Hārītī (although no love scene is observable) as "half-naked figures fighting and loving" (Klimburg-Salter 1997: 82, caption figs. 43, 44) and as "half naked, some wrestling or embracing" (*ibid.*: 82). The position of a couple surrounded by children at play above the portal leaves no doubt that it shows the popular tutelary couple.

ornamental elements are consistent with the surrounding paintings from the earliest phase of the temple, ca. up to the end of 1000 CE, as well as ceiling paintings and images in and around the cella also dating from this period.

The divine mother is shown in a hieratic position sitting with one leg folded inward and the other possibly pendant, in the posture of royal ease (*lalitāsana*). However, due to missing parts in this area it cannot be excluded that she is shown in the posture of *dhyānāsana*. Her right hand is shown in a boon-granting gesture (*varadamudrā*). She is richly attired in a sumptuous robe and intricately detailed ornaments, wearing bell anklets and round earrings. Her husband is shown in regal attire holding a staff or lance, while in later phases she is represented in a different form, namely multi-faced with an unclothed upper torso. Both Hārītī and Pāñcika sit on a piece of decorated textile or pillow and are each framed by a nimb and an aureole in rainbow colours. Hārītī's left hand is on her leg, holding a small boy (rather a small adult); his hand is stretched out to touch her breast or grasp the necklace.¹⁹ She wears a tight-fitting robe decorated with large ornamental patterns of connected circles. A long scarf floats, shaping a kind of frame, enlarging her contour and also indicating her divine nature. The robes of the couple clearly convey a sense of luxury.

In the Graeco-Iranian tradition of Gandhāra and in early Kashmir-style sculpture, the deity is characteristically attired with a thin cloth lying naturalistically in small folds revealing the contours of her body, while at Tabo the large surface pattern of the robe leads to a flattening of the body, typical of the West Tibetan ornamental tradition in various media. The *mudrā* and *āsana* recall Pāla-period sculpture from Bihar of the 11th century (cf. Shaw 2006: 133, see for a further comparison <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/20238/goddess-hariti-seated-holding-a-child>); however while the Pāla-type, typically emphasises the *yakṣiṇī*-ideal displaying feminine beauty, with ample contours, rounded, softly modelled treatment of the body, at Tabo an eastern Indian type appears to be combined with sumptuous garments covering the body, focusing on her regal aspect. An interesting comparative material is provided by a Hārītī-Pāñcika-group in stone from the Pāla-period, in which both are shown as royal figures embellished with high crowns. The goddess is shown on a bodhisattva-like figural model displaying *varadamudrā*, while her child reaches out an arm to grasp her necklace, also found in the Tabo example.²⁰

¹⁹ This element is typical of both Indian and Gandhāran imagery (cf. Granoff 1970: fig. 25).

²⁰ The sculpture is from Padumshahr Tank; now at the Varendra Museum, Rajshahi, Bangladesh; for an image see <http://huntingtonarchive.osu.edu/> (digital database collection: Scan Number 0013082).

The static posture and frontality emphasises the divine, trans-mundane nature of the Tabo couple, which contrasts with the interest in naturalistic movement and interaction between figures in later Kashmiri style (12th–13th century) temples at Nako and Dungkar. While the depiction of Pāñcika in an independent conjugal imagery at Tabo appears to be singular, Hārītī features prominently in all phases of early Western Himalayan temples both in *maṇḍala* configurations and as an independent tutelary goddess.

Earlier Representations of the Tutelary Couple in Central Asia and India

According to Buddhist texts, Pāñcika was the *senāpati*, or general of the army of Vaiśravaṇa, and leader of *yakṣas* famous for his merits related to glorious military victories and Hārītī was originally a goddess of smallpox but later became a source of protection and fertility.²¹ Pāñcika was considered patron deity of Kashmir, which is of course in particular relevant for the West Tibetan cultural context with historic ties to Kashmir as a vibrant Buddhist cultural centre.

According to various legends the child-devouring ogress was turned into a goddess by Buddha, whereupon she became the protectress of all children. She rose from the ranks of the *yakṣiṇīs* to the reign as the *yakṣiṇī* queen together with her husband Pāñcika.²² The history of the conversion took place in the north/Gandhāra according to most of the legends and various versions of her legend place her career in Kashmir and the Himalayas. Texts that narrate the story of Hārītī in detail can be found in the *Avadānakalpalatā* (Zin 2003: 237). She is further portrayed in the *Vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda-school (cf. Panglung 1981: 196). In a version of her legend in the *Vinaya*, Śākyamuni also addressed the monastic worship of Hārītī (Shaw 2006: 120), which is also described by the Chinese pilgrim I-tsing. He relates the conversion tale with the promise of the Buddha to feed her and her family every day in his monasteries, which resulted in the tradition of food offerings by the monastic community as part of her cult (Takakusu 1896: 37; cited after Shaw 2006: 120; cf. also Zin 2003: 237). The Chinese pilgrim also says that she is found represented in the porch of monasteries or in the refectory and that lay people also made offerings to her, praying for children (Shaw 2006: 120). Hārītī thus combines values of protection and procreation but also the idea of the Buddha extending his compassion and help to every human who converts

²¹ See Rosenfield 1967: 245f. (cited after Granoff 1970: 162).

²² Hārītī and Pāñcika are represented at the entrance to the sanctum (antecella) of Ajanta Cave II, protecting the cella together with the Four Dharmarājas (Zin 2003: 236).

to Buddhism and follows moral behaviour. The portal is the suitable/meaningful position to bring this concept to the mind of the devotee at the beginning of his path to the focus of the cult in the sanctum.

In order to define the context of form and ideas of the Tabo couple, the complex evolutionary history of tutelary couples of wealth and military protection in India and Gandhāra should be mentioned. One of the pioneers of the study of this iconographic theme in Central Asia, North-West India and Japan was Rosenfield (1967), who related it to the dynastic cult; Phyllis Granoff (1970) traced the genesis of the Vaiśravaṇa-Pāñcika-Kuvera-Pharro-complex and showed how these deities were closely related. She also reconstructed the social and historic circumstances of their popularity.²³ In Gandhāra the pair can have many different composite forms, often the couple is shown with a lance or staff, and Hārītī holding a money purse, partly in “northern” dress. This pair is closely related to Iranian forms of Pharro and Ardoxšo. Pharro’s attributes include a purse, shield, lance and bowl or fire. “He represents the Iranian *farr* or *xvarənah*, the ‘kingly glory’” and also “a tutelary divinity of the reigning monarch and the legitimizing factor in his rule” (Granoff 1970: 163). Pāñcika in the Kushan realm may be represented as purely Indian, or “northern”/Iranian in both costume and content or in armour. Apart from his military aspect Pāñcika can also be portrayed holding the money purse and thus containing the ideological content of the god of plenty combining “military attributes of the *senāpati* Pāñcika with the benevolence of his master, Kuvera-Vaiśravaṇa, the god of wealth. This Pāñcika-Kuvera-Vaiśravaṇa is extremely close in conception to the god Pharo, who was likewise regarded as a protector of wealth and giver of armed strength” (Granoff 1970: 163). This type is also represented in a Kashmiri relief, with a Pharo-Kuvera-Vaiśravaṇa in “northern” couture (with a crown?) sitting on a pot of plenty and Ardoxšo-Śrī holds a lotus or cornucopia (Fig. 12), recalling the royal, “northern” attire (from the viewpoint of South-Asian communities, corresponding to their mythical origin) of the Tabo couple. Several examples of Kubera/Kuvera sitting next to Hārītī can be found in Mathura (Zin 2003: 240) illustrating that the complex amalgamation of ideas of wealth, fertility and military attributes can also be found in the Indian sphere. According to Granoff (1970: 167) Vaiśravaṇa

²³ See also Bachhofer (1937) (he first identified the two couples) and Gnoli (1996); for a summary of the evolutionary history of the tutelary couple see Zin 2003: 236ff. Pāñcika and Hārītī are related to the Iranian deities Pharo (with wings) and Ardoxšo in particular during the Kushan period. In this period the pairs not only bear a striking resemblance, they were also closely related with regard to their conception, insofar as they were conceived as deities of prosperity and military value and they were partly regarded as tutelary deities of the local Kushan dynasty (Granoff 1970: 162).



12. Stone sculpture, Kashmir: Pharo-Kuvera-Vaiśravaṇa on a pot of plenty and Ardoxšo-Śrī with lotus or cornucopia (after Granoff 1970: 163).

13. Hārītī (above Mahākāla), Dungkar, Cave II, inner face of the portal (C. Kalantari, 2007).

14. Hārītī: outside the geometric frame of the *maṇḍala*, Dungkar, Cave II (C. Kalantari, 2007).



seems to have assumed the source of the state's monarchs at Khotan and his status is that of the power behind their rule. In Kashmir, Pāñcika—as already mentioned—was worshipped as patron deity,²⁴

²⁴ In the *Mahāmāyūrīvidyārājñīsūtra* Pāñcika is portrayed as patron deity of Kashmir and his son is described as the patron deity of China (Zin 2003: 240, n. 34).

which must have furthered the popularity of the cult of the tutelary couple and the spread of cult images associated with it, which may have also reached Western Tibet (mNga' ris skor gsum).²⁵

Parallel Phenomena to the Tabo Tutelary Couple in Other Temples and Later Developments in Western Tibet

At Tabo we find an emphasis of the regal aspect of Pāñcika with a crown: Pāñcika appears to show a god in royal or "northern" dress (which is typically associated with the aspect of wealth-bestowing of Kuvera, or Vaiśravaṇa, the King of the North) combined with the aspect of *senāpati* Pāñcika with an arm (lance) related to his ideological content as giver of armed strength.

The conjugal type of Pāñcika and Hārītī at Tabo appears to stand in the long and lasting tradition of independent tutelary couples of wealth and protection which play an important role in Buddhist communities in Central Asia and North-West India/Kashmir. A huge number of early sculptures reflect the popularity of this cult in Gandhāra and Kashmir, mostly following a synthesis of Graeco-Iranian and Indian forms and ideas. Due to the chronological distance and the limited number of relevant objects, a direct link cannot be postulated. The reconstruction of the artistic and cultural context of the typology of the Tabo couple needs further investigation, in particular with regard to its markedly Indian components of Hārītī, perhaps reflecting early North-West Indian art or the art of the Indian plains. The detailed depiction of children engaged in fighting and wrestling activities defining a scene covering a huge part of the wall cannot be compared with representations of this theme found in any relevant sculptures, with their concentration on the main icon and a condensed depiction of the children in a frieze below or on the sides. The naturalistically rendered children may represent an independent pictorial tradition with a strong local flavour and a certain freedom of the painter.

Independent singular images of Hārītī and those integrated into *maṇḍalas* follow different visual and religious traditions. An example of an autonomous depiction of Hārītī can be found in the porch or jamb of the portal (which has a comparable function to the *sgo khang* in previous periods) of a single-chamber cave temple at Dungkar

²⁵ See also an image of a goddess with a hybrid form of lotus/cornucopia published by Hélène Diserens (1993: 72) from the village of Brār in Kashmir, which Foucher discovered, probably representing a river goddess, related to the mythic origin in Kashmir according to a Buddhist text, in which Kāśyapa asked the goddess to settle there in order to purify the country by the gift of water. This example should demonstrate the widespread popularity of *yakṣa* deities, both male and female as protectors and patron deities of Kashmir. Comparable lotus-blossoms recalling cornucopia can be found on the *dri gtsang khang* ceiling design in the *gtsug lag khang* at Tabo.



(Cave II). The prominent position in the porch demonstrates that this female spirit associated with fertility and procreation maintains her important position in the ensemble of protectors associated with foundation of the ruling elites up to the 13th century. She is represented subordinated to the protector god Mahākāla (shown half-naked with one arm raised and a skull in his hand) (Fig. 13).²⁶ Hārītī is shown with one arm raised holding a cup or bowl while cradling an infant to her breast. Other boys are shown around her in playful attitudes. Due to the poor state of preservation almost nothing can be said about the costume. She seems to wear a crown but the Tibetan-style necklace made of corals and turquoises is likely a later addition. She looks at the practitioner/devotee and is shown in a rather open and free composition covering a large space while her depiction outside the *maṇḍala* (Fig. 14) seems to follow a strict iconographic formula, perhaps on the model of a sketchbook. Opposite the portal there is a proud warrior on horseback, representing a local territorial deity and warrior-like protector, which appears in Ladakh and other areas of historical Western Tibet around 1200, reflecting martial cultures of the region.²⁷

²⁶ I first came across the beautiful—to my knowledge hitherto unpublished—image of Hārītī in this cave temple during field research in 2006/2007 together with Tsering Gyalpo and Christian Jahoda, who organised and directed this campaign.

²⁷ He can perhaps be related to the appearance of the powerful protector Mahākāla, while his identity may be associated with Pe har, mentioned in *Rin chen bzang po rnam thar 'bring po*. In this a protector divinity is portrayed as

The Lady and the Lotus at Khartse

The tutelary couple at Tabo, above the entrance portal of the Tabo *sgo khang*, also contrasts with the deities integrated into an ensemble of “lower/protective deities” on the entrance wall at the Nyag phug pa *lha khang* at Khartse (Tshe ring rgyal po and Papa-Kalantari 2009: fig. 17) (Fig. 16). This is the first known example showing the couple depicted in midst a whole pantheon of lower deities on the entrance wall subordinated to monumental gate protectors in clay (Fig. 17). There we find *yakṣa* deities (*gnod sbyin*) and other “lower spirits” such as eight *nāgas* (*klu, klu mo*), above the portal, planetary deities and the Four Guardian Kings (*dikpāla, phyogs skyong*) represented on the entrance wall in their function as protectors of the threshold of the temple, protecting the sphere between nature or the worldly (*laukika*) and the sacred transmundane sphere (*lokottara*). The entrance wall, closest to the unordered, human world is of course a meaningful place for this function. This ensemble of Indic deities charged with protecting the realm of the Buddha recalls the *maṇḍala* of the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa (cf. Macdonald 1962) which describes specific configurations of gods as protectors of the sphere between nature and the transmundane as shown by Bautze-Picron (1996: 109), who studied the position of Hindu and Indic deities in the

having been put on oath to “work as personal attendant and responsible for guarding the possessions of all the temples of Rongchung” (cf. Snellgrove and Skorupski 1980: 93). He is complemented by a row of female *srung ma* above the portal on the inner face of the wall of the main sacred space.

15. Entrance wall, flanking the portal, Nyag cave temple, Khartse (Tshe ring rgyal po, 2002).

16. Hārītī, Nyag cave temple (entrance wall), Khartse (Tshe ring rgyal po, 2002).

17. Sketch of wall paintings on the entrance wall of Nyag cave temple (drawing: C. Kalantari, 2009).



18. Back wall flanking the niche, featuring donor images and Tārā above, Nako Lotsāba *lha khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).



19. Sanctum, Tabo *gtsug lag khang* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

late Buddhist iconography in eastern India, while in the context of Tibetan art this opposing pair has been discussed by Seyfort Ruegg 2008 (see below). In later periods, many of these Indic divinities are depicted outside the frame of different *maṇḍalas* of the Yoga Tantra class (Nako, Dungkar) or in the outermost spheres of the latter as found in the Alchi school of painting, which are shown on the side walls of sacred spaces.

At Khartse, Hārītī is among a group of divinities with her husband, shown in his many-faced form with a naked upper torso, holding a flask—which becomes the standard iconography from the mid 11th century onwards—positioned in the uppermost row. His attributes—with an emphasis on wealth-granting rather than on his military aspect—differ markedly from the majestic warrior type at Tabo with its royal garb (Fig. 15). The divine mother appears as a singular typology in this region: she is bare-breasted, with a narrow waist, attired with an Indian style of lower dress. Her offspring rest on her lap with hands folded in veneration. The deity represents the Indian

concept of beauty and aesthetics, in the sense of sexual appeal of the woman and radiance of attractiveness providing a prerequisite for fertility.²⁸ A significant feature is her raised right arm holding a flower or lotus. It recalls the treasure-displaying gesture in earlier images of Hārītī in Orissa holding a stalk of grain, according to Shaw (2006: 130) signalling her association with agricultural fertility and abundance.²⁹ The lotus at Khartse may signal fertility and her auspicious nature in the sense of human reproduction and thus the focus appears to be on the woman as a nature goddess and life source. The same gesture of the raised hand is also found in images of offering deities in the same temple, which is consistent with the idea of treasure-offering associated with this type of protector.

The characteristic gesture of the lotus-bearing raised hand at Khartse is ultimately related to the Indic visual pattern of the “lady under the tree”. It is borrowed from the theme of the birth of the Buddha with Māyā standing under the tree stretching her right arm toward the foliage and the child who emerges from her right side. Māyā at Nālandā (cf. Bautze-Picron 2010: fig. 19) holds a lotus flower in one hand. The typology is even adopted for the image of Tārā, as shown at Nako, Lotsāba *lha khang* (Fig. 18).³⁰ The emphasis of the type of Hārītī at Khartse is thus on birth, creation and fertility. In general this idea of the female divine, in the form of *yakṣa* deities, is frequently shown in specific positions in the temple. Fertility deities, signalling their auspicious nature, are often found on the border-zones of architectural ornament or in lower zones of *toraṇa* configurations, as seen on a famous Kashmir-style bronze frame. In this two auspicious nature deities are in the lowest zone in the *toraṇa*, below the representation of the life of the Buddha, alluding to their auspicious nature as the basis of the emergence of the Buddha. This configuration has many similarities to the cella ensemble in the Tabo *dri gtsang khang* (sanctum) (cf. Fig. 19).

²⁸ The iconography of fertility assumes an important position in architectural ornamentation; in particular *yakṣa* deities in their function of acquiring material riches and protecting the monument often at the threshold between the sacred and profane. As suggested by Bautze-Picron 2010: 209, such women-motifs initially appear near the portals of Buddhist monuments, which were later resumed by images of Māyā and Hārītī.

²⁹ Vegetal motifs or fruit as attributes are also shown in Pāla sculptures representing the goddess (Shaw 2006: 130).

³⁰ Tārā’s gesture at Nako is clearly based on the iconography of Māyā as lady below the tree. Bautze-Picron suggests this may refer to her description as mother of all Buddhas and to abundance and procreation in the sense of infinite compassion. All this demonstrates the dynamics of iconography and the processes of amalgamation of various different religious ideas, local gods and protectors, which were integrated under a new name, in this case in that of the popular goddess Tārā. The image of Tārā at Nako recalls a 12th-century book cover featuring this deity at the LACMA (cf. Bautze-Picron 2010: fig. 30).



20. Hārītī and Pāñcika, detail of the outer frame of the *maṇḍala* on the south wall, Nako, Lotsāba *lha khang* (C. Jahoda, 2009).

Hārītī, in the transition zone above the portal on the entrance wall of the Tabo *sgo khang*, can thus also be interpreted as an allusion to the idea of creation, marking and protecting the transition between two stages “of the unformed and uncreated and the formed and created” (Bautze-Picron 2010: 226). The mundane nature of the couple also marks the border between the material and the spiritual and—as protector of the entrance to the monument (closest to the human plane)—in charge of the richness a temple can provide. The protective deity pair, above the entrance to the *gtsug lag khang*, closest to our world and the human level, perhaps binds the lay world and the royal-monastic community together in concerns of a more mundane nature.

Hārītī in Cup-Bearing Mode with Indigenous Features and as a Tibetan Queen

Yet another type is that of Hārītī and Pāñcika, which from the end of the 11th century onwards in this region was integrated into the

outer spheres of *maṇḍala* configurations or outside the *maṇḍala* border. They belong to an ensemble which Luczanits (2008) classified as Hindu and pan-Indian deities, represented near an entrance or as part of the outermost circle of certain Yoga Tantra *maṇḍalas* (cf. de Mallmann 1986). Within this type the forms differ markedly at Dungkar, Nako (Fig. 20), and in the Alchi school, following different visual models within the wide spectrum of Kashmir-style artistic schools. Characteristically, Hārītī and Pāñcika images in *maṇḍala* images at Nako (Lotsāba *lha khang*) and Dungkar are depicted in single settings. While in the latter only their relative position in the whole configuration shows their iconographic relation, at Nako Pāñcika is turned smiling at his wife. In contrast to the early typology at Khartse, which still closely adheres to Indic models, with the emphasis as a nature goddess, Hārītī images in this later phase from the 12th century onwards are always fully dressed, with tight-fitting, North-Indian clothes reminiscent of the sartorial traditions in Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir. Also a metamorphosis of her characteristics



21. Detail *maṇḍala*, Sumda Chung, (C. Kalantari, 2009).

is observable, with an emphasis on the mother-child relation and motherly empathy, showing her as caring, nurturing mother, cradling an infant at her breast. This increasing focus on motherly tenderness and interest in feminine beauty with sartorial features from Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir contrasts with the rather hieratic, frontal image of a powerful protectress at Tabo. Interestingly, while the image of Hārītī gradually absorbs local features of material culture, Pāñcika is accorded less interest and retains his Indic iconographic features.

With regard to the iconographic form at Dungkar the divine mother is shown with a cup in her hand—which is absent at Tabo—from which two boys take food, in Indian attire, surrounded by putti-like playing children, in contrast to the children (or rather small adults) performing martial arts at Tabo. However, some of them carry weapons reminding that they are powerful spirits among their mother's troops. The Dungkar type is reminiscent of a Pāla stone stela in the Dacca Museum featuring Hārītī with four arms, holding a fish and a skull cup in her two upper hands (as described by Shaw

2006: 134). The cup-offering mode at Dungkar emphasizes the mild, benevolent and motherly character of the deity. The cup originally perhaps alludes to the Buddha's promise that if she gave up eating meat she would be fed at all his monasteries, and a plate for Hārītī and her children would be included at every supper by the monks in the monastery, in return she and her offspring were to watch over the monks and nuns in the monastery and ensure their security (*ibid.*: 112). Another interpretation of the cup is the bowl in which her youngest and most beloved son Priyaṅkara was hidden by the Buddha in order to make her feel the emotions of a mother who had lost her child. This was then the basis of her conversion to a child-protecting goddess. The cup has now turned to an attribute associated with offering, care, fertility and abundance.

A singular type of Hārītī is represented at Sumda and Alchi (Ladakh, both around 1200; Figs. 21–23), where she assumes the appearance of a Tibetan noblewoman (Fig. 24). In both cases the depictions are in the outer ring of the *maṇḍala*, at eye-level, perhaps signalling how much the image was still valued. Hārītī also holds a cup, which recalls the aristocratic banqueting couples on the entrance wall of the *'du khang*—surrounded by girls and boys in Tibetan dress; above in the outer ring of the *maṇḍala* is Kubera/Vaiśravaṇa. The cup is a leitmotif at Alchi: in the "royal drinking or rather cup-offering scene" the female donor is offering a cup to the person opposite her, presumably her husband, while in another assembly scene in the frieze she is shown holding a lotus with two children in front of her. While the cup-offering mode of representation has been rightly associated with the Iranicized Turkic rulers in neighbouring regions by various authors, the overall composition is in a long West Tibetan tradition of donor imagery. One layer of meaning of the so-called "drinking scene" in the context of a Buddhist temple is most likely that of marriage, fertility and procreation as an aspect of the protection of the line of the clan and thus also of security in the region. Moreover, clear resonances between female protector divinities and images and ideals of rule of the elite can be found in such depictions. Significantly, in another scene of the Alchi *'Du khang's* donor frieze (Fig. 25), the noble family is shown in the midst of their children—a boy and a girl—with the mother holding a lotus flower, recalling the aspect of procreation shown in the image of Hārītī at Khartse. Fertility, procreation and motherly care is also a major concern of female characters in donor depictions in a manuscript from Dolpo (cf. Fig. 26). In general a prominent depiction of female protagonists in donor scenes is observable from the end of the 11th century onwards, featuring couples represented at eye-level. It perhaps reflects a situation of a relative influential position of female donors—such as a daughter of Ye shes 'od, as has been shown—which even appears as founder of

a temple. Donor couples at Lalung, Alchi, Mangyu are shown in vivid scenes—contrasting to the static representation in earlier times—and in various settings, displaying marriage alliances, enthroned with their children, emphasising the aspect of motherly empathy and the women as life-force, alluding to a new idea of an ideal couple.³¹

Accordingly, the form and function of Hārītī in Ladakh appears not only to be exemplary for local Tibetan costumes used for a specific class of deities,³² but also relevant for the interpretation of the as yet little studied roles associated with donorship and female founders in particular, as will be examined in the following.

Ideology, Concepts of Supremacy and Ideals of Rule That Furthered the Popularity of This Divine Pair

The cultivating of various concepts of tutelary deities is one of the major strategies to legitimate the sovereignty of the newly established Buddhist rulers (various previous studies have focused on this subject: cf., for example, Jahoda 2006, Papa-Kalantari 2010). In addition to the central function of female protectors in the royal foundation of temples during this period (10th to 13th century)—perhaps reflecting pre-Buddhist local religious entities—in particular protectors of worldly concerns and against threat of military violence appear as a central component and a constant phenomenon in the religious-political system of the ruling elite in Western Tibet (10th–13th century). This class of protectors reflecting martial virtues, equestrian culture and culture of arms and armour of the time have hitherto received almost no attention.

Various characteristic features may support the assumption of inherent ideas related to historical circumstances:

Worldly protectors appear to be a constant theme in temples associated with the ruling and aristocratic elite and perhaps reflecting specific intentions of the donors. Protectors of mundane concerns are perhaps not subject to a strict iconographic scheme

³¹ In general marriage alliances are a constant theme in the shaping of Tibetan (political) identity; the model being the *chos rgyal*, in particular Srong btsan sgam po (reigned ca. 612–649; Dotson 2009: 18), who chose among others as his wives a Nepalese and a Chinese Buddhist princess. His Chinese wife Wencheng (Wen cheng Ong con/Kong jo), belonging to the imperial line of the Emperor of China, is said to have brought with her the Jo bo statue of Buddha Śākyamuni housed in the Lhasa Jo khang, which is still the centre of worship for Tibetans. However the Jo bo was probably brought to Lhasa by a later princess, her niece, Jincheng (cf. Sørensen 1994: 241 and Heller 2006). Princess Jincheng, who first came to Lhasa in 710, was married to Khri lde gTsong rtsan (704–755) when he was a six-year old child. She is recorded as having actively promoted Buddhism and having founded the first *saṃgha* in Central Tibet (Kapstein 2009: 22).

³² According to Christian Luczanits, certain lower divinities at Dungkar (Cave II) wear local Tibetan dresses; among them also Sūrya, shown on the chariot (verbal communication, 2009).



but a question of a conscious choice of the donors, representing an independent form of worship, with a great variety of individual solutions; thus previous generalised interpretations of the pantheon of the *sgo khang* as deities designed as guardians in the outer sphere of the *maṇḍala* need to be replaced by a more complex picture.

It is perhaps also significant that this type of worldly protector is absent at Alchi on the entrance wall of the 'Du khang (with a condensed field of local village and territorial deities subordinated to the *dharmapāla* Mahākāla (“the Great Black One”; or mGon po phyag bzhi pa, “the one who protects the doctrine”); the latter representing a group of higher deities, or wrathful protectors who “monitor” lower territorial deities—dwelling above the portal—to ensure they preserve their vows to protect the village, monastery and its treasures.³³ However in donor depictions there are clear

22. Hārītī and Kubera in the outermost ring—inside *vajra*-border (!)—of a *maṇḍala* configuration, Sumda Chung (by courtesy of Rob Linrothe, 2006).

23. Hārītī and Pāñcika (above the couple: Kubera; below: Gaṇapati), Alchi 'Du khang (west wall), detail of a *maṇḍala* (C. Kalantari, 2009).

³³ For the evolutionary history of demonic protectors and their introduction to Western Tibet see Linrothe and Watt 2004: 44ff.

24. Detail of 'royal drinking' or 'wedding scene', entrance wall, Alchi 'Du khang (C. Kalantari, 2009).

25. Detail of aristocratic donor couple amidst of their children, assembly frieze, entrance wall, Alchi 'Du khang (C. Kalantari, 2009).



resonances and reciprocal exchanges with tutelary deities, and in particular with ideas associated with the bestowing of wealth, securing of peace and procreation. In particular the famous drinking scene is represented as an independent setting, and in a higher position than the donor frieze it appears like a clamp binding the scenes featuring diverse ceremonies and the world of protectors, perhaps alluding to specifically revered ancestors.

In this context it is relevant to point to the remarkable emphasis on the composition of details depicted like narrative elements at Tabo, for example, the couple's children performing martial arts below. While the depiction of children's various activities—such as fighting scenes—is not unusual, perhaps underlining the aspect of demonic activities that were converted into a beneficent role, the detailed depiction of martial arts covering a large part of the wall and the detailed display of armour, which may be designed to enhance the aspect of protection against a military threat, is remarkable. This aspect is also mentioned in the important West Tibetan chronicle *mNga' ris rgyal rabs*. This confirms that the protection of the borders was an important concern in this period

(cf. Vitali 1996: 110–111).³⁴ However, the text does not directly relate to the Pāñcika-Vaiśravaṇa-Kubera complex. Thus a close association with his protective aspects must remain speculative. Male territorial deities, alluding to protection against a military threat and martial ideal, also feature prominently in a hitherto little-studied group of mounted horsemen, fully armed and reflecting indigenous military, martial and hunting customs, in later temples (presumably Pe har at Alchi—subordinated to Mahākāla—and at Dungkar), which appear around 1200, while female territorial deities dominate in earlier phases. The arms and equestrian culture reflected in this type of protector are reminiscent of descriptions in Rin chen bzang po's biography (*Rin chen bzang po rnam thar 'bring po*) (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1980: 91; see also Papa-Kalantari 2006, 2011 and Gu ge Tshe ring rgyal po and Kalantari, "Guge kingdom-period murals in the Zhag grotto in mNga' ris, Western Tibet", this volume, pp. 424–425); also relevant are depictions of arms and armour in the Sudhana frieze in the Tabo 'du khang, and in donor depictions at Nako and Alchi. Arms are depicted in utmost detail, certainly reflecting real weapons of the time, consistent also with the ubiquitous theme of descriptions of insignia in historical texts and edicts, reflecting their high value as symbolic capital of the royal insignia (cf. Vitali 1996: 107).

Whereas the role of Pāñcika with his martial ideals seem to have been replaced or complemented by armed horsemen, hunters and warriors—both subordinated to the pan-Indian protector Mahākāla—Hārītī remains a constant important religious factor reflecting an important popular projection screen in which a wide range of female

³⁴ I wish to thank Christian Jahoda for directing my attention to this passage.



26. *Yum chen mo/Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript (Dolpo), final page (by courtesy of Thomas Pritzker; Heller 2009: fig. 136).

ideals of protection, fertility and creation from various periods and iconographic backgrounds could be amalgamated. The archetype of a mother's compassion extended to humankind due to the conversion of the Buddha is a main principle of the figure of Hārītī. This is also echoed in images of female founders and their ethos of rule. Especially relevant in this context are resonances between the secular and divine sphere as related to images of self-representation of the ruling elite at Alchi, in particular those of female donors. This reflects important aspects of the Buddhist ethos of sovereignty of the Buddhist female elite and the strategies of attaining respectability among the local population, focusing on the aspect of women as life source, protection and procreation.³⁵ Here a process of appropriation

³⁵ The interpretation of the aspect of this pair of deities as ideal conjugal couple related to the ethos of rule of early dynastic art in this region is a rewarding question of future research. I proposed consonances between tutelary couples and donor depictions at Alchi ('Du khang) as a couple in my paper at the 11th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Königswinter-Bonn (see Papa-Kalantari 2006, 2011), which is singular in this cultural sphere. Perhaps the idea of marriage alliances, as a source of peace in the region, which is a constant theme in the Tibetan cultural sphere and corresponds to the political conditions in the region, is relevant in this context. The type of conjugal couples at Alchi contrast to images of the enthroned Lord-Ruler Royal Monk (*rje rgyal lha btsun*) Byang chub 'od at Tabo, on the model of the First Sermon of the Buddha, with the lay and monastic community subordinated. Women are also depicted at the Lotsāba *lha khang* in Nako, however there they are shown at a lower level (Papa-Kalantari 2002).

The ideas of legitimation linked with conjugal images to secure the line of the clan and marital alliances creating peace and prosperity as a basis of the establishment of Buddhist ideals in the region reflects a process already undertaken during the time of the old Tibetan monarchy. The most famous typology referring to this theme is the triad of Srong btsan sgam po and his two wives, and many images of it can be found in the Lhasa Jo khang.

or integration of local cults and the sphere of worldly and local spirits by the royal and noble elite can be observed.

Not only do various resonances between lay and religious imagery testify to this assumption, but it is perhaps also indicative that the only hitherto known temple featuring an independent image of Hārītī on the portal can perhaps historically be related to a female foundation related to a lady from the royal lineage of Ye shes 'od (Stoddard 2004).³⁶ As Vitali (1996: 274) stated "By virtue of her foundation, lHa'i me.tog fulfilled one of the principles of *chos.khrims* in sTod, by which women were encouraged to take vows (*mNga'ris rgyal.rabs*, p. 55, lines 3–4)." Historical sources in addition say that "she regarded her *gtsug. lag. khang* as though it were her adopted child" (*sras.tshab*) (Vitali 1996: 274). The presence of the divine mother on the entrance wall of Dungkar would well fit to female donorship, and the text portraying the temple as an "adopted child" of lHa'i Me tog. This not only demonstrates that women were endowed with economic wealth but also reflects their position in the social order.

³⁶ Stoddard (2004: 93) has put it as follows: "Lha Bla ma Ye shes 'od's two sons are well known, however his daughter, Lha'i Me tog [...] deserves better fame, since it appears that she is the founder of the now famous Dung dkar cave temple, in ca. 1000, and thus was the first princess among the patrons of the early Phyi dar". According to *mNga'ris rgyal rabs* (cf. Vitali 1996: 114) she was ordained and founded Kre wel dbu sde temple. Whether this temple and the community of nuns can be related to the cave sanctuaries of Dungkar known to us cannot be stated with certainty. Cf. Vitali's statement (1996: 274): "Kre.wel, a temple unknown to me". However, *Vaidūrya ser po* mentions the monastery Dung dkar bKra shis chos gling and that lHa'i me tog supported 30 monks at this place long before this temple's foundation (*ibid.*: 274–75).

On the Symbolism of the Entrance Hall in the Overall Spiritual Programme

The last part of this text looks at the specific function and symbolism of the *sgo khang* and its decorative programme within the tripartite layout of the *gtsug lag khang*. The temple's structure and programme (in its hypothetical "original" form from the beginning of the 11th century) can be interpreted as a realisation of the *trikāya*: the *dri gtsang khang* where the image of the Buddha is venerated in a sacred enclosure represents the *dharmakāya*; the *du khang* represents the *sambhogakāya*, while the cosmological images, protectors and donors represent the *nirmāṇakāya*, placed in the *sgo khang*, representing the border between the profane and the sacred sphere. As has already been mentioned, the Tabo *gtsug lag khang* represents a distinctive type of longitudinal architectural structure in the region with a horizontal succession of independent but interrelated spaces of increasing sacrality, which is also expressed in specific decorative programmes in each of them. This approach in the interpretation of sacred space contrasts to previous research, which subsumed the whole pantheon in the *sgo khang* as deities imagined as integrated into the outer sphere of the *maṇḍala* of the (later) *'du khang* without considering the fact of a chronological sequence of the two distinctive phases of decoration of the temple.³⁷

A closer examination reveals that the *sgo khang* appears to represent an independent ritual space with a distinctive "pluralistic" iconographic programme characteristic of early Buddhist art at the end of the 10th century in the region, which was perhaps prevalent in India at that time and can also be found in Central Tibet (e.g. in the old *sgo khang* at Shalu). Moreover, it perhaps also reflects distinctive cultic needs, as will be discussed below.

From Mundane to Transmundane

In the entrance hall distinctive themes can be observed from worldly protectors on the entrance portal (flanked by cosmological imagery and the Wheel of Rebirths), guarding the sphere from nature to tamed world, which is characteristically inhabited by *yakṣa* deities (*gnod sbyin*) to territorial deities (*srung ma*) on the opposite wall, above the portal leading to the *'du khang*, subordinated to two clay *dvārapālas* (gate-protectors, *sgo bsrungs*), often guarding the

³⁷ In Klimburg-Salter's view (1997: 87) the *maṇḍala* represented in the adjoining *'du khang* of this temple. This interpretation of space is open to doubt, due to the fact that the *'du khang*'s programme as it presents itself today, stems from a later phase and thus perhaps also reflects a different religious orientation and symbolism of space.

portal of the *maṇḍala*.³⁸ While the theme of worldly protectors above the entrance porch represents the *yakṣa* deities associated with wealth and protection integrated into the Buddhist pantheon to guard the Buddha and fulfil the wishes of the devotee, the female protector deity recalls local religious experiences imagined as spirits protecting specific locales that were converted into the service of the newly established Buddhist elite to become protectors of villages, monasteries and their treasures. Accordingly, the local territorial deity (*srung ma*) is shown in a setting with a strong local flavour.

On the side wall specific groups of Indic deities can be found, among them (on the south wall) are great Hindu divinities, the Eight Great Nāgas which subordinated themselves to protect the Buddha and planetary gods. The latter reflect the aspect of astronomy and astrology in the cosmological order and are an expression of the idea that the temple was conceived as related to the laws that govern the movements of the planets. The position of a group of protectors of the directions (*dikpāla*) above the portal is particularly meaningful in the spatial iconography of the *sgo khang*, positioned above the local protectress charged with the protection of the main hall.

The position of the tutelary couple on the entrance wall, above the portal—near cosmological imagery and thus most closely related to cosmic creativity—suggests an association with the long tradition of female spirits of creation and fertility, which have an important position in architectural ornamentation. Various female deities assumed the role of *yakṣa* deities in their function of acquiring material riches and protecting the monument, positioned at the threshold between the sacred and profane (Bautze-Picron 2010: 209). The image of creation, reflecting the transition between two stages "of the unformed and uncreated and of the formed and created" (*ibid.*: 226), was practically and logically aimed at being positioned at a place of passage in the architectural ornamentation. This "mundane" function is opposed to that of the local goddess, protecting the threshold to the sphere of the *maṇḍala*, positioned on the opposite wall above the portal to the assembly hall.

Certainly, the Wheel of Rebirths shown to the left of the conjugal imagery is also significant for the interpretation of the position of the couple. Due to the improvement from her position as a morally ambivalent person and increase in merit, Hārītī turned from a demoness to a goddess, being exemplary for the path to liberation. An inscription above the wheel is indicative of the interpretation of the entrance wall's function. Schlingloff (1988: 169; cf. also Zin and Schlingloff 2007) was the first to identify the Mūlasarvāstivāda

³⁸ In addition inside the gateway leading to the main hall are two painted *dharmapālas* (*chos skyong*), one of them a red Hayagrīva.

Vinaya as the textual basis for paintings of the Wheel of Rebirths at Ajanta, and also noted that this is also the case for the Tibetan *saṃsāracakra*. The *Vinaya* also prescribes a text together with an image of the preaching Buddha to be painted above the Wheel of Rebirths in the porch or entrance hall of a monastery, as also found at Tabo (for a transcription and translation see Luczanits 1999: 115–16). The text encourages the conversion to Buddhism as a basis of deliverance. The ensemble of the *saṃsāracakra*/the Buddha/and the didactic text is related to the teaching of the dependent origination and—due to its connection with enlightenment—can be regarded as the quintessence of the teaching of the Buddha (Zin and Schlingloff 2007: 124–25).³⁹ Significantly, it is presented to the monks and the lay population on the entrance wall of the *sgo khang* at Tabo. Of course the question if and in what form the cult of Hārītī was present in the institutional life during the foundation phase of Tabo will require further studies of relevant related texts.

The mundane spirits and Indic gods in this space recall their position within the Buddhist cosmos in the Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa, where they belong to the clans of the *laukika*, which are in the outer mansion of the *maṇḍala* and, as C. Bautze-Picron has put it (1996: 115): “They mark the threshold between the external chaotic universe and the inner world of the *maṇḍala* which the initiated must cross before reaching the inner circles, they belong thus to a required phase in the spiritual way.” However, the significance of these Indic gods in the religious-cultic context of a late 10th-century West Tibetan temple remains a question for future research.

The devotee must thus also pass through these spaces, transcending from mundane to transmundane on a symbolic level. The image of the *yakṣa* deity Hārītī is a paradigm for the transformation of a demoness into a goddess in the service of Buddhism. The Indic deities serve as further models for the concept of the process of perfection undergone by ordinary, mundane beings, leading to ultimate liberation.⁴⁰

The Programme of the Tabo *sgo khang* and Its Representation in Later Periods as Ensembles of the Entrance Wall or in *maṇḍalas*

In the development of spatial organisation of the temple’s programme, the ensemble of Indic gods and didactic imagery associated with the

teaching of the Buddha shift from an independent space in the *sgo khang* to the surface of the entrance wall or portal of the main hall (Khartse, Nyag *lha khang*, Zhag cave, Dungkar). It is significant to note that the historical development of the iconography is also reflected in the evolution of the early West Tibetan temple structures. In the early phase of Tabo (comparable to Shalu) Hindu or Indic deities occupy an independent space reflecting their status as individual objects of worship, and their religious significance was still alive, perhaps reflecting a religious-cultural landscape marked by the co-presence and integration of non-Buddhist and Buddhist belief systems in neighbouring regions such as north-west India, in Himachal Pradesh as well as in Nepal. The monumental depiction of the tutelary couple above the Tabo portal indicates that it held a particular position in the cultic tradition at that time.

Accordingly, the programme at Tabo is an important evidence of a specific phase of inclusion of popular protector divinities, Hindu and other non-Buddhist deities and spirits into the Buddhist pantheon, which is expressed in the layout and decoration of a temple.

In the later development and formulation of an indigenous architectural and religious-cultural tradition, central elements of the *sgo khang*’s programme can be found on the surface of the entrance wall (in single-chamber temples), which takes over the function of threshold from *laukika* to *lokottara*. One example is the entrance wall of the Nyag cave temple at Khartse, which features a monumental Buddha assembly, or “sacred conversation” with the Buddha (cf. Allinger and Kalantari 2012 and Kalantari, “Shaping space, constructing identity: The illuminated *Yum chen mo* Manuscript at Pooh, Kinnaur”, this volume, p. 365) on the side wall next to the portal.⁴¹ While in the latter the pantheon of Buddhist and non-Buddhist folk religious deities and spirits subordinated by the Buddha covers the whole entrance wall, in later traditions (Nako, Lotsāba *lha khang*, ca. 1100) the deities are shown residing in the outermost circle of the *maṇḍala* palace of the Yoga Tantra class shown on the side walls (Nako, Dungkar, Alchi ‘Du khang). Interestingly they are shown outside the fire-ring in the earlier phase while from the mid 12th century onwards they are integrated into the outermost circle of the *maṇḍala*.

³⁹ Cf. also Bechert and Gombrich 1995: 28, 49.

⁴⁰ According to Seyfort Rugg (2008: vii) the *laukika-lokottara* opposition, i.e. the mundane and transmundane levels were not necessarily separated from each other, but “a mundane divinity or daemon occupying the *laukika* level may finally be raised [...] to the *lokottara* level of the *ārya*, or ‘Noble (of the spirit)’”. After this process of perfection, ordinary, mundane beings could become even higher protectors of the *dharma* and “be trained and transformed into *ārya-Bodhisattvas*” (*ibid.*: vii).

⁴¹ In general, the deities on the entrance wall (Khartse) represent “lower spirits” of nature, *yakṣas* and *yakṣiṇīs* (*gnod sbyin*), mythical animals and hybrid creatures (such as *kinnaras*), *nāgas*, Gaṇapati (Tshogs [kyi] bdag [po]), as well as a rare type of the Four Great Kings (*rgyal chen bzhi*)—the guardians of the world (*lokapāla*, *jig rten skyong ba*) and of the four directions (*dikpāla*, *phyogs skyong*)—shown as similarly or uniformly garbed warriors with suits of armour and banners. They mark the border between inside and outside, the wilderness and the tamed world, separating the world of wilderness and the sacred sphere of deities. They represent a barrier or a force field between the ordinary world and sacred space from invasion by negative influences.

In a parallel development, the protectress Hārīti and certain other popular Indic tutelary divinities as the Four Heavenly Kings continue their role as guardians of the portal and their representations can be found above or in the inner faces of the temple's portal (such as at Nako in the lHa khang gong ma temple, and at Dungkar) in later phases, while—as a consistent feature in all periods—local territorial divinities watch over the portal.⁴²

To summarise, the outlined development demonstrates a gradual integration of the multifaceted pantheon into a more “purified” religious system in later periods. This development coincides with a tendency towards centralised layouts and programmes of single chambers in the temples. A key concept of the ordering of space in these later periods is the *maṇḍala*. With its geometric rigidity it is designed to represent an immaculate outer-worldly sphere, which is beyond the plane of existence.

Protectors in the Overall Spiritual Programme of the Tabo *gtsug lag khang*

The clear horizontal hierarchy in the *sgo khang* (from worldly protectors and didactic imagery at the portal, to local territorial deities watching over the 'du khang) representing the mundane sphere/*laukika*—leads to the gateway in which Hayagrīva and an unidentified protector are shown on the opposite side, watching over the sphere of *lokottara*. The 'du khang programme from around the mid of the 11th century features a Vajradhātu *maṇḍala*. The entrance wall of the main hall shows a protective-didactic ensemble featuring the “First Sermon of the Buddha” flanked by bodhisattvas, tantric divinities and gatekeepers above lay imagery.

On the side walls, narrative paintings—shown in the lowest zone—and raised sculptures attached to the walls provide a lead for dynamic circumambulation around this space. The devotee

⁴² In the latest phase (beginning of the 13th century) in the upper storey of the Alchi Sumtsek a unique type of protector is shown above the portal, featuring Ācala holding up a sword. The protector—a fully enlightened Buddha assuming a terrifying form—characteristically tramples or rather dances on an elephant-headed demon, Vināyaka (Lord of Obstacles) and like the Gaṇapati (Tshogs [kyi] bdag [po]) of Hinduism, he clutches a white radish. The demon holds aloft the deity showing his ambivalent position appearing both as a demonic element which has to be dominated and as a worshipper who subordinates himself to Buddhism and thus transformed to a protector. This type of protector marks a significant shift in Tibet in the representation of worldly spirits and the superordination of the transmundane over the mundane and subordinate level. These different approaches of integration of Hindu and non-Buddhist divinities into sacred Buddhist order and cosmological conceptions from the 10th century onwards in the Western Himalayas need further research. It will also be necessary to examine parallel developments of the position of Hindu and Indic gods in the late Buddhist iconography in India and Tibet.

then proceeds to the *dri gtsang khang* cum-ambulatory. Above the portal to the *dri gtsang khang* there are the great Hindu deities, among them Brahmā, Indra, Kuvera as well *mahābodhisattvas* and gatekeepers, associated with the protection of the directions and the portal respectively. The side walls of the ambulatory are covered with the theme of the Thousand Buddhas. We thus find a complete religious programme (or a second *maṇḍala*) in the space of the *dri gtsang khang* (sanctum). In the shrine of the sanctum Vairocana is flanked by the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Vajrapāṇi, the bodhisattvas that head the lotus and *vajra* families in three-family configurations according to Luczanits (2004: 37).⁴³ In the Tabo *dri gtsang khang* a donor—presumably with his wife—is depicted in close proximity to the bodhisattva of this group offering a lotus to him.⁴⁴ This cultic centre is honoured and elevated by a distinctive ceiling decoration, featuring a mandalic layout⁴⁵ and opening the centre to a cosmological concept of space thereby contributes to the structuring of sacred space in the *dri gtsang khang* into a mandalic site.⁴⁶

A comparable spatial attribution of different classes of protector deities can also be found in a different type of slightly later (centralised, single-chamber) temples. From the 12th century onwards the horizontal succession of built sacred spaces appears to be “transformed” in favour of a more unified, centralised layout of sacred space, typically displaying squarish ground plans and shallow niches in the main wall. There are examples of these at Nako the Lotsāba *lha khang* and the lHa khang gong ma; in the latter Guardian Kings of the Four Directions of a singular “Chinese Central Asia” type above the portal represent the class of worldly protectors⁴⁷ (which

⁴³ These deities may also reflect the aspect of bodhisattvas as attendants and protectors of the Buddha in the earlier Indian tradition, where such configurations (of a Buddha attended by bodhisattvas) are frequently represented in the temple's sanctum (cf. Zin 2003: 408ff.).

⁴⁴ At Tabo the bodhisattvas discussed above belong to an ensemble of four bodhisattvas, with two flanking the area between *dri gtsang khang* and 'du khang.

⁴⁵ The design shows auspicious signs in the corners and airborne offering deities in clouds. The whole configuration recalls a surface pattern consisting of pearl-medallions found on luxury textiles.

⁴⁶ This horizontally structured spatial layout reflects the early, late 10th-century phase, which was then overlaid by a later late 30s/early 40s of the 11th-century phase of decorative programme in this temple (including perhaps a replacement of an earlier main sculpture in the 'du khang in favour of a monumental fourfold representation of Vairocana in clay placed between *dri gtsang khang* and 'du khang.

⁴⁷ The guardians at Nako appear to be painted on the model of portable objects, one possible example being silk banners at Dunhuang (cf. Papa-Kalantari 2007b: 154–55).

are represented in earlier temples in the *sgo khang*) and perhaps underline the martial ethos of the aristocratic donor shown flanked by his riderless horse and his horse-bearer as if ready for combat (Fig. 18, lower part). In contrast, the donors are on the walls flanking the sanctum or below the focus of worship on the rear wall of the temple facing the portal. In both cases they are shown in close relation to the female Bodhisattva Tārā (Fig. 18, upper part) as if blessed by this “higher” tutelary divinity, popular from the 11th/12th century onwards in Western Tibet as a universal “helper in need”. In the *sgo khang* Tārā is represented as protectress against the Eight Perils. The donors are shown being blessed by the deity and at the same time engaged in rituals in her honour. The ensemble—reminiscent of contemporary book illuminations—is positioned below a clay Prajñāpāramitā *maṇḍala* configuration covering the upper part of the main wall of the temple (see Müller 2008 for a study of this goddess at Nako). In concept and layout the overall layout of the wall decoration at Nako recalls early Dunhuang banners with regard to the relation of donor depiction and overall iconographic composition.⁴⁸ In the lowest zone—on either side of the central Tārā image—there are the Eight Great Bodhisattvas in linked heavenly palaces like a gateway marking and protecting the sphere to the *maṇḍala* above.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ This transformation in the spatial concepts may well be related to different forms of spiritual practice and forms of liturgy in which portable objects may have played a role. Due to their portability, thangkas may have well been media of transmissions not only of motifs and styles but also of religious ideas—having also effects on interior programmes and spatial organisation and symbolism of the temple. Public ceremonies held outside the temple, which can still be observed in the Western Himalayas and in the area of historical Western Tibet may have triggered the use of ritual paraphernalia. Among them are festivals in which the appearance of protector deities, which act in a ritual space defined by various ritual paraphernalia and thangkas, plays a central role. They are often represented as portable objects kept in the temple during the year and presented to the devotees in specific rituals outside the temple on the occasion of festivals. The decorative programmes today are thus a complex interlacing of built structures and ephemeral sacred spaces shaped in Buddhist religious practice.

There are also significant parallels with contemporaneous Buddhist festivals and performances (such as by Buchen of Pin valley, Spiti) where thangkas, placed on an altar or positioned as a background of a stage, are used to shape a sacred space (see Kalantari, forthcoming).

⁴⁹ This horizontal hierarchy of deities associated with different categories of protection from the *sgo khang* or from a condensed configuration on the entrance wall to the cultic centre perhaps has a vertical equivalent at Shalu (ca. mid-11th century), where the “lower” class of protectors are in the ground floor (including donors and a *srung ma* above the portal) recalling the configuration of protectors found in the Tabo *sgo khang*, represented as ensemble in the entrance hall to the *’du khang*), while a representation of Prajñāpāramitā (Yum chen mo, “Great Mother”) is represented on an upper spatial level. The distinction between an entrance hall in the ground floor in which the lower spirits dwell, and one on the upper level, is the spatial equivalent of the concepts of worldly protectors, partly inhabiting the earth and more abstract concepts of sacred

Early Donor Depictions at Tabo and the Question of the Function of the Entrance Hall as Expression of Ritual Needs

As already mentioned, the dominant role of donor depictions in iconographic ensembles of the temple’s programme is a specific feature in the region from earliest times around the end of the 10th/beginning of the 11th century. On the side walls of the *sgo khang* at Tabo there are donor depictions as parts of the whole ensemble of protectors. The donors are not only shown as engaged in ceremonies and thus commemorating a historic moment or ceremonies, but also because of their protective virtues. In particular in the old *sgo khang* at Shalu (c. mid-11th century), with a comparable arrangement, donors are shown together with armed horsemen displaying their martial virtues in the service of the protection of the temple.

Complementing earlier interpretations of the donor images “possibly on the occasion of a public ceremony connected with the foundation or consecration of the temple”, as first suggested by Luczanits (2004: 34) I am proposing that here it is most likely that specific types of worship related to festivals that typically take place in the space in front of the temple and in the entrance hall are being commemorated. As an example, on occasion of specific festivals (Namthong) at Khorchag monastery, the main guardian spirits appear in performances outside the temples. Here the huge statues of protector gods (which are usually kept in the *mgon khang* or Protectors’ Temple of the IHa khang chen mo) are carried by monks while the protective deity rDo rje chen mo performs a ritual dance at the end of the ceremony, much revered by the local population. The festival ground outside the temple consists of thangkas associated with the respective deity or ritual, marking and protecting an ephemeral space. Textiles used as backdrops for altars and thrones, carpets and other ritual paraphernalia play an important role in such settings as well (see Jahoda and Kalantari 2015: 120–145; Jahoda 2015: 214–255). The notions of ephemeral spaces and in particular textiles and specific canvas (*bskang rdzas*), designed for the unfolding of a Buddhist ritual outdoors appear to be alluded to in the painting featuring the local territorial deity above the portal in the *sgo khang*. The space outside the temple is typically also shaped

entities on a higher spatial level. I wish to thank Hubert Feiglstorfer, who drew my attention to the fact that the Yum chen mo temple in Shalu is positioned directly above the old *mgon khang* of the monastery (personal communication, Oct. 15, 2010), further corroborating this hypothesis of strict spatial hierarchy of different classes of protectors within a temple. (For a discussion of the original shape and function of these structures see Ricca and Fournier 1996: 344–45). The goddess Prajñāpāramitā is also represented in the Nako Lotsāba *lha khang*, on the left wall leading to the niche with donors represented below. Such configurations are also found in contemporaneous illuminated *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscripts illustrating the dominant position of this goddess in the spiritual praxis of that time. See also Müller 2008 on this topic.

by the assembly of monks as well as high-ranking members of the local population, reflecting a strict system of social order. The entrance hall's programme thus perhaps reflects the religious practice outside the temple in the courtyard, which is the place where typically the cohesion/interface between the royal elite and the local community and the sacred sphere of the temple and the community of monks is acted out regularly. This function of this ephemeral "sacred space" is then also expressed in the shaping of sacred space inside the temple and in the decoration of the entrance hall. Accordingly, as recently suggested by Christian Jahoda (2012: 43f.) based upon a preliminary study of the Khorchag Namthong festival, it can be proposed (with high probability) that specific public ceremonies of that time are represented here, and in particular offerings on occasion of high religious festivals—"on the occasion of the consecration of the temple" (see Jahoda and Kalantari 2016: 98; see also Jahoda, "On the foundation of the Nyarma *gtsug lag khang*, Ladakh", this volume, p. 284).⁵⁰ It is perhaps indicative that the devotees on the north wall at Tabo are shown kneeling, as if engaged in an act of veneration of a deity, facing the wall where the local divinity protects the portal to the main hall. The "public" function of the *sgo khang* as a place where offerings are laid, in contrast to the main hall reserved for ceremonies by the monastic community, can be seen in the Khorchag Jo khang temple up to the present day (as observed during there during field research in February 2010; see Kalantari 2012: 106). This religio-cultic function appears to be consistent with the tripartite layout of a group of structurally related temples (Nyarma, Alchi and to a certain degree Shalu in Central Tibet). The latter type of temple appears to have a function associated with worship of a wider public audience. While only traces of a veranda of the Nyarma Main Temple have survived, the Alchi 'Du khang still has its original layout with a veranda and a courtyard, perhaps assuming the public function and the spatial symbolism of the former entrance hall.

Hārītī and Pāñcika in Western Tibet: Concluding Remarks

Despite the poor state of conservation and recent crude over-paintings, the depiction of the tutelary couple Hārītī and Pāñcika at Tabo is an important and singular representation in the still little studied early Buddhist artistic phase in the region, at the end of the 10th century CE. It reflects a phase in which this couple was still held in high esteem, perhaps reflecting North-West Indian art or the art of the Indian plains of that time.

An evolutionary process of form and idea of the tutelary couple can be observed in the imposing regal figures at Tabo, which still

⁵⁰ I wish to thank Christian Jahoda for inspiring discussions on this topic, which were the basis of these observations.

show the powerful, perilous and rather bodhisattva-like aspect of its Indic prototypes to different images of the feminine divine focusing on fertility and creation, as well as on motherly empathy with strong local features of material culture and aristocratic life. The perilous aspect at Tabo is illustrated by the fighting children below, Pāñcika fully armed and Hārītī shown with outstretched hand signalling the transformation of her original demonic power into a faculty of protecting all humans. The accent in later phases in contrast changes to a markedly benevolent and auspicious nature: in larger ensembles she is shown as a cradling or nursing mother displaying motherly care in an intimate relation with the child. The defining aspect of her divine nature is her role as the mother as life-source, reminiscent of a nature goddess, also showing off feminine beauty and sensuality.

The strong hieratic form of the protective deity couple at Tabo reflecting the idea of ceremonial grandness (also in terms of actual size) corresponds to the mode of donor images in the same sacred space with their strict frontal form of representation which is "beyond time". In the later development at Nako, Alchi and Dungkar (12th–13th century) in contrast deities of this class are rather engaged in actions or narrative scenes. A typical phenomenon—which appears to be a characteristic feature of Western Tibetan art between the 10th and 13th century—is the parallel development in the depiction of worldly protectors and donor imagery of the aristocratic elite. The latter are shown as enthroned rulers or aristocratic couples, in complex public gatherings and religious ceremonies reflecting their religious-political ethos of rule. This process runs parallel with the "reification" or appropriation of a certain class of "worldly" divinities as well as local territorial spirits by the local elite. The lively and almost casual mode of donor images from the 12th century onwards, depicted in actual events and characteristic costumes, are also model for images of deities of a certain class and vice-versa. Hārītī in Alchi and Sumda is exemplary for exchange between imagery and ideas from the aristocratic world and the sphere of lower gods. At Tabo and Dungkar the goddess of protection and female solicitude does not only have a prominent position close to donor images, as if the latter receive her favours (cf. Linrothe 2014). Moreover, she is depicted in important zones above or around the portal, perhaps reinforcing the donors' and devotees' wish to experience her sacred presence during the ritual walk below.

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