THE BHUTANESE ICONOGRAPHY OF VAISRAVANA

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ABSTRACT

THE BHUTANESE ICONOGRAPHY
OF VAIŚRĀVANA

by

Bonnie Sigren

The Lokāpala, Vaiśrāvana, originated in India from the indigenous popular beliefs in Yākṣās. These were powerful earth deities whom the Asian peoples regularly propitiated and appeased in order to avert calamities and acquire good fortune. Vaiśrāvana was their ruler and the custodian of riches. When the Āryan invaders, and later Buddhism, adopted him into their cosmology, Vaiśrāvana became the Guardian of the North.

His iconography in India continued in the form of a Yākṣā. In central Asia and Tibet, Vaiśrāvana was assimilated into the figure of the warrior King from the North. Indigenous popular religious beliefs from Tibet and Bhutan added other iconographical elements. He was identified with the God of Wealth and with the cult of the mountain gods. His subjects became the Himalayan earth deities, further enriching his iconography.

Other aspects of iconographical associations developed from Buddhist doctrines and symbolism. Some conventions were derived from the general body of Buddhist symbols; others were based on the god's attributes and functions in Buddhist cosmology. The elements from popular traditions were recognized by Buddhism and assimilated into

the god's iconography. There is a possibility that some iconographical elements are disguised symbols relating to yogic practice and, as such, fully understood only by the initiated.

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by

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For the Buddha faced by foemen
His disciples don their armour.

--Tibetan Poem

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter I

The Influence of Popular Beliefs on the Development of Iconography

The development of the iconography of the Bhutanese Buddhist Lokāpala, Vaiśrāvana, occurred in Central Asia and Tibet. There, the earlier Indian iconography of the god was altered by the Northern Buddhists according to associations made with reference to his various functions. In Bhutan, the art is largely Lamaist and is, therefore, directly descended from Tibet with its ancestry rooted upon Indian soil in both Hinduism and Buddhism. However, the influence of Indian and Tibetan folk traditions are also to be found. Vaisravana's final iconographical form, consequently, resulted from his roles in both the formal tradition of Buddhism and the popular traditions of the animistic cults.

As early as the fifth century B.C., the Lokāpala functioned as guardian figures in India. They were not the orthodox Vēdic gods, but

> were popular objects of worship like the Yaksas and the Nāgās; they are...the Mahārājās (Kuberā, Dhṛtarāṣtra, Virupākṣa and Virudāka) the guardians of the Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern quarters, respectively.[1]

These popular, non-Vēdic deities are generally attributed to the indigenous peoples of India, possibly the inhabitants of the Indus

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[1] J. N. Banerjea, The Development of Hindu Iconography (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1956), p.85.

Valley civilization. During the early period of their depiction, which may have been stimulated by the rise of bhākti cults, the four were often shown on elephant vahānas (mounts).[2] Vahānas were used to further amplify a god's powers, such as in this case where they strengthen the concept of power. Elephants were the mounts for Kings.

The original function of the Lokāpala was as rulers of the semi-divine earth deities who were propitiated and appeased by the inhabitants of India. Hence, their designation as Kings or Maharajas. In later Buddhist practice, which emphasized the role of guardians, the Kings, and their subjects, continued to be the objects of popular religious observances. The link of animistic practices continued to associate the Lokāpala with their origins, despite the various formal religions which adopted their guardian function.

In the Purānās, eight deities are listed as guardians of the major and subsidiary quarters. The deities are all of Vedic origin and the god, Kuberā, is listed among them. It is highly unlikely that a non-Vēdic and a Vēdic god would originally have had the same name. Prior to Buddhism, Kuberā must have been known by both antagonistic groups. It is not clear whether he had similar functions for both groups or whether he was taken on by the Āryans so early that he appears in the Vēdas.

The origins of the Buddhist guardians listed above is not clear except that they represent animistic, indigenous beliefs. Kuberā, who was King of the Rākṣas in the Vēdas, became King of the Yakṣas in later Vēdic literature. Virupākṣa, Virudāka and Dhṛtarāṣtra were Kings of the Nāgās, Khumbhāndras and Gandhārvas, respectively.[3]

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[2] Ibid., p. 90

[3] Ibid., p. 521

Ancient votive tablets and words for the worship of these deities, and their subjects, have been found throughout India.[4] There is no systematic explanation as to why the Māharājās should have been named as rulers of these semi-divine peoples. The Kings are not of the same nature as the peoples they rule (although in pre-history they may have been) and they occur in Vēdic literature outside their roles as Kings and Lokāpala.

Buddhism included the Kings and their subjects in its cosmology at an early date. Their images are found on the Bhārhut Stupa, dating from the first century B. C. According to Indian Buddhist theory, Mount Sumeru is regarded as the hub of the egg-shaped cosmos. The mountain is flanked by the four peninsular continents and rises to celestial realms. Each quarter of the cosmic mountain's slopes is peopled by its own variety of semi-divine beings who are ruled by the Māharājās.[5] The slopes are also jeweled and in some vague sense the lesser deities guard the treasures. The Kings and their subjects also guard their respective areas from attack which might be leveled at the lower reaches of heaven by the Asurās, demons.[6] The summit contains the palaces of the great gods, the Deathless Ones; the summit quadrangle is known by the Hindus as Amārāvāti, the capital of Indrā, King of the Hindu pantheon and now a servant of Buddha.

In adopting the Hindu cosmology, perhaps the Buddhists found it desirable to have guardians which were non-Vēdic in origin. Some authors have attempted to harmonize the four Lokāpala with the eight

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[4] Ibid., p. 103.

[5] Heinrich Zimmer, The Art of Indian Asia (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), Bollingen Series XXXIX p. 47.

[6] Alice Getty, The Gods of Northern Buddhism (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1962), p. 160.

deities listed in Purānic literature. They consider the four Mahārājās as the guardians of the slopes of Mount Sumeru while the Vedic deities guard the world from its ten directions.[7] This would enable both systems to function within one cosmic system.

Another system for combining the Maharajas with Vedic gods occurs in the preparation of the Lama Eucharist, the Tse-guz.

> "O lord Amitāyus, residing in five shrines whence glittering rays shoot forth! O Gandhārva in the east! Yama in the south! Nàgā in the west! Yakşa in the north! Bramā and Indrā in the upper regions!, and Nānda and Taksha in the lower regions! And especially all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas! I beg you all to bless me and to gratify my wishes by giving me the gift of undying life and implore you to cause it to come to me. Hri! I beg your blessings, O Buddhas of the three times (Dipankara, Sākyamuni and Maitreyā)."
>
> The gods invoked consecrate the fluid in the Ti-bum vase, held by the Lama. This liquid is therefore transformed to immortal ambrosia.[8]

There is greater evidence to support the theory that the four Lokāpala evolved from an older system which was later paralleled by Vēdic literature. Both systems may have been merged by the Āryans but in Buddhist cosmology, the Four superseded the Puranic deities.[9]

Early Indian representations of the four Guardians took the appearance of Yakşas. They were bare to the waist with a dhoti-like garment reaching to the knees. There was very little ornamentation on their corpulent bodies and they were barefoot. Usually they wore a turban-like headdress and long earrings. Despite the diverse peoples over whom they ruled, the Kings were all depicted as Yakşas. This

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[7] L. A. Waddell, The Buddhism of Tibet (London: W. H. Allen & co., Ltd., 1895), p. 84.

[8] Ibid., p. 447.

[9] Banerjea, pp. 519-529.

indicates, perhaps, some prominence of the Yaksas over the other semi-divine peoples. Kuberā, as King of Yakṣas, thus has a pre-eminent position over the other Lokāpala. This fact has important implications for the iconography which developed outside India and will be discussed later.

Brahmanical writings mention the Yakṣas both out of fear and respect.[10] They are referred to as "other People" in the Vēdas[11] and this points to their non-Āryan origins. The Arthārvā-Vēda was first to mention Kuberā as King of Yakṣas and he first appeared in Buddhist art as Guardian of the North at Bhārhut Stupa. Whereas Kuberā has a Yakṣas vahāna here, the other Lokāpala were given vahāna appropriate to their identification with their subjects.

It can, therefore, be seen that in India, the formal religion derived from the Vēdas coalesced with folk religion through the Maharajas. Similarly, Buddhism joined forces with other Asian folk religions as it spread across the continent. The deities ruled by these Maharajas were feared and regularly propitiated by Eastern peoples. This practice continues today throughout most of Asia, even in the predominantly Buddhist countries. The practices are not viewed in opposition to Buddhism but are embraced by it. The indigenous deities have become regarded as in the service of Buddha much the same as Indrā's role was sanctioned.

The Lokāpala's formal role in Buddhism is based upon their legendary presence at every important event in the life of Siddhārtā Gautāmā, the Buddha, and at his Parinirvāna. The four gods visited

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[10]Ibid., p. 98, n.18.

[11]Ibid., p. 338.

Gautama in Tusita Heaven while he was waiting for his time to come. They were present at his incarnation and received him on the skin of a spotted tiger when he was born from the side of his earthly mother, Maya. When Gautama forsook the life of luxury into which he was born, the Lokāpala held up the hoofs of the horse, Kanthaka, so that the secret departure would not be detected.[12] Later, at the time Gautama broke his fast just prior to his Enlightenment, the four gods presented him their begging bowls which he transformed into the one bowl now associated with his iconography.

In the Chinese translation of the Sāmyuktagāma, the dying Buddha summoned Indra and the four Lokāpala to his couch and gave each an equal share in the defense of the church in evil times to come. In the Sutra on Four Celestial Monarchs, translated into Chinese in the fifth century A.D., the Lokāpala are part of a worked out law enforcement system headed by Indrā in his heaven. On six days of each month, which are therefore designated as fast days, inspection trips are made to examine the conduct of the living and reports are made back to Indrā. The good are rewarded by the guardian spirits who watch over the welfare of each person. They are called Keepers of Destinies.[13] There is no evidence that this later elaboration was part of the Tibetan worship of the guardians but it does represent the extent to which Buddhism went to sanction the role of the Lokāpala. There is also recognition, on the part of the Buddhists, of the relationship between the Lokāpala and the deities of the soil

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[12] Getty, p. 166.

[13] Alexander C. Soper, Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China. (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae Pub., 1959. p. 232.

who correspond to the "guardian spirits who watch over the welfare of each person", as quoted above.

In Tibet, the indigenous deities corresponding to the Indian Nāgās and Yakṣas have kept the role of these earth deities very prominent within Lamaism. The Khumbhandrās and Gandhārvas are not earth deities and have no counterpart in the Himalayas. Their role in Lamaism, consequently, is not important.

The gradual absorption of similar attributes from deities of different cultures has made these guardians and their subjects very complex. The iconographical manifestations of the compounded characteristics absorbed by one deity (or the set of them) creates many problems for the art historian. This is especially true when some of these characteristics are not sanctioned in literature but only appear visually.

> As soon as a deity takes a preeminent place over others of the same cycle, it assumes their names, virtues and qualities; its original character is thus enriched with new elements, becomes more and more complex, is transfigured. The same process took place with Vaiśrāvana.[14]

In the Indian tradition, Vaiśrāvana deserted his father to serve Brahman and, to appease his angry father, gave him three beautiful Raksasi for wives. Vaiśrāvana then reigned in Lanka from whence he was expelled by the son of his father and one of the Rakṣasi. Brahman rewarded Vaiśrāvana's devotion by making him King of Yakṣas, gave him power over treasures and conferred upon him the office of Lokāpala.[15] Vaiśrāvana was therefore identical to Kubera.

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[14] Guiseppi Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls (Roma: La Libreria Dello Stato, 1964) p. 571.

[15] Ibid., p. 571.

It is common in India for each deity to have several names and iconographical forms to depict different aspects of his personality. The Kuberā form of the compound deity Kubera-Vaśiravana had preeminence in the Sādhnamālā, the iconographical text of Indian Buddhists. Vaiśrāvana was regarded as an acolyte and had no independent existence of his own. This would be considered as a case of assimilation between parallel deities, Kuberā and Vaiśrāvana, or a double form of the same deity.

However, besides this problem of convergence, there is, according to Guiseppi Tucci, in Tibetan Painted Scrolls, a problem of the opposite process of dissimilation. These two may have been one deity originally but later they became independent figures. In the tradition of the Northern Buddhists of Tibet, they are regarded as two deities with two distinct functions. This might have occurred because the Tibetans had a pre-Buddhist God of Wealth, Nor lha who was associated with the Kubera aspect of the Indian deity. Vaiśrāvana's role as Lokāpala absorbed the characteristics of Gesor, the King of the North. The Tibetans call Kuberā 'Lus gnan and Vaisravana is 'rNam tos sras.[16]

The Lokāpala iconography with which we are confronted in Tibet and Bhutan does not have Indian prototypes. The non-Indian origins for their iconography grew out of the associations made by the peoples of Central Asia and Tibet. Because the Lokāpala are defenders, their active character became prominent. In ancient Buddhism, they were faithful followers of the Buddha. Gradually a more war-like character was added to their primitive one.[17] This war-like iconography

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[16]Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons of Tibet (London: Oxford University Press, 1956) p. 68.

[17]Tucci, p. 572.

which Vaiśrāvana assumes, does not occur, therefore, simply as an amplification of his early Buddhist role as defender of the faith. It is rather because he makes contact with other mythical types, from the indigenous traditions, which transform him into a god of war.

Vaiśrāvana's identity with Gesor may explain his compounded function as Lord of Horses. The Lokāpala is often shown on horseback, dressed as a warrior. In some forms he is accompanied by eight Lords of Horses[18] and has led further to his role as King of Kinnara, horse-headed people.[19] The Tibetans regard the subjects of Vaiśrāvana as horse-faced.[20] Horse-riding peoples have overrun Tibet from the north on several occasions and they are generally identified as Turks.[21] An identification of these peoples with the Sassanians is possible from the style of Vaiśrāvana's crown, cuirass and armor, in some representations of the god.

Armor became a necessary part of the warrior iconography adopted for Vaiśrāvana, and it is worn over the dhoti-like garment associated with the Yakṣa iconography of India. The dhoti is also appropriate for heavenly beings, generally. The source for the warrior-type is probably around the area of Tun-huang. The guardian deity in Figure 1 dates from T'ang China and illustrates the warrior iconography of Central Asia. He is dressed in a thigh-length leather coat which can be regarded as the early armor of this area.[22]

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[18]Nebesky-Mojkowitz, pp. 68-69.

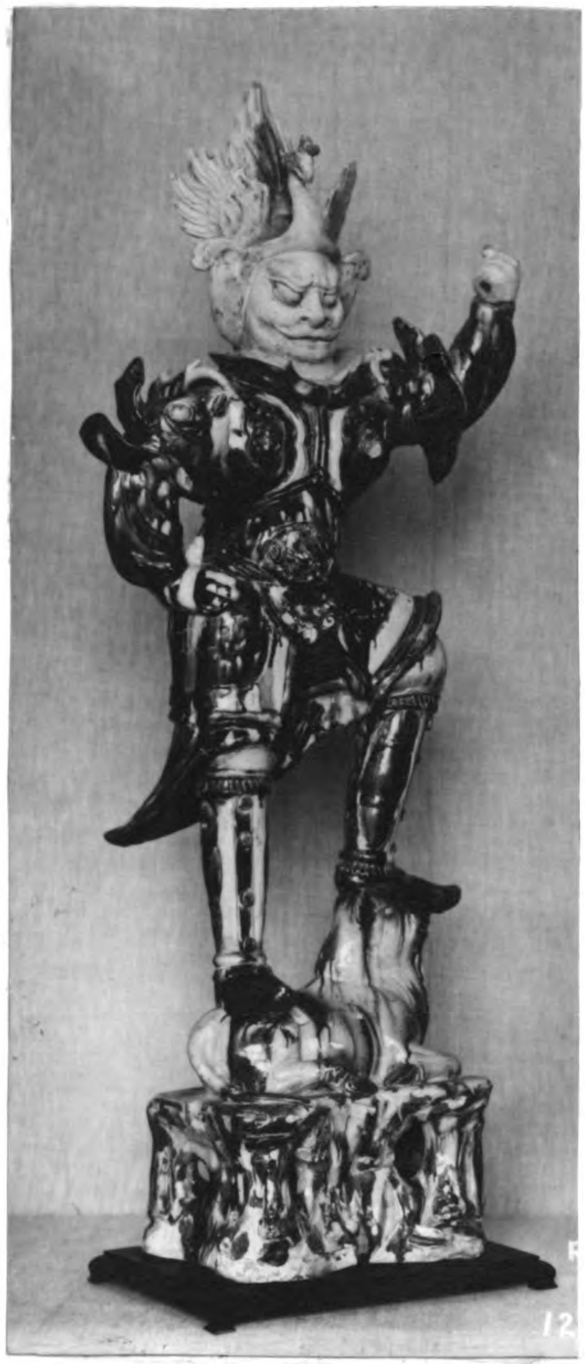
[19]Getty, P. 156.

[20]Waddell, p. 412.

[21]Tucci, p. 574.

[22]Publications of Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Series XIII (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1913-1914), p. 300.

Figure I



T'ang Tomb Guardians
China

Tibetan armor was slightly different as it was constructed of strips of leather fastened together to form a coat of mail. Metal plates were attached to the armor, of both Tun-huang and the Tibetans, for greater protection at vital spots. The discs can be seen in the illustrations on the breast of the guardian. They are called me-long (literally, "mirror") by the Tibetans. There were originally four: one on the back, one over the heart and one on both sides near the armpits.[23]

The Tibetans were active around the site of the Tun-huang caves from 777-848 A.D. Tibetan histories and copies of Tibetan translations from Sanskrit texts have been found there.[24] After this period, the Central Asian forms may have entered Tibet through China or through direct contact with the sites. Bhutan received Buddhism, in the form of well-developed Lamaism, in the late fifteenth century and acquired the vast artistic traditions of the Tibetans.

Besides the warrior iconography, the cave-sites established new precedents for placing the images within the sanctuary. In India, the Buddhist Lokāpala stood guard precisely as the Hindu guardians had done. They watched the four entrances or the four cardinal directions.[25] At Tun-huang, in a late fifth century cave, they are placed on four sides of the main cult image, guarding it from the four directions. The Tibetans do not follow this placement but adopted the procedure at Rowak in Khotan.[26] The guardians at this site are

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[23]Letter from Turrel C. Wylie, University of Washington, 1969

[24]Deitrick Seckel The Art of Buddhism (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1963) Trans. from German by Ann Kelp., p. 70.

[25]Zimmer, p. 47.

[26]Ibid., p. 49

placed on either side of the main entrance to the monastery.[27] Bhutan follows the Tibetan placement.

The Lokāpala in Figure 2 are to be found in the vestibule of Paro Dzong in Bhutan. The full armor of the T'ang guardians has been modified but the thigh-length coat is discernible. The breast plates and the abdomen guard are but decorative designs. This stylization has become a convention for depicting the Lokāpala armor and can be found throughout the Himālayan states.

In Tibet, not only did Vaiśrāvana's function take on broader significance but there was also a subtle shift in his domain. There is less reference to the northern slopes of Mount Sumeru and more reference to the northern directions as such. The Indians regarded the Himālayas as the site of Sumeru, in some general sense but did not limit it to Vaiśrāvana's domain. The shift was natural for the Tibetans once they identified Vaiśrāvana with Gesor. The Bhutanese place the god's domain on Kula Kangri, a prominent summit on their northern frontier.[28]

Guiseppi Tucci, according to his theory attempts to establish a clear division between Vaiśrāvana and Kuberā using their iconography as his basis. He describes Kuberā as the God of Wealth, the Indian Pluto, who lives in a house of great splendor. Kuberā also functions as Dhānāda, the dispenser of riches and Nidhipāti, who guards treasures and helps his devotees to find them. Vaiśrāvana is limited to the Lokāpala function which includes the King of Yakṣas and chief of the Yakṣa army.

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[27] Waddell, p. 290.

[28] P. P. Karan Bhutan (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967) p. 27.

Figure 2

Vestibule Lokāpala
Paro Dzong, Bhutan

Under Tucci's schematization, Kuberā would always follow the Pluto form which is much like the Yakṣa iconography of India. He would be half-naked with a lance, money bag or mongoose or lemon or gem. In some forms he might also have a sword or club.[29] Vaiśrāvana, on the other hand, would have the warrior iconography and carry a banner adorned with the wish-granting jewel. This gem is especially associated with those protectors of religion who are believed to be owners of treasures. It is called the "Jewel fulfilling the nine kinds of wishes."[30]

Due to the use of the wish-granting jewel, Vaiśrāvana takes on connotations which Tucci would reserve for Kuberā. The problem of separating the two is further hampered by the association of the mongoose with Vaiśrāvana. It appears in the Rin'byung, the Tibetan text on iconography, as an appropriate symbol for the Lokāpala in most of his forms. There is, therefore, an extent to which the two are regarded as separate deities and their iconography reflects this independence. But the distinction must not be carried too far, in the case of either deity, because he never completely escapes associations with his counterpart.

For instance, Kuberā is honored by the Tibetans at the Feast to all Gods (Ch'ag-chi-du).[31] None of the other Lokāpala are so honored and the conclusion is that Kuberā here has ritual separation. However, the distinction between the two forms is obscured in Bhutanese iconography. Figure 3 is a detail from a

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[29]Tucci, p. 573.

[30]Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 15, 19.

[31]Waddell, p. 412.

Figure 3

Vaiśrāvana
Paro Dzong, Bhutan

Figure 4

Kuberā
Paro Dzong, Bhutan

fresco illustrating a cosmic mandala. Vaiśrāvana is located in the lower right corner, where he is often placed in Tibetan tankhas. He is clearly functioning as a Lokāpala because he is paired with Virupākṣa who appears on the other side of the mandāla. Vaiśrāvana wears but scant flowing garments, is bare to the waist and wears an ornate crown and garland fit for the God of Wealth, according to Tucci. He also carries no banner but may have a mongoose on his lap.

There are also times when the God of Wealth appears more like a guardian than like a Yakṣa. In Figure 4, the deity pictured looks more like a warrior and would be identified as Vaiśrāvana without any problem. As was mentioned earlier, the Lokapala are all located at the doorway to the monastery, inside a vestibule. This fresco is to be found on an outside veranda where important deities are represented. None of the Lokāpala are so honored independently except the ambiguous Kubera-Vaiśrāvana. The God of Wealth here can only be distinguished from the vestibule Lokāpala (Figure 2) by the elaboration of his garments. See Figures 5, 6, and 7.

It is not possible to make clear distinctions about the division of functions which Tucci mentions above. He attempts to separate the role of Yakṣa King from that of guardian and dispenser of wealth. This demarcation is shown to be impossible in the use of the Nan-ga pa-ni rosary which is proper only for the worship of Viaśrāvana. The rosary consists of glossy, jet black nuts which are emblematic of the eyes of the Gàruda, the great enemy of snakes. The Sanskrit name for these nuts is derived from Nāgā (serpent).

> Its use in the worship of Vaiśrāvana follows the association of snakes as the mythical guardians of treasures. Thus linking them up with wealth.[32]

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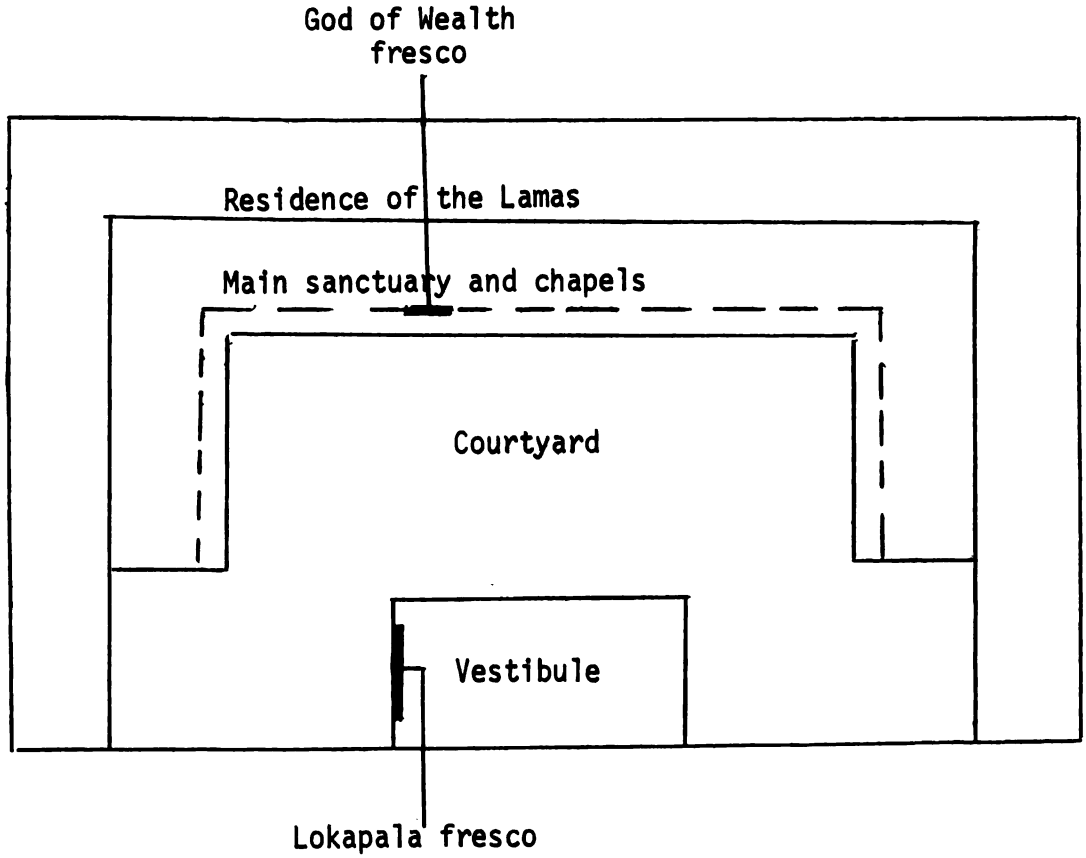
[32] Ibid., p. 209.

Figure 5



Floorplan
Bhutanese Dzong
(according to P. P. Karan)

Figure 6

Paro Dzong
Bhutan

Figure 7

Courtyard
Paro Dzong
Bhutan

The association of the Nāgās with wealth implies that Vaiśrāvana has some authority over the domain of Virupākṣa. According to Pānacarākṣa literature, Vaiśrāvana has preeminence over all the other Lokāpala. In some mandalas of Vaiśrāvana, the King and Queen of Nāgās pay homage to him.

The reason for this subtle shifting of deities may be due, in part, to the absorption of some indigenous deities into the ranks of other similar deities. In the pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet, Bon, the earth deities, Sa bdag (Bhutan: shibdag), corresponded to the Yakṣas of India. They made their homes in four kinds of earth and were bound to the soil over which they resided. Every inch of soil fell in the domain of one of these deities and all men were, as they result, subject to the Sa bdag in whose territory he resided. The earth deities could be good or bad but were the latter only if offended or if a mistake occurred in liturgy. Another class of earth deities, the gNam (Bhutan: ts'en), resided in stones and trees making them correspond to the Nāgās of India who dwelt under trees. The gNam were known as the "kings and queens of diseases" and were essentially harmful by nature.[33]

After Buddhism came to Tibet, in the eighth century A.D., some Sa bdag were absorbed into the ranks of gNam i.e., the counterpart of the Yakṣas was merged with that of the Nāgās. Hence, the association of Vaiśrāvana with Nagas in practice and iconography.

Vaiśrāvana accepted many Yakṣas, and consequently many Tibetan Sa bdag. An important member of this class of earth deities is the rTa bdag of the northwest, Pancikā. Sometimes he is depicted as a

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[33]Tucci, pp. 721-722.

a warrior with a kind of armor, a lance and a bird in his hands. Usually he wears a jeweled turban, a necklace and bracelets; he is bare to the waist with a dhoti covering his legs.[34] In the lower left corner of Figure 4, Pancikā is shown as an attendant of Kuberā. It is not possible to apply Tucci's distinctions and separate the acolytes of Vaiśrāvana and Kuberā. The dhoti, untonsured hair and large eyes indicate that this is a Yakṣa and the Tibetans adopted Yakṣa iconography for the Sa bdag. To indicate Tibetan origin, a turban was added to the figures. Figure 3 pictures Pancikā on the right of Vaiśrāvana and his unusual face may be an attempt to show him as a horse-faced acolyte. Several conventions have been merged in this Figure and the impossibility of applying Tucci's formula should be apparent.

Some Sa bdag were also absorbed into the ranks of the bTsan, the mountain gods who are regarded as the ancestors and patrons of the people living in their area. The bTsan were considered members of the gNam class where they are the most prominent and harmful members.[35] The cult of the mountain gods regards the mountains peaks themselves as lords of certain geographical locations.[36] All these earth deities are regularly propitiated by the Himalayan peoples. Annual horoscopes are issued each year by special Lamas and contain information on the most advantageous activities and directions according to the Lokapala and their subjects.

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[34]Getty, pp. 157-158.

[35]Tucci, p. 723.

[36]P. P. Karan and William M. Jenkins, Jr., The Himalayan Kingdoms: Bhutan, Sikkim, and Nepal (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co. Inc., 1963) p. 16.

As stated above, Vaiśrāvana is associated with mountain peaks and the same is true for Kuberā. In Bhutan, Kubera is identified with Kula Kangri. A mountain peak, with its summit often hidden by a cloud, is commonly pictured in the representations of these gods. (See Figures 3 and 4). Lokāpala are often shown in the beautiful landscapes of alpine meadows full of flowers and surrounded by beautiful trees. Such serene scenes are generally regarded as the abode of peaceful deities.[37] The Lokāpala have a certain fierceness due to their role as defenders, but within the framework of the wrathful Buddhist divinities, the guardians are relatively benign in appearance. (See Figure 2).

The mountain gods cult has its roots in Bön. The cosmology of this religion included four custodians of the great mountains which acted as the poles for the cosmic tent. In nuptial songs of an early period, the mountains are identified as a white lioness with a turquoise mane, a royal wild bird, a pie-bald tiger and a fish with golden eyes. Under the influence of Chinese astrology, these were changed to a tiger, dragon, bird and tortoise.[38] The Lokāpala do not generally indicate an iconographic influence from this tradition. Only Vaiśrāvana and Kubera are associated with their corresponding animal from the north, a white tiger with a green mane (See Figures 8 and 9).

Vaiśrāvana's color is usually yellow, "like the pure gold of the sun."[39] This color was assigned to him with reference to golden treasures. Sometimes, however, he will be shown green, which is

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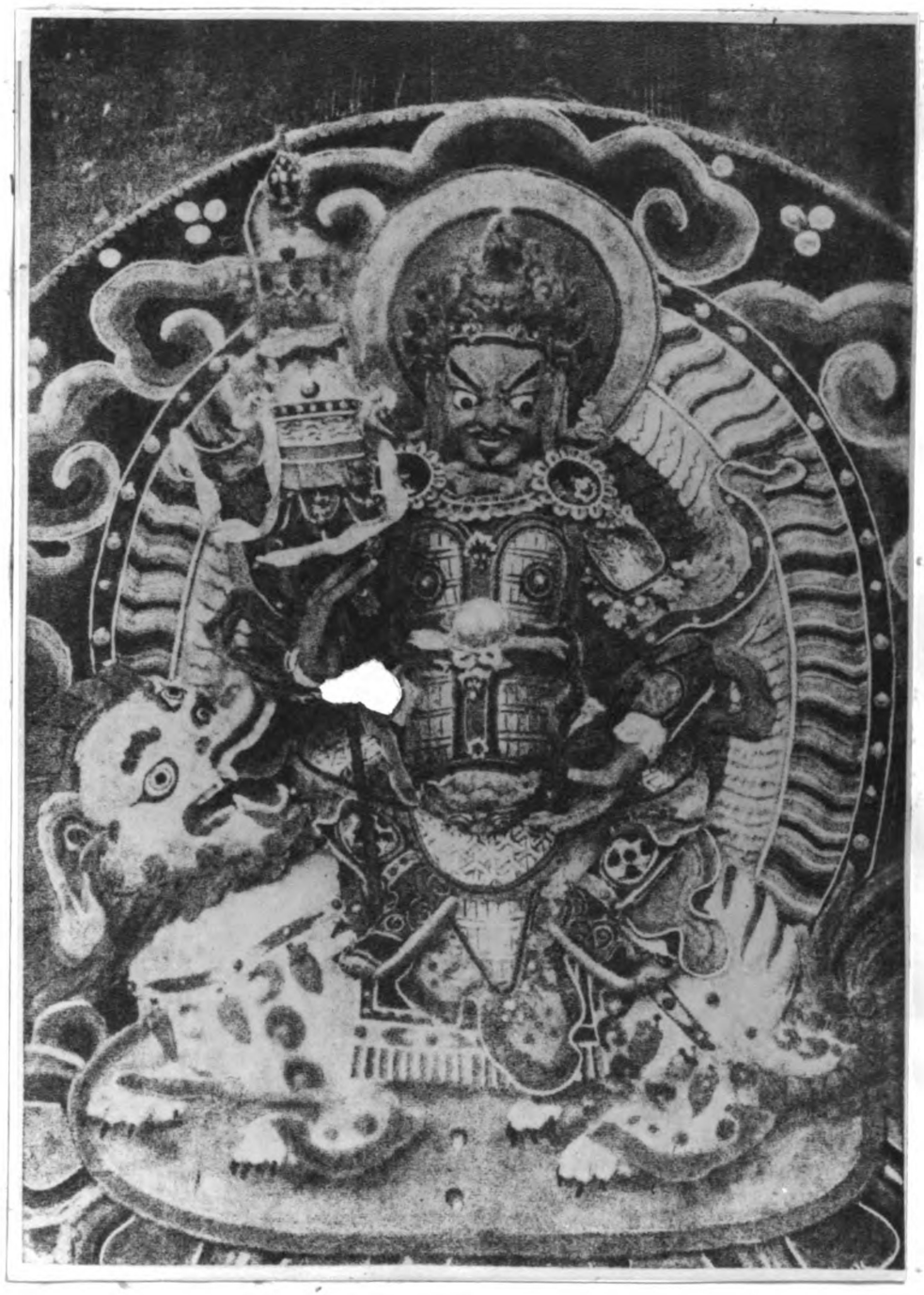
[37]Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 20.

[38]Tucci, p. 719.

[39]Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 68.

Figure 8



Kuberā
Festival of the Butter Gods
Choni Mountains, China

Figure 9

Vaiśrāvana
Bhutan

the color for the Lokāpala of the south. In the Buddhist system of directional Buddhas, the directional color of the south is yellow and of the north is green. This association would have been stronger for the peoples of India where the scheme originated. In regard to the Lokāpala, the Northern Buddhists continued their traditional associations and used yellow for Vaiśrāvana. (See Figure 10)

The close associations of Lokāpala with the powerful, semi-divine earth deities of the indigenous Northern traditions has made these guardians more prominent members of the Buddhist pantheon than they were in India. The cultural modifications which gradually occurred strengthened their roles in Buddhist cosmology. In India, their iconography was not supported by textual evidence. The Sādhāmālā contained detailed instructions for the various forms of most other deities while the elevated position of the Lokāpala in the Himālayas really amounted to official recognition of the importance of Vaiśrāvana's subjects in the lives of the people. The other Lokāpala probably acquired esteem through their association with the God of the North.

The specific duties of the Lokāpala in the Buddhist pantheon are important for the Lama but probably not for the masses. The populace worships them merely to obtain good luck and avert calamities. The Lokāpala must always be considered in their dual roles, held simultaneously, as popular gods and as Buddhist Lokāpala. For Vaiśrāvana, the dual role is complicated by his own complex nature as Kuberā and Vaiśrāvana. The two must be regarded as only different aspects of one deity, despite their independent roles in many rituals. It will be shown in the next chapter that the Buddhists also separate the two gods in their schematization of the pantheon. But hasty conclusions about the separateness of their functions and iconography

oversimplifies the god's true nature. To make such assertions ignores his dual role and nullifies the very premises from which he originated.

Chapter 2

The Iconography Derived from Buddhist Traditions

The influence of popular religion shaped much of the final form of the Lokāpala iconography but some additional conventions arose from within Buddhism. The Rin'byung provides textual evidence for essentials in the depiction of only Vaiśrāvana. The other Lokāpala depend on visual conventions; and, to a certain extent, this is also true of Vaiśrāvana. These conventions were generally accepted although not textually sanctioned. Their use depended upon the artists own desires, his patrons' wishes or the precedents of his sect. Even so, some of these conventions became so widespread in use, they took on necessity for characterizing the Lokāpala involved.

The artists working in the Northern tradition were not primarily concerned with creating great works of art. Their motivation was religious devotion and not aesthetic appreciation; nor is there a correlation between the beautiful and the good in the Platonic sense. In fact, the Tibetans do not refer to beautiful art pieces. They reserve the word "beautiful" only for animate objects and refer to art as "well done."[1]

The northern tradition also embraced the visual theology found in Buddhist art generally. Compound symbols are incorporated

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[1]Marco Pallis Peaks and Lamas (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1932) Fourth Edition, p. 370.

into the works of art to express more completely the essence of that which is beyond expression. Every detail in these religious works is a symbol of one kind or another[2] and yet many of them exist only as conventions which have no textual backing.

Perhaps the most commonly used aniconic symbol is that of the lotus, the international symbol of Buddhism. It has cosmic significance and also represents the Buddha, himself, rising above the troubled world of samsārā much the same as the beautiful flower rises above the muddy waters in which it grows. Figure 4 contains a lotus depicted in many of its aspects. There are also lotus-like clouds around the summit and elsewhere within the picture. It is only conjecture, but the lotus-clouds could simultaneously represent the essence of Buddha and the supremacy of the Lokāpala and the summit identified with him. The cloud pattern in China has long been associated with heavenly forces[3] and may have influenced Tibetan artists. This cloud stylization is referred to as "Kargyu-pa clouds" and cannot be used by artists of another sect.[4] The Bhutanese Buddhists belong to the Drug-pa, a branch of the Kargyu-pa.

The residences of Indian Buddhist deities are always presented after the Chinese manner and deities of Himalayan origin are placed in Tibetan palaces. A three storied palace with curving roofs is shown in all mandalas of Vaiśrāvana. It is Alākanāti, located on the northern slopes of Mount Sumeru; the heavenly place

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[2]Deitrick Seckel The Art of Buddhism (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1963) Trans. from German by Ann Kelp, p. 281.

[3]C. K. Yang, Religion in Chinese Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) p. 129

[4]Pallis, p. 336.

where the pious go. Evidently the Buddhist doctrine expanded the Dhanānda aspect of Vaiśrāvana-Kuberā to enable the god to distribute rewards after death. According to Buddhist metaphysics, the heavenly domains on the Wheel of Transmigration provide for a rewarding rebirth. Trifling services can be acknowledged by the god but cannot remove the devotee from the rebirth cycle of samsārā. The doctrine goes hand in hand with the popular practices described in the previous chapter, especially the ritual prayer used in preparation of the Lamaist Eucharist. The Lokāpala heaven was placed on the bottom tier of an hierarchy of heavens at Sānci Stupa, first century, B.C.[5] Therefore, these Buddhist beliefs developed parallel to popular associations with the gods.

Across the bottom of all paintings of Vaiśrāvana and Kuberā, are scattered the jewels coughed up by the mongoose on the gods' left arm. In the bottom center of Figure 10, these jewels fill a large vessel. This corresponds to the ritual vessel in the bottom center of Figure 4 and they both serve as a sacrifice to the god. According to the cannon for properly depicting deities, the appropriate sacrifice must always be present. This rule is not always followed, however.

Many conventions derived from Buddhist doctrine are not uniquely applied to Vaiśrāvana. Large, bulging eyes are employed to scare away evil demons. These are not demons in the sense of the folk religion but, in Tantric idealism, they represent evil thougths and states of mind. The mākarā (crocodile) on Vaiśrāvana's boots

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[5]Alexander Soper, Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, MCMLIX), p. 232.

Figure 10

Vaiśrāvana
Thimbu Dzong
Bhutan

in Figure 4, as well as the cintāmani (flaming jewel) at his elbows in Figure 11, represent power. The mākārā is also widely used as a Buddhist symbol. In Hātha Yogā, the slow moving, tenacious makara represents breath control which is the first step in the physical control necessary for yogic medition.[6]

The sun and moon symbolism refers to the opposites which are reconciled in Enlightenment when all distinctions are eliminated and the unity of all is apprehended. Associated with Vaiśrāvana, they probably refer to the outward directed activity of the warrior reconciled with the inward activity of the yogin. The Enlightened man combines both.[7] This is, of course, only another way of expressing the unity of oppotites.

Many elements of Lokāpala iconography are derived from the ranks of the Dharmāpala. As guardians of the religion, in a more general sense, the Dharmāpala may have originated in India. However, their textually documented iconography is found in the Rin'byung of Tibetan origin. They perhaps gained more importance in Tibetan religion than they had in India or else their function may have originated in the Northern tradition. The Dharmāpala are defenders of the faith, not against outside destruction, but from that which comes from the error in one's own mind.

Whereas Vaiśrāvana is a Lokāpala, Kuberā is a Dharmāpala. There is a possibility that he may not have been assigned to those ranks from the beginning. His iconography may have been already

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[6]Agehananda Bharati, The Tantric Tradition (London: Rider & Co., 1965), p. 293

[7]L. A. Govinda, Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism. (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1960), p. 164.

Figure 11

Vaiśrāvana
Enchi Monastery
Sikkim

established and his importance in the lives of the people warranted a separate designation. As was shown earlier, efforts to separate the two gods were never successful; even though they had some ritual separation, they were always bound together in popular beliefs and in iconography.

Kuberā's iconography did not grow with the iconography of the other Dharmāpala. They are pictured naked to the waist, with the skin of some animal covering their loins, a crown of skulls and fierce expressions on their faces. They usually have three eyes and bared teeth. Art historians have designated Kuberā as the "heroic" type Dharmāpala because he is always in the "heroic" asāṇga (sitting position). The other Dharmāpala are always standing with their right knee bent and their left leg straight as if taking a large step to the right.

Kuberā does share some iconographical elements with the other Dharmāpala and these elements appear on the Lokāpala in some representations. Perhaps, the conventions transferred to the Lokāpala first entered their ranks through Vaiśrāvana's identification with Kuberā. In the Rin'byung, translated by Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, the iconography of the Dharmāpala is stated. Nebesky-Wojkowitz translated the deity in question as Vaiśrāvana, because the Tibetan word used in the text was rNam thos sras not 'Lus gnan. The other Lokāpala were given similar iconographical aspects to agree with that of the leading Lokāpala, Vaiśrāvana.

All Lokāpala are shown in the "heroic" asanga even when they are placed on a vahāna. At times, they are shown sitting on animal skins which refers to the destroyer aspect of the Dharmāpala and to the emphasis on ascetism. Destruction in this sense refers to the

destruction of the ego and of all wordly desires. Further significance was given to the animal skins in Tibetan Tantrism. They are the first step or seat for rituals and must be blessed before meditation begins.[8]

The Dharmāpala of the "heroic" type also wears high boots, usually of Mongolian origin.[9] These can often be found on Lokāpala, especially Vaiśrāvana. At other times, the Lokāpala appear in slippers similar to those worn in India. Conch shells provide much of Dharmāpala jewelry especially as earrings and as a hair ornament. They can similarly be seen on Lokāpala along with the Dharmāpala hairdo of a toupet from which the conch protrudes. (See Figures 3, 4 and 10).

It is also possible that the use of Dharmāpala iconography on the Lokāpala may have been derived from the ability of a Lokāpala to function in the capacity of a Dharmāpala. Vaiśrāvana's main function in Buddhist cosmology was limited to his position as a Guardian of the North, but it has been shown that he took on other aspects in popular religion. In meditation, he could also function in the capacity of the Dharmāpala or of any other member of the heavenly realm. This would enable him to function as a guardian in a more general sense. Of course, this change of roles is only mental. It occurs when the yogin brings the desired Lokāpala into his mind and then commands him to guard the yogin's faith. As in all Tantric practice, however, this is only a representation, with outward signs

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[8]Bharati, p. 249.

[9]Rene de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, Oracles and Demons of Tibet (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 8.

[10]Ibid., p. 13.

and images, of the particular state of mind which the yogin maintains.

Many of the Dharmāpala have a court of lords who serve them. In popular religion, the nature of the semi-divine peoples was related to their animistic origins. In the idealism of Tanrism, these acolytes or lords are but the manifold reproductions or "emanations" of the deity upon whom a yogin is meditating. They are produced by the deity's own free will, to cope with his various tasks, and can be re-absorbed into himself at any time. This is also true for Lokapala.

In mandala of Vaiśrāvana,[11] a continuous row of Yaksa type figures is pictured among the god's numerous acolytes. The presence of Yākṣās on a Buddhist mandala leaves no doubt that the two traditions have fused. Recognition is hereby provided for the prominence of the deities in the popular conception of Vaiśrāvana's domain and even offers a Buddhist reason as to why and how these deities exist there, i.e., as emanations of the god for some special task.

When meditating upon a Dharmāpala, a yogin must first

> imagine his residence and in it an open lotus, on which the vahāna--if any--of the dharmapala is resting, and finally he has to imagine the dharmapala himself, whom he creates out of the corresponding "seed syllable", in the shape described in the sadhana, together with all his chief and minor acolytes.[12]

From the mandala, it is apparent that the same process is followed with the Lokāpala. However, the use of "seed syllable" with Lokāpala must be established.

On the "fierce" type of Dharmāpala, the "seed syllable" is placed upon a me-long which hangs around his neck and rests on his

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[11]Guiseppi Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls. (Roma: La Libreria Dello Stato, MCMXLIV), Plate 177

[12]Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 20.

chest. No such iconography exists for the Lokāpala. However, it is possible to connect the practice of meditation, the "seed syllables" and the Lokāpala. Quoting from the Rin'byung, (Vol II, fo 11sb):

> On the four spokes of the wheel: in the southeast comes forth from the syllable nghri the white Yul'khar bsrung, holding a guitar and riding an elephant. In the southwest issues from the syllable be the blue "Phags skyeo po, holding a sword and riding a buffalo. In the northwest comes forth from the syllable bi the re Mig mi bzang holding a snake anare and a stupa and riding a makara. In the northeast comes forth from the syllable be the dark green Ngal bsas po, holding a club and mongoose, riding a lion. All of them wear armor and appear in an angry mood.[13]

The four Lokāpala are all present in this mantra and can be identified by the symbols they hold and by their vahānas. (See Figures 12 and 13). Mantrā Yogā relies upon these sounds to develop the meditative mood and is used in connection with other forms of meditative yogā.

In comparing the T'ang tomb guardian (Figure 1) with the images of Vaiśrāvana at Paro and Enchi, it can be seen that the me-long have been converted into "firery faces". The presence of a distinct "face" in the pubic area of these images, and also on the Choni Butter God, indicates some symbolic reference. In addition, all these images have a small head and a pair of hands in the center of the gods' crowns. The Lokāpala at Potala in Tibet also have these four "faces" indicated and placed in a similar manner upon the gods' armor and crown.

The location of these four "faces" corresponds to the four yogic centers of the Kamakāla system of yogic meditation found in Tibetan Tantrism. There is no textual evidence to support the

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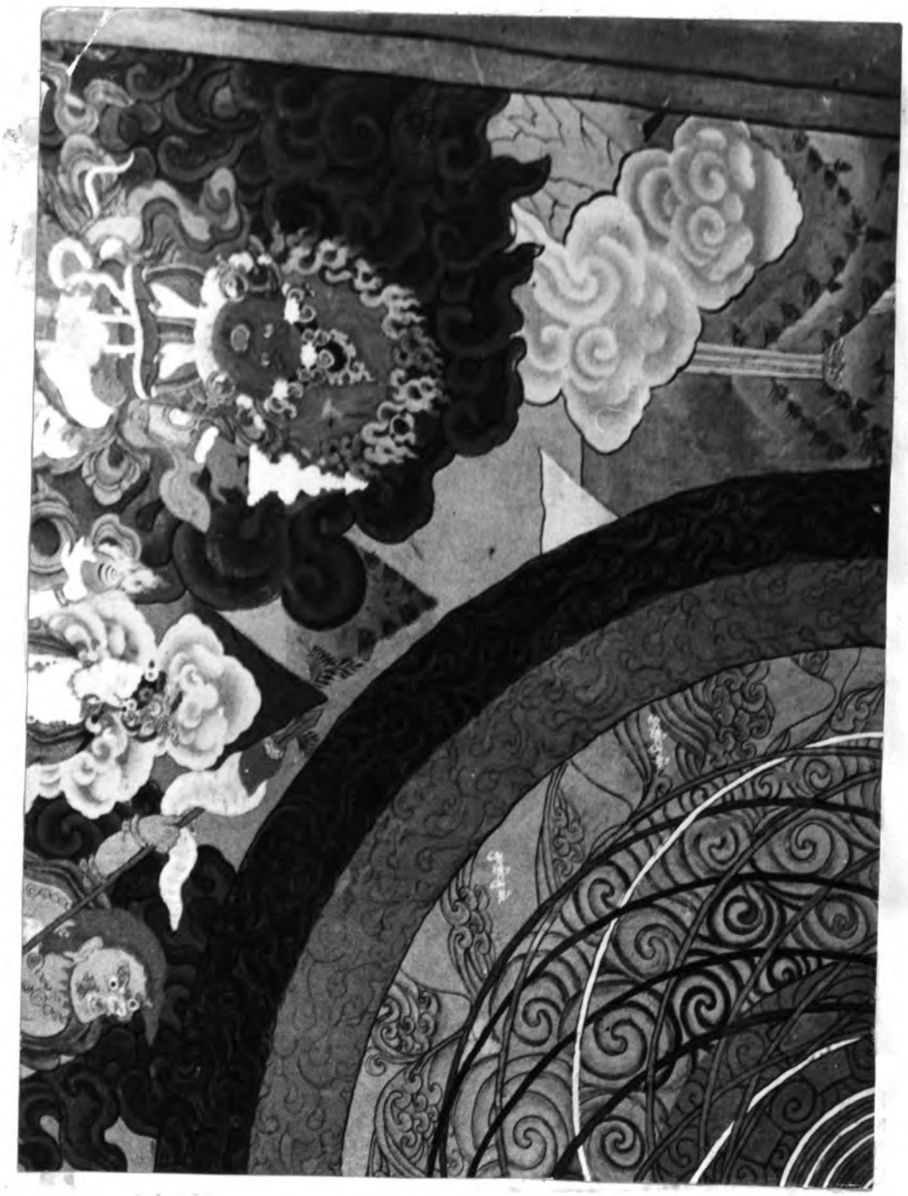
[13]Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 68.

Figure 12

Dhṛtrarāṣtra and Virudākṣa
Bhutan

Figure 13



Virupākṣa
Bhutan

proposition that yogic centers are indicated by "faces", however, each center does have a god or goddess associated with it.[14]

> In every many-sided symbolism, one main point must prevail, and the more manifold and complicated the system, the more restricted are the meanings of its single constituents.[15]

In the Kamakāla meditation, the body is regarded as the microcosm which reflects the macrocosm, the spiritual world. The body can, therefore, serve as a mandala through which the yogin can attain identity with the universe. This means that there would be complete integration of the opposites of spiritual and physical. "There is nothing in the universe which is not in the human body."[16]

> On the mandala was projected the drama of cosmic disintegration and reintegration as relived by the individual, sole contriver of his own salvation. . . . Not only is the body analogous to the universe, in the physical extent and divisions; but it also contains within itself all the Gods.[17]

Strictly speaking, such meditation is possible with any mandala, including the one mentioned earlier of Vaiśrāvana. A class of deities designated yid-dam are the tutelaries of each Lama and it is with these deities that he would seek the liberating identity. Every yid-dam is some form of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who inhabit the seventh and eighth realms of existence outside the Wheel of Transmigration. Both the Lokāpala and the Dharmāpala are within the rebirth cycle at the sixth level. Rebirth in the devālokā (heaven)

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[14]Govinda, p. 142.

[15]Ibid., p. 180

[16]Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe), The Serpent Power. (Madras: Ganesh & Co., Private Ltd., 1964), p. 50.

[17]Guiseppi Tucci, The Theory and Practice of Mandala. (London: Rider & Co., 1961), p. 108

is only a temporary state of bliss. Even the various gods from this realm cannot attain nirvāna because their heavenly existence does not allow for the experience of suffering which is a pre-requisite for release.[18] For this reason, these gods too must have a tutelary upon whom they can meditate for identification. The yid-dam for Vaiśrāvana is Vajrāpani.[19]

The use of mantrā for the worship of devātas (minor gods) is proper only for the purpose of acquisition and propitiation.[20] They are evoked through the

> mūlāmantrā (OM AH HUM) . . . (as) the matrix, and the bija (seed syllable) of any deity--especially of a minor deity that does not have its own set of established mantrās.[21]

Thus the mantra for meditation upon Vaiśrāvana would be OM ĀH VĀ HUM.

Therefore, the devatas of the sixth level could never be used as yid-dam. If such Kamakāla markings were to be meaningful, they would have to be on images of one of these deities.[22] But they never are placed on Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, probably because their iconography originated in Indian and would not have been tampered with by the Tibetans. Instead, "seed syllables" were placed on the back of tankhas in the appropriate yogic centers.[23]

There is another possible way to explain yid-dam, which seems to oppose the above position. The center of the mandala is sunyā, the Void which is everything and nothing. It is the complete inte-

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[18]Seckel, p. 242.

[19]Conversation with Thubten J. Norbu, brother of the Dalai Lama, March 11, 1969.

[20]Bharati, pp. 135, 144.

[21]Loc. Cit.

[22]Norbu

[23]

gration of opposites into a state of absolute potentiality. The personification of sunyā is the Ādi Buddha and all that is, emanates from him. The direct emanations from the Ādi Buddha are called the Dhyāni Buddhas, of which there are five. In order to systematize their cosmology, the Northern Buddhists designated each deity as belonging to one of the families of these Dhyāni Buddhas. Vaiśrāvana and and Kubera emanate from the Dhyāni Buddha Vairocanā much as the Yākṣā Lords emanate from the Lokāpala. This means that Vaiśrāvana could serve as yid-dam because he is ultimately a Buddha.[24] Even one's own body contains all and is a mandala.

Obviously, these two lines of reasoning contradict one another. One states that identity is not possible with a devāta and the other that a devāta can serve as yid-dam. One explains the "faces" on the Lokāpala as a means to make him look more powerful and the other contains the possibility that "faces" mark yogic centers for Kamakāla meditation. The latter is in keeping with Vaiśrāvana's position as the center of the mandala and, therefore, as sunyā itself. The first explanation is part of physical cosmology which accepted these devātas as actual deities. The second explanation acknowledges the fundamental principle of Tibetan Buddhism, that all is sunyā and ultimately mental.

Both of these explanations serve the purpose of Lamaism. Its art is deliberately disguised from the uninitiated. But on the other hand, for the initiated, there are no wasted symbols.[25] "There is in principle nothing that is not a symbol; strictly speaking, even the

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[24]Correspondence, Turrel Wylie University of Washington, 1969

[25]Seckel, p. 281.

Buddha himself is a symbol."[26] On this basis, the evidence for the possibility that these "faces" are indeed yogic centers must be examined.

Stella Kramrisch, in The Art of Nepal, designates the "faces" appearing on the crown of Tantric images (both Hindu and Buddhist), as the "leonine face of glory" or the Kirttimurknā.[27] It represents mahāsunyā or Brāhman center when Enlightenment has been obtained. An image of the śākti Durga has a "face" in her crown. This shows a face and two hands visible. Kramrisch also identifies it as a Kirttimurkhā. The image corresponds to the one in the crown of Vaiśrāvana in Figure 4 and is of Tibetan origin. It is gci-bar, a mythological creature from ancient folk lore.[28] His image often appears in monasteries and must hold some significance within Buddhism. He represents the waters of creation and only his face and hands (sometimes with a lotus bracelet around his wrists) show beneath the clouds. The lotus also indicates adoption by Buddhism.

Gci-bar is shown in Figure 14. The sun and moon on his head are joined, indicating that Enlightenment has occurred and enhancing the possibility that the creature represents mahāsunyā. Even greater emphasis can be given this premise when the "firery faces" upon the breast are considered. In Kamakāla, the heart and throat center are combined upon the breast. They are associated with the element of fire, "fire of inspiration, psychic fire, the fire of

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[26]Seckel, p. 278

[27]Stella Kramrisch, The Art of Nepal. (The Asia Society, Ind., 1964), pp. 35, 42.

[28]Norbu

Figure 14

Gci-bar
Paro Dzong
Bhutan

religious devotion."[29] The "faces" on the breast of the deities in Figures 4 and 11 are clearly firery. When combined with the water symbolism of gci-bar, the opposing elements of fire and water represent the psychic integration of all opposites harmoniously united in the central figure.[30]

This integration begins with the rise of the Kundalina from the bundi (spot, point, which is neither extended in time or space) located in the solar plexus and the reproductive organs. Earlier, the human body was indicated as a mandala of all that exists in the universe. This yogic meditation regards the entire cosmos as arising from one source symbolized by the coiled, serpentine Kundalina. From this source, or center, the psychic energy moves up the spinal cord and eventually provides the psychic integration of yogic meditation.[31] The center of the sleeping Kundalina is also marked by a "face" on some Lokāpala images. The Choni representation leaves no doubt that the "face" rests under the god's abdomen and not on it.

There is no doubt that the three centers are very convincingly depicted on these deities. In addition, there is the brāhmarādha, "the orfice of Brāhma from beyond which is accomplished the 'leap' into the other sphere."[32] Because of this, the orthodox Hindu wears a crest-lock which is raised in honor of the Supreme Lord who is Pure Consciousness itself.[33] Could this crest-lock have any relation to

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[29]Govinda, p. 179.

[30]Peter H. Pott, "Tibet", in The Art of Burma, Korea and Tibet. (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1964), p. 230.

[31]Govinda, p. 173.

[32]Tucci, Mandala, pp. 116-117.

[33]W. Y. Evans-Wentz, The Tibetan Book of the Dead. (London: Oxford University Press, 1967) Third Edition., p. lxxii.

Vaiśrāvana's conch shell-adorned toupet?

To conclude that this evidence touches upon a fundamental aspect is tempting but premature. It is only possible to state that the use of disguised symbolism is possible. As to why such markings appear only on Lokāpala is also conjecture. It is true, however, that these guardians have no śākti (female counterpart) which deities of the higher levels have. Union of the deity in the embrace of his śākti indicates Enlightenment. Such powerful gods, as the Lokāpala were in the eyes of the people, may have led to supplying them with a female counterpart within the confines of their physical place in the pantheon. The Kamakāla meditation involves the personification of Enlightenment by mentally putting on the body of the Kundalina goddess.

> the first syss: 'of the three Bindus, O Mistress of the Devas, let him contemplate the first as the mouth and in the heart the two Bindus as the two breasts. Then let him meditate upon the subtle Kāla Hākarār-dha in the YonT (pubic organs)'. and the second days: 'The face in the form of Bindu, and below twin breasts and below them the beauteous form of the Hākarārdha.[34]

It should be noticed that the "face in the form of Bindu" above refers to the "face" seen in Vaiśrāvana's crown.

The complexities of Buddhist Tantric symbolism are therefore integrated with Buddhist doctrines. There are many levels of interpretation depending upon the degree of Enlightenment the viewer has attained. Iconographical associations, which Vaiśrāvana carries, begin at the level of the masses in popular beliefs and reach the heights of profoundity in Kamakāla meditation. Such an interpretation of the god's iconography cannot be fully documented but conclusions from the evidence cited is consistent with the artistic purposes of Lamaism.

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[34]Avalon, p. 135.

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