

Preliminary Remarks on the Buddha Sculptures of the Khaśa Kingdom in Western Nepal

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ABSTRACT: In 1994, Ian Alsop's seminal research "The Metal sculpture of the Khaśa Malla Kingdom" provided clear characteristics to define the sculptural style predominant during the 13th and 14th centuries in the Khaśa kingdom, exemplified by several sculptures of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the goddess Prajñāpāramitā and meditation deities. No sculptures of Buddha were examined in Alsop's initial study. In the course of my research on the cultural history of Dolpo to prepare *Hidden Treasures of the Himalayas, Tibetan Manuscripts, Paintings and Sculptures of Dolpo*, subsequent research has yielded sculptures in stone still in-situ in the Karnali basin in western Nepal (the former Khaśa territory) as well as cast sculptures of the Buddha and a lama which share the distinctive aesthetic features Alsop identified as typical of Khaśa workmanship. Some were commissions for patrons in Dolpo, where they eventually graced the altars of both Buddhist and Bonpo monasteries, some were for unidentified patrons in Tibet and Nepal during 13th-14th century. The final example is a 21st century cast sculpture of the Buddha made in the Khaśa style in Kathmandu.

In 1994, Ian Alsop's seminal research "The Metal sculpture of the Khaśa Malla Kingdom" provided clear characteristics to define the sculptural style predominant during the 13th and 14th centuries in the Khaśa kingdom of western Nepal.¹ Alsop's research studied a cohort of

1 See Alsop 1994.

relatively small scale sculptures (5.5 to 25cm), cast in gilt copper or silver notably introducing aesthetic and iconographic features of Pāla India (due to the Khaśa forays in Bodhgayā mid-13th century) in the representations of deities typically venerated in Tibetan Buddhist traditions.² Often inscribed on the base in Sanskrit written in Devanāgarī letters, Alsop's readings of these Sanskrit inscriptions identified several sculptures of specific iconographic aspects of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the goddess Prajñāpāramitā and meditation deities. No sculptures of Buddha were examined in Alsop's initial study. In the course of my research on the cultural history of Dolpo to prepare *Hidden Treasures of the Himalayas, Tibetan Manuscripts, Paintings and Sculptures of Dolpo*, subsequent research has yielded wood and metal Khaśa sculptures of the Buddha, of a monk and Shen rab mi bo, founder of the Bon religion, which were commissioned for monasteries in Dolpo,³ as well as antecedents which are stone sculptures still in-situ in the Karnali basin in western Nepal (the former Khaśa territory) which we will examine here.⁴ Some of these stone sculptures were first studied by Prayag Raj Sharma and Marc Gaborieau in the pioneering study in 1972, *Preliminary Study of the Art and Architecture of the Karnali Basin, Western Nepal*. At the time I presented my lecture on this topic in the 2012 Beijing conference on Tibetan Art and Archaeology, Dilli Raj Sharma published an anthology of his research, *Heritage of Western Nepal Art and Architecture*, under the auspices of the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribuvan University, Kathmandu. I am grateful to him for authorization to reproduce here some of his photographs as well as to Pamela Ross for the opportunity to study her photographs of the fragmentary stone remains of the Kankrevihar monastery in the Surkhet district. Due to unforeseen reasons, the 2012 proceedings volume was never published, thus this research, revised to reflect recent discoveries, was presented at the 2018 ICTAA in Chengdu.

To determine the aesthetic and chronological context of the Buddha sculptures of the Khaśa kingdom, as a first comparative example we may examine this wooden bookcover (Fig. 1) which was used for a volume of the Prajñāpāramitā, now conserved in the Gnas gsar temple library in the village of Bicher, Dolpo. There is a carved Śākyamuni Buddha (H.18cm) at the center of the bookcover; he is represented wearing monastic robes, in the bhumisparśa gesture, seated above a lotus cushion positioned on a simple throne, graced with a small cloth. The Buddha has distinctive hefty appearance, with broad shoulders and a thick waist; his square face has a rather low forehead. As we will see, the massive body proportions are characteristic of the Khaśa

2 Ian Alsop has further studied the Khaśa sculptures. See Alsop forthcoming.

3 Heller 2009: 72-73, 221.

4 The present article reflects my presentation at ICTAA5 (Beijing, 2012), in Sichuan University at the Center for Tibetan Studies during my classes as visiting professor, adapted from my presentation at the Buddhist Sculpture seminar at the Victoria and Albert Museum in November 2010, organized by John Clarke with the support of the Robert N. Ho Foundation.



Fig. 1 Bookcover, wood, Śākyamuni surrounded by carved mantra in Lantsa script, Gnäs gsar temple, approximately 70 × 25 cm. ca. 1340 (Photo: Maya Klat).

sculptures of the Buddha as is the small uṣṇīṣa with a jewel finial, although in the Buddha on the bookcover, the finial above the perfectly spherical uṣṇīṣa is not visible on the photograph. The Buddha is surrounded by two lines of letters of Sanskrit mantra in Lantsa script (Fig. 1). The inscription is read left to right, and in the following transcription, the (B) stands for the image of the Buddha at center.

- 1) Om Muni Muni Maha (B) Muni Śākya Muni
- 2) Ye Svaha. Om Mani (B) Padme Hum. Mangalam.⁵

The local historical documents of this monastery record that the Khaśa sovereign Bsod nams lde (r. 1328-1340) presented many manuscripts to this village temple because he was an admirer and patron of the Gnäs gsar lama, the eleventh abbot, Mkhan po 'Jam dbyangs. His support indicates that Dolpo had close ties with the Khaśa kingdom during his lifetime, thus it is quite likely that this bookcover was carved in the Karnali basin and presented to the temple shortly thereafter.⁶ In the same village temple, an enthroned gilt-copper statue of Śākyamuni Buddha was dedicated ca. 1340, the chronology is clear due to the inscription incised on the base naming the donor who commissioned the sculpture just after the reign of Bsod nams lde (Fig. 2). The height of the Buddha is approximately 25cm, with the total height including base and throne measuring 49.5cm. The tiered throne is on a classical model with Nepalese garuḍa at the apex flanked by two dynamically rendered nāga, positioned above the curving tails of two makara. The Buddha is surrounded by typical throne guardians (vyāla standing above elephant), the base of the throne has lions and elephants flanking the triple jewel emblem at center.⁷ The dedication inscription reads:

⁵ I thank Ian Alsop for this reading of the Lantsa inscriptions.

⁶ Heller 2009: 67.

⁷ Heller 2009: Figs. 45-46.



Fig. 2 Enthroned Buddha dedicated to the Gnas gsar temple, H. 49.5cm, gilt copper with pigments, ca.1340, Pritzker Collection (Photo: Hughes Dubois).



Fig. 3 Shen rab mi bo, H. 29.7cm, gilt copper with pigments, late 13th century, Pritzker Collection (Photo: Hughes Dubois).

Bi cer kyi gnas gsar tsug lag khang du slob dpon bsod nam rin 'bul/Mangalam
 Blessings, the teacher Bsod nam rin (recte: rin chen) presented this to the Gnassar Temple in Bicher.⁸

A gilt-copper alloy Bonpo statue (Fig. 3), formerly photographed on the altar of Dolpo's

⁸ Slob dpon Bsod nam rin chen is described as donor in a Gnassar manuscript dated by colophon to the reign of Pritivimalla, son of Bsod nam lde. Therefore the statue was commissioned either towards the end of the reign of Bsod nam lde (ca. 1330-1340) or during the reign of Pritivimalla (ca. 1340-1358).

Samling Monastery, could be taken for a “close cousin” of the Gnas gsar Śākyamuni, so close are they in overall body proportions and in distinctive design details and draping of the robes.⁹ In the case of the Bonpo statue, however, the subject depicted is Shen rab mi bo, legendary founder of the Bonpo school, whose iconography can sometimes be identical to Śākyamuni. With the exception of a few details, such as the turquoise in the center of the Bonpo sculpture's chest, and the ornaments in its lower earlobes, the two statues are very similar. Both have square faces, with eyebrows delineated by a single line across the brow, wide eyes that dip at the corners, a raised ūṛṇa, and a high narrow nose, but the Bonpo statue has a fuller face and his ūṛṇa is a turquoise in the center of his forehead. Their bodies are similarly proportioned, with massive, broad shoulders and heavy legs, and similar height: 29.7cm for the Bonpo statue and 25cm for the Buddha without the throne and prabha.

Additionally, they share many common features in the rendering of their robes, such as the splayed pleats between the legs falling to the lotus-petal base, the fish-tail drape of the shoulder folds¹⁰ and the rice-grain patterns interspersed with circles on the hems. The two statues could appear to be roughly contemporary, however the face of the Bonpo sculpture is much fuller, and the spherical uṣṇīṣa is more broad. Unfortunately, the Bonpo statue has no inscription to further document its donor or provenance, but the curious ear lappets-cum-earrings are well known from one of the most important Buddhist relics of Nepal, a cast gilt copper alloy figure of a Buddha attributed by Hagemüller to the 12th century and considered to be of Nepalese workmanship, now in the Patan Museum in the Kathmandu valley (Fig. 4).¹¹ This sculpture of the Buddha in Patan Museum shares the same square hairline and jewel finial atop the semi-spherical uṣṇīṣa, the rice-grain engraved pattern on the edge of the monastic robe, as well as the massive body proportion (albeit with more rounded, less broad shoulders) of the Shen rab in the Pritzker Collection. The full, sensuous lips of the Patan Museum Buddha recall Gupta antecedents. Placed in a comparative context with the Gnas gsar Buddha made under Khaśa patronage ca.1340, both the Bonpo statue and the Patan Museum Buddha are most probably to be understood as reflecting slightly earlier Khaśa workmanship: the Bonpo statue to be dated to the late 13th century to early 14th century, and the Patan Museum Buddha ca. late 12th to 13th century.

We may identify the enthroned Śākyamuni Buddha made for the Gnas gsar lama as a Khaśa Buddha because the patron named in the inscription at the base of the sculpture, slob

9 Karmay and Watt 2007: Fig. 8; Heller 2009: Figs. 47, 48.

10 J. Siudmak has discussed the “fishtail” flap on the shoulder as characteristic of the merging of the Pāla stylistic features, which would also be the case in these Khaśa Buddha. See p. 45 in J. Siudmak, “The development of the Classical Buddha Image from Kashmir and Some Observations on Kashmirian Influence of the Sculpture of western Tibet.” *Oriental Art*, Vol.46, no.2, 2000: 36-46.

11 Hagemüller 2003: 94.



Fig. 4 Buddha Śākyamuni, H. 48cm, gilt copper with pigment, hollow cast, ca.12th-13th century, Patan Museum, Kathmandu (Photo: Rupert Steiner).

dpon Bson nams rin chen is known to have lived during the reign of Pritivimalla, just after Bsod nams lde's patronage of Gnas gsar temple while he was ruler of Khaśa. This historic attribution is supported by the aesthetic qualities of the statue such as the preference for gilt-copper alloy, an emphasis on the articulations of both hands and feet, and a distinctive amalgamation of Tibetan and Nepalese stylistic features that characterize Khaśa statues. The facial features of



Fig. 5 Buddha of the Sauna Karki pillar, stone, H. ca. 40cm, 1250-1280, Padukestan, Dullu (After D.R. Sharma 2012: 74, Plate 15b)

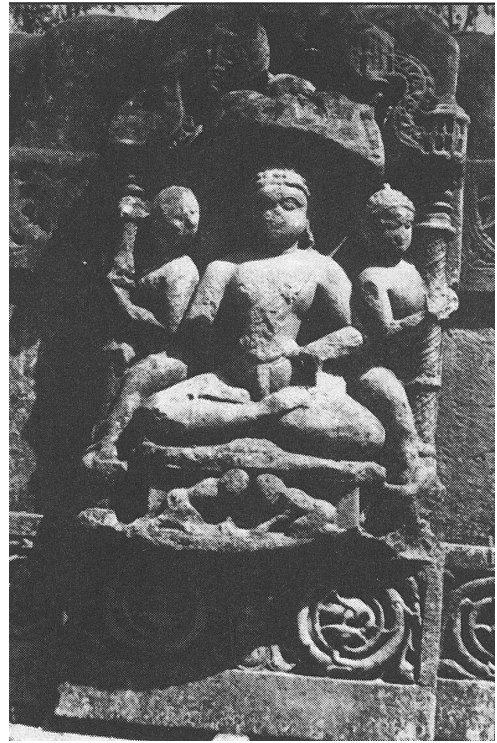


Fig. 6 The Buddha Miracle at Sravasti, stone, H. ca. 40cm, late 13th century, Kankrevihar (After D. R. Sharma 2012: 134, Plate 33b)

these Buddhas reflect a pure Nepalese aesthetic, as does the toraṇa of the Nesar Buddha, with its Nepalese-style crowned garuḍa with tiny extended hands inside widespread wings. Yet there is a dynamic activity to the whole toraṇa that is not typical of the peaceful Nepalese Buddha inside a hieratic throne. The strong, lithe bodies of the two nāgas clasp the garuḍa's claws as they strive to keep him in place, placing one foot over his belly as they leap over the scrollwork emerging from the tail of the gaping makara. In the lateral struts of the toraṇa, the elephant throws back his head and raises a foot while the vyāla rears up on its hind legs.

The gilt copper enthroned Śākyamuni Buddha dedicated to Gnas gsar and the Buddha of the carved wooden book cover thus provide clues to understand the aesthetic grammar of the Buddha as practiced by the artists of the Khaśa Kingdom ca. 1340 A.D.

Among the antecedents of these statues of Buddha and Shen rab, at present the earliest dated sculpture of a Khaśa Buddha now identified is carved on a stone stele bearing an inscription during the reign of Khaśa king Aśokacalla (r. 1251-1278) in Padukastan, Dullu,

called the “Sauna karki” pillar due to the name of one of the donors (Fig. 5).¹² Dullu was the sacred capital of the Khaśa kingdom. The Buddha is portrayed inside a polylobate arch, ca.45cm in height. It would appear to be Śākyamuni represented in the earth-touching pose, wearing monastic robes, the edge of which is visible at his left shoulder; his facial shape is rather square, with flat cheekbones, very long pendulous earlobes. The forehead is low; the hairline is close to the eyebrows, and very straight, while the hair is carved in low spherical individual curls, rising to uṣṇīṣa, which has a pointed jewel finial. The hairline is a horizontal line, so straight across the upper forehead that the viewer almost has the impression that the Buddha is wearing a helmet. The body proportions here show relatively narrow shoulders, a broad chest without any muscular delineation and rather heavy legs. This sculpture thus indicates the aesthetic model approximately a century earlier than the cast gilt-copper alloy Buddha of Gnasa and the wooden Buddha of the bookcover now in Gnasa library.

The continuation of this phase is represented by the sculptures and fragmentary remains of the Kankrevihar monastery in the Surkhet district, which was the winter capital of the Khaśa kingdom. Kankrevihar is now not functioning as a Buddhist monastery, it is in a Hindu district with little Buddhist practice since centuries. Among the fragments of stone columns and lintels, some may belong to the 13th-14th century sanctuaries of the Khaśa period, while others may be fragments of later temples. However, the friezes with the images of the Buddha all appear to be contemporaneous. Notably there are scenes of the Eight Great Events of the life of the Buddha, such as the miracle of Śrāvastī, where the Buddha replicated his body to appear in multiple bodies (Fig. 6). The niche in which the Buddha sits measures ca. 55cm, flanked by two pilasters which are held by the two lateral Buddhas. The Buddha has the same very low forehead, heavy body proportions and clinging robe observed on the Padukestan Buddha. The detail of the throne base with the spiral tendrils of vines is a theme repeated in other sculptures of the Buddha's life story at Kanrevihar, such as this Buddha with his right hand over his heart and the left hand in his lap, palm up, probably representing a moment of teaching (Fig. 7). There is also a Buddha seated under the leaves of the Bodhi tree, at the Moment of Enlightenment (Fig. 8). The artist has so smoothly sculpted the stone that the representation of the Buddha is particularly serene and calm in demeanor. The monastic robe is draped over the left shoulder and falls into a sleeve with a splay of pleats extended under the cuff of the sleeve, resting on the thigh. Over the chest, the robe is rendered as if clinging and translucent to the extent that the navel is visible, and the robe is only again discerned by the splay of pleats of fabric between

12 This stele is discussed and illustrated in D. R. Sharma 2012: 72-73. This stele was previously studied and the sculpture identified as Akṣobhya Buddha by S. M. Adhikary 1997: Fig. 1 and p. 134, however none of the photos published (or those personally examined by the present writer) show the vajra in front of the Buddha which would determine the identification as Akṣobhya. On the chronology of the reign of Aśokacalla see M.R. Pant 2009: 297-300.



Fig. 7 The Buddha teaching, stone, H. ca. 40cm, late 13th century, Kankrevihar (After D.R.Sharma 2012: 132, Plate 33a).



Fig. 8 The Buddha at the Moment of Enlightenment, stone, H. ca. 40cm, late 13th century, Kankrevihar (After D.R. Sharma 2012: 138, Plate 35a).



Fig. 9 Fragment of a frieze with Buddhas, stone, H. ca. 30cm, late 13th century, Kankrevihar (Photo: Pam Ross).



Fig. 10 Buddha Śākyamuni as “Cakravartin”, gilt copper alloy, hollow cast, H. 24.9cm, 14th century (Photo: Courtesy of Alain Bordier Foundation, Gruyères, Switzerland. ABS 184).

the legs. The Buddha's facial expression is gentle with the low hairline observed previously. Several leaves hover over his head and shoulders, to show how the Bodhi tree shelters the Buddha. Although damaged, this sculpture is remarkable for its expressive and aesthetic qualities. These Buddha of the Kankrevihar monastery show aesthetic paradigms which are similar to the Buddha at Padukestan, Dullu and likewise may be attributed to the period of the second half of the 13th century during the reign of Aśokacalla. Among the fragments of Kankrevihar, some of which defy interpretation due to the lack of context, there is also a carved stone lintel which has several sections among which two seated figures of the Buddha, lacking their hands, with standing, almost dancing, figures inbetween (Fig. 9). The carving of the figures is again very smooth. The figures of the Buddha have the broad shoulders and heavy thighs observed in the previous examples, and their waists are more emphasized and slender like the Buddha under the Bodhi tree (Fig. 8). The two standing figures beside the Buddhas are dynamic, so slender and lithe. In the future it is hoped to be able to more precisely determine the context of this frieze and attempt the interpretation of the content and closer appreciation of the chronological context.

The next example is again a hollow cast gilt copper Buddha (Fig. 10), represented as a “Cakravartin”, the sovereign of the Dharma, wearing crown and formerly earrings suspended from the long earlobes with wide hole.¹³ This sculpture is now conserved in the Alain Bordier Foundation, Switzerland. The draping of the robe is very similar to the robe of the Buddha sculpture in the Patan Museum, there is an effect of rippled pleats of the fabric between the legs. The body proportions have the strong and massive shoulders observed previously but the waist is more pronounced. Above the crown, the *uṣṇīṣa* with the jewel finial may be observed. The face has a higher brow and more delicate features than the previous examples in stone. There is a distinct elegance to the entire sculpture which has been attributed by von Schroeder to the 14th century. As a *contrapunto* to this Buddha as Cakravartin, we may examine a portrait of a lama whose appearance recalls the historic Buddha Śākyamuni at the moment of the Enlightenment when he placed his right hand in front of him, touching the Earth to witness his steadfast perseverance to attain Enlightenment. This portrait of a lama is cast in silver with inlay of copper and gold, his hands forming the earth-touching gesture as he is seated on a gilt copper lotus base (Fig. 11). It has been attributed to the 14th century.¹⁴ The lama's chignon and thick robes indicate that he is not a monk, but rather a tantric lay practitioner. The robe has the copper and gold inlay along the hem and front closure of the garment. The lama's gesture is a reminder of the human life of the Buddha Śākyamuni, and how those who practice the Buddha's teachings may hope to attain enlightenment in this very lifetime.

13 von Schroeder 2010: 28.

14 von Schroeder 2010: 28.

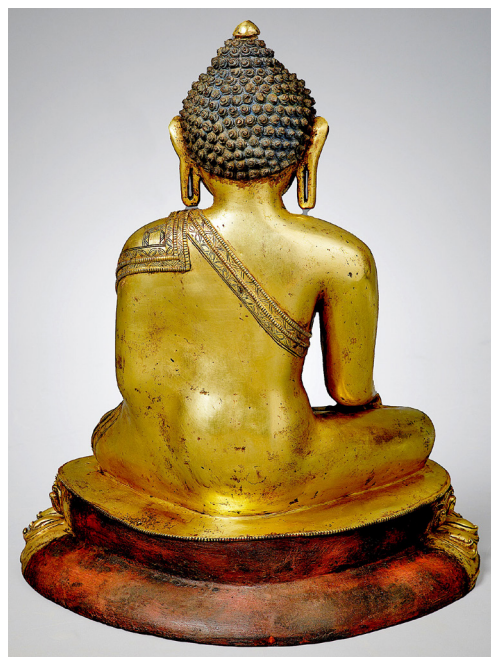


Fig. 11 Lama of the Bka' brgyud pa tradition, silver inlaid with copper and gold, H. 25cm, 14th century
(Photo: Courtesy of Alain Bordier Foundation, Gruyères, Switzerland. ABS 246).



Fig. 12 Buddha Śākyamuni, gilt copper with pigments, hollow cast, H. 29.5cm. late 13th century. Solomon Family Collection.

Fig. 13 Buddha Akṣobhya or Vajrāsana Buddha, gilt copper with pigments, hollow cast, H. 50cm. 14th century. Solomon Family Collection.



Two additional sculptures help to better understand the preferred iconographic models of the Buddha of the Khaśa kingdom. The Buddha Śākyamuni at the moment of his enlightenment has maintained total calm despite the taunting of Mara, sitting straight as his right hand reaches to call the Earth as witness. Yet this cast gilt copper sculpture of the Buddha (Fig. 12) already has the gold jewel atop his uṣṇīṣa, the broad forehead is emphasized by the smooth gold band above the dark curls of his hair, a floret of gold above each earlobe with narrow ribbons draping to his shoulders. His ūrṇā is incised. This Buddha represents an enhanced portrait of Śākyamuni, beyond the sage in meditation, foreshadowing his role as Cakravartin. His monastic robes with delicate incised stars fit closely to his suavely modeled body. His head glancing downward, the Buddha's gentle expression conveys a unique spiritual grace. He has the characteristic Khaśa feature of the fleshy toes and articulations as observed by Alsop (1994, 1997, 2005).

The second Buddha sculpture (Fig. 13) is also cast in gilt copper, height of 50cm including the lotus pedestal. This Buddha may be possibly identified as Akṣobhya due to his emblem, the vajra, positioned in front of the pleats of his robes. While Akṣobhya may often be crowned wearing jewelry and royal garments, he may also be represented wearing monastic robes. Alternatively, the identification of Vajrāsana Buddha (*Thub pa rdo rje gdan pa*), literally, the Buddha on “the diamond throne of Enlightenment” referring to Bodhgaya, may be proposed. This Buddha's gold jewel is striking in contrast to his dark curls and the smooth gold of his broad forehead, where formerly a jewel was present in the raised ūrṇā. The back of the sculpture is fully modeled with the triangular flap of the robe over the shoulder, the hem of the robe with rice grain pattern is carefully incised. The lotus pedestal has in the front two tiers of ornate lotus petals; in the back, the pedestal is devoid of ornamentation except for red pigment. Alsop has observed this as salient characteristics of the Khaśa sculptures (Alsop 1994, 1997, 2005).

To conclude this preliminary study of the Buddha sculptures of the Khaśa kingdom, we will study two additional exceptional sculptures of the Buddha which have recently come to light thanks to Yixi Pingcuo, who has organized the exhibition *Quintessential of Returning Tibetan Cultural Relics from Overseas* (August 2012) and *The Art of Buddhist Sculpture* (October 2013) in which the scholar Ian Alsop was responsible for the description and historical analysis of these two Khaśa Buddha sculptures (Figs. 14, 15).¹⁵ Alsop's succinct discussions will be elaborated in his forthcoming research,¹⁶ in view of which our present remarks will be brief. These two Buddha sculptures are both remarkable for the change in scale, from the 25cm Enthroned Buddha, with prabha at 49.5cm (Fig. 2) to the scale of 58.5cm for the Buddha

¹⁵ Ian Alsop, “Buddha Shakyamuni” in Yixi ed. 2012: 53 and Ian Alsop, “Śākyamuni,” in Yixi ed. 2013: 120-125.

¹⁶ Alsop forthcoming.



Fig.14 Buddha Śākyamuni, gilt copper, cast in one piece, H. 58.5cm, 13th-14th century (After Yixi ed. 2013: 125).

Śākyamuni on ornate pedestal, while the Enthroned Śākyamuni is also more than 45cm, having a prabha of total height 105cm! The sheer grandeur and elaborate workmanship of these sculptures are awe-inspiring. In terms of the Enthroned Śākyamuni, thanks to the exhibition “Light of the Buddha” organized in 2018 by the Palace Museum and Zhiguan Museum of Art, Beijing, it was possible to closely examine the Tibetan dedication inscription which had been published with small errors which are indicated here:

- 1) *om sa (sic: sva)sti // dpal dan bstan pa rin chen rgyas bya dad (sic: dang) / rang gzhan tshogs gnyis rdzogs par bya ba'i phyir// thub chen bstan pa'i bdag po khyad 'phags 'di// rigs rgyud khyad 'phags lo tshwa bsod ran (sic: rin chan = ran?) dad (: dang) // 'phyo (sic:cho) rigs*
- 2) *khungs btsun dpon mo gha tu yis // legs bzhengs 'dis yis 'gro ba'i don grub shog.*

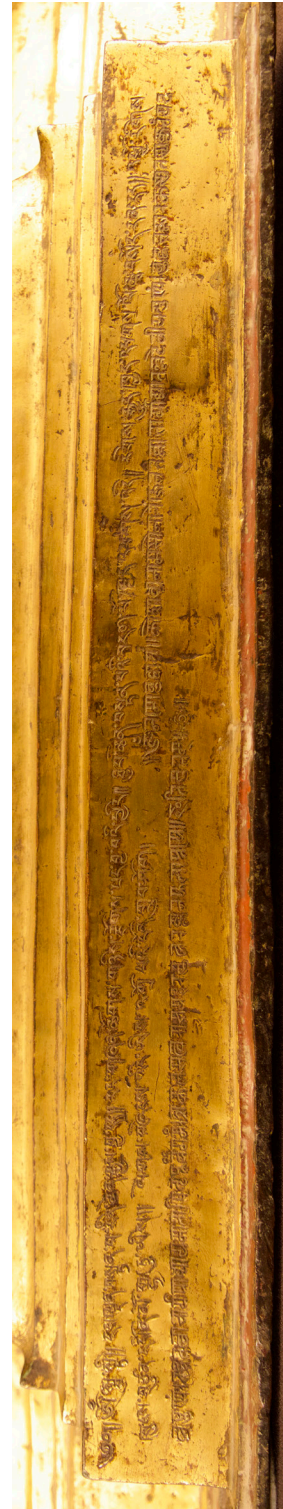
Om svasti. May all living being benefit from this (image of) Śākyamuni, the Great



Fig.15 Enthroned Buddha Śākyamuni, gilt copper, throne cast separately, H. 105cm, 13th-14th century (After Yixi ed. 2013: 121).

Sage, noble Master of the teachings, that has been excellently produced by (i.e. at the request of) the distinguished translator of exalted descent Bsod nams rin chen and the Chieftain Lady Ghatu, who is of illustrious ancestry, to perfectly spread the precious and glorious Buddhist teachings and to accomplish the dual accumulation (of wisdom and merit) for the benefit of oneself and others.

At present it is still a matter of future research to determine the origins of the family of which the Lady Chieftain Ghatu



(Sanskrit: Ghatalladevi) was a descendent.¹⁷ It may be noted that the Sanskrit inscriptions describes the two donors as a married couple, which is not the case in the Tibetan inscription.¹⁸ The Sanskrit name would be “Goddess of the water mill”, conceivably indeed an important function but possibly an epithet rather than a proper name. The region Ghatu tol is now a place name in western Nepal but it remains to be determined if such a name was current during the Khasa kingdom or is a modern term.¹⁹ It is to be hoped that Alsop will bring clarifications to this intriguing bi-lingual Tibetan-Sanskrit inscription and historical data for a firmer chronological assessment of this important sculpture. Pending such, it is pertinent to remark the formal similarity of the throne of the Buddha (Fig. 2) and the throne of the Buddha (Fig. 15) where the horizontal plinths of the throne supporting the makara are virtually identical except for scale, and the makara of the larger sculpture area far more exuberant, still formally virtually identical in terms of the gaping jaw and curling trunk as well as the excretions which ornament the three swirling branches of the tails. The Enthroned Buddha of the Pritzker collection has been attributed a date ca. 1340-1350 due to the lifetime of the teacher Bsod nams rin chen of the Gnas gsar monastery in Dolpo who is mentioned as donor in a manuscript attributed to the reign of Pritivimalla (see above).²⁰

The sculpture of the Buddha seated on his lotus above an ornate pedestal (Fig. 14) has been previously identified as Śākyamuni due to the bhūmisparśa mudra where he gracefully extends his right hand towards the Earth. One may call attention, however, to the vertical vajra which is positioned at the center of the ornate base beneath the lotus pedestal. Perhaps this is meant to indicate an identification as Akṣobhya rather than Śākyamuni? The sculpture too has previously been attributed a chronology of 13th to 14th century.²¹ With all due allowance for different media of stone carving versus cast copper alloy with gilding, it is striking to compare the bas-relief in swirling circles for beneath the stone Buddha sculptures of Kankrevihar and some of the elements of the ornamentation of the base pedestal of this Śākyamuni.

These two large sculptures of the Buddha are masterpieces of the Khasa kingdom, allowing us to appreciate the great skill and mastery of casting, inspired and derived from the Newar art of the Kathmandu valley which was extrapolated to a new scale and exuberance of

17 'phyo rigs is not a specific personal clan name, it is misspelling for the homonym cho rigs, family line, Jaeschke s.v. cho 'brangs, cho rigs, 1972: 161. I thank Charles Ramble for this suggestion and discussion of this inscription (personal communication 19.10.2020).

18 personal communication from Ian Alsop, November 2018.

19 https://satellites.pro/carte_du_Nepal#29.415003,80.267572,14.

20 Heller 2009: 72, footnote 23, detailing the mention of Slob dpon Bsod nams rin chen in manuscript T17, attributed to the reign of Pritivimalla. It remains to be determined if the translator Bsod nams rin chen named in the inscription of the Enthroned Buddha (Fig. 15) has any relation to the teacher of Gnas gsar temple in Dolpo who donated the Enthroned Buddha (Fig. 2) to this sanctuary.

21 Alsop 2012 and 2013.



Fig. 16 Buddha Śākyamuni, H. 48cm, gilt copper with pigments, hollow cast in 2007 at Curio Concern modeled on the Buddha of Patan Museum (Photo: Courtesy of the Alain Bordier Foundation, Gruyères, Switzerland).

vitality during the 13th to 14th century, the apogee of the Khaśa kingdom.

Appendix:

A sculpture of Śākyamuni Buddha cast in the 21st century (Fig. 16), inspired by the style of the Buddhas of the Khaśa kingdom. This sculpture was a commission by the Alain Bordier Foundation to an atelier in Kathmandu to cast six statues modeled on the Buddha of the Patan Museum (Fig. 4). Exactly the same height of 48cm as the Buddha of the Patan Museum, and carefully emulating the details of the robes, jewels and the grace of the Buddha of the Patan Museum, the present sculpture allows us to appreciate how skillfully modern Kathmandu sculptors still achieve the elegance of proportions and details of hollow cast gilt copper sculptures for which the Khaśa kingdom was renowned.

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