

The Reliefs of the Portal of the Temple of Kojar in Western Tibet

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The most ancient religious monuments in Western Tibet date from the time of the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. They owe their foundation to the initiative of two powerful personalities: King Srong nge (947-1024?), who when later he became a monk was named Yeshe (Ye shesod) and the great Western Tibetan translator Richen Zangpo (Rin chen bzang po, 958-1055), the most important religious dignitary of his time.

Only a few of the temples which they founded in various parts of the Western Tibetan Kingdom have survived to the present day. The most prominent is the main temple (gtsug lag khang) of Tabo monastery in the Spiti valley, presently politically part of the Northern Indian state Himachal Pradesh. It is the only Western Tibetan temple of this period in which the wall paintings and the clay statuary remained



largely intact. This is unfortunately not the case for Kojar which was founded about the same time toward the end of the 10th century in the valley of Purang, close to the Nepalese border in the most Southern part of the Western Tibetan Kingdom of Guge-Purang. What sets this temple prominently apart from the other temples founded at that time, is the large wooden portal, the only part of this temple surviving from the time of its foundation. This was already remarked by Giuseppe Tucci, the most prominent of all tibetologists, in his account of the travels he undertook in 1937: "From Rinchen Zangpo's time only the portal remains, incontestably one of the most remarkable works of Western Tibet. In whole India there is not a single portal which could be compared to the one of Kojarnath." (1)

The portal survived to the present day, even though particularly the faces of some reliefs were badly mutilated in the time after Tucci's visit. This paper follows two aims: the first is to give a preliminary account of the iconographic program, which makes up the figurative part of the portal. This is work in progress. The second objective is to focus on the architectural aspects, comparing it with even earlier wooden portals in the Western Himalayas, but also with surprisingly similar portals of specific early Indian stone temples.

The portal consists of several frames in an almost incomparable complexity. Unfortunately, the portal cannot be photographed as a whole, since the frontal view is obscured by beams supporting a porch that was added later. The various parts of the portal therefore, have to



be photographed separately, from below and from the sides. The description of the portal follows the way the photographs were taken. The most conspicuous part is the large pediment (figure 1) which towers above the now red painted door. Above the frame of vajras which surrounds the door on three sides, lies the first lintel with a design of pearl garlands, interspersed with seated deities. The lintel above consists of a sequence of seated and standing deities in an architectural set-up with complex arch-like roofs resting on columns. Divided by a beam with a floral motif and a further lintel with pearled garlands follow two lintels with an abundance of figurative representations, topped by a band of Kirtimukhas.

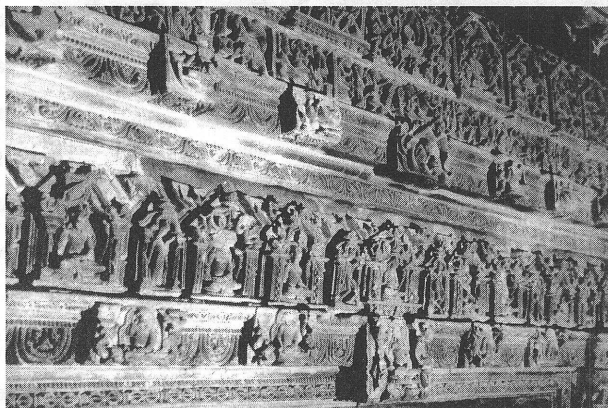


figure 1 Kojar portal (end 10th century) : the lintel

The Kirtimukhas are easily recognizable on figure 2 (and in detail on figure 7). It also becomes evident on figure 2 that the upper four beams or lintels of the pediment rest on a half-column with a square capital, the columns being delicately carved with a complex vegetal network. The architectural arrangement of the pediment with its supporting columns is symmetrically complemented on both sides by three figuratively sculpted jambs, the first consisting of a sequence

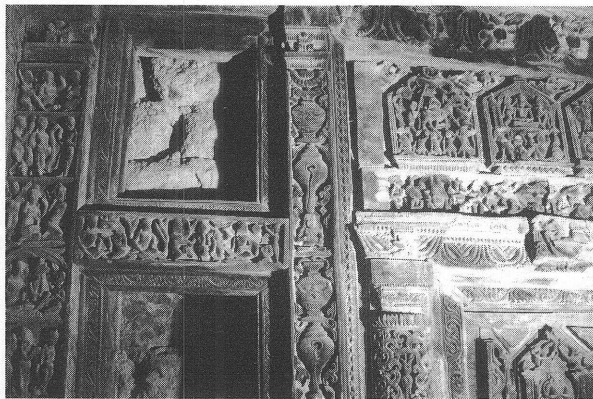


figure 2 Empty niches once filled with scenes of Buddha's life, divided by a scene of Ramayana and flanked by pilasters with Naga and Garuda stories (left) and vases and conch shells (right) . On the right side, the left end of the lintel

scenes. The outermost jamb consists of a sequence of scenes with mostly human figures.

After this first tour d'horizon of the arrangement of the doorframe, the pediment and the adjoining jambs, the question of the iconography of the sculpted reliefs has to be raised. Below a line of Kirtimukhas, the pediment (figure 2) shows a row of eleven large reliefs representing various scenes of the life of the Buddha. The sequence starts (figure 3) with the Great Departure of Prince Siddharta from the palace of Kapilavastu. The sculptor has given particular prominence to the Yakshas holding up the horse's hoofs. In the lower part of the second panel (figure 4) the haircutting and discarding of his princely robe is depicted. In the upper panel the Buddha-to-be, having lived for six years as an ascetic is shown with an emaciated

of vases and conches interspersed with a seated figure and other elements. It is followed by a succession of large frames, the sculpted panels of which have unfortunately disappeared save two. These windows are separated from each other by horizontal panels with various

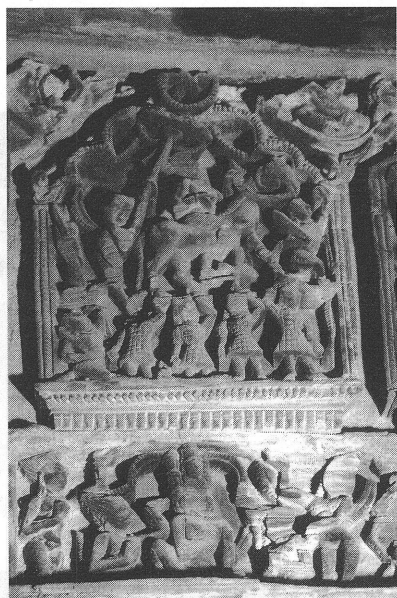


figure 3 The Great Departure of Prince Siddhartha

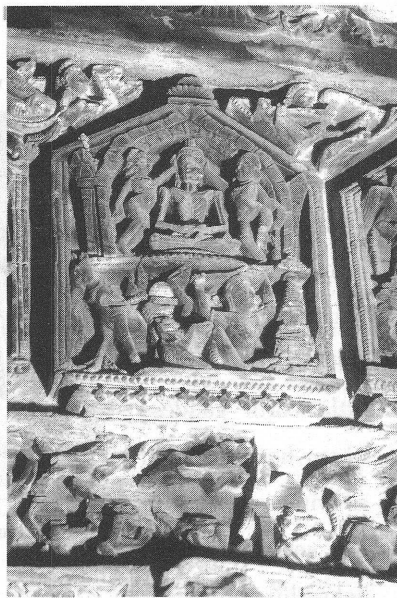


figure 4 Emancipated Buddha (above) , haircutting and discarding of the princely robes (below)

body. The boys on either side try in vain to disturb his meditation. The central scene stands out by a larger format and by its filling the entire space (figure 5) , omitting the arches and the celestial beings above. Shakyamuni sits on a throne in the centre of a great halo, surrounded by Mara's soldiers who are brandishing their



figure 5 Buddha's enlightenment, Mara's soldiers and Mara's daughters



weapons. This scene combines Mara's attack with Mara's daughters, Desire, Pleasure and Delight, who are pictured on the sides of the throne, trying in vain to seduce him. This scene also comprises Buddha's enlightenment as evident from the little earth goddess whom he has called as witness. She can be seen emerging below his throne.



figure 6 Buddha protected by Nagaking Mucalinda

On the right side follow five more scenes. The Nagaking Mucalinda (figure 6) wrapped his snake body seven times around the Buddha and spread out his hood over Buddha's head to protect him during the next seven days of his meditation. The next scene (figure 7) is the story of the four kings of the cardinal points who each present him a bowl. It is followed by Gautama

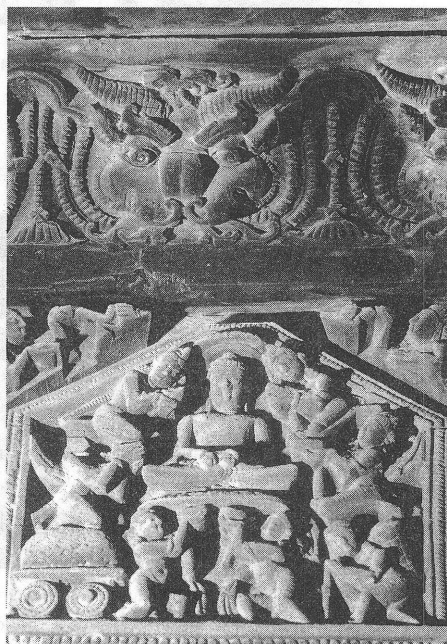


figure 7 The four kings of the cardinal points presenting bowls to the Buddha



meeting his five former disciples who had left him thinking that he lacked the necessary perseverance for asceticism. The gazelles confronting the wheel of Dharma clearly mark the one but last episode as the First Sermon in the deer park of Sarnath. The last scene on the top register depicts one of the great miracles of Sravasti, the multiplication of the Buddha, here shown by three identical enthroned Buddhas.

We are witnessing here a series of eleven events of the Life of the Buddha, starting with the Great Departure, ending with the miracles of Sravasti. This is neither a known beginning nor a known end. For those we have to look on the registers on the two sides of the door. In view of the central importance of the Buddha, one would expect the missing episodes of his life on the largest panels, which are unfortunately all lost except for two: the lowest on both sides. Even though they are in a dilapidated state, the lowest panel on the left side can be interpreted speculatively as a scene in Tushita heaven with the Buddha-to-be seated on the throne and the gods in anjali mudra asking him to return to earth. The counterpart to this first scene of the Life stories would be the parinirvana in the bottom scene on the right side, also very difficult to read with certainty in this state of preservation. If it is representing parinirvana, as it indicates, then these life stories would not be from lalitavistara which ends before the parinirvana. The other niches on the left side probably contained other scenes in Tushita heaven and other well-known events preceding the Great Departure, while the seven empty niches on the right would have pictured the scenes preceding the parinirvana. Altogether the life of



Buddha would have been documented on the Kojar portal by twentyseven events.

A comparison can be made with the portal of Tholing, geographically rather near, chronologically only slightly later (2). According to the account given by Klimburg-Salter, all panels picture scenes from the Life of the Buddha. Overall the Tholing portal is much less complex than the one in Kojarnath, but there is considerable similarity in several stylistic elements, notably the framing of the figures by Kashmir-derived architecture, e.g. trilobed arches.

Between the now missing large panels, which probably contained scenes of the life of the Buddha, are long panels (figure 8), each with a large number of figures, many of which prominently display monkeys engaged in different activities. These are all scenes from the Indian epic Rama- yana. These is a Tibetan version of the Ramayana (3), but this series of reliefs is the first occurrence of a pictorial

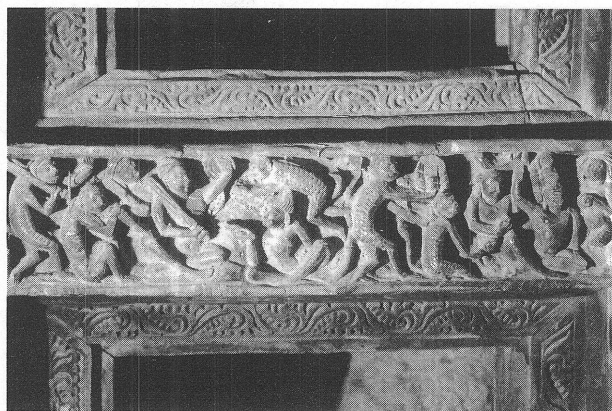


figure 8 Ramayana scene

representation of Ramayana in Tibet to become known.

At first, the combination of the representation of the life of the



Buddha with scenes from the Ramayana is quite surprising for a monument built at the beginning of the first diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. One would rather have expected Jatakas or Avadanas. But then this is just another facet of the long and strong tradition of Ramayana in the Western Himalayas, which must have remained popular among the local inhabitants even in times of strong patronage for Buddhism. It also testifies the wonderful amalgamation of different cultural traditions in this area.

The pilasters on the far left and far right side (figure 9) show a sequence of twenty-seven scenes each. The scenes of the right pilaster depict naga and garuda stories, a naga being clearly visible on the head of many of the carved figures. (The observation that they probably belong to the Jimutavahana I owe to Monika



figure 9 Naga stories

Zin.) Looking at the scenes, we can understand Tucci's enthusiasm: There is a wonderful restrained movement in these scenes. Despite their small size, the figures have a facial expression. There is no excessive refinement. To the contrary the sculptures have a certain roughness, which in modern art terminology might be called



expressionistic. The figures are so lively, that even though they were created over thousand years ago, one is reminded of the chisel of the artist who sculpted the details.

The innermost door jamb is separated from the door only by the band of vajras, to the left and right. Each jamb shows a row of single deities seated on a lotus cushion encircled by a wine creeper (figure 10) . Altogether there are thirty-two deities, possibly the deities of the mandala of a deity of cardinal importance to this temple (but unfortunately all are effaced) . Clearly recognizable is only Manjusri, who is one of the sixteen bodhisattvas of the mandala of Manjuvajra Vairocana (NSP 20) , but not of Vajradhatu Vairocana (NSP 19) nor of Dharmadhatu Vagisvara Manjughosha (NSP21) .



figure 10 Buddhist deities of a mandala

Between this pilaster and the register which contains the large panels representing stories from Buddha's life, is a particularly charming pilaster with conch shells (figure 11) and vases as main elements. Here the carvings of the Kojarnath portal can be seen at their best. A door post showing conch shells forms part of Lotsawa



Lhakhang of Ribba in Central Kinnaur, dating from the beginning of the 10th century (4). There the conch shells are interspersed with small flowers. Christian Luczanits, from whose publication I have taken this information, compared this with the row in Kojarnath and noted that the example in Kojarnath is much more complex and detailed. We have here ten groups of vase, conch and a varying element on each side.



figure 11 Pilaster with vases and conch shells

The additional elements are the astamangalas, the eight auspicious symbols, padma, the lotus flower and matsya, the fishes, dhvaja, the victory banner and seated deities or celestial beings like Kinnaras. The band ends towards the bottom with a sequence of various wild animals.

Where these doorposts rest on the ground, the sculptor has carved the river goddess Ganga on the left, Yamuna on the right. They are holding up the kamandalu, the water jar in their right respectively left hand. Each river goddess stands on the proper vehicle, the tortoise for Yamuna, the makara for Ganga and is surmounted by an arch on which two confronting parrots are sitting, their heads turned back.



Next to the river goddesses, also directly above the ground just adjacent to the door, are dvarapalas (figure 12), doorkeepers armed with dantas. They are placed under a round arch which itself is surmounted by a roof which is crowned by an amalaka-like finial. A very similar form is seen on the doorpost of the slightly earlier temple in Ribba, central Kinnaur, which clearly confirms the fact that the style of the portal of Kojarnath



figure 12 D varapala guarding the door

is firmly embedded in the artistic tradition of Western Tibet. It is therefore neither exclusively due to the vocabulary of Kashmir artists brought back from Kashmir by Rinchen Zangpo, nor as has been mentioned in passing by Giuseppe Tucci (1), is it based on an eastern Indian Pala idiom.

The combination of dvarapalas with the river goddesses is not a common element of Buddhist temples, but encountered frequently in temples of local gods in the Western Himalaya, which were at different times absorbed into the Hindu Pantheon. Many temples in the Kulu Valley of Himachal Pradesh, e.g. the temple of Dashed and Jagatsukh dating from the beginning of the 15th century, show the continuation of



the tradition to combine dvarapalas with the river goddesses on both sides of the door frame.

Continuing the stylistic discussion, Kashmir has to be mentioned as the source for the architectural set-up. The pent-roofs of the 8th century temple in Martand and the contemporary Pandrethan temple (5) are the model for the architectural surround of the sculpted scenes of the lintel of the Kojar portal. The architecture of Kashmir continued to influence temples in the Western Himalayas as is evident from the woodwork of the Sumtsek of Alchi, where the deities on the front above the entrance are set in triangles reminiscent of the pent roof of the earlier Kashmir temples.

Continuing the iconographic analysis of the lintel, a row of seated and standing deities in a complex architectural set-up was placed under the eleven scenes from the life of the Buddha and the long frieze with various Ramayana episodes. In the middle (figure 13) Buddha Shakyamuni is sitting on a lotus cushion. The sides of his throne are ornamented by Kinnaris. The large triangle above the trilobed arch, which covers Buddha's head, is filled by two large



figure 13 Buddha Shakyamuni in the centre of the lintel



Makaras and a Kirtimukha, flying Gandharvas fill the remaining space.

Buddha is flanked by two bodhisattvas. Each is standing under a trilobed arch resting on columns and surmounted by a pent roof, the familiar architectural set-up, derived from Kashmir temples. Also in this case Kashmir is the source for the architectural concept. A perfect model is the magnificent wooden miniature shrine in the British Museum, in which the central figure is surmounted by a trilobed arch and the pent roof (6).

The portal of Kojarnath is certainly the most complex Tibetan portal known. It is exceptional in its ingenious design of a large number of different elements. It stands out, but is still embedded in a tradition which existed before its creation and which continued thereafter. An excellent example of an earlier wooden portal is the one of the 9th century Lakshmana Devi Temple in Brahmor/ Chamba (7), 200 km to the Northwest of Kojar. It consists of a sequence of alternating ornamental and figurative forms, just like Kojarnath.

For the same period, close by (8) in Chatradi the portal of the Shaktidevi Tempel. Here the Dvarapala is standing above the river goddess.

And there are important examples following the Kojarnath portal in time: the 11th century (9) Markula Devi temple in Udaipur/ Lahul. On the detail Buddha is surrounded by Mara's daughters and



Mara's armies as a compelling example of the combination of Buddhist and Hindu elements in this area. Geographically at some distance and again somewhat later (10) perhaps from the 12th century, the doorframe from the Dukhang in Alchi (Ladakh). In later centuries, the doorframes are mostly simpler in the sense that the pediment is analogous to the sides of the portal.

A final question: where does the concept of this type of portal originate? Certainly in India. It may start around the 5th century as evident from the temple in Deogarh (11). Charming coincidence how the lion faces on top of the lintel correspond to the Kirtimukhas on top of the Kojarnath pediment. In greater complexity (12) the portal of the 7th century Durga temple in Aihole, one of the most beautiful Western Chalukyan temples. The sides of the doorframe are constituted by a sequence of door jambs with varying vegetal, geometric and figurative ornamentation. The doorframes of Deogarh and Aihole stand as examples for the beginning of a tradition which found one of its culminations in Kojarnath.

In conclusion an exercise in arithmetic: We have seen eleven scenes of the life of Buddha on the pediment, together with the twice eight panels in the empty niches: a total of twenty-seven. There were eleven Avadana/ Jataka scenes below and twice eight between the empty niches, again a total of twenty-seven. The small scenes on the posts at the far end of both sides of the portal number twenty-seven on each post. This makes a total of four times twenty-seven i.e. one



hundred and twenty-eight, an auspicious number already from Vedic times on, and particularly important to the Tibetans.

The author gratefully acknowledges the contributions by Monika Zin on the Ramayana as well as the Naga and Garuda stories and particularly the collaboration with Heidi Neumann in all parts of the project.

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[4] Christian Luczanits, "Early Buddhist Wood Carvings from Himachal Pradesh" in Orientations, vol.27, number 6, Hongkong, 1996, p.70.

[5] Robert E. Fisher, "Stone Temples" in Pratapaditya Pal ed., Art and Architecture of Ancient Kashmir, Marg Publications, Bombay, 1989, pp.29-40.

[6] Stanislav Czuma, "Ivory Sculpture" in Pratapaditya Pal ed., Art and Architecture of Ancient Kashmir, Marg Publications, Bombay, 1989, p.58.



[7] Hermann Goetz, The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba, Memoirs of the Kern Institute No.1, Leiden, 1955, plate I and II.

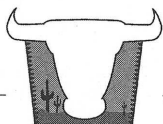
[8] Ibid., plate VIII.

[9] Ibid., plate XI-XVI.

[10] Pratapaditya Pal, "Kashmir and the Tibetan Connection" in Pratapaditya Pal ed., Art and Architecture of Ancient Kashmir, Marg Publications, Bombay, 1989, figure.8.

[11] C.Sivaramurti, Indien, Kunst und Kultur, Herder, Freiburg, Basel, Wien, 1975, figure.104.

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西藏西部科加寺的门雕

赫尔默特·纽曼

佛教第二次复兴运动肇始于西藏西部，公元10世纪末期，在西藏西部修建了许多重要的寺院。位于西部西藏最南端普兰河谷科加寺的木门是这一时期现存最重要的作品之一。除了其年代久远，还有其他很多引人注目的地方：建筑结构极其复杂、雕刻细部极其美观、图像布局极其合理。在科加寺木门上方的三角形木



构件内以及边侧的壁柱上共雕有108个形象，其主要内容是佛传，共有27处场景，此外还有规模小得多的《罗摩衍那》里(Ramayana)的场景27处以及54处关于那迦(Naga)和加如达(Garuda)故事的场景。迄今为止，这是西藏早期艺术中残存的唯一一件关于印度《罗摩衍那》史诗的代表作品。《罗摩衍那》的藏文版现仍保存完好。木雕上还有许多组曼陀罗中的诸神雕刻。

从艺术风格上分析，科加寺的木门雕刻与克什米尔的艺术和建筑有着密切的关系，如它们与克什米尔河谷的石建筑寺庙以及起源于克什米尔的木雕艺术有着许多相似的地方。尽管科加寺的木门雕刻在规模和技法上独具特色，但它仍然是在喜马拉雅西部地区建造寺庙的匠人后裔所造。这种形制的雕刻约于公元5世纪起源于印度。