

# Inner and Central Asian Art and Archaeology II

## New Research on Central Asian, Buddhist and Far Eastern Art and Archaeology

Edited by Judith A. LERNER & Annette L. JULIANO



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NEW RESEARCH ON CENTRAL ASIAN,  
BUDDHIST AND FAR EASTERN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

# INNER AND CENTRAL ASIAN ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

SERIES EDITORS:

Judith A. Lerner

Annette L. Juliano



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# Some Other Pieces of the Puzzle: The Restoration of the Alchi Sumtsek (A lci gSum brtsegs) by Tashi Namgyal (bKra shis rNam rgyal) and Other Considerations on the Stratification and Reinterpretation of the Paintings of this Temple.

CHIARA BELLINI<sup>1</sup>

LONDON, ENGLAND

The paintings preserved in the Alchi Sumtsek (A lci gSum brtsegs) (Fig. 1), in Ladakh, represent a unique and exquisite example of the Kashmiri stylistic milieu in the Himalayan world. At present, however, their dating represents a problem. David Snellgrove and Tadeus Skorupski (1977, pp. 45-64) and others have attributed the paintings to the late eleventh century based on stylistic, epigraphical and iconographic evidence. However, Roger Goepfer (Goepfer and Poncar 1996, p. 211) and Christian Luczanits (2005, 2006, 2007) date them to the thirteenth century, basing this on the discovery of the portrait, with an inscription, of the Master Jigten Gonpo ('Jig rten mGon po) (1143-1217). Scholars, such as Amy Heller, Philip Denwood, Robert Linrothe, Gerald Kozicz, and others, have expressed their views on this issue, some of them in favor of the earlier dating and some of the later one. My attention was captured in 2007 by the inscription, identified by Denwood as inscription number 10, in the Maitreya chapel (Denwood 1980, p. 140). The text contains the name of the sixteenth century King Tashi Namgyal (bKra shis rNam rgyal), (Fig. 3) as a patron of the renovation of the temple as well as the names of some of the artists who worked on the temple. In this paper I will discuss some additional aspects of the paintings in this temple (Fig. 2), without presuming to arrive at definitive answers, but with the intention of providing additional pieces to a very big and complicated puzzle.

For the definitive datation, we have to wait the publications of recent discoveries of Christian Luczanits and Amy Heller, still in preparation.

I believe that this work of restoration was more significant and substantial than previously thought<sup>2</sup> based on the implications of the contributions of the artists mentioned in inscription 10. Furthermore, I will also focus on the commissioning of temples carried out by the early descendants of the Namgyal Dynasty. Here I must make a small digression: The monastic complex of Phyang (Phy dbang), belonging to the Drigungpa Kagyupa ('Bri gung pa bKa' brgyud pa) religious order, is part of the work

begun in the sixteenth century by King Tashi Namgyal (r.1555-1575), and continued by his grandsons Tsewang Namgyal (Tshe dbang rNam rgyal, r.1575-1595) and Jamyang Namgyal ('Jam dbyangs rNam rgyal r.1595-1616). They were portrayed in the temple of Maitreya in Basgo (Ba sgo) (Fig. 4). This Dynasty was responsible for the foundation, decoration, and restoration of some of the most interesting temples of Ladakh: the small temple of the protective deities of the Namgyal Peak in Leh, the Monastery of Phyang, the Upper Maitreya Temple in Basgo and the restoration of the Three Storey Sumtsek Temple in Alchi. What unites these temples, as well as their relationship with the Drigungpa order and the Namgyal Dynasty, are the artists who executed the paintings inside them.

The names of the artists who worked for the Namgyal and were active in Phyang, Leh, Basgo, as well as in Alchi, and, probably in other sites, were examined and documented in part by Erberto Lo Bue (2007, pp. 102-115), and in part by me in my Ph.D thesis for the University of Turin (Bellini 2009). Of this school of artists, eight are known; their names have been identified, along with some information about their origins and unique professional skills.

One finds the painter Ganu ('Ga' nus), a native of Phyang, among whose works should be mentioned, the portrait of Rinchen Namgyal (Rin chen rNam rgyal, 1507-1564), the eighteenth abbot of the Monastery of Drigung, in Central Tibet, placed in the Assembly Hall of Phyang (Lo Bue 2007, pp. 106-107, figs. 3-4, 114-115, nn. 8-12) (Fig. 5).

The master Lozang Dondrup (Blo bzang don grub), fellow citizen of Ganu, painted the portrait of Jigten Gonpo, founder of the monastery of Drigung, visible in the Chapel of the Protective Deities adjoining the Assembly Hall at Phyang (Fig. 6). Other master painters include Gewa Sumpa Kyabs (dGe ba gSum pa sKyabs), who painted Vairocana and Amoghasiddhi, also in the Assembly Hall of Phyang; the master Senpa (Sran pa),

who created the image of the Bodhisattva Śaḍakṣarī and, together with Tenpa (bsTan pa), also painted an image of Padmasambhava. The same Tenpa also painted a group of figures including the yoginī Macig (Ma gcig) (Lo Bue 2007, pp. 109, fig. 6). Another master, Palgon Tshering (dPal mgon Tshe ring), painted the Medicine Buddha Bhaisajayaguru in the Assembly Hall of Phyang and on the wall of the protectors chapel or Gonkhang (mgon khang) entrance in the same monastery, four terrifying deities, including Mahākāla with four arms and Vajrapāṇi (Fig. 7). Also notable is the master Dondrup Legpa (Don grub Legs pa) from Spituk (dPe thub), who in the Phyang Assembly Hall painted the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. On the entrance wall of the Gonkhang, he painted a fine Mahākāla with four arms; while in Basgo painted the Green Tārā (Fig. 8) in the western section of the temple, the Four Guardian Kings of the Directions and some protectors of the doctrine, as well as the elaborate consecration's scene in which the king Tsewang Namgyal are represented with his brothers, their wives and some dignitaries of the court (Fig. 4). Finally, Dondrup Paljor (Don grub dPal 'byor), a native of Alchi, who created an image of Amitābha and some beautiful Mahākālas, among them, Caturbhūja Mahākāla at Phyang (Fig. 9), and in Alchi also restored the paintings in the Three Storey Temple, since his name appears in the inscription number 10 (Denwood 1980, p. 140).

The paintings that decorate the surfaces of the Chapel of the Protective Deities in Phyang are particularly valuable, as Snellgrove and Skorupski noted in 1974, describing it “the most pleasant *mGon-khang*” that they visited in Ladakh (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977, p. 123). The two scholars expressed the same appreciation of the Upper Maitreya temple in Basgo. Their expert eye had sensed, even then, what now is confirmed by the inscriptions: the paintings inside the two temples were, in fact, made by the same school of artists.

At this point we know that at least one amongst those who worked on the restoration of the Sumtsek, was not simply a carpenter or ordinary artist. The number 10 inscription recalls the work of restoration and its donors in the Sumtsek, and cites the painter Dondrup Paljor twice. The first time together with that of other artists, with his full name followed by “tsun pa” (incorrectly for *btsun pa*), an epithet that can mean “monk,” and a second time with the abbreviation Dondrup Pal preceded by the title “dbon mo che” (incorrectly for *dpon mo che*) contraction of *ponpo chenpo* (*dpon po chen po*). This is an epithet which, as clarified by Lo Bue, literally means “great lord” (Lo Bue and Bellini, *forthcoming*). It

is different from *dpon mo chen mo* which in an artistic context means “great teacher” with reference to both, painters and sculptors (Tucci 1941, pp. 10, 12, 13, 20, 22, 31, 33, 36, 38, 42, 43, 60, 64, 69, 101, 123 and 140, n. 4). Goepper mistakenly believes that the term *dpon mo che* indicates that the artist was a woman (Goepper and Poncar 1996, p. 138). Dondrup Paljor, and maybe some others amongst those who appear in the inscription number 10, were part of the group of artists commissioned to work by the Royal Court on more than one occasion. This shows that Dondrup Paljor, and perhaps his collaborators, were talented artists and, like all the most skilled Himalayan artists, would have excelled in any style of painting, and above all would have been able to imitate any artistic style. Regarding the ability to imitate styles and compositional themes we can analyze an example: a portrait of the king Tashi Namgyal (Fig. 3).

This king is portrayed in the gongkhang of the Namgyal Tsemo, the “Victory Peak,” in Leh. The names of the artists who executed it do not appear either below his portrait or in the neighboring inscription, but, judging by the style of the painting and the almost contemporaneous paintings made at Phyang and Basgo, it is reasonable to think that they were the same painters engaged in the decorations of the other sites mentioned.

The style in which the face of Tashi Namgyal was painted is perhaps one of the last examples in which it is possible to see some influence of the aesthetic taste of Kashmir. The king is portrayed in three-quarters perspective, with black mustache and pointed beard, with his right eyebrow slightly raised and a slight smile, which gives him an enigmatic expression. Particularly noteworthy are the almond-shaped eyes, reminiscent of Kashmiri art, which we also find in Persian art.

The inscription number 10, despite its self-congratulatory tone, recalls the pertinent political activity, the military deeds and the civil works of this famous ruler in the history of Ladakh. The restoration work undertaken in the Sumtsek in Alchi, a place dear to Tashi Namgyal, perhaps because it was probably the village where he was born, also reflected interest by the king not only in the religious merit of the paintings preserved in the temple, but also, maybe, in the artistic value of these paintings.

The artists who worked there, in fact, did not just cover the damaged paintings with new images, but retouched the paintings remaining faithful to the original style, without altering their composition. This mode of operation, not so common in the Tibetan cultural environment, reveals a new attitude and a sensibility to the artistic quality of the paintings and their style. It feels almost as if one is

observing an historical rediscovery of a resplendent past, conveying a sentiment similar to the one which animated the Italian courts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of the Este in Ferrara, and the Medici in Florence, with their rediscovery of Classical Greek and Roman Art.

Auguste Francke also thought that the Sumtsek had undergone restoration of its paintings and not simply a reconstruction. Although his theory is not entirely convincing, it is worth keeping in mind. In his *Antiquities of Indian Tibet* he wrote:

“At the feet of Avalokiteśvara [actually Maitreya] we found an inscription recording the restoration of this temple under King bKra-shis-rNam-rgyal in the 16th century. It is interesting that in this inscription, the amount of red, blue, and gold colour which was contributed by various peasants of the neighbourhood, is mentioned. King bKra-shis-rnam-rgyal’s court painter who was apparently an Indian who knew the Mughal art of painting. When he restored the temple, this artist preserved the old outlines of the 11th century as far as possible; but on the choice of colours he was more original than the old masters had been. For a large part, the walls had been covered with endless repetitions of the Buddha figure in the same colours. He brought variety into their dress, haloes and backgrounds. Whenever a picture had disappeared altogether, he invented new scenes in perfect Mughal style, viz., Indian musicians with harps, flutes, clarionets and violins; Indian acrobats, scenes of animal life, etc. Everything is of the most pleasing design and execution, and of the most brilliant colours. Ample use was made of silver and gold. When the artist painted the dress of Avalokiteśvara, he seems to have forgotten Buddhism altogether. Among the pictures we find Indian garden-houses in full Mughal style, and Indian nobles (perhaps meant to be portraits of bKra-shis-rnam-rgyal and his court) who look exactly like the Mughals themselves. This adaptation of Mughal art to a Buddhist subject is probably unique. The representation of lamas is also interesting with robes of various fragments patched together. Such representations are found at Alchi among the old originals as well as among Tashi Namgyal (bKra-shis-rnam-rgyal’s) renovated pictures (Francke 1992, pp. 89-90).”

If we cannot determine with certainty which specific details were restored or painted *ex-novo* by the sixteenth century artists, it is perhaps possible to identify, in

part, the surfaces that have been repainted. Looking at the image of an archer on horseback painted in the gongkhang of Namgyal Tsemo, it is noticeable that the heavy black outline (Fig. 10) emphasizes the figure’s halo, stylized clouds pattern and bottom edge of the lotus petals against the blue background clearly, is an aesthetic choice in accordance with many portions of the painted surface of the Sumtsek that may have been retouched in the sixteenth century (Fig. 11).

This is an example of what occurs during the centuries regarding the wall paintings in the Himalayan temples and chapels. Sometimes, we have a real stratification of different centuries of artistic productions; sometimes, as in this case, we have smaller interventions of restorations. We do not know, at present, which are the restored parts (perhaps the repainted surfaces of the clay statues, as suggested by Luczanits), but what is interesting is that an intervention occurred and this is substantiated by a royal inscription that presents also the names of the restorers.

We have already established that the painters sponsored by Tashi Namgyal were very skilled, as shown in the portrait of the sovereign in the Namgyal Tsemo gongkhang as well as in all the paintings made between Phyang and Basgo. The participation of one or more of them in the restoration of the Sumtsek documented by the inscription number 10, proves they would have been perfectly able to make paintings in the same ‘style of Alchi’, though perhaps with a less miniaturist’s attention to detail, and this would justify the differences in terms of ‘rigor’ in the execution visible in the characters of the Drigungpa lineage represented on the upper floor.

One may also point out the predominance, in the painting of the Drigungpa, of vermilion and blue indigo, the same natural pigments that are mentioned in inscription number 10 and were offered by some donors (Denwood 1980, p. 142).

## PART SECOND: A MYSTERIOUS HORSEWOMAN

The following iconographic analysis of a female guardian figure painted in the Sumtsek is offered in order to help clarify the concept of reinterpretation of the art that occurred during the centuries by different religious orders or donors. This kind of reinterpretations was based on their religious interests and speculations, and on the political meanings that they wanted to communicate. Sometimes, the necessity to affirmation or legitimation of a religious order was hiding behind to many of these



reinterpretations. This figure has hitherto not been interpreted correctly iconographically. Therefore, the second part of this article will focus on the enigmatic female figure on horseback painted on the entrance wall of the Sumtsek at the foot of Mahākāla (Figs. 11 and 13). Snellgrove and Skorupski simply defined her as a “royal figure” on horseback (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977, p. 56), while Goepper, subsequently, proposed that she was a manifestation of Rematī, that “as it is known, rides a blue mule and occasionally wears a cloak of peacock feathers” (Goepper and Poncar 1996, p. 34), referring to some descriptions of the goddess recounted by De Nebesky-Wojkowitz in his book, *Oracles and Deamons of Tibet* (1996, pp. 25-26, 32-33, 270).

However, the description of Rematī given by De Nebesky-Wojkowitz corresponds only slightly to the image of the goddess depicted in the Sumtsek temple, while actually, there are many more differences between the two goddesses. Some differences are particularly significant, for example, the nakedness of Rematī, in contrast to the goddess of Alchi who is wearing sumptuous robes richly decorated. The identification of Rematī by Goepper is based on the De Nebesky-Wojkowitz’s description of a group of twelve *ma mo* known as the Thuchen Mamo (*mThu chen ma mo*): “In the upper eastern direction dwells the *dPal ldan rematī* of a dark-blue colour, who holds a mirror and a snake in her two right hands, and a trident as well as a magic dagger made of meteoritic iron in the two left hands. Her mount is a three-legged mule. The dark-yellow *dPal ldan lha mo remadza*, who occupies the upper southern quarter, rides on a hind. She is dressed in a cloak of peacock-feathers, and her attributes are a golden *zor* or ritual sickle knife, and a chest of turquoise” (De Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993, p. 270). This is very similar to the one painted in the Likir (kLud kyil) gongkhang (Fig. 14), but very different from Alchi. In other cases cited by De Nebesky-Wojkowitz and subsequently by Goepper, some forms of Rematī retain just the umbrella or panoply made of peacock plumage (De Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993, pp. 25-26, 33), but no other details corresponds with the Sumtsek’s deity. In addition, all these goddesses mentioned by Goepper are part of Palden Lhamo’s retinue, while the goddess depicted at Alchi, as also pointed out by Goepper, is of equal importance to Palden Lhamo.

It is more likely that the goddess on horseback in the Sumtsek (which also appears in other temples)<sup>3</sup> can be associated with Kasrung lhamo Dorje chenmo (bKa ‘srung lha mo rDo rje chen mo), the so-called tutelary deity of Rinchen Zangpo (Rin chen bZang po).

The oldest depiction of Dorje Chenmo is located in the Assembly Hall of Tabo, where the goddess is represented in the center of a scene, flanked by Palden Lhamo and Garzema (Gar mzaḍ ma) (Fig. 15). The painting can be dated between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Klimburg-Salter 1997, p. 94, fig. 57). The image of Dorje Chenmo in Tabo is analogous to that of Alchi, except for the vessel instead of the kapala. She too is blue, wearing lavish clothes and a cape of peacock feathers, and flanked by the goddesses of her retinue and is accompanied by horses, one of which is blue, similar to that of the goddess of Alchi. The cult of this goddess, in Tabo, is still vital, and the faithful who profess her cult confirm the identification of the goddess painted in Tabo as Dorje Chenmo.

In 2003, I photographed the restoration work begun in a small temple in Shey (Shel), in Ladakh. I was very surprised to see that, on the right wall of this small chapel, was a depiction of a goddess on horseback recognized by the faithful as Dorje Chenmo (Figs. 16 and 17). The chapel is dedicated to this goddess. Iconographically, although the painting is damaged, the Dorje Chenmo of Shey is similar to the goddess of Alchi and Tabo: the goddess is of dark colour, rides a black steed, carrying in her hand the *vajra* and the *kapala*. De Nebesky-Wojkowitz was the first scholar to dwell on this goddess who is apparently a form or at least an “emanation” of Palden Lhamo. She is believed to have been the personal protectress of the famous lotsava Rinchen Zangpo (De Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993, p. 36). According to De Nebesky-Wojkowitz: “the goddess has one face, and her colour is ‘like that of the rain-clouds’. Her appearance is slightly fierce, and usually her face bears the expression of a ferocious smile. With her right hand she brandishes a thunderbolt towards the sky and her left hand holds a vessel full of *amṛta* in front of her breast. She is dressed in loose garment, adorned with wreaths of jewel and flowers, she rides on a lion and is accompanied on the right side by lHa mo rematī, riding on a mule and carrying a magic notched stick and a sack containing diseases. Her companion on the left is the goddess Garzad ma (Gar mzaḍ ma) who rides on a stag. *Ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs* follow behind these goddesses” (De Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1993, p. 36) (Fig. 11).

In the description of Dorje Chenmo reported by De Nebesky-Wojkowitz, there are some details that correspond to the figure of the Sumtsek in Alchi as well as others that do not match. One of those details is the vehicle of the goddess, namely the lion, while at Alchi, Tabo and Shey, we find the horse.

It should be kept in mind that the Tibetan text on which is based the description of De-Nebesky Wojkowitz,

whose full title is *Chos skyong rnams sgrub skor bskang ba bskul dang bcas pa bzhugs so* was composed by the third Panchen Lama of Tashilhunpo, Lozang Paldan Yeshe (bLo bzang dPal ldan Ye shes), who lived between 1738 and 1780. So, the description of Dorje Chenmo could be the result of some changes related to her iconography. Another detail of the description of De Nebesky-Wojkowitz that does not correspond exactly to the goddess of Alchi is the ‘vessel’ she holds. But in the Tibetan text the term used is *bum pa* (dPal ldan Ye shes 1975-78, p. 138), which also means ‘bowl’ as well as ‘vessel.’ More significant, instead, is the presence of Palden Lhamo and Garzema beside her, as expected from the iconography of Dorje Chenmo, together with their retinue (dPal ldan Ye shes 1975-78, p. 139).

In any case, a text that confirms the presence of the horse as a vehicle for Dorje Chenmo is the *Jo bo dngul sku gsum mched dkar chag* written in the sixteenth century by Wa gindra Karma, otherwise known as Nawang Thinley Namgyal (Ngag dbang ’phrin las rnam rgyal), reported by Vitali in *Records of Tholing* (Vitali 1999, p. 24). This source informs us that an image (perhaps a statue) of Dorje Chenmo, riding a ‘black horse,’ was brought from the kingdom of Magadha to Tholing by Rinchen Zangpo, after his second trip to Kashmir, and was placed in the Tholing Tsug lakhang (*gtsug lag khang*). The text also says that the goddess was accompanied by Palden Lhamo and Garzema (Vitali 1999, p. 24). A chapel, the Srungma khang (bSrung ma khang), was built specifically for her cult, probably in 1001 (Vitali 1999, p. 122), and there was in addition to her life-size statue, a wall painting of the goddess with her two companions, and probably a large *thang ka* (Vitali 1999, pp. 86-87)

There is much oral information in Ladakh, relating to Dorje Chenmo. The Gelukpa (dGe lugs pa) monks of Tikse (Khrig se) argue that the complex of Nyarma (Nyar ma), founded by Rinchen Zangpo, was dedicated to Dorje Chenmo, although there is no evidence of this in any of the many biographies of Rinchen Zangpo. Vitali says it was a mistake on the part of the abbot of Tikse, Lozang Zodpa (bLo bzang bZod pa), and author of a hagiography of Rinchen Zangpo written in 1978, which confused the proclamation of Dorje Chenmo as tutelary deity of the temple complex of Nyarma with that of Tholing. In any case, the worship of Dorje Chenmo is still alive in Ladakh: certainly, the cult of this deity is still felt at Shey. What I have noticed is that the worship of Dorje Chenmo, that according to later Gelukpa sources it was introduced by Rinchen Zangpo, was developed, as a consequent result, within the religious order of the Gelukpa. The cult of

the goddess has survived in the temples and monasteries that naturally passed from the Kadampa (bKa’ gdams pa) orbit to that of the Gelukpa. It was probably a natural process if the site, which had been under the Kadampa control, returned legitimately under the Gelukpa. The link between Dorje Chenmo, Rinchen Zangpo and the Gelukpa is found in each of the sites that I have mentioned so far. Even the small temple of Shey, founded by Drukpa (’Brug pa) teachers in the eighteenth century, is linked to the influence that the Gelukpa exercised in Ladakh at that time.

In fact, the goddess and her retinue were brought to Shey by the Tibetan lama Kathog rigzin Tsewang norbu (Ka’ thog rig ’dzin Tshe dbang nor bu) who installed her as a protective deity in 1753 at the time of King Tsewang Namgyal’s enthronement (Dollfus 2006, pp. 373-406). Kathog rigzin Tsewang norbu (1698-1755) was a Nyingmapa (rNying ma pa) incarnate from Kathog Monastery in East Tibet. He was sent to Ladakh in 1752 by the Seventh Dalai Lama to solve the conflict between the Kingdom of Purig and the Kingdom of Ladakh (Schwieger 1997, pp. 219-230).

In light of this, it is possible that the goddess depicted in the Alchi Sumtsek should be, therefore, the mysterious goddess that the Gelukpa recall as Dorje Chenmo. In fact, the name Dorje Chenmo means simply “Great Vajra” and this is a general name maybe for re-named a type of ancient himalayan goddess. The fame of the goddess probably remained for the subsequent two or three centuries, because we find other similar representations of this goddess in the neighboring temple of Avalokiteśvara in Tsha Tsha phuri (Tsha tsha phu ri), in the Alchi district called “Gompa.”

Her image is visible also on the lower register of a fifteenth century *thangka* dedicated to Guru Dragmar (Guru drag dmar) preserved in a private collection<sup>4</sup> and in the murals at Mangdrak (Mang brag), a cave site in Guge, far western Tibet (Bellezza 2015). In both case we have the inscriptions with the name Dorje Chenmo. This means that this goddess on horseback was already known as Dorje Chenmo since 15th century, but she is never quoted in the biography of Rinchen Zangpo. There are many female goddesses on horseback or riding some animals in the Himalayan context and they are sometimes of Indian origins as well as of Himalayan origins.

Dorje Chenmo and Achi Chodzom (Aphyi Chos rdzom), the Drigungpa main protectress, for example, also have symbolic affinities with Dorje Chenmo; in fact, they are both the guardians of a religious order or of a teacher, and are represented at the entrance of the temples, on the



door. They also have a valence of protection towards the sacred place in which their images are kept, and finally they have in common the link with Palden Lhamo and Mahākāla.

We can therefore affirm that the deity painted in the Sumtsek and other Alchi and Himalayan temples is Dorje Chenmo. What we do not know is whether this goddess is really the protectress of Rinchen Zangpo or whether this link was built by the Gelukpa to connect a female deity revered by them with that renowned teacher who was so important in the spread of Buddhism in Tibet. We do not even know if “Great Vajra” was her real name.

Dorje Chenmo is depicted in Alchi, but who was Dorje Chenmo? This name associated to her iconography appear only by the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. The written evidences that identify that goddess as Dorje Chenmo, as protectress of Rinchen Zangpo, were later attributions by the Gelukpa for religious and political meanings, or codifications of an ancient oral tradition? The manipulation and reinterpretation of the iconography and symbolic meanings of Tibetan sacred art are a constant in this culture.

The art manifests not only stratification of ideas, concepts, symbols, and speculations, but also political and social interests. The art historian acts as a geologist who investigates the portion of a mountain: the thicker and deeper the layers, the more difficult it is to arrive at certain and definitive considerations.

The history of the Sumtsek of Alchi, as well as, more generally, the history of Himalayan art is like a massive and complicated puzzle, made of thousands of pieces. We can, from time to time, add some new ones. But only when, and if, we find all the pieces will it be truly possible to see the complete image reveal itself to our eyes.

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## Notes

1. This paper is the result of a talk presented in Chicago in 2014, in the occasion of the workshop “The Date of the Alchi Sumtsek Murals: 11th or 13th Century?” (April 4-5, 2014, Department of Art History, Northwestern University, Chicago). The workshop was focused on the dating of the paintings of the Alchi gSum brtsegs and the Three Storey Temple, in Ladakh.

2. Snellgrove and Skorupski assert: “redecorators repainted the temple as it was originally, simply giving fresh color to what was already there” (Snellgrove and Skorupski 1977, p. 48).

3. For example, the dukang (du’ khang) and the lhakhang soma (lha khang so ma) in Alchi.

4. Personal communication by Amy Heller. In this thangka is clearly depicted the same goddess on horseback of Alchi with the inscription below of her name: Dorje Chenmo.







Fig. 1. Sumtsek Temple, ca. Late Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries. Alchi, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India.





Fig. 2. Avalokiteśvara, ca. Late Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries.  
Sumtsek Temple, Alchi, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India.  
Photograph courtesy of Jaroslav Poncar.



Fig. 3. Tashi Namgyal portrait. Sixteenth century. Namgyal Tsemo gonkhang, Leh, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India.



Fig. 4. Tsewang Namgyal and his entourage by Dondrup Legpa. Sixteenth century. Upper Maitreya Temple, Basgo, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India.





Fig. 5. Rinchen Namgyal by Ganu. Sixteenth century. Assembly Hall of Phiyang monastery, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir state, India.



Fig. 6. Jigten gonpo by Lozang Dondrup. Sixteenth century. Gonkhang of Phiyang monastery, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India.





Fig. 7. Vajrapāṇi by Palgon Tsering. Sixteenth century. Gonkhang of Phyang monastery, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India.



Fig. 8. Tārā by Dondrup Legpa. Sixteenth century. Upper Maitreya Temple, Basgo, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India.





Fig. 9. Caturbhūja Mahākāla by Dondrup Paljor. Sixteenth century. Gonkhang of Phyang monastery, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India.



Fig. 10. Archer on horseback. Sixteenth century. Namgyal Tsemo gonkhang, Leh, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India.





Fig. 11. Mahākāla. Sumtsek, Alchi, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India. Photograph courtesy by Jaroslav Poncar.



Fig. 12. Kagyu lineage of masters. Thirteenth century. Sumtsek, Alchi, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir state, India. Photograph courtesy by Jaroslav Poncar.





Fig. 13. Kasrung lhamo Dorje chenmo. Ca. late eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Sumtsek, Alchi, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir State, India. Photograph courtesy by Jaroslav Poncar.





Fig. 14. Palden Lhamo remazda by Tsering Wangdu (Tshe ring dbang 'dus), Twentieth century. Gonkang of Likir monastery, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir state, India.





Fig. 15. Kasrung lharmo Dorje chenmo. Ca. fifteenth to sixteenth centuries. Tabo Assembly Hall, Spiti, Himachal Pradesh State, India. Photograph courtesy of Jaroslav Poncar.

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Fig. 16. Kasrung lhamo Dorje chenmo. Eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. Dorje chenmo chapel, Shey, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir state, India.





Fig. 17. Kasrung Ihamo Dorje chenmo, Eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. Dorje chenmo chapel, Shey, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir state, India.

