

NOTES ON THE DISPERSED JUCKER COLLECTION

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LAST YEAR, a private collection of Himalayan paintings gathered by the Swiss chemist Mischa Jucker and his wife Angela was auctioned off in New York. Previously the collection had come to attention through Hugo Kreijger's *Kathmandu Valley Painting*¹ (hereafter *KVP*), a catalogue of the Nepalese works in the collection, which made several errors of identification and was considered by some reviewers to be a perfunctory treatment.² Many of these shortcomings were corrected in the auction catalogue,³ which re-examined the paintings at first hand and offered a more expert appraisal. Prior to the auction a number of paintings in the collection had been scanned for the *himalayanart.org* website (hereafter *HA*), an extensive internet art resource, where the paintings may still be freely viewed.

The auction yielded record prices for Nepalese art, as much as three or four times more than the estimates.⁴ A painting of 'Siddhimañjuśrī' and consort⁵ dating from 1409 (*KVP* #30) was

sold for US\$676,800, the highest price ever paid for a Nepalese painting at auction.⁶ These high figures may point to a maturing appreciation of Newar art among Western art buyers. The level of craftsmanship was not exceptional in some of the more expensive pieces; rather, it seems that these were sought as much for their cultural or religious value. There is a lesson here, perhaps, for artisans in the present day: faithfulness to Nepal's Sanskritic heritage is what makes the difference between paintings from the pre-modern period and the finely-crafted but jejune thangkas coming off the Valley's modern production lines.

Although the Jucker collection has now dispersed, a few of the problems of identification that lingered into the auction catalogue remain to be addressed. Also more could be said about the significance of some items in their original Newar Buddhist context.⁷ In the following I would like to show these paintings why deserve to be properly documented and studied, should they re-emerge.

¹ Kreijger, Hugo E., *Kathmandu Valley Painting: The Jucker Collection*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999.

² "...the text is quite rudimentary. There is no point of view. The introductory text is a rather superficial look at Nepal's geography and history... As for the catalogue descriptions, they are, on the whole, just descriptions of what we see in the plates" (Tony Luppino, <http://www.asianart.com/books/reviews/kathmandu.shtml>).

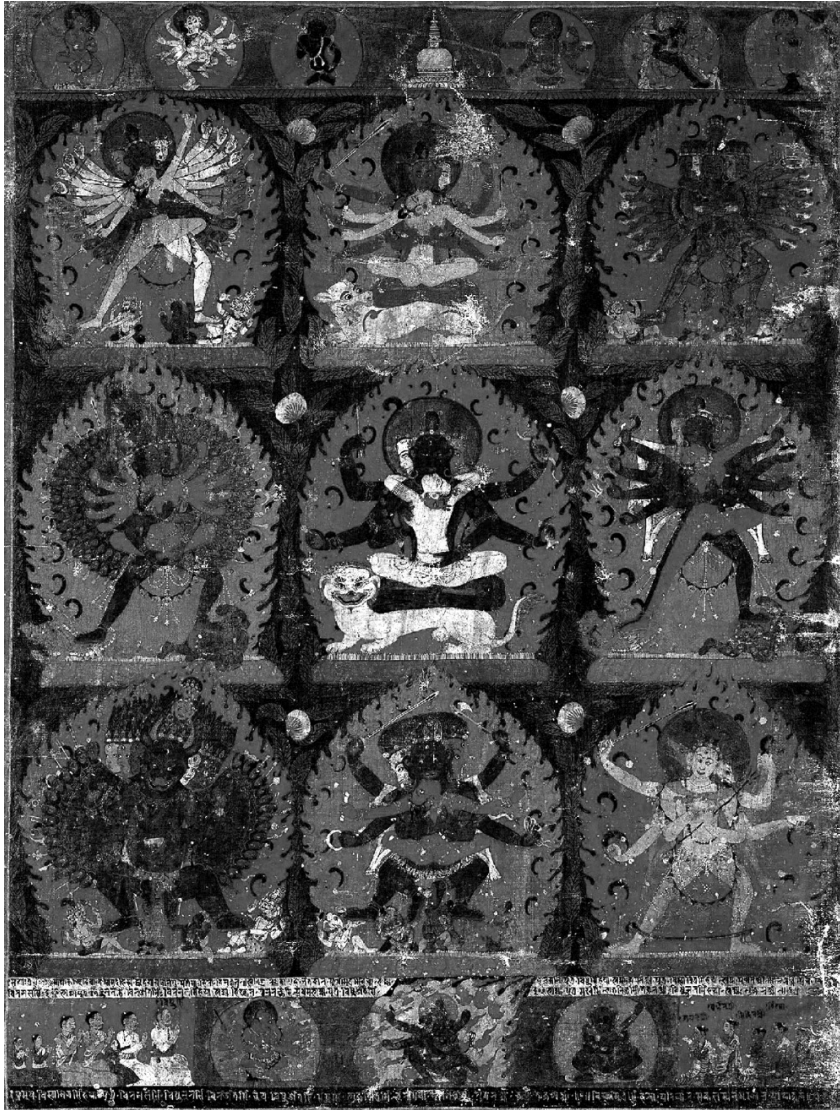
³ *Sotheby's: The Jucker Collection of Himalayan Paintings. New York: March 28, 2006*, Sotheby's, 2006.

⁴ Weigman, Matthew and Gelder, Kristin, 'Sotheby's sets records for Tibetan and Nepalese works of art at auction... the Jucker collection of Himalayan paintings totals \$9,050,600 (est. to bring \$2.5/3.5 million)', Press release, 28 March 2006.

⁵ These appellations are those of the (unpublished) inscription; cf. *KVP* p.36. This three-faced, six-armed deity, 'sunrise saffron' (*kumkumārūna*) in colour, who is a common subject in Nepalese art (*KVP* #10, p.46, seems to be derived from this particular painting), is the central deity of the *Māyājāla-tantra's* maṇḍala, as described in *Niṣpannayogāvalī* XXI (identified therein as 'Vairocanasvabhāvo Mañjuvajraḥ', with consort Vajradhātviśvarī) and *Sādhanamālā* 76.

⁶ At a separate auction, a gilt Buddhist statue from the Yongle period — undoubtedly of Newar workmanship, but not advertised as such — sold for the astronomical price of HK\$116.6 million (=US\$14.9 million), also the highest on record ('Chinese Artwork Set Record Price in HK', Xinhua, October 8, 2006).

⁷ Some paintings from the collection I plan to discuss elsewhere, eg. *KVP* #21 (*HA* 89001), probably depicting Viśvarūpa Lokeśvara of the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*; *KVP* #37 (*HA* 89016), a spurious 'Cosmic Puruṣa'; and *KVP* #36, portraying the Sixty-four (Catuṣṣaṣṭhi°) Samvaras.



Notes on the Collection

22: ‘Nine Tantric Deities’

KVP p.71; *HA* 89002; Lot 23. Dated NS 895 (1775 CE).

This painting of nine tantric deities is a copy of a mid-fifteenth century work now in the Pritzker collection.⁸ Neither *KVP* nor the auction catalogue

fully identify the main figures, which are, in their respective directions (assuming top marks East):

NE (top L)	Kālacakra
E (top M)	Mañjuvajra-Akṣobhya ⁹
SE (top R)	Hevajra
N (mid L)	Mahāsamvara
(mid M)	Yogāmbara
S (mid R)	Cakrasamvara

⁸ Pal, Pratapaditya, *Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure*, University of California Press, 2003; cat.37, p.66–67, ‘Esoteric Buddhist Deities’.

⁹ This deity, who is not ‘Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara’, is correctly shown with saffron (*kum kuma*) hue in the original, changed to brown in the copy; cf. Abhayākara Gupta, *Niṣpannayogāvalī* I.

NW (low L)	Vajrabhairava
W (low M)	[?] ¹⁰
SW (low R)	Ubhayavarāhānana-Mārīcī ¹¹

Many of these figures are rarely depicted in Newar painting, especially with the detail and prominence seen here. According to the catalogue the artist (*citrakāra*) Viṣṇusimha, who made the 1775 copy (and whose extended family is shown at the base of the copy), had to take tantric initiation in order to paint it. A comparison of the paintings shows that the copy updates the style but is studiously accurate, despite the loss of a head (on Mārīcī) or pair of arms (from Mahāsamvara's consort) here and there. The painting's renewal was an act that required close attention, if not direct supervision.

The catalogue offers the intriguing suggestion that “this particular grouping of deities relates to a specific ceremonial or meditation practice”. If so, there is no obvious inspiration in what is so far known about the Newar Vajrayāna. Whatever custom guided the original composition, or motivated its renewal, is quite probably lost; only visual clues remain. As most of the high Vajrayāna deities are represented here (including a few not part of Abhayākara Gupta's systematization), it is a safe assumption that this configuration postdates the final phase of Indian Buddhism. The arrangement of these deities must be a Nepalese conception dating from the twelfth or thirteenth century at the earliest. The painting's creators clearly had a good command of tantric Buddhism — and by extension, were driven by some purpose or design

— because the iconography is accurate and draws on several independent texts. Does this group of deities suggest a kind of geographic maṇḍala centred on the Kathmandu Valley? Seen in this way the deity Yogāmbara, in the middle, would represent the heart of the Valley itself, with the other deities somehow evocative of their respective directions. A number of correspondences could be grounded in contemporary tantric knowledge:

- Kālacakra in Sambhala, the legendary Vajrayāna oasis to be sought in the real northeast;
- Hevajra to the southeast, reminding us of the widespread and once-famous cult at Angkor, where dozens if not hundreds of images have been found;
- Mārīcī in the southwest, perhaps pointing to Orissa, a place similarly dense with Mārīcī images, many still worshipped *in situ*; and
- Vajrabhairava in the northwest, where at least one scholar thinks the deity's cult originated.¹²

It is hard to say now — due to the lack of written evidence and losses in traditional learning — whether this painting was intended as a kind of tantric map of South Asia, seen from a Nepalese perspective. More might be gleaned from a comparative study of paintings which place high-tantric deities in the ordinal directions. Certainly the placement of Kālacakra in the northeast and Hevajra in the southeast is an extremely common configuration, and one which predates the earlier painting.

¹⁰ Although this six-armed, three-faced, four-footed figure is identified as Vighnāntaka in *KVP* and the auction catalogue, presumably because one of the trampled figures is an elephant-headed *vighna*, the iconography does not match any recorded form of this deity (ie. those enumerated in de Mallmann's *Introduction à l'iconographie du tântrisme bouddhique*, Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1986, p.448; most forms tend to show the central hands with skullcup and chopper rather than the vajra-bell mudrā). The original bears a caption in which the characters [Mahā-?]*kāra* can almost be discerned.

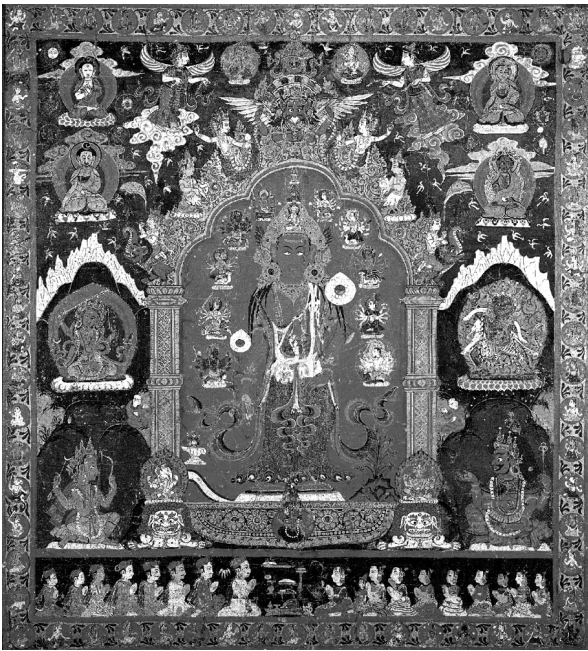
¹¹ This is the 'Double-sow-faced' Mārīcī described in *Sādbhanamālā* 145.

¹² Siklós, Bulcsu, *The Vajrabhairava Tantras: Tibetan and Mongolian Versions, English Translation and Annotations*, Tring: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1996, p.3ff. In this study the place of origin is linked less than convincingly to Iranian 'Yama-cult'; however the tantric sources' references to animals such as camels also point to some location around the northeast of India.

25: 'Padmapāṇi'

KVP p.77; HA 89005; Lot 29. Dated early eighteenth c.

The Nepalese deity Buṅgadyaḥ, known to Newar Buddhists as Karuṅāmaya Lokeśvara and to everyone else as Matsyendranāth, is represented here in a curious way. All the conventional attributes are present, namely bright red complexion, wide eyes, and so on; the figure is also surrounded by emanated gods, in the manner of Sṛṣṭikartā (or °kānta) Lokeśvara, whom Newar Buddhists accept as “creator” of the Brahmanical pantheon.¹³ It is not uncommon for Sṛṣṭikartā and Karuṅāmaya Lokeśvara to be graphically conflated, but the depiction of the surrounding gods with multi-headed, multi-armed forms is unusual. Although similar multifarious forms of these deities exist within Buddhism, a Nepalese viewer would be more likely to associate them with tantric Śaivism. This association is heightened by the presence of a small *linga* to the deity’s lower left, and especially, by an image of Maheśvara (Śiva) in the deity’s



crown — signalling, apparently, the deity’s Śaiva allegiance.

Yet this is definitely a Buddhist painting. On closer inspection, the Śiva in the crown is surmounted by the Buddha Amitābha, head of Lokeśvara’s lotus family; and Amitābha, in turn, is topped by a miniature Vajrasattva.¹⁴ The other four Buddhas appear in the top corners in a position of primacy, while Lokeśvara’s traditional retinue of Sudhana, Hayagrīva, and others (including a distant pair of monks) look on from the hills. The painter thereby conveys a remarkably defiant message: although Buṅgadyaḥ may outwardly look like a tantric Hindu saint (and be worshipped as such by the Valley’s Gorkhā rulers), the deity is in his heart aligned firmly with high tantric Buddhism — “high” evident in the presence of six Buddhas, as mandated in the later *ṣaṭkula* system.

¹³ cf. *Kāraṇḍavyūha* I.4, ‘Candrādyutpatti’.

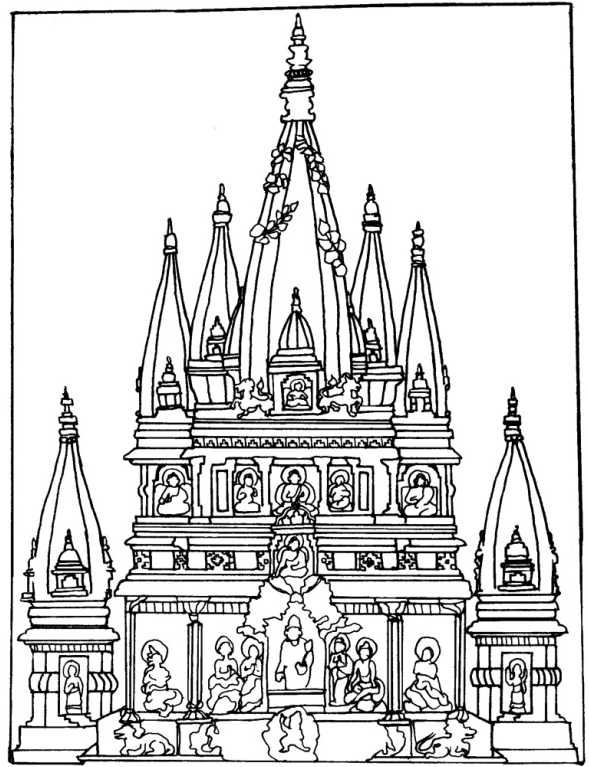
¹⁴ In the catalogue it is suggested that these figures are “possibly [Śiva’s] spiritual progenitors the Siddha Luyipa and his disciple Gorakhnātha above”; however the iconography is clearly that of Amitābha and Vajrasattva.

The sixty-six figures shown in the painting's border may be connected with the deities who are summoned into pots during the deity's annual chariot festival, while Buṅgadyaḥ is stationed at Ta Bāhā. During this rite the pots are arranged in four rows to form a square, in much the same way as seen on the border of the painting [see **photograph**].¹⁵ An emblem (*ciṃ*) painted on each pot shows which member of Buṅgadyaḥ's divine retinue and "pals (*pāsāpim*)" has been summoned within.

30: Buṅga Bāhā ('Padmāpaṇi Shrine')

KVP p.87; *HA* 89010; Lot 39. Dated NS 970 (1850 CE).

This important painting depicts the deity Buṅgadyaḥ (inscription: *Ārjyāvalokiteśvarah*) in a large temple. It was certainly an important site for the sponsors; no less than 108 worshippers (not counting their accompanying children) are



individually portrayed and named in the painting's lower half. According to an interpretation of the inscription (largely illegible both in *KVP* and *HA*) published in the auction catalogue, several Mānandhars had the painting made and donated it to "Thatu Bahī" — presumably Jayakīrti Mahāvihāra in Bhaktapur.

¹⁵ According to Bruce Owens, *The politics of divinity in the Kathmandu valley: The festival of Bungadya/Rato Matsyendranath*, Columbia University: PhD diss., 1989, p. 370, this part of the festival is normally carried out on Vaiśākh kṛṣṇa 13 and involves 72 clay pots; when I saw it on 21 April 2001 (=Vaiśākh śukla 7?), 72 copper pots were used (including a waist-high pot of the main deity, whose emblem is a vajra and vajra-bell, blue and yellow respectively, on a lotus).

The auction catalogue tentatively identifies this place as Ta Bāhā in Lalitpur, which is one of the deity’s two resting places, the other being Buṅga Bāhā at Buṅgamati. The building as it appears in the painting is fundamentally unlike the shrine at Ta Bāhā in that period — Ta Bāhā having been sketched for a British collection a few years earlier.¹⁶ The inscription mentions that the donors had worshipped during the month of Gunlā, a time when Bhaktapur’s Mānandhars traditionally visit Buṅgamati.¹⁷ During this period the annual chariot festival of Buṅgadyaḥ has already concluded with the deity being returned to Buṅgamati. In the painting a plume of foliage is visible behind the shrine, evoking a countryside (*buṅga*) location. At the time when the painting was commissioned, Buṅgamati would have still been surrounded by forest.

So the painting probably shows Buṅgamati, even though the *śikhara* spires of the Buṅgamati shrine differ considerably from the more traditionally Newar *kūṭāgāra*-style architecture shown in the painting. A few structural elements in the lower section are similar to the building as it stands today. It may be that the artist was not concerned with achieving an accurate representation, but presumably the painting’s sponsors would have wanted something readily recognisable. Or perhaps the building was altered in the nineteenth century, although no account of such a change has come to light.¹⁸ Compare another depiction of Buṅga Bāhā in the Ekai Kawaguchi collection (unfortunately undated, but probably not later than mid-nineteenth century¹⁹). This painting shows both the white *śikhara* spires and ornate

lower sections crowded with deities [see [drawing](#)], also seen in the present painting.

31: ‘Kapāladharahevajra’

KVP p.88; *HA* 89011; Lot 41. Dated NS 975 (~1855 CE).

The value of this painting lies partly in its confirmation that an initiation lineage of Hevajra still existed in the mid-nineteenth century. Its inscription notes that ‘Hevajra-Nairātmā’ is the personal deity (*śrī 3 svastadevatā*) of the sponsor, one Jivanārāya[ṇa?]. This person self-identified as a Kāyastha (*kāyista*), and so was one of the many Newars not from a monastic Buddhist caste who, throughout history, are recorded as recipients of Vajrayāna *dīkṣā*. The painting was consecrated on a Thursday, the thirteenth of the waxing half of the month of Kārtika, just prior to the full moon which traditionally commemorates the manifestation of Guhyeśvarī, aka. Nairātmya. The four *yoginīs* in the painting’s four corners are presumably the four *yoginīs* of the Kathmandu Valley.

33: ‘Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara’

KVP p.92; *HA* 89013; Lot 44. Dated 19th century.

In this painting a ‘peaceful’ deity, Dharmadhātu-vāgīśvara, is placed within a prominent frame of eight charnel grounds, a setting normally considered proper for ‘frightful’ deities. One possible explanation for this incongruity is that the charnel grounds stand for the periphery of the Kathmandu Valley itself. The later *Svayambhū*

¹⁶ British Library (Lawrence Collection), Add.Or.5251, dated 1843–46.

¹⁷ Gutschow, Niels, *The Nepalese Caitya*, Stuttgart/London: Axel Menges, 1997, p.79.

¹⁸ John Locke, in *Rato Matsyendranath of Patan and Bungamati*, Kirtipur: Tribhuvan University, 1973, states (p.11) that the present form of the temple dates to 1675; but, in attempting to explain discrepancies in a slightly later written account, acknowledges that substantial changes must have taken place since then (“the temple during the last two hundred years has suffered greatly from neglect and pilferage”). It would be unusual if the structure had stood in its present form for over three centuries, in the earthquake-prone Valley, without undergoing any form of renovation.

¹⁹ Cat. 2-055, kept at Tohoku University; discussed by Tanaka, Kimiaki 田中公明, *Shōkai Kawaguchi Ekai Korekushon: Chibetto-Nepāru Bukkyō Bijutsu* 『詳解河口慧海コレクション—チベット・ネパール仏教美術』 (*A Catalogue of Ekai Kawaguchi’s Collection of Tibetan and Nepalese Buddhist Art*), Tokyo: Kosei Shuppansha 佼成出版社, 1990, pp.244–6.

Purāna literature identifies the Valley's eight holy bathing places (*tīrtha*) with the eight charnel grounds, eight Mothers and eight Bhairavas.²⁰ This conception of the charnel grounds enlarges upon the descriptions found in basic Vajrayāna texts.

The eight Bhairavas here take central place in each charnel ground, as the *Purāna* stipulates. Although the inspiration for their iconography is not immediately clear, it seems to derive as much from the Śaiva traditions handed down by Newar painters²¹ as from the brief descriptions in the larger *Svayambhū Purānas*.

If the charnel grounds represent the Valley, it follows that Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara personifies the Svayambhū caitya itself — a correspondence that was well established by the nineteenth century.²²

34: Dīpaṅkara ('Buddha Śākyamuni')

KVP p.95; *HA* 89014; Lot 142. Dated NS 1017 (1897 CE).

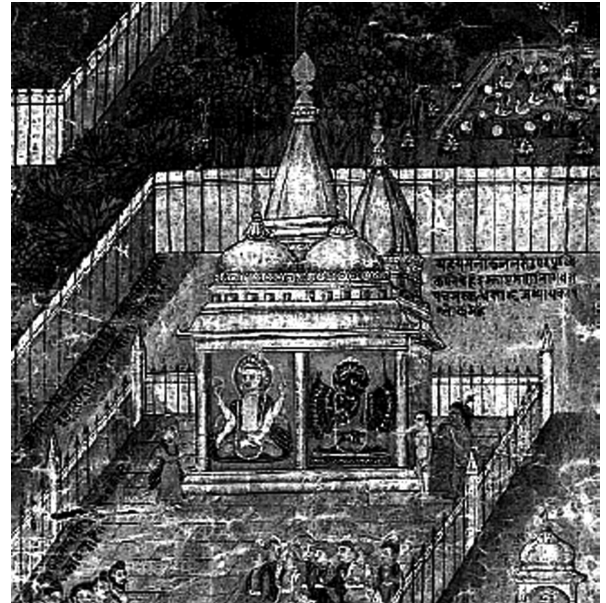
The figure identified both in *KVP* and the auction catalogue as 'Śākyamuni' in fact represents the Buddha Dīpaṅkara, as spelled out in the dedication inscribed around the painting (beginning at top left corner: *om namaḥ śrī dīpaṅkarāya* ||). The form shown corresponds to the usual iconography of Dīpaṅkara in Nepal: golden complexion, standing upright, and displaying the gesture of giving (*varada*) at the waist with the right hand. Dīpaṅkara is especially associated with Newar Buddhist rituals of charity (*dāna*). Kazumi Yoshizaki's reading of the dedication shows that the

painting was commissioned by five Śākya brothers from the *saṅgha* of Hiranya-varṇa Mahāvihāra — who were apparently Lhasa Newars judging by their portraits at the painting's base — to commemorate a *pañjadāna* held in the month of Śrāvaṇa that year.²³

38: Yama's Realm ('The Judgement of Human Deeds')

KVP p.102–3, *HA* 89017, Lot 47. Dated late nineteenth century.

This extraordinary panorama of Hell (*Yamaloka*), over two metres wide, is abundantly captioned and seems to have been devised for the edification of Nepal's Rāṇā élite. The painter's brazen merger



²⁰ Kölver, Bernhard, 'Stages in the Evolution of a World Picture', *Numen* XXXII fasc.2, 1985, p.155.

²¹ See drawings in manuscript reproduced in Blom, M.L.B., *Depicted Deities: Painters' Model Books in Nepal*, Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1989, esp. p.27.

²² Compare a similar painting from the same period, recently put up for auction at Christies (Lot 2172, Sale 5092, London, February 22, 2007). The composition is identical in most respects, except that the charnel grounds lack Bhairavas, and the main deity is instead Sukhāvātī Lokeśvara. The presence of this uniquely Newar form of Lokeśvara indicates that this is not a Tibetan painting, as advertised ("A Tibetan Thangka, 19th century... depicting... the multi-headed and eight armed figure of Guhyasanaja..." sic; <http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lfsearch/LotDescription.aspx?intObjectId=4865959>.)

²³ Yoshizaki, Kazumi 吉崎一美, 'Newaru-go meibun wo motsu Chibetto Bukkyō eiga ni tsuite' ネワール語銘文を持つチベット仏教絵画について ('Tibetan Buddhist Paintings bearing Newari Inscriptions'), *Mikkyō Bunka* 『密教文化』 213, 2004, pp.21–43 [via: *The Kathmandu Valley as a Water Pot*, unpublished draft, 2006].

of classical Hindu prescriptions with European architecture and perspective offers a revealing window not only onto contemporary taste, but also on how afterlife beliefs were perceived in a modernizing culture. The reproductions in *KVP* and *HA* are not detailed enough to allow close reading of the captions. The enclosure at top left seems to house a form of Viṣṇu (*Vaikunṭha*). In the main compound are two pavilions: the one to the right housing Citragupta, the one to the left with possibly Yama and – quite anomalously – the tantric Buddhist deity Vajrabhairava.²⁴

40: Kāraṇḍavyūha MS (‘Illustrations from a Buddhist Manuscript’)
KVP p. 106, *HA* 89020.

The ‘Buddhist manuscript’ which remained unidentified in *KVP* is the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*. One folio (*KVP* p.106 #2, *HA* 89020 #8) depicts a Vajrācārya bearing the manuscript itself (it begins: *om namo āryavaroki*), a fitting allusion to the self-referential and self-propagating qualities of Mahāyāna literature which the *Kāraṇḍavyūha* (and its Nepalese verse derivative, the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*) epitomises. All the illuminations and (uncorrected) captions can be correlated with narratives in these texts.

49: Jambhala and Hariharivāhana Lokeśvara (‘Folio from a Sketchbook with Images of Kubera, Viṣṇu, Garuda and Avalokiteśvara’)
KVP p.118; *HA* 89034; Lot 36. Early nineteenth century.

Here two figures are sketched on a leaf of what seems to be European paper.²⁵ The deity shown on the left of the page, which is not identified

in *KVP*, conforms to the iconography of Ucchuṣmajambhala. The figure is meant to be colored dark blue (label: *ni*) and the caption above says *Jamala*. It is possible that the artist copied a Tibetan exemplar (cf. Tib. *Jam bha la*), as this deity has no known function in Newar Buddhism, and there are deviations from the extant Sanskrit *sādhanas*.²⁶

As for the deity shown on the right, the artist has not “combined gods from the Hindu and Buddhist pantheon... as an exercise of drawing”; rather the iconography conforms to the usual form of this deity, well-known in Nepal, here captioned *Hariharivāha-na Lokeśvara*.



²⁴ I owe this observation to Hubert Decler’s ‘Largely *Fonds de Tirroirs*: The [Mischa & Angela] Jucker Collection’, unpublished draft, 2002.

²⁵ According to the auction catalogue, this drawing is one of several in the collection originally belonging to the famous Brian Houghton Hodgson (1801–94).

²⁶ Namely, *Sādhanamālā* 291 & 295. In the drawing the hand holds a skull-cup containing what seems to be three jewels, whereas the *sādhanas* say only that it should be “full of blood” (*pūrṇarakta*); this suggests a miscopying of the exemplar. The drawing also omits the Buddha that is to be shown in Jambhala’s crown, ie. Ratnasambhava (#291) or Akṣobhya (#295).