

A HINDU IMAGE IN THE HIMALAYAS

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In the temple of Khojarnāth, a statue is worshipped of the *rigs gsum mgon pos*, the three nāthas: Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, which the Indian pilgrims who visit the temple on the occasion of their yātrā to the Kailāsa and Manasarovar take for a statue of Rāma accompanied by Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa.¹ I too was in Khojarnāth and could examine the images: I had hardly any doubt that, in spite of the clothes which cover them, the statues represent the three Bodhisattvas. We do not know if the statues now worshipped in the temple are the original ones, because the temple was often looted; therefore it is not excluded that the original images have been either destroyed or carried away. The fact is certain that the temple of Khojarnāth boasted and still boasts of having a famous image, the so-called Jo bo Jamali.² One story runs as follows. There was once in sPu-hrañs an ascetic to whom seven *ācāryas* gave in custody seven bundles before departing again for India. Since many years had elapsed and the *ācāryas* did not come back, the ascetic opened the bundles and he found inside each of them silver wrapped in cloth on which the letters Dsa ma li were written. He sent the silver to aDsum lañ to some local silversmiths requesting them to make an image of Jo bo: when the statue had been completed up to the knees, the upper part was miraculously finished. It was therefore considered a self-originated image (*ran̄ abyun̄*) and taken to Tibet; but when it reached the place where at present there is the monastery of Khojarnāth, it was impossible to take it any further. A temple was built on the spot which was called K'ur c'ags. The statue was therefore called K'ur c'ags Jo bo, or Dsa ma li Jo bo. Side by side with this Tibetan tradition there is

another related by the Indians.³ When the Turuška invader No ro ji conquered Chitōr, the king and his brother carried away to the Himalayas the images of T'ugs rje c'en po and Tārā which were worshipped in Chitōr.⁴ When they reached the place where at present there is Khojarnāth, they were unable to carry the image any further. In the place where they had laid it down there arose a throne of *armolikā* stone and a three stemmed iron *āsana* in form of lotus: then a voice was heard to say in the sky: leave it here. The Tibetans later built there a temple: then the king and his brother took away the image of Tārā to Nepal and probably to Kathmandu. After some time the elder brother became master of aDzum lañ and the younger of Nepal: but successively the younger brother left Nepal and went to South India to be king somewhere there, leaving on the occasion of his departure a replica of the image of sGrol ma, which he had taken along with him.

In the guide of Khojarnāth the first part of the story is recorded, and that also with some variations, but no mention is made there of the Indian development.

We are here confronted with some oral traditions concerning the image worshipped in Khojarnāth which oppose two main trends. One of Tibetan origin insists on the wonder of the self-originated statue. The second betrays its Indian origin. The most interesting part of this tradition is its connexion with aDsum lañ that is Jumla. This, as I have shown in my book *Preliminary Report on two scientific expeditions in Nepal*, was for a certain time a very important town in the proximity of the capital of Western Tibet and Western Nepal as well under a dynasty which though prevalently Buddhist was equally sympathetic towards Hinduism and finally accentuated its Hinduistic propensities.

These rulers were Khasa (Khasiya) by origin: but were succeeded in later times, when their kingdom collapsed, by the influx of some chiefs and princes which the events in medieval India had compelled to take shelter in safer countries. This fact is testified by the records contained in the *Vaṃśāvalis* of some families of Nepal, and by the claim of some rulers of the Malla dynasties of Nepal. The tradition concerning the foundation of the monastery of Khojarnāth as told by the *gnas yig* is contradicted by another story told in the biography of Rin c'en bzañ po according to which the monastery of aK'a ač'ar in sPu hrañs was founded by the famous lotsāva. It is said to be one of the 108 IHa k'añ built by him and aKa c'ar (= K'ur c'ags) is taken as the extreme eastern limit of the activity of Rin c'en bzañ po.⁵ We are therefore confronted with two traditions the former explaining the foundation as

³ This story is narrated in the *aDam bu gliñ rgyas bśad*.

⁴ I cannot identify No ro ji, nor is it possible to accept the statement of the tradition here implicit that the presiding deities of Chitōr were Buddhist.

⁵ See G. Tucci, *Rin c'en bzañ po e la rinascita del Buddhismo nel Tibet intorno al mille*. Roma, 1933.

¹ Swami Sivananda, *A trip to sacred Kailās-Mansarovar*, Madras, 1932, p. 32 (the principal idols are those of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Sītā). Swami Pranavānanda, *Exploration in Tibet*. Calcutta 1950, p. 96 ff. (Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, Avalokiteśvara). G. Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, p. 684. G. Tucci, *Santi e Briganti*, Milano 1937, p. 38. G. Tucci, *Preliminary report on two scientific expeditions in Nepal*, Roma, 1956, p. 62 n.

² The meaning of Dsamali, Jamali is uncertain. One story connects the seven *ācāryas* with king gNam mgon sde (Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, p. 684, n. 2), a devotee of Jambhala: so the words Dsa ma are put into relation with Jambhala. But of course this is merely a learned speculation of the monks of Khojarnāth. Another solution is that in Jamali we see a reference to Jumla, where the work had been made by the local artists; Jo bo Jamali, the Jo bo made in Jumla. Jamala may well be the old spelling of Jumla. On the place see my *Preliminary report on two scientific expeditions in Nepal*, p. 112.

suggested by a miraculous event, the second attributing it to a celebrated lotsāva, usually considered as responsible, with Atīśa, for the revival of Buddhism in Western Tibet in the Xth–XIth centuries; of course these two different accounts regarding the foundation of Khojarnāth are derived from two different sectarian centres: the biography of Rin c'en bzañ po reflecting the ideas of the bKa' gdams pa's and then of the dGe lugs pa's and the guide of Khojarnāth those of the Sa skya pa's.

Evidently we cannot decide for either solution; but the fact seems beyond doubt that Khojarnāth is one of the oldest religious settlements in sPu hrañs. We may add that the Tibetan tradition concerning the statue of Khojarnāth cannot but refer to the period of the Malla rule of Western Tibet and Western Nepal, when Semjā near Jumla⁶ was the capital of the kingdom and therefore a centre where artisans were held in special consideration, for their workmanship (XIIth–XIVth centuries).

The Indian tradition on the other hand probably records the later newcomers from Central and South India, after the increasing danger of the Mohammedan invasions.⁷ It is interesting that an Indian document proves that in Western Tibet there was an image of a Hindu deity or at least that a rather old tradition existed in India concerning the presence of a Hindu image in those parts.

The document to which I am referring is the Inscription of Yaśovarman of year V.S. 1011=A.D. 953–54 of Khajurāho (E.I., i, p. 122 ff. and specially 129 and 134)⁸ in which we are told of an image of Vaikuṅṭha which was originally in Kailāsa; from there the lord of the Bhoṭas obtained it and gave it as a token of friendship to Śāhi king of the Kīras. It was then obtained in exchange for elephants and horses by Herambapāla and his son Devapāla gave it in his turn to Yaśovarman himself.

In front of the statement contained in the inscription two directions are possible: either we assume that it is a mere story concocted for some reasons which we cannot now discover or we accept it as a true fact. The proclamation of the origin of the image in a public document of that importance and concerning an image which must have enjoyed a particular worship, the reference to persons of recent date or alive, the notoriety which the image must have enjoyed exclude, to my mind, the first hypothesis. We can therefore accept the statement of the inscription as reliable.

⁶ G. Tucci, *Preliminary Report*, p. 112 ff.

⁷ Many references can be found in Nepalese documents and Vaṃśāvalis to Chitōr and the descendance of the Western Nepalese rulers from that locality. See *Preliminary Report*, pp. 117, 119, 125, 128.

⁸ On this inscription *cf.* G. S. Ojha in E.I., xiv, p. 180. B. N. Puri, *The History of the Gurjara-pratihāras*, pp. 76, 89. As to the identity of Devapāla of this inscription with the Pratihāra Devapāla of Kanauj it is questioned by some scholars. See R. S. Tripathi, *History of Kanauj to the Moslem Conquest*, p. 272. N. S. Bose, *History of the Chandellas of Jejakabhukti*, p. 33. Sisir Kumar Mitra, *The early rulers of Khajurāho*, p. 55.

The image was brought to India at the times of Herambapāla who is supposed to be the father of Devapāla of the Pratihāra dynasty and to have lived in the first part of the first quarter of the Xth century; but since the image came to India not directly but through the Śāhis of Kīra (Kāngrā), it means that some time must have elapsed between its first removal from the Bhoṭadeśa and its transferment to Khajurāho. All this takes us back to about the end of the second half of the IXth century, that is to say approximately to the time of the beginning of the Guge and sPu hrañs kingdoms immediately after the death of Glañ dar ma in 842.

The religious situation of that part of Tibet at that time is practically unknown: the general belief was centred on the Bon c'os: the Bon po's have always considered Western Tibet as a kind of Holy Land and the birth-place of the systematizer of their religion Mi bo gšen rab. The scions of the royal family of Tibet, just escaped after the collapse of the dynasty and the revival of Bon c'os in Central Tibet, might have had a liking towards Buddhism. But this is only a surmise, because we can speak of a revived interest in Buddhism, much later with Ye šes 'od about the end of the Xth century: he was the king who sent Rin c'en bzañ po, born in 958 (*Blue Annals*, i, 68), to Kashmir to study Buddhism.

So the gift of the image of Vaikuṅṭha⁹ by the Bhoṭas to the Śāhis of the Kīras must have happened before the effective spreading of Buddhism in Western Tibet at the very time of the first rulers who hailing from Central Tibet took control of that region.

Nothing prevents us from thinking that in those times to which we are referring there existed the same pilgrimages to Manasarovar and Kailāsa as they still continue, and that in a *dharmasālā*, along the routes, some statue of hindu gods might have been placed for worship of the pilgrims. In the Indian literature this part of the world near the Kailāsa is well known and it must have been in old times too a common place of pilgrimage as it is now, if in the Rāmāyaṇa the swelling of the lake Mānasa caused by the rains is already referred to (story of Saramā. Rām. vii, 12, 24. *Cfr.* Sven Hedin, *Southern Tibet* i, p. 13). Of course we cannot expect the references in Sanskrit literature to be so accurate as we could expect from modern travellers: the pilgrims went to these places not in order to draw maps, but only to participate with awe and religious reverence in the mystical aura which surrounded the place. The visitors were not scientists, but *siddhas* and people anxious to get *siddhi* or *svarga*, mystic realizations or paradises, and they saw the sacred places with different eyes than we do at present. In spite of that, the references to be found in Sanskrit literature betray the direct

⁹ We would have rather expected an image of Śiva abiding on the Kailāsa, but Viṣṇu too is connected with the Himalayas; his mountain was according to Mahābhārata the mountain Mandara to the East of Meru and to the north of the Milk sea (Fausbøll, *Indian Mythology according to Mahābhārata*, pp. 103 and 169).

knowledge that the Indians had from old times of the Kailāsa and the Manasarovar and therefore testify to the antiquity of the intercourse between the plains and that part of the world.

Moreover we must consider that the name Kailāsa does not refer in Indian literature to the mountain only, but in a general sense it may designate the great Himalayan range including Kumaon, Garhwal, and the country of the Khāsas. The looseness of the sense in which the word was used is confirmed by the reference to Kailāsa as one of the places which were overrun by Rāmacandra, according to the Puruṣottamapuri plates of 1310 (E.I. xxv, pp. 207, 211).

The name Bhoṭa, whose king gave as a token of friendship the image of Vaikuṅṭha to the Śāhi of the Kīras,¹⁰ is equally vague: it does not necessarily refer to the Tibetans, but it can be applied to all mixed population of the northern borders near Tibet, Ladakh and the extreme parts of Kumaon and Garhwal. The image had three heads, a human one, that of a boar and that of a lion (see H. Goetz, in *Arts Asiatiques*, 1958, p. 37), though other dhyānas represent the deity with four faces and eight arms (*gadā*, sword, arrow and *cakra* in the right hand; conchshell, *kitaka* flower, bow and lotus in the left). His vehicle must be the Garuḍa (G. Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, i, p. 256).

The description of the image rules out that it did not really represent Vaikuṅṭha though it was presented as that of Vaikuṅṭha; moreover Indians are very cautious and respectful when gods are concerned and such a misbehaviour is to be excluded also because each deity must have its own *upāsana*, and it would be dangerous to worship it with a cult reserved to another. This could happen only unconsciously as it can be noticed in some villages in Bengal where I saw Buddhist deities worshipped as Viṣṇu or Lakṣmī though they clearly represented Avalokiteśvara or Tārā. But this is not the case here; the image was sent to some royal courts as a most precious thing, and at those courts there were pandits who could have controlled the reliability of the iconography of the god: so much so because Vaikuṅṭha had a well fixed iconography of his own.

A last word must be said concerning the Kīras, and the Śāhis of the Kīras; there is little doubt that the Kīras must be located in the Kāngrā district; they have been for long time at war with Chambā: their history has been in the main outlined by R. C. Majumdar, and I am afraid, at present, very little can be added to it (IHQ, ix, pp. 11-17).

To conclude it seems that we have no reason to doubt about the existence of a Hindu image which from the Himalayan region went down to Khajurāho, though a further localization of the part of the Bhoṭadeśa from which it came cannot be properly determined. Its presence there may point

out to the existence of some temple or chapel along the pilgrim routes once more confirming the antiquity of these contacts between India and the Himalayan countries. The tradition did not disappear but, while it finds its Indian witness in the inscription of Yaśovarman, it survives in the other side of the Himalayas in the *gnas yig* of the temple of Khojarnāth. This temple must have enjoyed a particular importance during the time of the Malla dynasties ruling over Western Tibet and Western Nepal usually open to Buddhism and Hinduism and having, at a certain period, its capital in Semjā on the route to Khojarnāth, and very near to it. The later influx of newcomers from India, who established in those parts small principalities and who were for the main Hindu, fostered this tradition speaking of a link with Chitōr and stating that the chief image of the "misericordious one" worshipped in temple was brought to Khojarnāth from that Rājput fortress when it fell. The "misericordious one" is regularly Avalokiteśvara but it is known that the blending of Avalokiteśvara and Viṣṇu in later periods is not unusual.

¹⁰ See A. Stein in *Kalhana's Chronicle of Kashmir*, i, p. 312 n.