The Zhiguan Museum Vajrapani (?) and The Life and Work of The Tenth Karmapa Choying Dorje

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This article was written in 2022 for a bilingual catalogue of seven exceptional works of art that had been loaned by the Zhiguan Museum in Beijing to the Rubin Museum in New York. This catalogue, was published in October 2023 as a magnificently produced volume in a very small edition: 妙相梵宗 / ***Sculptures from the Sacred Land***, Edited by Luo Wenhua and Li Hongwei 罗文华, 李宏伟. As this volume is quite difficult to find or obtain, we are publishing the article here on asianart.com as well.

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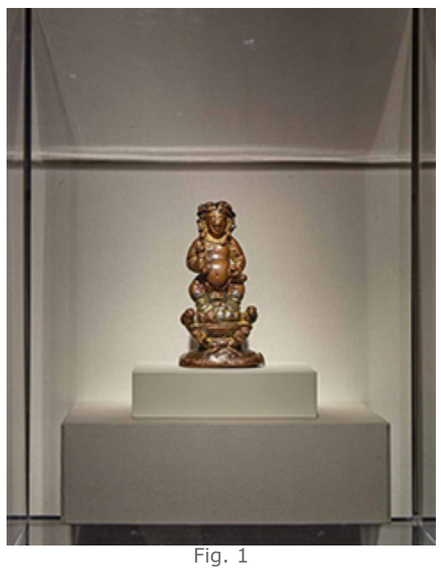

Fig. 1

The subject and origin of this small bronze sculpture has puzzled scholars ever since it was first published in 1987. (fig. 1).

The sculpture depicts a squat and dwarfish – or childlike - male deity who stands, bow-legged, upon an hourglass-shaped base, the lower section of which is plain while the upper section is engraved with lines to depict a rocky setting. The middle part of the base is encircled by two nagas, serpent demigods, both hooded by three serpent heads, with their tails entwined, who look up to the god above with gestures of adoration. The figure stands on what appears to be an upturned lotus on the top of the base flanked by two birds (possibly garudas). In his right hand the god holds a vajra (Tib. dorje), the thunderbolt scepter that is the powerful symbol of Vajrayana Buddhism, and in his left he holds what appears to be a mongoose. It is because of these two attributes that the figure has been identified as a composite figure of Vajrapani, whose indispensible attribute is the vajra, and Kubera, the lord of wealth whose attribute is the jewel-spitting mongoose. The god's head is crowned by copious curls of hair, and his face is set in a serious, even slightly frowning, expression, with round eyes, a large flat nose and pursed lips. The sculpture appears to be cast in an almost pure copper alloy, and exhibits traces of gilding and cold gold paint; through considerable wear it has achieved a smooth and lustrous patina. Around the feet there are signs of welding or soldering of an old break, with a crack still visible in the back of the figure's left leg. The back of the base has a protruding ring, which may have supported a now missing aureole.

The sculpture is inscribed across the front of the base in Tibetan with a simple attribution:

> *rje btsun chos dbyings rdo rje'i phyag bzo.*
> *"A work made by the hand of (the) venerable Choying Dorje."*

The "venerable Choying Dorje" of the inscription was the 10th incarnation of the Karmapa lineage of Tibet, who lived for 70 years during the 17th century, and was a renowned painter and sculptor.

When it first came to light in an advertisement in a British Asian art journal in 1987, this small figure was identified as Kubera, Nepalese and was dated 6/7th centuries. It then appeared in two auction catalogues in the US in 1993 and 1994, where it was identified as Vajrapani, Nepalese, and was dated 7th/8th c and circa 8th century. [1] The attributed age and origin stemmed largely from the very worn and apparently ancient patina of the surface of the metal, which is clearly of a high copper content alloy favored by the Newar sculptors of the Kathmandu valley. While the inscription was first quite accurately read in a 1993 Sotheby's catalogue as "Dzi-Chun Chue-Yin Dorje made this bronze by his own hand", there was no attempt to identify whom the inscription referred to. After being passed in the 1993 sale, the next year the figure was sold in another Sotheby's sale, and entered the collection of Ulrich and Heidi von Schoeder, where it remained until purchased by The Zhiguan Museum in a Hong Kong Bonhams sale in 2016 [2].

Eventually the figure's inscription was understood to refer to the 10th Karmapa, whose paintings were first correctly attributed by David Jackson in 1996. [3] In 2001, Ulrich von Schroeder published this sculpture and a group of somewhat similar sculptures kept in the Lhasa Jokhang collection and other monastic collections in Tibet as among the earliest Tibetan metal sculptures, which he dated to the Yarlung period, 7th -8th century. He described this figure as "the oldest surviving Tibetan metal sculpture" and indentified the subject as a "Composite Image with Aspects of Vajrapani, Kubera, and Possibly Hayagriva, Central Tibetan Imperial Period (Yarlung Dynasty): 7th-8th Century". [4] He believed that the inscription on this sculpture, and almost identical inscriptions on two others of the group he believed to be Yarlung, were later 17th c. additions. [5]

An in-depth study of the works of the Tenth Karmapa, by Karl Debreczeny and published by the Rubin Museum in 2012, contained a chapter by the present author, where I posited that this sculpture and the others like it are in fact the work of Choying Dorje himself, as the inscriptions state. [6]

There is still no overall agreement on the origin of this mysterious sculpture, and the state of the discussion regarding this sculpture is summed up in the label accompanying this sculpture in the Rubin Museum of Art, where it is currently displayed, on loan from the Zhiguan Museum:

> "UNIDENTIFIED DEITY (VAJRAPANI?)
>
> This famous figure is one of Tibetan art's most enigmatic sculptures. It has fascinated scholars, receiving at least three different attributions in the last thirty years. First it was described as a seventh- to eighth- century Nepalese sculpture, due to its high copper content and glossy, worn patina. Based on a similar argument, it was later heralded as one of the earliest surviving sculptures from the Tibetan Empire (seventh-ninth century).
>
> More recently, it has been attributed to the Tenth Karmapa Choying Dorje (1604-1674), based on an inscription that runs along the base, which reads, "made by the hand of the venerable Choying Dorje." The honorific "venerable" probably precludes the possibility that the Karmapa inscribed it himself. Some scholars believe an artisan in his workshop or a follower could have added the inscription. Others assert that it is a false attribution from a later date.
>
> Aspects of this sculpture closely relate to other painted and sculpted works attributed to the Tenth Karmapa. But he was known to have copied a wide range of ancient models during his artistic career. Whether the similarities are a sign that this sculpture is from the same artist's hand or indicate that it is an ancient model from which he copied continues to fuel debate."

We will revisit some of the issues in this discussion again below. But first it is worth the time to examine the life and records of this extraordinary lama and artist, the Tenth Karmapa Choying Dorje.

The Life of the Tenth Karmapa (1604-1674) [7]

The Karmapa lamas of the Karma Kagyu sect were the first Tibetan teachers to be recognized as reincarnations, a fact reflected in the fact that the present incarnation is the 17th of his line, whereas the Dalai Lama is the 14th head of the other major reincarnate lineage, the Gelugpa.

Choying Dorje, the 10th Karmapa, lived an extraordinary life, which spanned most of the 17th century, from 1604 to 1674. After the previous Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje died at the age of 47 in 1603, Choying Dorje was born in the far Northeastern Golok region of Tibet, and was locally recognized as an extraordinary child. The biographies of the young Karmapa record that he practiced painting from a very young age, and also liked to "collect threads of different colors and practice making the designs for embroidered cloth or brocade." [8] He also showed clear signs of an innate knowledge of Buddhist traditions, exhorting others to follow the peaceful and compassionate ways of Buddhism, and he also recognized the attendants of the previous Karmapa. The sixth Shamarpa, who was entrusted with the task of finding the reincarnation of his guru the ninth Karmapa, learned of the incarnation's general whereabouts in auspicious dreams and sent emissaries to find him. Soon the rumors spread that the new Karmapa had been born in Golok.

Hearing of the precocious child, a powerful local lama, Chagmo Goshri or Chagmo Lama, who wished to profit from the young prodigy's increasing renown, by an elaborate subterfuge took the young Karmapa and his family under his protection – and control [9]. For the first six years of his life the young Karmapa was sequestered in the chief's palace and was not allowed to go out to meet several of the high lamas who were eager to meet this young prodigy, and for much of the time he was separated from his family as well.

Eventually the sixth Shamarpa succeeded in sending a messenger to the young Karmapa when Chagmo was away, confirming the young boy's identity as the tenth Karmapa; the news travelled quickly, and as the Karmapa wrote in his autobiographical notes, "I became famous, and my fame spread everywhere." [10] In 1610, when the young Karmapa was seven, the sixth Shamarpa was successful in travelling to Chagmo with a large entourage, and performed the enthronement of his young charge. At that time, he asked Karmapa's parents to hand over the young boy to him for instruction, but although the parents were happy to accede to this request, the Chagmo Goshri would not allow it. The Shamarpa had no choice but to bide his time until the situation changed; after the enthronement ceremony they did not meet again for seven years. The disruption of his religious education, such an important element in the training of a high incarnate lama in Tibetan Buddhism, was particularly damaging; a later biographer saw in the Chagmo's obstruction "the cause of the future decline of the Karma Kagyu". [11]

The Karmapa's prominence made it possible for him to travel and visit holy sites in the following years, but the Chagmo Lama always accompanied him and kept control. Although the Shamarpa was unable to personally guide the young Karmapa's education, he arranged for other high Karma Kagyu lamas to help guide the young Karmapa for the period when he was barred from meeting with him. The most important of these was the third Pawo Rinpoche, who met his young student in 1615 on the Karmapa's first visit to his monastic seat, Tsurphu, and gave him the novice's vows there, at which time he gave him his initiation name Choying Dorje. The third Pawo was the most important teacher for the Karmapa until he was reunited with the Sharmapa several years later. [12]

This early period of the Tenth Karmapa's life, which lasted through his early teens, was entirely dominated by Chagmo's greedy control.

His situation made clear to the young Karmapa the dangers posed to religious leaders by unscrupulous secular (and religious) chiefs; as he wrote in a poem, "asking a thief to keep your money, or relying on a bad lord, are causes of regret...". [13] This was but a taste of the turbulent world of central Tibetan politics, which would later explode into his life again and again.

Even throughout the period of the Chagmo's control, when he was deprived from fully receiving the religious instruction of his lineage, Choying Dorje began and continued his production of religious art, and his biographies and autobiographical works mention paintings and sculptures he created in his youth. One biography from an early attendant appointed by the Chagmo Gushri records his first drawings and paintings made in 1613, when he was nine years old, including a drawing on cotton cloth of the First Karmapa, "with matted hair, black hat and robe", and a painting on paper of the great Karma Kagyu founder Milarepa "with a bright complexion, surrounded by the hunter Gonpo Dorje with his dog and a deer seated in the middle of clouds, fog covering snow and clay mountains in the background". [14] In 1615, while studying with Pawo Rinpoche at Tsurphu, the young Karmapa one day observed an antelope with its young, and made a painting of the scene, inscribed at the bottom with a verse:

> By the red cliff, the antelopes live happily.
> Among the many antelopes, the baby lives happily
> When the baby plays, I, the yogi, am happy.
> This is like Milarepa singing his song, *The six Forms of Happiness* [15]

Animals play an important role in Choying Dorje's art, both painting and sculpture; and his love and admiration for the great yogi Milarepa, who he took as his model, was a constant theme in the young lama's art and life.

In 1616, the young Karmapa traveled to the seat of the Tsang king at Shigatse, where he was welcomed and honored with splendid ceremony. During his stay in the region Choying Dorje viewed two renowned statues of Tara, but he was unimpressed, remarking, "They possess a great power to bestow blessings but their workmanship is not really that excellent. Among all bronze statues, the most precious Kashmiri bronze statue is the Zur-ma Buddha statue, brought from Zur in La-stod." [16] He later frequently mentioned his appreciation of the style of ancient Kashmir, which had a clear influence on much of his sculpture.

Later works from his teenage years include six paintings he produced to give to his teacher Pawo Rinpoche in 1620. [17] Two metal sculptures are mentioned in his biographies from the same year, a "Tara statue made from a very special bronze" [18], and a metal sculpture of the great Kagyu lama Marpa made from five metals at Sekhar Guthog in Lho drag, Marpa's home district made in the same year. [19]

By 1620, when the Karmapa was 16, he was finally freed from the Chagmo Lama's control, largely through his guru Pawo's intercession with the Tsang Desi, the king of central Tibet, who ordered the Chagmo and his cronies to leave the Karmapa's entourage. Finally, the young Karmapa was able to meet and travel with his guru the sixth Shamarpa, but the isolation and subsequent damage to his early education and religious training caused by the unscrupulous Chagmo would have long lasting effects. [20] Even though Choying Dorje had been freed from the clutches from the predatory Chagmo Gushri, he was still at the mercy of secular rulers. The Tsang Desi, who had released the Chagmo's hold, was an aggressive ruler, who continuously waged war to gain an even greater hold on all areas of central Tibet. In 1621, after an unsuccessful campaign to gain control of Lhasa, he died on his way back to his palace at Shigatse. He was succeeded by his fifteen-year-old son, who continued his father's support of the Karma Kagyu lineage. The Tsang kings' patronage was a crucial element of the prestige and wealth of the Karma Kagyu domain, but in the end the connection between this ruler and the Karmapa's lineage was to contribute to the almost total eclipse of the Karma Kagyu. But in 1621, this was still in the future.

When the restrictions imposed by the Chagmo were lifted, Choying Dorje was able to meet, travel with and take instruction from Shamarpa and the other high lamas of the Karma Kagyu lineage, and he rapidly absorbed their instructions and teachings. He traveled again to South Tibet to the area of Lhodrag, home of Marpa, the great Tibetan root guru of the Kagyu sect, and visited again the Syekhar Guthog, the tower that the great yogi Milarepa had constructed at Marpa's request. Although the Shamarpa left soon after arriving in the region, Choying Dorje and the Pawo remained there together for several years, with the young Karmapa profiting from continuous teachings from the Pawo. He also concentrated more than ever on his artistic pursuits; he made a painting of the Buddha Tathagata and many others, and by the end of the three-year period from 1622 to 1625 he "felt confident that he had become an expert". [21]

An invitation from the young Tsang Desi drew Karmapa back to Shigatse, where he met the Shamarpa again. Together with two other high lamas of the Kagyu tradition, they performed funeral ceremonies for the young Tsang king's late father. [22] From there Choying Dorje returned again to Tsurphu, the seat of the Karmapas, which he had first visited at the age of 11, when he had taken the novice vows under the direction of Pawo Rinpoche. In 1624 he took the full vows of ethics and conduct for a monk, a crucial step in the path of a Buddhist master, with Shamarpa conducting the ritual as the Master of Studies, assisted by the Pawo and other high lamas. This important milestone was followed by a period of widespread travel for the Karmapa, often in the company of his guru the Shamarpa, from whom he took teaching at every opportunity.

The two lamas also collaborated in the arts, as Choying Dorje once recounted: "sometimes ... (we) would be together on the top floor of Tsurphu Monastery. We would create paintings of the Buddha surrounded by bodhisattvas and arhats, of Chenrezig and others. Bodhisattva Chokyi Wangchuk (the sixth Shamarpa) and I exchanged views about how to design the background scenery in the paintings..." [23] The Shamarpa clearly appreciated his young student's skills in the arts and encouraged him to paint thangkas. [24]

In 1628, the Sharmapa was again invited to the young Tsang Desi's palace in Shigatse; the Karmapa was also called, but was planning to make a pilgrimage to Mount Kailash and initially resisted the visit; but acceded when Sharmapa persuaded him to accompany him to the palace for a brief period

before embarking for the holy mountain.

From the time of the fourth Karmapa Rolpai Dorje (1340-1383), it was the custom of the Karmapas and the lamas of the other high lineages of the Karma Kagyu to travel all over Tibet with a very large retinue of monks and attendants, and at each place in their travel to set up an enormous tented community – “virtually a tented monastery” [25] - which was referred to as the Karma Kagyu “great Encampment” (garpa or garchen). While the monastic seats of the sect were important, the high lamas were most often traveling, and the Great Encampment became synonymous with the Karma Kagyu sect itself. [26] It was in just such a moving mass of monks and attendants, headed by the Karmapa and the Shamarpa, that left Tsurphu in the autumn of 1628 to visit the Tsang Desi’s domain In Shigatse at his invitation. [27] When several of the high lamas of the Karma Kagyu lineage were assembled together, the term “garpa yabse” (The father and sons – or master and disciples - of the Encampment) was also used. [28]

After several months at the court of the king, in the spring of 1629, Shamarpa and Karmapa left the court and travelled to the west visiting many sites associated with Milarepa, the great poet saint who was to Karmapa a heroic model. After taking leave of his teacher, that autumn Karmapa started his pilgrimage on foot to Kailash, one of many long distance pilgrimages the Karmapa made throughout his life. [29] While the Karmapa was on his pilgrimage, his teacher the Shamarpa was on a visit to the Kathmandu valley in Nepal. [30]

The two lamas met again in Dingri, in southern Tibet near the Tibet border after Choying Dorje had returned from his Kailash pilgrimage and Shamarpa had returned from Nepal, and together they made their way to a hermitage that Shamarpa had built before they parted last on their separate journeys. Their first days together were spent in pleasant conversations as each told the other of their travels. But after several months, Shamarpa became increasingly silent. Eventually it became clear that his master was failing; in his biography of his guru, “Wish-fulfilling Cow”, Choying Dorje describes in detail how he nursed his great teacher through his final illness.

A few days before Shamarpa passed away, Karmapa received word from Southern Tibet that his other great teacher, Pawo Rinpoche, had unexpectedly died. The Karmapa lost his two most important teachers in the same year, 1630, when he was 26 years old.

In deep mourning for his revered teacher, the Karmapa set off from Dingri for Tsurphu, bringing Shamarpa’s corpse with him. In Tsuphu he directed the elaborate funeral ceremonies for his master, attended by thousands of monks. Sometime after the funeral Choying Dorje summoned Nepalese craftsmen to begin the work of constructing

a silver reliquary stupa for the remains of the Shamarpa. The construction of the elaborate seven-story silver stupa took three years. As part of the funeral ceremonies Choying Dorje himself painted a silk thangka of the sixteen arhats, and made statues of Hayagriva, Manjushri, Avalokitesvara and Vajrapani. [31]

Choying Dorje’s youth can be said to have ended on the death of the third Pawo Rinpoche and the sixth Shamarpa. From this time onwards Choying Dorje assumed the mantle of the head of the Karma Kagyu lineage, which was at that time the most revered and the most powerful of all the Tibetan Buddhist lineages. Whereas he himself had been recognized and enthroned by the Shamarpa, and taught the history and teachings of his lineage by the Shamar and the Pawo, from this time onwards it was he who would recognize and teach the other incarnate lamas of the Karma Kagyu, including the seventh Shamarpa and the fourth Pawo.

After the death of his teachers, Choying Dorje increasingly turned away from the pomp and circumstance of the life of a high lama. His yearnings for the simple life of an ascetic meditator are reflected in a poem he composed after the death of the Shamarpa:

From today on, I will live at uncertain empty places,
at the foot of trees and in the mountains.
From today on, my food will be alms
and my clothes just the rags I have gathered from the rubbish heaps.
I will be content with just these daily necessities. [32]

Although there were times when he was obliged to travel with the full entourage of the Great Encampment, Choying Dorje also found ways to travel on pilgrimage with much smaller numbers of attendants, such as in his visit to Lhasa in 1634, recorded by the Fifth Dalai Lama, who wrote in his autobiography that “the Lord Karmapa Choying Dorje came to Lhasa, not following the previous encampment traditions [ie. without tent and huge entourage], and wearing the clothes of a lay person”. [33]

In the decade of the 1630s, after the death of Shamar and Pawo, Choying Dorje travelled widely on pilgrimage, and was able to examine and copy famous sculptures and paintings, such as a famous sculpture called “the powerful sage of Suvarnadvipa” at Tsethang monastery, which has been identified as a model for Choying Dorje’s subsequent production. [34] He continued his output of paintings and statues as he travelled. In 1637, while staying at the holy mountain of Tsari in southeastern Tibet, he “set up a workshop with ten craftsmen. To each monk promising to go into retreat, he gave one Milarepa statue, and to the others, who promised to recite the mantra “*Om mani padme hum*” one hundred million times, he presented a thangka of Avalokitesvara.” [35]

Karmapa increasingly attempted to remove himself from the turmoil of political intrigue, but the greatest storm was still to come. Later in 1637, while the Karmapa was still staying in the region of the crystal mountain of Tsari, Gushri Khan, the patron and supporter of the Dalai Lama, advanced with an immense army on Tibet from the north. In 1638, Gushri arrived in Lhasa, where the Dalai Lama declared him to be “Holder of the Buddhist Faith and Religious King”. In 1639, Gushri entirely subdued Eastern Tibet, and the next year, 1640, he advanced on the kingdom of Tsang, whose king had long been the patron of the Karma Kagyu. At each turn, the Karmapa refused to get involved in the struggle.

In the midst of this titanic struggle which would determine the history of Tibet for several hundred years, the Karmapa had one of the most important meetings of his life when he encountered the scholar and writer Tsang Khenchen (gTsang mKhan-chen) in ca. 1641, who came to meet him in his forest retreat near the Tsangpo river. Both Tsang Khenchen and Choying Dorje recorded the meeting in their respective autobiographies, and both attached great importance to the meeting, each describing the other in glowing terms. Tsang Khanchen remembered, “As soon as I saw [him approaching] I was moved by intense faith. He blessed me by looking at me for a long time with half-open, aged eyes. Many quick thoughts of faith came to my mind, such as “The Lord Dus-gsum–mkhen-pa (the First Karmapa) is this very person.” [36] Choying Dorje wrote that, “at that time the people of the region made offerings to one monk, showing him respect as guru and revering him. Earlier, this monk had studied with the Bodhisattva Choskyi Wangchuk (the Sixth Shamarpa, Choying Dorje’s teacher). He was handsome and good looking. As young as a new flower, he had a tamed mind and had studied many sutras… When I knew that this monk, resembling a flower, had a tamed mind, I talked with him. The monk came every day. Then when the monk learned that I was going to another country, he followed me, and together we left the place and kept on going to other regions…”. [37]

Later Choying Dorje would refer to Tsang Khenchen as “his attendant Kuntu Zangpo”, who is an ubiquitous figure in the life of the 10th Karmapa from this time onwards. [38] Together they travelled with the retinue of the Karmapa south to Lhodrag, where the Karmapa recognized the fourth Pawo, the incarnation of his first important teacher, the third Pawo. The two lamas stayed together for most of the remainder of Choying Dorje’s life.

This momentous meeting of the two lamas occurred in the midst of the burgeoning crisis that would upend the life of the Tenth Karmapa and cause the near disappearance of the entire Karma Kagyu tradition and lineage. In 1642, the capital of the Tsang Desi was captured by the forces of the Gushri Khan after a long siege; the young king was imprisoned in Lhasa, and executed there a few months later. The Tsang kings were ardent Tibetan nationalists, and the patrons of the Karma Kagyu: they opposed to the Gelugpa sect headed by the Dalai Lama, and the Dalai Lama’s Mongol patrons. After this victory by Gushri Khan, the young fifth Dalai Lama was declared the ruler of all Tibet. [39]

The Karmapa was inexorably drawn in to this terrible conflict. The Karma Kagyu monasteries were being taken over and forcibly converted to Gelugpa. He wanted no part in the bloodshed, and tried to petition the Dalai Lama to allow his school to continue as before, but the Dalai Lama’s courtiers demanded an oath that the Karmapa would not oppose or subvert the Gelugpa: the Karmapa replied that such an oath was unnecessary, since he had never opposed the Gelugpa in the past. This answer was seen as an indication that the Karmapa would not cooperate, and the order was given to attack the Karmapa’s Great Encampment in Lhodrak. [40]

The attack destroyed the Great Encampment entirely, and many of the monks and attendants were killed. The Karmapa and his faithful attendant Kuntu Zangpo/ Tsang Khenchen miraculously escaped and fled to the northeast. After travelling for two years, the Karmapa eventually took refuge with the King of Lijiang, in present day Yunnan, whose ancestors had become devout followers of the Karma Kagyu after a visit by the eighth Karmapa. At the age of 42, Choying Dorje was a refugee. The great encampment had been destroyed, and most the Kagyu monasteries were seized by the new government of the Fifth Dalai Lama and forcibly converted to Gelugpa institutions.

For the rest of his life, the Karmapa's life was based in Gyalthang, to the north of the kingdom's center in Lijiang, where he stayed with is faithful attendant Kuntu Zangpo. While in exile he reconstituted the Karma Kagyu Yabse, eventually recognizing the incarnations his main teachers, the Shamarpa and the Pawo, and other high lamas of the Yabse, including the Situ and Gyaltsab Rinpoches. In 1649-50, he made one great journey to the north, alone, to meet the seventh Shamarpa, Yeshe Nyingpo, the incarnation of his main guru; he described this adventure in one of his autobiographical works, the "Travel Song". Eventually the seventh Shamar came to Gyalthang to stay with Karmapa and receive the teachings of the Karma Kagyu tradition. Throughout his years of travel in Gyalthang and Lijiang Choying Dorje continued to produce many works of arts, both paintings and sculptures, and it is likely that his contact with Chinese paintings and Chinese painting techniques had an impact on his paintings from those years.

While living in Gyalthang, he eventually took a wife and had several children, one of whom he recognized as the sixth Gyaltsab Norbu Zanpo. This of course reinforced his reputation as an unconventional lama, which he had already earned from his unconventional dress and long hair, and his avoidance of the large retinue and splendid robes of most high lamas.

His last voyage was back to central Tibet, where he met the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1673 and obtained permission to return to his main monastery, Tsurphu. He died less than a year later in a monastery in a remote region north of the Tsangpo river; his body was brought back to Tsurphu, and after elaborate funeral ceremonies, the seventh Shamarpa and the sixth Gyaltsab - Choying Dorje's son Norbu Zangpo -oversaw the building and consecration of a silver reliquary stupa, just as Choying Dorje had done for his guru the sixth Shamarpa almost 40 years before.

Choying Dorje, the Tenth Karmapa, was memorialized thus by one of his biographers:

" 'Lord of all beings at a time when the age was full of dissension. By the power of his compassion like a banquet of pure food. When the heart of the doctrine was assaulted by foreign troops; when the great expanse of the earth was crowded with corpses; when through the destruction of the three precious symbols all beings were in misery; he then by the power of his compassion was Lord of beings who had no lord. Who but he was the second ruler of the Sakya?' Thus it was said." [41]

The sculpture of Choying Dorje

Having reviewed the life of Choying Dorje let us now return to our examination and analysis of the extraordinary sculpture from the Zhiguan Museum, which is inscribed with the brief note attributing it to his hand (fig. 1).

I am convinced that this figure is indeed the work of this great lama for three main reasons: first, because the inscription tells us so; second, because of the unprecedented and highly unconventional iconography which could only be produced by a high lama, and would not have been produced at the beginning of the Buddhist period in Tibet; and third, because the figure and other sculptures like it, so strongly remind us of paintings – several also inscribed - which are agreed by all scholars to be works of Choying Dorje.

The appearance of great age

The main characteristics of this small sculpture that have led scholars and experts to consider it to be much earlier, from the 7 th- 8 thcentury of the Yarlung period, are the technique and the condition, which give it an aura of great age, and are difficult to reconcile with a 17 thcentury date. As Ulrich von Schroeder wrote: "Technical characteristics, such as the heavy casting and the strong fire gilding, as well as the worn appearance due to prolonged worship, point to a much earlier period." [42]

This is indeed true; these characteristics would tend to indicate an earlier period. It was because of the heavy casting in copper and the remnants of fire gilding, typical of the casting in Nepal, that the sculpture was called Nepalese in all three instances of publication from 1987 to 1994, before the inscription was understood. And again, because of the evident wear, the sculpture was dated 6/7 thc., 7th/8 thc., and 8 thcentury in those three instances, while von Schroeder assigned it a 7th/8 thcentury date.

The clearly Nepalese technique – the almost pure copper of the metal and "the heavy casting and strong fire gilding" may well be because Nepalese casters could have been directly involved in the manufacture of this sculpture and several others attributed to Choying Dorje. Nepalese artists have been involved in the production of Buddhist art in Tibet from at least the 7 thcentury, and Nepalese craftsmen are mentioned in Choying Dorje's biographies at several points, as we will see in more detail below.

As for the clearly apparent worn appearance of the sculpture, this too is indeed often indicative of great age: but not always, because in certain circumstances a metal sculpture may become worn and even damaged in a relatively short period of time.

Choying Dorje's biographies – and autobiographies – show that he travelled almost constantly, and often his traveling was under duress. The destruction of the great encampment at the hands of the Mongol army was violent and necessitated a very quick escape, and whatever precious icons were carried with the 10 thKarmapa and his attendant would have been very hurriedly packed and taken away. This type of hurried escape from danger occurred all too often in the life of the Karmapa. Even his refuge in Gyalthang was not immune from invasion and warfare. In 1658, a Chinese force invaded Gyalthang, forcing the Karmapa to flee, which he described vividly in the autobiography Big Drum; having been warned of the imminent attack, "all the villagers ran away in every direction", and the Karmapa recounted advising his attendant Kuntu Zangpo,

> "… 'Instead of staying near any danger, one should go far away, stay far away from it , [and] be cautious.' Having said so, I took a [bag] like the skin bag (rkyal ba) of a mongoose, belonging to the yaksha Kubera, filled with jewels, under my left arm, carried the Kashmiri statue of a deity on my back, and rode on horseback to a solitary place." [43]

This type of movement would clearly create wear on any sculptures that the Karmapa and his attendant Kuntu Zangpo carried with them, and might even result in breaks such as the repaired damage clearly visible in the legs of the Zhiguan Vajrapani (Fig. 1).

In his autobiography Big Drum, Choying Dorje describes "the very lovely dwelling place of Kun-to bzanp-po, a small house with several floors", situated "not too far away from the hermitage" in which the Karmapa stayed in solitude. This dwelling of his attendant was filled with fine sculptures, several made by Choying Dorje himself, and "all kinds of gods from Central Tibet, Nepal and Eastern and Western India – innumerable objects of prostration for the people" as well as "countless books from the vast collection of teachings of the Buddha". Choying Dorje describes the daily worship he and his attendant performed:

> "To all of these objects of prostration for the people and to the stupas that held the core of the relics [we] the two Bodhisattvas (the Tenth Karmapa and Kun-tu-bzang-po) from time to time offered flowers, sprinkled oblation water, permeated [the holy objects] with sandalwood incense, and offered fruits and food with every delicious taste and excellent nutrition." [44]

The worship Choying Dorje describes can, over several years, result in "the worn appearance due to prolonged worship" mentioned by von Schroeder. That even quite recent sculptures can be considerably worn from this type of worship is attested by later Nepalese sculptures with the features clearly worn. [45]

The inscribed sculptures

It is worthwhile to examine this sculpture in comparison with three somewhat similar sculptures also first published by Ulrich von Schroder, and also considered by him to be of the Yarlung period. While the Zhiguan sculpture left Tibet at some point before 1987 and eventually entered the collection of Ulrich and Heidi von Schroeder, von Schroeder discovered the other three sculptures we'll examine during his extensive research in Tibet for his monumental two volume *Buddhist Sculpture in Tibet*. These three (figs 2 and 3 and also fig. 4) he found in storerooms of the Jokhang temple, the central shrine of all Tibetan Buddhism.

As a group these four sculptures share several characteristics. All are cast in a relatively pure copper, show remnants of gilding, and are difficult to place or identify within the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon.

In addition, the first three (Figs 1-3) bear a nearly identical inscription stating that each was made by the venerable Choying Dorje. [46]

Von Schroeder himself recognized the similarity of these works, when he remarked that Fig. 3 was "made by the same anonymous Tibetan artist who modeled the two other images" (Fig. 1 and 2). [47] The inscriptions would posit that they were indeed made by the same Tibetan artist, but not an

anonymous one: for the inscriptions attest that all three were made by Choying Dorje.

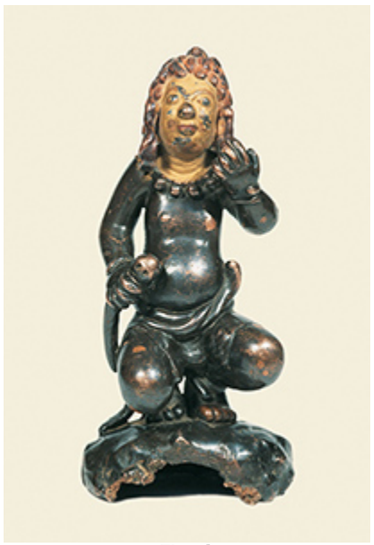

Fig. 3

We have seen that the inscriptions of these sculptures were considered spurious because of the apparent age exhibited by the surface of these sculptures, but we have already examined another explanation for the wear that gives the impression of great age. While my main reasons for believing they are the work of this prolific and eccentric artist are their unprecedented iconography, their extraordinary cohesiveness as a group, and their strong resemblance to other works by this artist, we should certainly also examine the issue of the inscriptions themselves.

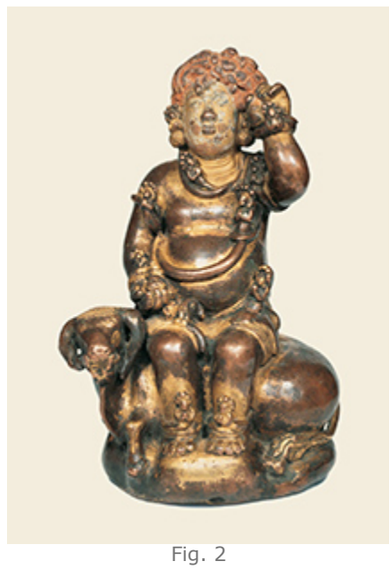

Fig. 2

It is worth noting that these three sculptures are not the only objects bearing inscriptions attributing them to the Tenth Karmapa Choying Dorje. Four other sculptures bear quite similar inscriptions, although some are stylistically quite different from these three; we will examine two of these four below. In addition, several paintings are also inscribed with attributions to this artist; in two cases with wording similar to the inscriptions on these sculptures.

In my experience with inscriptions of works of art from the Himalayas, I have never run across an inscription that I feel was intended to inaccurately portray when or by whom the object was made, unless it was clearly a modern attempt to deceive the market as a fake. [48] There are occasions when the replacement for a destroyed or damaged object is inscribed with a copy of the inscription from the original object; however, this is invariably accompanied by a further inscription describing the repair/replacement and re-consecration of the object. [49]

In considering these inscriptions on works by Choying Dorje we should note that they are unusual in the Tibetan context in that they mention only who made the image, and no other information is given. Most Tibetan inscriptions on icons deal specifically with the circumstances of the consecration and dedication of the sacred image, describing details of who ordered the image to be made and for what purpose. [50] As von Schroeder notes in his descriptions of Figures 1-4, there is no evidence that any of them were ever consecrated in the standard Tibetan style by filling them with religious objects and sealing the bottom with a plate. [51] In the more standard consecration inscriptions, it is rare—though not unknown— to have any information regarding the artist who made the object. And inscriptions as terse as the six we have encountered here are uncommon.

It is likely that these inscriptions represent an attempt by someone — either the Karmapa or someone else, perhaps after his death — to inventory works by the Tenth Karmapa by adding these terse inscriptions. They can be compared with the equally terse inscriptions added to two other groups of Tibetan works of religious art, one a group of sculptures inscribed with the name Naga Raja and another group of thangkas consecrated by Onpo Lama Rinpoche. [52] But we cannot be certain how they came to be inscribed. Were they inscribed thus by the Karmapa himself or on his orders? Or were they perhaps inscribed on someone else's instructions?

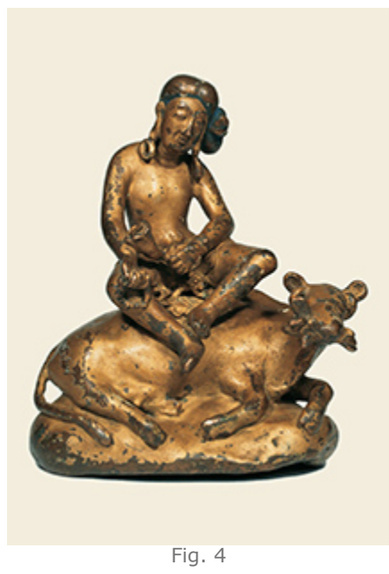

Fig. 4

Choying Dorje's description of "the very lovely dwelling place of Kun-tu bzang-po" that we quoted above makes clear that the Karmapa and Kuntu Sangpo managed a large collection of sculptures from all over the Buddhist world, including objects made by the Karmapa himself. It is not surprising that an artist so attuned to these objects would desire to inventory those he made himself. If the inventory was not the Karmapa's idea, one wonders if it might not have been Kuntu Sangpo who was responsible for the inscriptions on the Tenth Karmapa sculptures. His devotion to the Karmapa is one of the overriding features of the biographies and autobiographies of Choying Dorje.

Unprecedented and unusual iconography

If we return to our review of the Zhiguan sculpture and the 2 other figures illustrated above (figs. 2 and 3), as well as fig. 4 above, we can immediately see that all four of these figures incorporate unprecedented and confusing iconography. They are very difficult to specifically identify, as can be seen in the descriptions given by Ulrich von Schroeder when he first published them:

> He identified Figure 1 as "Composite Image with Aspects of Vajrapani, Kubera, and Possibly Hayagriva." [53]
> He identified Figure 2 as "Composite Image with Aspects of Agni,
> Yama, Kubera and Hayagriva," [54] and again as "the enigmatic composite image incorporating aspects of Agni, Kubera, Nagaraja and Yama," [55], and later as "Yama with aspects of Kubera and Hayagriva." [56]
> He identified Figure 3 as a "Composite Image with Aspects of Hayagriva and Yama" [57] or "Hayagriva—the 'Horse-Necked One' ". [58]
> He identified Figure 4 in 2001 only as "Unidentified Male Deity Seated on a Cow" [59]. In 2008, however, he changed the identification of this figure to "Yama—the 'Lord of Death'", and changed the mount to a "horned bull buffalo." [60]

This type of composite imagery is unprecedented in Tibetan Buddhist iconography. It is worth noting that the other sculptures that von Schroeder dates to the Yarlung period, appx 7th/ 8 thcentury, including those he ascribes to the Zhang Zhung tradition of West Tibet, (PL 182-189) do not display this perplexing assortment of various deities combined in "composite images". [61]

Normally, Tibetan sculptors do not indulge in fantasy or invention when portraying the deities; they follow the strictures of the texts that describe the forms of the gods and confine their inventiveness to the style or decorative aspects of a painting or sculpture. If the artist is a layperson or even if he is a monk, he will refer to the knowledge of a lama and to sacred texts for instruction on how the deity should be portrayed. The extraordinary composite iconography of these figures imply a kind of inventive bravura that has no place in the religious art of Tibet and perhaps even less in the earlier periods than the later. Indeed, it has no place in the early Buddhist art of any region or culture.

In the Tibetan environment, however, there is one circumstance in which the artist has far more freedom. If the artist is a high- ranking lama, such as one of the great reincarnate lamas of Tibet, a Dalai Lama, a Panchen Lama, or a Karmapa, then he is empowered to portray a deity as he saw the deity in his visions or meditations. The religious visions of these higher lamas have their own inherent validity, and are accepted as representations of the god or goddess. [62]

Choying Dorje, the Tenth Karmapa, was just such an empowered high lama who was also a prolific artist. Tsang Khenchen, the learned lama who was Choying Dorje's close confidant and attendant, once described Choying Dorje's creative process:

> "Furthermore, during those times it is certain that many amazing signs occurred, such as beholding the faces of the divine chosen deities, but he did not say to anyone, 'It happened like this.' Nevertheless, since he created unprecedented images of Tara in the form of a human girl with an extremely passionate demeanor and of Avalokitesvara seated upon a cow and holding the stem of a lily, everyone proclaimed that these were from having beheld their faces." [63]

This passage describes the period just before Choying Dorje's great teacher, the Sixth Shamarpa, died, when Choying Dorje was about 26 years old. [64] We have already see how Choying Dorje immersed himself in the funeral ceremonies for his guru after he passed in 1630 and beyond that, in erecting in Tsurphu structures and paintings and sculptures to honor the Shamarpa. It is worth recalling some of the details of those events again. To hold the precious bodily remains of his departed teacher, "Karmapa called for Nepalese craftsmen to build a precious silver reliquary stupa (mchod sdong) for the Zhwa-dmar's relics." [65] This seven story stupa took three years to build, and after its completion "the artists from Nepal were paid generously with gold and sent back home." [66] Further, Choying Dorje "painted a silk thangka of the Sixteen Elders and made statues of Hayagriva, Manjushri, Avalokitesvara and Vajrapani for the funeral ceremonies". [67]

We cannot help but wonder from these passages whether several of the sculptures we have been examining – all made in the Nepalese fashion of heavy casting in almost pure copper - are the early productions of the young Tenth Karmapa. Is Fig 1, the "Vajrapani" perhaps the Vajrapani he made for the funeral ceremonies, and the Hayagriva made at the same time perhaps Fig. 3? Is it not possible that Fig. 4, the wonderful image of a "Male Deity Seated on a Cow" is in fact the "Avalokitesvara seated upon a cow and holding the stem of a lily" that Tsang Khenchen describes in his biography as being created from the young Karmapa's visions, and/or the Avalokitesvara made at the time of the ceremonies following his guru's death? We can never know for sure, but this scenario is possible.

The close resemblance to Choying Dorje's paintings

Choying Dorje was a great painter as well as a sculptor. In one of his biographies, he is quoted as saying, at the age of 49:

> In Tibet there will be no one better than me in the arts of poetry and painting. I am a person who gladdens Avalokitesvara. I have come into this world to paint paintings. [68]

We are lucky that quite a few of his paintings – of course more fragile than his metal sculptures –have survived; several of these bear inscriptions attributing the paintings to Choying Dorje [69]. In fact it was largely via his paintings that the art of Choying Dorje was first re-discovered by modern western scholars [70]. In contrast to the controversy surrounding the age of his sculptures, scholars in general agree on the paintings attributed to him, although there is also agreement that many paintings in his style were likely made under his direction or painted after his lifetime as copies (a situation which also applies to his sculptures).

While Choying Dorje in his painting was influenced by other artists and styles, there are aspects of his that are unique to his work: as Debreczeny writes: “His figural style is quite distinctive, especially in his fleshy elongated heads, featuring simple abbreviated faces with tiny, red, pursed lips...The fingers on the hands of the Karmapa’s male figures are often bulbous and knotted, with an almost signature-like handling of the thumb.” [71] These figural characteristics are shared by his paintings and his sculptures, as we can see in several details.

Fig. 5

The “elongated heads with abbreviated faces with tiny, red, pursed lips” can be clearly seen in Fig. 5, which combines a detail from a painting of Milarepa on the left, which we can compare to a detail of the Fig. 2 sculpture on the right. Both faces are elongated, with an especially long lower face under the “tiny, red, pursed lips”. The nose and eyes are small, and the brows are arched. The hair in both the painting and sculpture is depicted as a rather unruly mass.

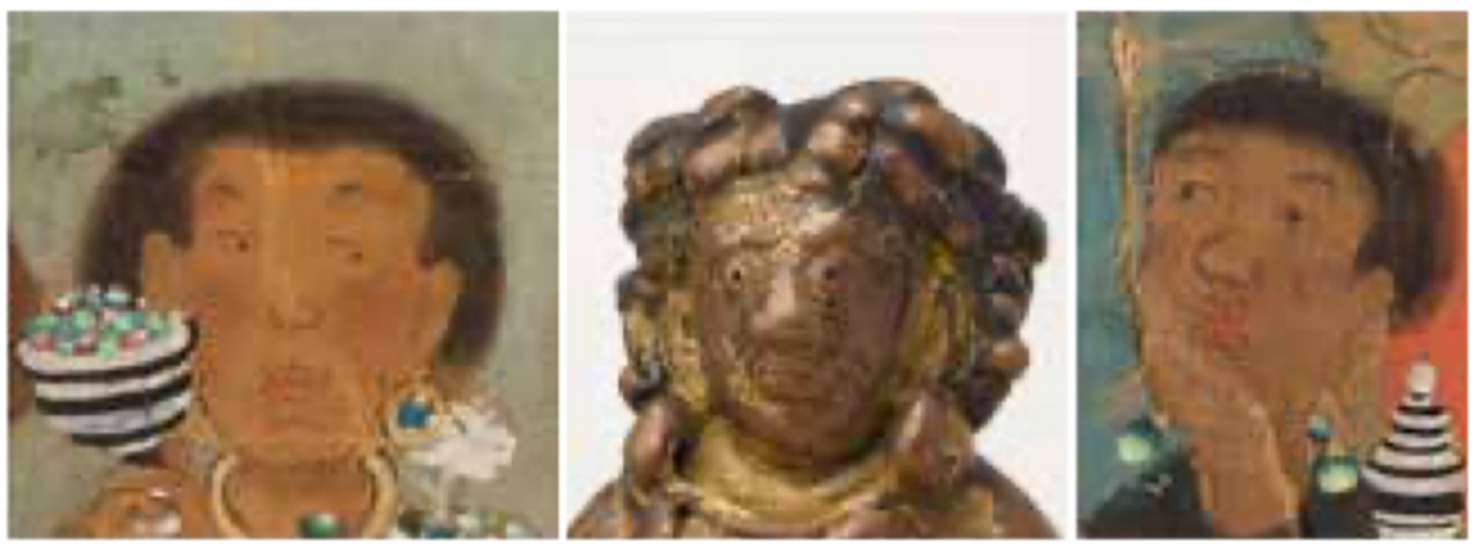

Fig. 6

In another comparison, Fig. 6, we can compare the head of Fig. 1 “Vajrapani” with two of the many faces found in the crowd of mourners in a recently published painting of the Paranirvana of Buddha attributed to Choying Dorje [72]. The face on the left exhibits the mass of hair, the narrow forehead and the long chin of the sculpture, while the painted figure of the right display the pursed lips and the bulbous nose of the Vajrapani.

In one further comparison image, fig. 7, we compare remarkable depictions of cows that appear in the sculptures of Fig 2 (on the left) and Fig. 4 (on the right), with a depiction of a cow from Choying Dorje’s wonderful inscribed painting of Marpa in the center. [73] Animals in general and cows in particular are a constant presence in both the paintings of Choying Dorje, as these three details testify.

Karl Debreczeny, in discussing the painting of Marpa, noted “... one can still observe several striking things about this painting, the most immediate being the profusion of sensitively handled animals. The number and wide variety, from kneeling cows, horses, sheep, dogs, to fish, are well beyond the norm found in Tibetan painting. Food and feeding is also an unusually prominent theme here for a painting of Marpa (not a natural association with this theme), but it is consistent with what we know of the Karmapa’s visual idiom .” [74]

Choying Dorje was well known for his love of animals. One biography noted that as a very young child, “Having taken rebirth as one full of compassion”, he said at the time of sheep-shearing “Do not harm the creatures in any way” and he wept. Loving all sentient creatures as dear friend and sacred beings, he said “Whenever I see flocks of sheep and cattle I regard them as myself and it pleases my mind.” [75] His respect for cows was such that he several time described his guru the sixth Shamarpa as resembling a cow. [76]

The three cows in the composite details below are similar in many respects, most clearly in the unusual placement of the downturned horns, and also in the fact that all three depictions show the cows eating, instances of the theme of food and feeding that Debreczeny notes is so prominent in Choying Dorje’s work.

Fig. 7

In all of the comparative illustrations, we see the remarkable similarity of style and detail between the sculptures we’ve examined and paintings that are universally recognized to be the works of the tenth Karmapa.

In reflecting on these numerous stylistic parallels between these four sculptures and Choying Dorje's attested paintings, we cannot help but conclude that the sculptures and paintings are the work of the same talented and – in the context of Tibetan Buddhist art – highly unusual visionary artist. Choying Dorje was permitted by his high rank to invent new ways of seeing and creating : "he created unprecedented images" and "everyone proclaimed that these were from having beheld their faces."

Other sculptures

In our study of the Zhiguan "Vajrapani" now exhibited in the Rubin Museum, it is worth examining a few more sculptures can be compared with this sculpture or the others we have already viewed. In addition to the our Vajrapanai and Figs 2 and 3, four other sculptures bear inscriptions attributing them to Choying Dorje. We will examine two, both of which are very different from Figures 1 through 4, and thus illustrate the extraordinary range of this artist's work.


Fig. 8

Fig. 8 is a depiction of a "willow-branch Guanyin" a rather rare form of Avalokitesvara unique to China. The sculpure has a history of publication and research remarkably similar to that of the "Vajrapani" of Fig. 1, as explained by Luo Wenhua in his authoritative paper on this figure [77]. It entered the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing, in 1957, where it was identified by two scholars, Tang Lan and and Yan Wenru, as Tang dynasty (618-907). In 1996 it was futher studied by Li Jinjie, who slightly modified the dating to the late Sui (581-618) or early Tang dynasty. [78] In 2002, it was shown in a slide presentation at an international conference on Tibetan art, where one slide displayed the inscription on the back of the robe of the figure, which is in Tibetan with the same wording as the inscription on "Vajrapani", fig. 1:

rje btsun chos dbyings rdo rje'i phyag bzo.
"A work made by the hand of (the) venerable Choying Dorje."

Scholars at the conference took note of the inscription, and "since then the work has become well-known as a newly found sculpture by the Tenth Karmapa". [79] Here again we have a sculpture, which had been known for years and had been dated to a very early period of Buddhist art, but was later, because of the Tibetan inscription, ascribed to Choying Dorje. Unlike the Vajrapani, however, the iconography of this sculpture is well known and quite easily recognized, even if it is quite rare. Most surviving sculptures of the willow branch Guanyin date from the Sui or Tang dynasties, which is why the scholars who viewed this sculpture in the late 1950s assigned it a Tang date. As Luo Wenhua writes, "In southwestern China, such as in Dali, Lijiang, and Sichuan Province, it appears that the belief in Willow-branch Guanyin was extant at least to the thirteenth century, even possibly much later in all of southwestern China." Since Choying Dorje took refuge in Gyalthang and Lijiang of southwestern China it is possible that he was exposed to this very Chinese subject there and perhaps was asked to make an image of this form of Avalokitesvara for a patron there. In fact he made two images of this subject, the other of very similar size and with the same inscription [80]. These two sculptures (along with a small silver sculpture of his previous incarnation, the Ninth Karmapa) are unusual in his oeuvre for their quite conventional depictions of established iconography, although in all three sculptures there are clear indications of Choying Dorje's unique stylistic characteristics.

Fig. 9 provides us with yet another inscribed example of the varied style of the sculpture of Choying Dorje. This sculpture is the only inscribed metal sculpture by Choying Dorje so far known to be cast in brass or bronze, rather than copper or silver. [81]

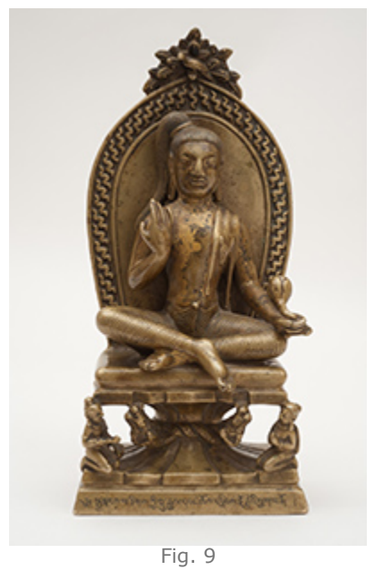
Fig. 9

The inscription varies somewhat from the inscriptions we have seen so far:
spyan ras gzigs kyi sku rgyal dbang chos dbyings rdo rje'i phyag bzo.
"Icon of Avalokiteśvara made by the hand of Gyalwang ("King of the Victorious Ones") Choying Dorje."

While the end of the inscription is the same as the others (made by the hand of Choying Dorje), this one refers to Choying Dorje not as "the venerable" but as "king of the victorious ones", a title especially connected with the Karmapa lamas. Further, this is the only inscription on a sculpture to identify the subject, Avalokitesvara.

Avalokitesvara was Choying Dorje's personal deity and many passages in his biographies attest to his devotion for the greatest Mahayana bodhisattva. [82]

Avalokitesvara is depicted here seated in a relaxed pose on a throne, holding the bud of a flower in his left hand at his knee, with his right hand before his chest in an indeterminate open gesture. In pose and gesture, this figure reminds us in some ways of Figure 4, the lovely copper sculpture of a male deity seated on a cow: in both, the god is seated in a relaxed, open-legged posture; both hold a diminutive, semi open flower in the left hand; and both have their hair dressed with a plait or bun at the side.

The antelope skin draped over the left shoulder of this figure reinforces the inscription's identification of Avalokitesvara. Clear references to the Kashmiri style so beloved of Choying Dorje include the striated dhoti and the several donor figures on the base, as well as the mountainous hourglass-shaped support to the throne with intertwined nagas - reminiscent in this respect of the base of "Vajrapani" (Fig. 1). The motif of a bird in a bower of leaves at the top of his throne back is found in several paintings and several other sculptures linked to Choying Dorje.

This sculpture forms a link with some sculptures we have already viewed, and also with the many other bronze or brass alloy sculptures, without inscriptions, that have come down to us that are clearly linked to this artist's oeuvre, but where we cannot be sure if the sculpture is by Choying Dorje himself, or a product of one of the workshops he set up, or made in his style after his death. In this short article we have not investigated sculptures that fit this category, but it is worth examining one example here.

Fig. 10

This brass sculpture in the Lima Lhakhang of the Potala immediately reminds us in one respect of our fig. 2, the figure of a difficult- to-identify figure, as both are seated on a cow in much the same frontal seated pose. But in this example it is clear from the antelope skin over the left shoulder, the lotuses held in the hands and the Amitabha nestled in the hair, that the subject is Avalokitesvara. [83]

In this respect it is linked to our Fig. 9, the inscribed figure identified in the inscription as a portrayal of Avalokitesvara, with both further clearly identified by the antelope skin over the shoulder. But in other characteristics, these two sculptures seem to hark back to two different sculptures from our first group of four copper sculptures.

As we have already seen, the relaxed pose, handheld lotus, and hairstyle of the inscribed Fig. 9 relate to the god riding a cow of fig. 4, which I feel may in fact be a visionary depiction of Avalokitesvara from Choying Dorje's early years. In fig. 10, the Potala brass sculpture above, we can see a relationship to the enigmatic fig. 2 in the frontal seat upon a cow, but not in other respects; if it were not for the resemblance to fig. 10 and another similar figure in ivory, it would be difficult to suggest that fig. 2 is a portrayal of Avalokitesvara. [84]

These comparisons show clearly how motifs from the various stages of Choying Dorje's artistic career reappear again and again in differing subjects and styles.

In this short essay it is not possible to address the challenges presented in determining which surviving sculptures - and paintings – are from "the hand of Choying Dorje" and which are those made by the workshops he set up, or were created after his death in homage to him and his unique style.

I feel we can be sure that the "Vajrapani" presently on view in the Rubin Museum, on loan from the Zhiguan Museum, Beijing, is an original work from "the hand of" the young Choying Dorje, the Tenth Karmapa, as its inscription attests, and can be included in a group that represent him at the height of his exuberant, visionary, creative powers.

Annotation:

1. Previously published: Oriental Art, n.s. Vol. 33, No. 2, 1987, in an advertisement by Adrian Maynard, described as: "Bronze figure of Kubera;

Nepalese, 6/7 th c."; Sotheby's New York, 1993 Indian and Southeast Asian Art, 17 June 1993, lot. No. 4: "Nepalese Bronze figure of Vajrapani, Licchavi, circa 7/8th century"; Sotheby's New York, 1994 Indian and Southeast Asian Art, 30 November 1994, lot 235: "Nepalese Bronze Figure of Vajrapani, Licchavi, ca. 8th c.".

2. Bonham's Hong Kong, Nov 29 2016, lot 110.

3. David Jackson, A History of Tibetan Painting (Vienna: Beitrage zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, nr 15, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), Chapter 9, pp. 247 ff. Jackson was greatly aided by Heather Stoddard's discovery of an inscribed painting, see p. 354, n. 591 and 593.

4. Schroeder, Ulrich von. 2001. Buddhist sculptures in Tibet. Hong Kong: Visual Dharma, p. 743, "oldest surviving Tibetan metal sculpture", and p. 754, pl 175A-D "Composite Image with Aspects of Vajrapani, Kubera, and Possibly Hayagriva, Central Tibetan Imperial Period (Yarlung Dynasty): 7th-8th Century"

5. von Schroeder 2001, p. 754: "There can be absolutely no doubt that this inscription referring to the Tenth Karmapa Chos dbying rDorje (1604- 1674) was added in the 17th c at the earliest"

6. Alsop. Ian, 2012, "Chapter 8: The sculpture of Chöying Dorjé, Tenth Karmapa", in Debreczeny, Karl, Ian A. Alsop, David Paul Jackson, and Irmgard Mengele. 2012. The Black Hat Eccentric: Artistic Visions of the Tenth Karmapa. New York, N.Y: Rubin Museum of Art, 215- 245: also published Alsop 2013 as "The sculpture of Chöying Dorjé, Tenth Karmapa" in asianart.com, https://www.asianart.com/articles/10karmapa/index.html

7. For this brief account of the Tenth Karmapa's life, I have relied on the translations of the various biographies and auto briographies of Choying Dorje found in Mengele, Irmgard. 2012. *Riding a huge wave of Karma the turbulent life of the Tenth Karma-pa*. Kathmandu: Vajra Publishing; Shamar Rinpoché 2012. *A golden swan in turbulent waters: the life and times of the Tenth Karmapa Choying Dorje*. Lexington, Virginia, USA : Bird of Paradise Press; Richardson, Hugh Edward. 1987. *Chos-Dbyings Rdo-Rje, The Tenth Black Hat Karmapa*. Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Sikkim. 2012. http://www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/242743.

8. Shamar 2012, p. 79.

9. Douglas, Nik, and Meryl White. 1976. Karmapa: the Black Hat Lama of Tibet . London: Luzac, p.83; Shamar 2012, p. 83.

10. Shamar 2012, p. 94.

11. Mengele 2012, p. 49; she quotes this passage from Belo 163b. 1, which Mengle notes "sees in Gushri's interference, in the relationship between teacher and student, an inauspicious sign that would have many disastrous consequences, not the least of which was the demise of the Karma Kagyud tradition in the decades that followed." Mengele 2012 dates the departure of the sixth Shamarpa to July 29/30, 1611). See also Shamar, p. 96, where he quotes the same passage from BL "Therefore Chagmo Lama's obstruction was the cause of the future decline of the Karma Kagyu".

12. Mengele 2012 p.77-78; Richardson 1987, p. 28 has the name-giving occurring several years earlier, instigated by the sixth Shamarpa before the enthronement of the young Karmapa.

13. Shamar 2012, p. 94.

14. Mengele 2012, p. 51-52, from Gling pon's biography.

15. Mengele 2012, p. 81-82.

16. Mengele 2012, p. 99, n. 58. Choying Dorje's fondness for the style of ancient Kashmir informed many of his works, see Luczanits 2016, "Inspired by the Past: The Art of Chöying Dorjé and Western Himalayan Sculpture" in Debreczeny, Karl, and Gray Tuttle. 2016. The Tenth Karmapa and Tibet's turbulent Seventeenth century . Chicago: Serindia.

17. Mengele 2012, p. 371-372.

18. Shamar 2012, p. 118.

19. Mengele 2012, p. 384.

20. Shamar 2012, p. 123.

21. Mengele 2012, p. 115, n. 109.

22. The six-year old Fifth Gyaltsab, who Karmapa had recognized previously at Sekhar Guthog, and the Situ Rinpoche, Mengele 2012, p. 116, n. 114.

23. Shamar 2012, p. 133.

24. Mengele 2012, p. 131.

25. Richardson 1987, p. 42, n. 7.

26. see https://kagyu.org/great-encampment/

27. Mengele 2012, p. 128-129.

28. see Shamar 2012, p. 113, n. 212; where Shamar Rinpoche credits the term to the Tsang Desi.

29. Mengele 2012, p. 136 for a poem describing the solitude at Manasarovar; p. 144 for love of travel and independent life.

30. Mengele 2012, p. 140; Ehrhard 1997, p. 128, "The lands are like a wiped basin: The Sixth Zhadmar-Pa's Journey to Nepal". In: S. Karmay and P. Sagant, eds. Les Habitants du Toit du Monde, Etudes Recueilles en Hommage a Alexander W. Macdonald (Nanterre: Societe d' ethnologie), pp. 125-138. This article was also included in Erhad, Franz-Karl, 2013, Buddhism in Tibet & the Himalayas (Kathmandu, Vajra Publications), pp. 283-293.

31. Mengele 2012, p. 165-166.

32. Mengele 2012, p. 158.

33. Fifth Dalai Lama (1989-1991) Vol. 1, pp.153.18-21, as quoted in Mengele 2012, p. 167-168.

34. see Mengele 2012, p. 172 and also von Schroeder 2001, Vol. 2, p. 800; von Schroeder recounts the confusing legends surrounding this now-lost sculpture.

35. Mengele 2012, p. 174.

36. Mengele 2012, p. 184.

37. Mengele 2012, p. 185.

38. Though not all scholars agree, Irmgard Mengele (2012) has made a strong case for the identification on Kuntu Zangpo with Tsang Khenchen. see

Mengele 2012, p. 183 ff, see also https://purl.bdrc.io/resource/WA27481, where his collected works are described as: “Collected Works by a 17th century literary figure, Tsang Khenchen Gyatso (1610-1684). Biographer of Zhabdrung 01 and apparently had served Karmapa 10 Choying Dorje under the name Rimdrowa Kuntu Zangpo”.

39. Mengele 2012, p. 190.

40. Mengele 2012, p. 190-191.

41. Richardson 1987, p. 41.

42. von Schoeder 2001, p. 744.

43. Mengele 2012, p. 240, quoting from Big Drum, 745.7-746.2.

44. Mengele 2012, p. 238, translated from Big Drum, 742.4-743.5.

45. The type of daily attention to sacred sculptures described by Choying Dorje is more typical of worship in Nepal than in modern Tibetan shrines, where sculpture are often kept in glass-enclosed altars, are often dressed in brocade, and are rarely touched. Relatively recent Nepalese sculptures often show considerable wear, eg. Schroeder, Ulrich von. 1981. Indo-Tibetan bronzes. Hong Kong: Visual Dharma Publications, fig. 104D.

46. Fig. 1, the smallest of these three sculptures, has the shortest inscription, stating only “made by (the) hand of the venerable Choying Dorje” ; Fig. 2 and 3 have the same inscription enlarged by the Tibetan phrase, byin rlabs can implying that the sculpture is ‘spiritually charged’ or ‘magical’ or ‘blessed, holy’.

47. von Schroeder 2001, p. 744.

48. Alsop 2012, p. 218 n. 681. Of course there are attempts to forge inscriptions on modern copies. These are usually rather easily found out as almost invariably there are mistakes in orthography and awkward engraving.

49. Alsop, 2012, 218, n. 682 A good example is the copy, now in Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi, India, of the remarkable painting of Vanaratna in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The original, dated 1469, is quite damaged, and a copy (now in Bharat Kala Bhavan) contains a copy of the original inscription as well as an inscription describing the circumstances of the copy. See Dr. Pratapaditya Pal 1985, Art of Nepal (California: University of California Press, 1985), 136-137, also discussed inDr. Pratapaditya Pal 1978,e *Arts of Nepal: Part II, Painting* (Innerasien, Vol. 3, No 2) (Leiden/Köln: Brill), 22-23.

50. Alsop 2012, p. 218, n. 683. Amy Heller has described the normal relationship between inscription and consecration, remarking: “The inscription may be conceived as an aspect of the consecration ceremony, whether or not that is formally stated in the inscription, as such a ceremony punctuates the act of creation. Had the inscription been afterwards as a re-consecration, the initial phase would in principle be noted, for such an omission would be tantamount to negating the previous consecration.”

Amy Heller 1995, “Buddhist Images and Rock Inscriptions from Eastern Tibet, VIIIth to Xth Century, Part IV,” in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Graz 1995 , Vol. 1, ed. Helmut Krasser, et al. (Vienna: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 386.

51. on Schroeder 2001, p.750, 754, 756, 766.

52. see Alsop 2012, p. 218 n.689: Such inscriptions serve to include these inscribed images in a specific set: in the case of the Nagaraja sculptures, they identify the royal owner of the sculptures, and in the case of the thangkas they identify the lama who consecrated the paintings, while the Choying Dorje inscriptions identify the creator of the sculptures and paintings.

53. von Schroeder 2001, p. 754, pl 175.

54. von Schroeder 2001, p. 750, pl 174.

55. von Schroeder 2001, p. 814.

56. Schroeder, Ulrich von. 2008. Buddhist statues in Tibet: evolution of Tibetan sculptures. Chicago, Ill: Serindia. p. 108, pl 30.

57. von Schroeder 2001, p. 756, pl 176.

58. von Schroeder 2008, p. 110, pl 31B.

59. von Schroeder 2001, p. 766-767, pl 181.

60. von Schroeder 2008, p. 110, pl 31A.

61. von Schroeder 2001, pp. 768-791, pl 182-189.

62. see Alsop 2012, p. 222, n. 710 for a detailed note on this issue by Jeff Watt.

63.vonSchroeder2001,p.798,n.664asquotedinAlsopBHEn.665and n.711.

64. von Schroeder 2001, p. 798.

65. Mengele 2012, p. 165: Mengele quotes a passage describing the stupa in detail from Choying Dorje’s biography of the sixth Shamarpa,Wish Fulfilling Cow , p. 324. 4-7.

66. Mengele 2012, p. 165.

67. Mengele 2012, p. 165-166.

68. Mengele 2012, p. 234-235. Quoted also in Jackson 1996, p. 247. Richardson 1987, p. 40 interprets part of the quote somewhat differently, “I am one who delights in spyan ras gzigs (Avalokitesvara)”.

69. see Debreczeny, Karl, Ian A. Alsop, David Paul Jackson, and Irmgard Mengele. 2012. *The Black Hat Eccentric: Artistic Visions of the Tenth Karmapa*. New York, N.Y: Rubin Museum of Art.

70. Jackson 1996, Chapter 9, pp. 247- 258.

71. Debreczeny 2012, p. 125.

72. Debreczeny, Karl, 2020, “Recrafting Remote Antiquity: Art of the Tenth Karmapa” Arts of Asia Nov-Dec 2020, p. 84, fig. 14, 16; Debreczeny, Karl, 2021, “Of Bird and Brush: A Preliminary Discussion of a parinirvāna Painting in the Distinctive Idiom of the Tenth Karmapa Recently Come to Light” in Caumanns, Volker, Jörg Heimbel, Kazuo Kano and Alexander Schiller (eds.) Gateways to Tibetan Studies: A Collection of Essays in Honour of David P. Jackson on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday 2 Vol. Hamburg: Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg, pp. 179-186, fig. 1, 2, 4, 8.

73. from the collection of Ulrich and Heidi von Schroeder; von Schroeder 2001, p. 807, fig. XII-23; Debreczeny 2012, pp. 179-180, fig. 6.6.

74. Debreczeny 2012, p. 180.

75. Richardson 1987, p. 27.

76. Mengele 2012, p. 150, 151-152, quoting from *Wish Fulfilling Cow*, 292.4-5 and 295.7-296.2: In his account of his experiences with his guru the sixth Shamarpa, he describes the Sharmarpa as he was approaching death: “he carefully looked again and again at the whole gathering in a slow manner, like a Nepalese cow (*bal glang mo*), without saying a single word”; and in another passage: “all the while, he stared slowly and unblinking, like a Nepalese cow, at each wild animal, bird, and even small insect he saw at the waterfall and forest edge”.

77. Luo Wenhua 2016, “A Survey of a Willow-branch Guanyin Attributed to the Tenth Karmapa in the Palace Museum and Related Questions” in Debreczeny Karl and Gray Tuttle (eds) 2016, The Tenth Karmapa and Tibet’s Turbulent Seevnteenth Century, London and Chicago: Serindia Publications, pp. 153-183.

78. Luo Wenhua 2016, p. 155, n. 4.

79. Luo Wenhua 2016, p. 156.

80. Alsop 2012, p. 219, fig. 8.9.

81. Figs 1-3 are almost pure copper, as are Fig. 8 and the very similar willow branch Guanyin, and the remaining inscribed sculpture, a portrait of the ninth Karmapa, is in silver.

82. see Richardson 1987, p. 40: “By his nature devoted to intensely calm concentration in progressive meditation on his personal deity the compassionate One, he constantly repeated the six letter prayer.”

83. This sculpture resembles a very similar, but fragmentary portrayal of the same subject with much the same treatment in ivory, now in the Metropolitan Museum. Alsop 2012, p. 233, fig. 8.24; von Schroeder 2001, p. 803, fig. XII-21.

84. see Alsop 2013, fig. 30, where all three images are compared: https://www.asianart.com/articles/10karmapa/30.html

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From 1970 to 1988, he lived in Kathmandu Nepal, where he eventually learned the Newari language and became a student of the cultural and art history of Nepal. From the early 1980s he was a member of a committee of scholars who worked together to produce a classical Newari dictionary, which was published as A Dictionary of Classical Newari in 2000. He has written numerous articles in Orientations, Arts of Asia, and Artibus Asiae, and was a contributor to the Grove's Dictionaries' Dictionary of Art (1996) and the volume The Art of Tibet: Towards a Definition of Style (1997). He is also the founder and editor emeritus of an online Journal, asianart.com, to which he has also contributed numerous articles.

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