Chapter 8

Far-away Visitors of Buṅgadyaḥ: The Khaśa Mallas of West Nepal and Newar Buddhism

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Introduction

Buṅgadyaḥ is undoubtedly one of the most prominent Buddhist deities of the Kathmandu Valley. A focal point of the valley's religious life since at least the seventh century (Slusser 1982, 368), the deity and its festival also attracted foreign devotees, who joined the local crowds in rituals related to Buṅgadyaḥ, the "rain-making" god turned Bodhisattva.[1] The *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* is an important chronicle (Skt. *vaṃśāvalī*, lit. "royal list") redacted in the late fourteenth century. It contains references to the "Khas", a group of people "from the west", who visited the Valley of Nepāla during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (*Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* 1985). Because they ruled over territories predominantly populated by Khaśas (Khaś), the kings of these people have been named Khaśa Mallas by modern scholars (Alsop 1994).

Available historical sources show that their passages in the Kathmandu Valley were motivated by dual and seemingly contradictory goals: plunder and worship. Luciano Petech ([1958] 1984), William B.

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Douglas (2003) and Samuel Grimes (2023) have discussed the purpose of these visits, especially from a religious perspective. The sites of Paśupatinātha and Svayambhū in Kathmandu, and Buṅgadyaḥ in Bungamati, are mentioned as places of worship in all the Khaśa Mallas' visits. In this context, the status of Buṅgadyaḥ as a tutelary deity of the court or the kingdom (Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*), had Douglas (2003) wonder about the Khaśa Mallas' political agenda in the Valley of Nepāla. Furthermore, since the divinity is also identified as Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara (or red Avalokiteśvara), the same author raised the notion of these kings having a dynastic cult of Avalokiteśvara, to which they associated through identification with the figure of Lokeśvara (see also Locke 1980).

If the idea of a political agenda was rejected by Douglas himself, this topic and the question of a royal cult of Avalokiteśvara constitute relevant fields of investigation. Recent surveys carried out in the Karnali basin allow us to reassess the cultural milieu of West Nepal during the medieval period. With this material at hand, it becomes possible to put into perspective information provided by the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī*. This allows us to re-evaluate the Khaśa Mallas' connection with Nepalese Buddhism and also the relationship that the Newar kingdoms had with other Himalayan powers, not only in the religious sphere but also in the diplomatic one.

The Karnali basin during the medieval period

The term Khaśa Malla was formulated by twentieth-century historians and art historians (Alsop 1994). It is built on the ethnonym Khaśa (Khaś), relating to Himalayan populations attested since early texts such as the *Manusmṛti* and the *Mahābhārata* (Andolfatto 2019), and the dynastic name Malla. "Khaśa Malla" refers to a dynasty ruling over a vast central Himalayan region between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. Their territory included tracts of land in the Purang area of Southwestern Tibet and stretched from Kumaon-Garhwal (State of Uttarkhand, India) in the west to Mustang in the east (Figure 1). At its centre, the Karnali basin of Western Nepal comprised the localities of Dullu and Sinja. These places have been identified respectively as the kingdom's winter and the summer capitals (Tucci 1956; Petech [1980] 1988). But the rulers of this dynasty never referred to themselves as "Khaśa Malla." In effect, they titled themselves "supreme king of kings

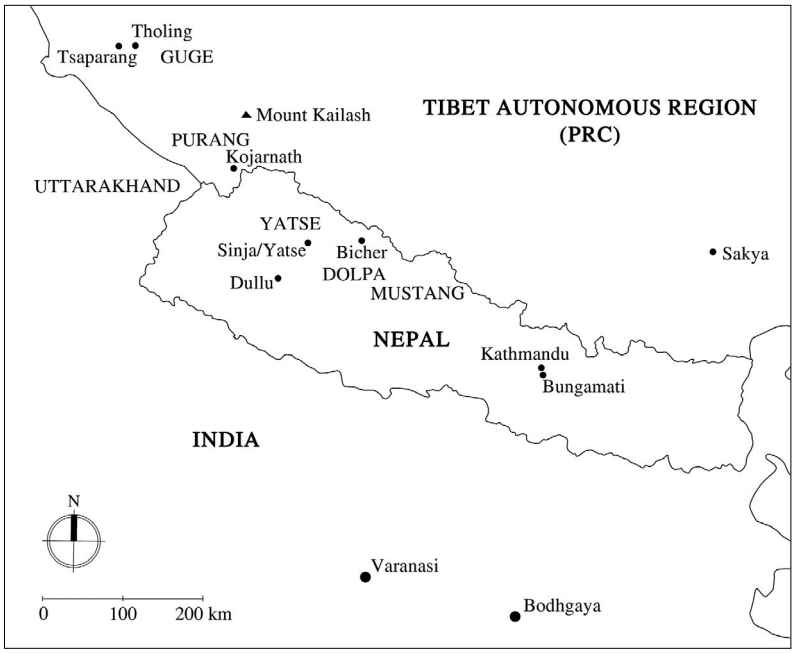

Figure 1: Map of Nepal, map: David C. Andolfatto.

of the Khaśa country" (Skt. *khasadeśarājādhirāja*)[2] and "Yatsé sovereign" (Tib. *ya tse mnga' bdag*)[3] (Andolfatto 2019). Nevertheless, due to its widespread use, the terms "Khaśa Malla" and "kings of Yatsé" will be used here to designate the rulers of this Himalayan polity.

Information about the Khaśa Mallas comes from Tibetan sources and epigraphic records found in Nepal and India. An important document is the Kīrtikhambā ("Pillar of Fame"), erected by King Pṛthvīmalla (r. 1338–1358) in Dullu in 1357 CE (ŚS 1279).[4] The inscription is redacted in a mixture of Sanskrit and a vernacular (Figure 2). One side of the pillar lists Pṛthvīmalla's maternal line, while the other side lists his paternal line. The maternal list goes back to Nāgarāja, who can be situated around the first half of the twelfth

2 From a Bodhgaya inscription dated to 74 of the Lakṣmaṇasenadeva era (1253 CE). See Pant 2009 and Balogh 2021.

3 From a dedicatory inscription found on an undated metal statue of Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara (HAR 16801; Heller 2013). See *infra*.

4 The artefact is a *kīrtistambha*, a type of pillars that "established (*stambha*) fame (*kīrti*)." Other pillars, called "hero pillars" (Skt. *vīrastambha*), are found throughout West Nepal. They are usually installed to honor the memory of deceased warriors (Andolfatto 2019).

Figure 2: The Kīrtikhambā of Dullu Installed by King Pṛthvīmalla in 1357 CE (ŚS 1279), View from the south, 2014, photo: David C. Andolfatto.

century. We have limited information on his direct successors, although it appears that they originated from the lineage of kings from Guge and Purang. Indeed, from the tenth to the mid-twelfth century the west of today's Nepal was a territory under the direct control of the kings of Southwestern Tibet (Vitali 1996). The area was then known in Tibetan as Yatsé (Tib. *ya rtse*), a name it preserved until the mid-fourteenth century. Around the mid-twelfth century though, Yatsé became a more independent power.

Interestingly, the Kīrtikhambā and other documents found south of the Himalayas provide the kings' Sanskritic names, while Tibetan historians mention them by their Tibetan names. Such a feature can be explained by the rulers' need to better fit in a predominantly Khaśa ethnic environment, which manifested by the adoption of Sanskritic cultural idioms as well as marital alliances with the local aristocracy (Andolfatto 2019). The Kīrtikhambā itself expresses Pṛthvīmalla's desire to establish his local credentials. Indeed, although his mother, Śakunamālā, comes from the lineage of Nāgarāja, his father, Puṇya-malla, originates from Purang, where he is known as Sönam Dé (Tib. *bsod nams lde*). Pṛthvīmalla's rule is generally considered as marking the heydays of medieval West Nepal (Adhikary [1988] 1997, 63–65).

Yet, signs of political weakening started to appear under his rule, with the feudatory Kingdom of Doti showing signs of greater independence under King Niraipāla (Pandey 1997, 171).

The Khaśa Malla dynasty collapsed in the second half of the fourteenth century, and for most Tibetan authors the house of Yatsé died with Pṛthvīmalla. The polity's territory was thence divided into a multitude of petty kingdoms collectively called the *Bāise Rājya* or "Confederation of twenty-two kingdoms" (Kirkpatrick 1811; Buchanan-Hamilton 1819).

Khaśa Mallas in Nepāl Maṇḍala

The *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* contains genealogical details about the rulers of the Kathmandu Valley and accounts of major historical events that took place in the region. Compiled in the last years of the fourteenth century, the text is recorded in Sanskrit and old Newari (i.e., Nepālabhāṣā) (Malla 2015, 497–543). This text is the only witness to relate the visits of the Khaśa Malla kings. Although the eulogical character of this type of literature calls for a cautious approach, the chronological proximity of the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī* (henceforth GRV) with the events that interest us makes it a relatively reliable document. Dhanavajra Vajrācārya and Kamal P. Malla published the only edition of the GRV (Vajrācārya and Malla 1985), which will be referenced here.

The GRV attributes the first incursion to Jitārimalla. This king is mentioned in the Dullu Kīrtikhambā and in Tibetan sources (Tucci 1956, 66). Jitārimalla succeeded his father Aśokacalla, who is known from four inscriptions in Bodhgaya and one from Gopeshwar (State of Uttarakhand). Together these documents situate Aśokacalla's rule between ca. 1230 and 1269 CE (Balogh 2021). It is nevertheless doubtful that Aśokacalla ruled a territory that stretched from the Karnali to Bodhgaya. His epigraphic presence there is more likely to indicate, besides his status of Buddhist devotee, his holding of limited and shared powers over Bodhgaya. His name was engraved on a seated Bodhisattva in copper alloy that may have been acquired in north-eastern India or in Nepal (Alsop 2005; Andolfatto and Weinstein, forthcoming). Aśokacalla also supported Drigung Kagyu institutions in Tibet (Petech [1980] 1988, 376).

Jitārimalla left no inscriptions in Western Nepal. The GRV's records of his three visits constitute the main source of information on this

ruler. The first two incursions are dated to 1287/88 (NS 408) and February–March 1289 (NS 409).

> The Khaśas entered (the Nepal Valley) from the west. In N. S. 408 (A. D. 1288), Jayatāri (Jitārimalla) entered for the first time. The whole nation entered the forest after massacring eight hundred Khaśas at Svayambhū. Consequently, the Khaśas took to their heels. People returned safely to their respective home and hearth. A year passed by. In the month of Phālguṇa, Jayatāri entered again. He set villages on fire. He visited the Svayambhū Caitya, paid homage to the Lokeśvara of Bugma (Buṅga), pleased Paśupati (by offerings). In N. S. 409 (A. D. 1289) he returned back happily to his own country. (GRV, folio 26, 129–130)

A third passage is recorded in February 1290 (NS 410).

> In N. S. 410, Phālguṇa Kṛṣna Partipadā, Jayatāri came and occupied Navakvāṭha. In Bugandevala (Buṅga), he donated a treasure for the maintenance (of the temple). He entered Gvala from the western gate. He donated flowers and help(?) with his own hands. […] After setting all the villages on fire, for one month he laid siege on Yarha. The fort Māṅā remained inaccessible. (GRV, folio 40, 143)

The events of 1288 (NS 408) seemed to have only consisted in a battle taking place near Svayambhū and, according to the available translation, resulted in Jitārimalla's defeat. This only triggered his will to return a year later. One can only be puzzled by the actions of these foreign troops during their passages in 1289 (NS 409) and 1290 (NS 410), ranging from the destruction (and probably the looting) of villages, to the worship and offering of donations at major Hindu and Buddhist sites.

In many regards, these first accounts from the GRV contain significant information on medieval warfare in the Kathmandu Valley. They highlight the key role of Nuwakot (Navakvāṭha) as a base for military conquests in Nepāla Maṇḍala, a strategic position that the settlement maintained until the eighteenth century, as it is from there that Śāha King Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa launched his conquest of the valley. A year after Jitārimalla's last visit, in 1291, the valley was again in turmoil when it was raided by Ḍoya troops from the Tirhut Kingdom of Mithilā (GRV, 130; Petech [1958] 1984, 103).

The next western Malla King mentioned in the GRV is Ripumalla, Jitārimalla's nephew. His ascendency appears to have been at the detriment of Jitārimalla's son and heir Ādityamalla. According to Tibetan sources, Ādityamalla became a monk at Sakya Monastery before becoming "king again" (Francke 1926, 169; Vitali 1996, 457). Douglas proposed that he fomented a coup in 1299, which failed and forced Ādityamalla from the position of power (Douglas 2003, 55). Ādityamalla remained as a royal monk (Tib. *lha btsun*) in Sakya for seventeen years, before ascending to the throne (Petech [1980] 1988, 378).

Ripumalla is without a doubt the Yatsé King that left us with the most diverse and numerous documents. In the Karnali basin, three bilingual inscriptions, in Tibetan and in a mixture of Sanskrit and an Indic script bear his name (Adhikary [1988] 1997, 170; Andolfatto, forthcoming). Likewise, in the Nepalese Terai, the Nigliva and Lumbinī pillars erected by the Mauryan emperor Aśoka in the third century BCE contain bilingual inscriptions by Ripumalla. These epigraphic records all start with Avalokiteśvara's mantra "*Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*" (in Tibetan script in Nigliva, and in Tibetan and an Indic script in Lumbinī) and are followed with the propitiatory injunction: *śrī ripumalla ciraṃ jayatu*, "May the fortunate Ripumalla be long victorious." The Nigliva inscription is dated to 1234 of the Śaka era (1312 CE). The inscription in Lumbini is undated and appears to have been executed by a less-experienced hand. Importantly, the name Saṃgrāmamalla is engraved below Ripumalla's name, who, as we know from the Dullu Kīrtikhambā, was Ripumalla's son.

Where Jitārimalla conducted both destructive and devotional activities, the sole occurrence of Ripumalla's visit to the Kathmandu Valley, in February 1313 (NS 433) only relates ceremonial deeds. The GRV describes it as follows:

> In N. S. 433, on the day of Phālguṇa Kṛṣṇa Partipadā, Khaśiyā King Ripumalla anointed the God of Buṅga and donated treasures, including a horse. He pleased the Bhaṭṭāraka of Gvala (Paśupati). He offered a *pūjā* at the *caitya* of Yeṃde (Svayambhū, Kathmandu). He gave a feast at Svayambhū (?) to all the ordained (?). He returned after staying for 18 days. (GRV, 145–146)

In contrast to his predecessor, Ripumalla did not engage in battles nor did he torch villages. Between Jitārimalla's incursions of 1288, 1289

and 1290, the Ḍoya's raid of 1291 and the return of the latter in the winter of 1300 and from March 1311 to March 1312 (Petech [1958] 1984, 103–107), the Kathmandu Valley must have been in a disastrous state at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and in particular when Ripumalla visited it.

As suggested by the Lumbini and Nigliva pillars inscriptions of 1312, Ripumalla and his son Saṅgrāmamalla must have been on a pilgrimage tour of important Buddhist sites that took them to the Terai. Lumbini is identified as the birthplace of Śākyamuni Buddha and Nigliva (or Nigali) is the so-called birthplace of Kanakamuni Buddha. It is not known if they visited other Buddhist sites in the subcontinent. The second stage of their journey took them to the Kathmandu Valley, where they arrived in February 1313.

The rule of Ripumalla is only documented from 1312 to 1314. The latter date comes from the colophon of a volume of the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* found in a Tibetan monastery and dated of VS 1370 (1313/14 CE).[5] Although patrons do not necessarily visit the places, they make donations to, one may propose that Ripumalla continued his journey, from Nepāla Maṇḍala to Tibet. In favour of this hypothesis is the record of Ripumalla's donation, in Lhasa, of a statue of Avalokiteśvara and a golden pinnacle surmounting the Jokhang's statue of Jowo Rinpoche (Tib. *jo bo rin po che*) (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1995, 86; Richardson 1998, 259). Furthermore, the Yatsé kings were well connected to religious institutions in Tibet. They mainly supported Drigung and Drukpa Kagyu schools, as well as Sakya monasteries. This patronage was expressed through donations that included gifts of statues and other objects to the most revered temples of Tibet (Andolfatto and Weinstein, forthcoming).

In this regard, Ādityamalla's stay in Sakya can be understood, as it was so far, as the consequence of a failed coup resulting in a political exile, but also as a strategic move aiming at strengthening Yatsé's relationship with a powerful monastic order. We do not know when Ādityamalla was born and if he stayed in Sakya during his formative years or if he was already of adult age. Whatever the case, if he indeed remained in Tibet for seventeen years, his return to power must have taken place around 1316.

5 The *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* is a commentary of the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*, originally redacted around the fourth century. The manuscript was first mentioned by Rāhula Sāṅkṛtyāyana (Sāṅkṛtyāyana 1938, 163, n. 2) and later discussed in Petech [1980] 1988, 377 and Locke 1980, 415.

The Khaśa Mallas reappear in the GRV on March 1, 1321. The text does not mention their ruler, but only that "In N. S. 441, on Caitra Śukla Dvitīyā, the Khaśiyās came in fighting. They demolished/destroyed the Rājavāsa fort of Tripura" (GRV, folio 44, 147). If Ādityamalla returned from Sakya to the throne of Yatsé around 1316, these "Khaśiyās" may very well be his men. An alternative possibility is that these troublemakers were mere looters or mercenaries, operating under no king's banner, but simply identified by their ethnic origin. The GRV claims that, in early 1300, the Ḍoyas of Tirhut were called in by King Anantamalla and Jayaśaktideva, a prince and pretender to the throne. This military support from an outside power is explained by ongoing feuds between the contending house of Tripura on one side and the house of Bhonta, of which Anantamalla was a puppet king (Petech [1958] 1984, 93–136). Furthermore, historians Dhanavajra Vajrācārya and Ṭekabahādura Śreṣṭha have proposed that Ripumalla was also called in, but by the Tripura faction (as cited in Petech [1958] 1984, 108, n. 2).[6] In the perspective of this "brilliant hypothesis", to quote Petech's words, Ripumalla would anyways have arrived too late to support the Tipuras, as by then the Ḍoyas had already spent a year pillaging the valley. An "important battle (*brahmayuddha*) took place at Sanaṇimaṃ Nakacheṃ", in 1321 (NS 442) (GRV, folio 45, 147). This battle, on which the GRV provides no additional information, may have involved some of these Khaśas who had arrived in the valley a year earlier.

Ādityamalla is in the Kathmandu Valley in March–April 1328. This is related in two passages of the GRV. The first one is very short as it only indicates that "on the day of Caitra Śukla Pūrṇimā N. S. 448, Ādityamalla entered (the) Nepal (Valley)" (GRV, folio 27, 130). The second occurrence is more detailed.

> In N. S. 448, on Phālguṇa Śukla Saptamī, the Khaśiyā King Ādītamala (Ādityamalla) came to invade. He occupied Navakvāṭha. Five days later, after occupying Śākharakvāṭha, he entered the Valley. He set fire on all the three cities. He occupied the Pulavahīri in Yarha and laid siege on the town for 22 days. But the fort remained unpenetrated. (GRV, folio 46, 149)

6 Dhanavajra Vajrācārya, and Ṭekabahādura Śreṣṭha. 1975 (VS 2032). *Nuvākoṭako Aitihāsika Rūparekhā*. Kirtipur: Tribhuvan University.

Nuwakot plays the same role of a starting base of operations that was observed during Jitārimalla's invasion of 1290. Śākharakvāṭha could not be identified. Ādityamalla would have sowed chaos all over the valley, or at least in Patan, Kathmandu and Bhaktapur. He seemed to have settled in Patan ("Yarha", an alternative spelling for Yala). Pulavahīri can be equated with Puco Mahāvihāra, a monastery currently known as Cwecwangu Puco Bahī and Akṣayeśvara Mahāvihāra, located in Pulchok, near the western "Aśoka stūpa" (Locke 1985, 219). That the Khaśa Mallas would have taken over a monastic compound and made it their headquarters makes sense, as these monuments present an obvious defensive design (Andolfatto, forthcoming).

The GRV does not mention the departure of Ādityamalla's troops. Yet the Khaśas are mentioned again five years later, on September 6, 1334.

> In N.S. 454, on the day of Bhādra Śukla Saptamī, Thayita Bhā penetrated into Yarha. As for Sakhupatirāja, he was killed by the Khaśiyā before he could get inside (Yarha?). Forty others perished (in the confrontation?). On the day of Phālguṇa Kṛṣṇa Partipadā [February 1335], the Khaśiyās returned after taking ransom. They set fire on the settlement of Sākhu. (GRV, folio 48, 151)

Petech proposed that the Khaśas in question in this last historical occurrence were commanded by king Puṇyamalla (Petech [1958] 1984, 117–118). The date indeed falls within this ruler's known regnal years (1333–1340). Puṇyamalla is a particularly interesting character. For unknown reasons Ādityamalla's son Kalyāṇamalla never went on the throne. Instead, he retired as a monk at the Sakya monastery in Kojarnath (Purang). His sister, Śakunamālā, is one of the few queens of Yatsé whose name was recorded. She was married to an aristocrat of Purang, Sönam Dé (Tib. *bsod nams lde*), who was aged seventeen at the time (Vitali 1996, 122). Purang was then a vassal of Gungthang, a Sakya-backed kingdom.

Sönam Dé had to rule an ethnically predominantly Khaśa territory. For this reason, and as his predecessors did before him, he translated and "sanskritized" his name to become Puṇyamalla, thus adopting the dynastic name of the Yatsé kings, Malla. Sönam Dé/Puṇyamalla made generous donations to Sakya and Drigung Kagyu institutions. The Khaśas' visit of 1334 therefore happened in the early years of

Puṇyamalla's rule. He may or may not have been involved in their five months stay in the valley, which was marked by the killing of Sankhu's king and the collecting of a ransom.

The timing of the Khaśa Mallas' passages in the Kathmandu Valley can be summarized as follows (after GRV; Petech [1958] 1984; Douglas 2003):

King	Date
Jitārimalla	December 1288 or January 1289 (NS 408 Pauṣa)
Jitārimalla	March 6, 1289 (NS 409 Phālguṇa Śukla)
Jitārimalla	February 26, 1290 (NS 410 Phālguṇa Kṛṣna Partipadā)
Ripumalla	February 12, 1313 (NS 433 Phālguṇa Kṛṣna Partipadā)
unknown	March 1, 1321 (NS 441 Caitra Śukla Dvitīyā)
Ādityamalla	February 18, 1328 (NS 448 Phālguṇa Śukla Saptamī) and March 26, 1328 (NS 448 Caitra Śukla Pūrṇimā)
Puṇyamalla?	September 6, 1334 (NS 454 Bhādra Śukla Saptamī) leaves or returns late February (Phālguṇa Kṛṣna Partipadā) of 1335

The period during which these outsiders came to the valley was one of great political instability. As local rival factions competed for the throne, foreigners seized the opportunity to loot the region. The Ḍoyas, Khaśas and, in 1349, the army of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (founder of the Sultanate of Bengal) represented the main sources of outside disturbances, what Kamal P. Malla called "the three apocalyptic events of early mediaeval Nepal valley" (Malla 2015, 541). Nevertheless, despite their respective capacity to seize entire parts of the valley, they never seem to have particularly considered the valley as a new tract of land to add to their dominions.

Jitārimalla, Ādityamalla and potentially Puṇyamalla, engaged their troops in looting and destruction. On the contrary, Ripumalla is the only king who did not engage in violence, or at least that we know of. Logically, their long sieges, particularly in Patan, have raised the question of their purposes. Did they hold territorial views over the valley? "Such an idea was far from their mind", wrote Dilli Raman Regmi, for whom the only motive for the Khaśa Mallas was greed (Regmi [1965] 2007, 244). It remains a possibility for Douglas, who focused his study on the importance of their worship of Buṅgadyaḥ.

According to him, the Khaśa Mallas' participation in the festival of Buṅgadyaḥ could be indicative of these kings' "territorial ambitions in the Kathmandu valley" as they "would have recognized the political aspect of Buṅgadyaḥ's Yātrā" (Douglas 2003, 56). Grimes (2023) convincingly proposed that it was part of the Khaśa Mallas' legitimation campaign to become more Indic.

The Khaśa Mallas, Buṅgadyaḥ and Newar Buddhism

Barring two exceptions, the Khaśa Mallas entered the valley around the same time of year, in Phālguṇa (late February–March). This pattern led Douglas to propose that "for some time there was a calendrically fixed ritual quite possibly scheduled according to the ritual year of the Khasa court, which was transplanted to Buṅgadyaḥ as the Khasas were themselves squeezed out of the lowlands" (Douglas 2003, 61). This theory rests on a position maintaining that the Khaśa Mallas ruled over parts of India. One may understand the "lowlands" from where they were drawn out as the large tracts of land extending from the hills of western Nepal down to the Bodhgaya region, where certain historians thought the Khaśa Mallas held sway.[7] But it is more likely that their presence in Bodhgaya was more about the limited control, religious and/or political, of Bodhgaya and its direct vicinity, and not of the vast lands comprised between the Karnali and the holy place.

Aśokacalla is the only Yatsé king attested in epigraphic records from Bodhgaya. But he is nowhere mentioned as the king ruling over Bodhgaya. Instead, he is titled as a "King of Kamā" in the Bodhgaya inscription of Buddhasena (Balogh 2021, 51), and a king of the "Khaśa country", in the "Sapādalakṣa Mountains"[8] in a Bodhgaya inscription of 1253 CE (dated year 74 of the Lakṣmaṇasenadeva Era).[9] The reference to the Sapādalakṣa Mountains is again found in another Bodhgaya inscription from 1269/70 (dated year 1813 of the Nirvāṇa Era). The

7 See for instance Heller 2009, 23; Alsop 2005.

8 "*Sapādalakṣaśikharikhasadeśarājādhirājaśrīmadaśokacalladeva*." The term Sapādalakṣa literally translates as "hundred and twenty-five thousand mountains." It corresponds to today's Sivalik Hills (Pant 2009; Balogh 2021).

9 Mahes Raj Pant has dated this inscription from 1278 CE (Pant 2009, 300–301, 320) and Daniel Balogh from 1253 CE (Balogh 2021, 52). The latter calibration is the one retained as it fits Aśokacalla's rule more adequately with inscriptional evidence of his grandson Akṣayamalla ruling in Dullu in 1271 CE (Pant 2009, 314).

latter document records the construction of a Buddhist shrine by a man named Dharmarakṣita. It indicates that beforehand Dharmarakṣita sought permission from Aśokacalla and an unnamed ruler from the Chinda dynasty (probably from Karnataka) who was there at the time. Aśokacalla's power was thus shared with other monarchs, such as the Chinda King, but in no case extended beyond Bodhgaya, as, it is necessary to recall, the Indo-Gangetic plain was conquered by Bakhtiyār Khaljī's Turuṣkas in the early thirteenth century and in the hands of the Delhi Mamluk dynasty in the mid-thirteenth century.

Based on the available data, it cannot be demonstrated that Khaśa Mallas ruled over any substantial portion of northern India. They were not "squeezed out" of India but probably lost their political and religious footing in Bodhgaya after Aśokacalla. With the major Buddhist sites of India made inaccessible, the ones in the Kathmandu Valley thus constituted new *loci religiosi* where Aśokacalla's successor Jitārimalla could shift his devotion. The Lokeśvara of Bungamati was already famous in India by the mid-thirteenth century. This is reported by Dharmāsvāmin, a Tibetan monk who resided in the Kathmandu Valley from 1226 to 1234 (*Biography of Dharmasvāmin* 1959, 54; Regmi [1965] 2007, 569). Dharmāsvāmin indicates that, in Tibet, it is the Svayambhū Stūpa that is the most famous Nepalese Buddhist place, while, according to Mary Slusser, Buṅgadyaḥ was also famous in Tibet in the thirteenth century and considered there as Nepal's most revered form of Avalokiteśvara (Slusser 1982, 370).[10] Jitārimalla may thus have initiated a Khaśa Malla tradition of worshipping Buṅgadyaḥ, although it remains striking that such a tradition would open with a blood bath in Svayambhū.

Jitārimalla likely originated from a Southwestern Tibetan aristocratic milieu and was well infused with Tibetan and Indian cultural idioms (languages, religions, etc.). In this regard it is significant that the first place related to Khaśa forces in the valley is Svayambhū. Could this indicate that the first goal of these raiders was the holy hill? Little is known of the site's morphology during the medieval period, although the mention of a battle taking place there and causing heavy casualties (eight hundred dead on the Khaśas' side, according to the GRV, a figure that should be taken cautiously) can be understood as evidence

10 Much later, by the eighteenth century, Mīnanāth, the god for which a chariot is also carried during the Buṅgadyaḥ Yātrā, came to be considered as one of the "Four Brothers", or "Four Noble Friends" (Tib. *'phags pa mched bzhi*) (Wylie 1970, 14, n. 20).

for Svayambhū being both a religious place and a defensive position, possibly fortified. Svayambhū is in the western part of the valley, where a western invading force would logically come from. It was thus also the first place of importance on Jitārimalla's path, and the first resistance met by him.

The three religious sites visited by the Khaśa Mallas are Svayambhū, Buṅgadyaḥ and Paśupatināth. Paśupati (Śiva), who was titled "Lord of Nepāla" (*nepālādhipati*) in an inscription dated to NS 502 (1381 CE),[11] was conceived by Newars as a state-God, together with Viṣṇu and Buṅgadyaḥ (Toffin 1986; Owens 1989). Buṅgadyaḥ was thus not the Khaśa Mallas' sole religious place of interest with a political dimension.

In addition to this, one may note that the seasonality of their passages, given the latter's military aspect, may be dictated more by logistics imposed on campaigning armies than by religious calendars. Long marches through the hills and lowlands of Nepal are easier in winter and spring than in other periods. Moreover, the Khaśa troops were most likely made up of a majority of people involved in agriculture and trading activities the rest of the year. Military campaigns thus had to accommodate with the soldiers' economical and agricultural obligations in their homelands. During winter, the plants of barley and wheat are in their growing stage, paddy is not planted yet and millet fields are lying fallow (Bishop 1990). The dates of Khaśa passages hence appear primarily constrained by practical reasons, and the existence of a fixed ritual at Buṅgadyaḥ remains doubtful, especially considering the often long gaps between (recorded) occurrences.

Nonetheless, Buṅgadyaḥ, and Nepalese Buddhism in general, seem to have played an important role in the religious life of the Khaśa Malla kings. Understanding this relation requires one to approach the question from the perspective of Buddhist artefacts that can be traced to, or directly related to the Khaśa Malla kings of Yatsé. Three groups of objects are at our disposal: 1. the monuments and statues found in the Karnali basin of West Nepal, 2. the corpus of "Khaśa Malla" metal statues that was first brought to light by Ian Alsop (Alsop 1994) and 3. the artefacts found in the Kathmandu Valley that can be traced back to a Khaśa Malla patronage.

11 Stone inscription of chief minister Jayasiṃharāma located in Itumbāhā, Kathmandu. See Naraharinath ([1966] 1998 [VS 2055], 232–233).

The twelfth–fourteenth century archaeological landscape of West Nepal

Study of the archaeological heritage of West Nepal began in the 1950s, with works produced by Yogi Naraharinath (1955, 1956) and Giuseppe Tucci (1956). The study was continued with work by Satya Mohan Joshi ([1971] 2021) Prayag Raj Sharma (1972), Dilli Raj Sharma (2012) and the author (Andolfatto 2019). They show that, in the Karnali basin, currently known Buddhist monuments mostly consist in stūpas built between the fourteenth and the early sixteenth century. Before this period one may count the tenth–twelfth century Kakrevihar temple in Surkhet (although it is not sure if it was built under the Khaśa Mallas) and a Tibetan inscription from around the tenth century recently discovered in the Sinja Valley, Jumla district. (Andolfatto 2019; Andolfatto and Martin, forthcoming).

Inscriptions left by Khaśa Malla kings and their ministers on rock boulders, steles, stūpas or other types of monuments also attest the presence of Buddhism. Executed from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century and redacted in a mixture of Sanskrit and local vernacular languages, inscriptions on stone dating from the early to the mid-fourteenth century often open with the mantra "*Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ.*" On inscriptions left

Figure 3: Inscription of King Ripumalla in Sera, near Sinja, Jumla district. Ca. 1312–1314. The mantra "*Oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*" is inscribed in Tibetan and followed by four lines in Nāgarī script, 2014, photo: David C. Andolfatto.

Figure 4: Damaged stone Buddha statue in Pādukāsthān, ca. fourteenth century, near Dullu, Dailekh district, 2022, photo: David C. Andolfatto.

by Ripumalla, the mantra is written in Tibetan script (Figure 3), except on the Lumbini pillar, where a clumsy engraver used the Nāgarī alphabet. After Ripumalla, the use of Rañjanā/Lantsa script for the opening mantra becomes generalised, as seen on top of the Kīrtikhambā (Figure 2). The mantra is found inscribed on monuments until the 1350s. As far as Buddhist statuary is concerned, a dozen of broken Buddhist statues in stone are found across the sites of the Dullu Pañcakośī (Dailekh district). They represent Buddha (Figure 4), Caturbhujā Avalokiteśvara, Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara and a potential Maitreya (Andolfatto and Weinstein, forthcoming). All the images seem to have been voluntarily damaged. This suggests the possibility that a period of iconoclasm against Buddhism took place in Dullu at some point in time after the Khaśa Malla rule. These sculptures, roughly datable from the tenth–fourteenth century, show influences from the West Indian Māru-Gurjara style and from Southwest Tibet.

The metal statuary

The second corpus concerns metal sculptures that have been identified as displaying a "Khaśa Malla style." This style is understood by certain authors as particular of this dynasty and the result of Newar artists invited in the Karnali to produce art for the Khaśa Malla court (Alsop 1994, 2005; Heller 2020). As demonstrated elsewhere, there are in fact few common features tying this corpus together (Andolfatto and

Weinstein, forthcoming), and only a handful of statues are inscribed and can be directly linked to the Khaśa Mallas. A further caveat to the theory of a "Khaśa Malla style" lies on the fact that, bar one sculpture originally from Dolpa, the geographic origin of these objects is a matter of mere conjecture since they are currently all in private collections or in museums. Additionally, and this is probably the strongest point that puts into perspective the idea of a "Khaśa Malla style," is that no artefact found so far in West Nepal, in Yatsé, the heartland of the Khaśa Mallas, displays the stylistic features seen on some of the metal statues (Andolfatto 2019, 2021).

Nevertheless, the tracing of inscribed metal statues by Alsop and Heller constitutes an invaluable contribution to the history of the Khaśa Malla Kingdom and to Himalayan art history in general. Only the statues connected to West Nepal through their epigraphic contents shall be mentioned here as they directly inform us on the religious orientations of the Khaśa Mallas, their court members and other local aristocrats. Importantly, all the inscribed statues surveyed so far are related to Buddhism.

We have previously mentioned King Aśokacalla, who was present in Bodhgaya in the mid-thirteenth century. His name is found engraved on a copper bodhisattva statue (Alsop 2005, fig. 2). Another inscription on the same object, presumably older based on its epigraphy, suggests that the statue predates Aśokacalla (Alsop 2005, n. 33), who may have acquired it in Bodhgaya or elsewhere (Andolfatto and Weinstein, forthcoming). The next king found mentioned on a statue's dedicatory inscription is Ripumalla. The sculpture represents Nairātmyā, dancing on a corpse, with an aureola in the back (Alsop 2005, fig. 3). As on the Aśokan pillars, the inscription reads *śrī ripumallaciraṃ jayatu*. Dated from the time of Ripumalla's reign is a gilt copper statue of Machig Labdrön (1055–1149, Tib. *ma gcig lab sgron*) now in the collections of the Tibet Museum (Acc. Num. ABS 252).[12] The image of the Chöd tradition's founder has an engraving on its base. It is identical in content to the one on the Nairātmyā, except that it bears the name Medanimalla and the date of ŚS 1234 (1312 CE). Because of the dynastic title, this Medani could have been a relative of Ripumalla.

12 For the link to the image of the statue see Himalayan Art Resources, HAR 200430. Accessed April 15, 2025. https://www.himalayanart.org/items/200430.

Next is a seated Śākyamuni Buddha in gilt copper currently in the Pritzker collection. Contrarily to the previous dedicatory inscriptions, this sculpture has a text engraved in Tibetan (Uchen) script. It indicates that "the teacher (Tib. *slob dpon*) Sonam Rinchen" offered it to the Nesar monastery in Bicher, Dolpa (Heller 2009, 71, fig. 45–46). A similar but larger and finer image of Śākyamuni Buddha, currently in a private collection in Beijing, contains a bilingual inscription, in Tibetan and in Sanskrit. According to the inscription, the statue was commissioned by a translator (Tib. *lo tsa ba*) named Sonam Reṃjen and his wife Ghātalladevī (Alsop 2012; Andolfatto 2019). Both statues were apparently donated by the same character named Sonam Rinchen (Heller 2009).[13]

Also datable from this period is a gilt copper statue of a seated woman (Alsop 2005, fig. 1). The figure may represent Prajñāpāramitā or the donor under her traits. Her name, Dīpamālā, is indicated in the accompanying bilingual inscription (Tibetan and Sanskrit). Dīpamālā is one of Pṛthvīmalla's queens, which contributes to dating the statue between the 1330s and the 1350s. Direct evidence of Khaśa Malla royal patronage is further provided by a gilt-bronze image of Padmapāṇi in the Rietberg Museum, Zürich, recently published by Heller (2025). She identified a brief yet significant Tibetan inscription recording that "the precious Raja of Khaśa (*kha' 'dza'i ra ja*) offers a golden statue." Another statue with a Tibetan inscription is a Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara in gilt copper alloy and bearing the inscription "The Ya tse sovereign has offered this to the monastery of Lha tong" (HAR 16801; Heller 2013). Despite it not mentioning the name of the sovereign who donated it,

13 One may go even further and propose that Sonam Rinchen is none other than Sönam Dé, aka Puṇyamalla, the aristocrat from Purang who was "invited" to reign over Yatsé after Ādityamalla, in the 1330s. Puṇyamalla is Pṛthvīmalla's father. Although the Dullu Kīrtikhambā states that Pṛthvīmalla's mother is Śakunamālā, it is very possible (and likely), that Śakunamālā and the Ghātalladevī mentioned on the sculpture are either the same person or two wives of Puṇyamalla. Pṛthvīmalla himself had two wives named Dīpamālā and Dharmamālā (Tucci 1956; Andolfatto 2019). The turning of Sönam Dé to religious life would have resulted in the taking of Sonam Rinchen, the Translator (Tib. *lo tsa ba*), as a religious name. This would have allowed for his son Pṛthvīmalla to succeed to his father while the latter was still alive. Such an arrangement was indeed in accordance with the eleventh century reform of succession rules in Guge-Purang issued by Yeshe Ö. According to a provision introduced by him, an heir could succeed his father if the latter became a monk (Vitali 1996, 110). Furthermore, the equation of Sönam Dé with Sonam Rinchen is formulated by locals in Bicher, who celebrated the statue as a gift from Sönam Dé (Heller 2009, 72).

the image may be stylistically dated from the fourteenth century. One should finally mention a statue of Vajrapāṇi from the Rubin Museum of Art (Acc. Num. C2005.34.3a-b).[14] The inscription running along its base mentions the donors as "Śrī Udecandra Rāuta and his wife Singāradevī." In this case, it is an Indic script, similar to the one used in West Nepal at the time, that relates the object to potential Khaśa Malla patronship (Vajracharya 2016).[15]

Khaśa Malla religious patronage in the Kathmandu Valley

The curated corpus of metal statues highlights the ties of Khaśa Malla kings with Buddhist monastic institutions. The only direct material evidence for this patronage in Kathmandu Valley is found in Itum Bāhā. The monastery, one of the most ancient in the valley, preciously preserves a manuscript of the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* written in silver and gold ink. The document is dated of ŚS 1280 (1358 CE). The colophon indicates that it was copied by the monks Vajraṇāv and Prabhunāv, under the supervision of Rājabrahmaśrī, a Vajrācārya from Itum Bāhā, under the patronage of King Pṛthvīmalla (Pant 2012 [VS 2069]).

Given the GRV's mentions of Khaśa Malla's worship and offerings at Buṅgadyaḥ, Svayambhū, and Paśupatināth, it is worth considering whether material evidence of this patronage can be found. So far, no inscription has been identified in the valley that bears references to the Khaśa Mallas. However, in Bungamati the dismantlement of Buṅgadyaḥ's temple, in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquakes, led to the discovery of artefacts from the medieval period. The operations were not documented by trained archaeologists and no report has been produced about it. Photographs taken by Anil Tuladhar and transmitted to the author reveal the presence of a foundation stone with deposits of gold artefacts and gems in its thirteen square holes, a few dozen of corroded coins from the medieval period and a small metal statue.

14 For the link to the image of the statue see Rubin Museum of Himalayan Art. 2023. "Vajrapani." Accessed August 12, 2023. https://rubinmuseum.org/collection/c2005-34-3a-b/.

15 Furthermore, Rāuta is a name found on certain stone memorial pillars from the Karnali basin. See, for instance, Nepal Heritage Documentation Project. "Bistara Stone Memorial Pillar, JUM0453." DANAM. Accessed February 3, 2025. https://danam.cats.uni-heidelberg.de/report/00c84501-dc97-43c8-b6b5-8b0e9735b8dd. In Nepali *rautel*, *raute* and *rāut* also mean "a young prince."

Figure 5: Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara discovered in 2016 in the foundations of the Buṅgadyaḥ (Bungamati). Gilt copper. H. approx. 10 cm. Ca. twelfth century, 2016, photo: Anil Tuladhar.

The latter object is particularly significant. It represents a standing Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara made of gilt copper and about 10 cm in height (Figure 5). The Bodhisattva stands on a base with a single row of lotus petals. The right hand executes the gesture of granting blessings (Skt. *varadamudrā*) and the left one seems to have held a lotus stem. Similar statues of Padmapāṇi were produced in Nepal between the eleventh and the fourteenth century (Schroeder 1981). The Buṅgadyaḥ statue is especially reminiscent of ca. twelfth century productions such as the large Padmapāṇi copper image in the south-eastern corner of Kvā Bāhā monastery in Patan (Schroeder 1981, 328) and a statue currently at the Cincinnati Art Museum (Acc. Num. 1965.445) (Schroeder 1981, 328–329).[16]

Since the object seems to have been deposited at a temple dedicated to Buṅgadyaḥ, who is also a red Lokeśvara, I suggest that the statue was considered a representation of Buṅgadyaḥ. The same iconography is found later, in nineteenth-century *paubhā* paintings representing Buṅgadyaḥ/Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara (Figure 6). The identity of the statue's donor is unknown. Yet, as will be seen, the kings of Yatsé appear to have fostered a dynastic cult of Avalokiteśvara and, to a certain extent, identified themselves as Lokeśvaras. They were of course not the only ones to worship and support Buṅgadyaḥ, as the deity was foremost a national Newar god. Nevertheless, considering its antiquity, it is possible to propose that the statue may have been donated by people from the Kathmandu Valley or by one of our Khaśa Malla kings.

16 See also the Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Acc. Num. 1982.220.2), Tibet House Museum (HAR 71770) and the one at the Musée Guimet (Acc. Num. MA 3373).

Figure 6: Padmapāṇi Lokeśvara. *Paubhā* dated 1842 CE. Pigments on cloth. 76 × 57 cm. The Rubin Museum of Art, Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin C2006.66.45 (HAR: 100013), photo: courtesy of the Rubin Museum of Art.

A dynastic cult of Avalokiteśvara?

It has been proposed that the cult of Buṅgadyaḥ was of particular importance to the Khaśa Malla kings because it was "part of their own dynastic ritual" (Douglas 2003, 61). According to Douglas, this significance manifested in the Khaśa Mallas' borrowing of the Lokeśvara's

"institutional charisma […] in order to sustain the dignity of their own dynasty" (Douglas 2003, 61–62). The comment arises from John Locke's interpretation of the colophon from the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* volume donated by Ripumalla and mentioned above. In this document of 1314 CE, Ripumalla is titled "during the divine rule of Ripumalla, the lord of emperors, the lord of the world" (*rājarājeśvara lokeśvara śrīrīpumalladevarājye*).[17] According to Locke, the colophon's presentation of the king as a Lokeśvara ("Lord of the World") indicates the identification of Ripumalla with Avalokiteśvara, whom he believes "assumed a more official role" than it did for the Hindu kings of the Kathmandu Valley (Locke 1980, 415).

Ripumalla is not the first king of Yatsé to identify himself with a divine figure. Before him King Aśokacalla was already described in the 1253 CE Bodhgaya inscription as: "one who adheres to the most excellent Great Vehicle (*mahāyāna*), the supreme lay worshipper (*paramopāsaka*), in character like the firm Bodhisattva who is intent on the vow of truth" […] "a bee on the nectar of the lotus feet of Hevajra, […] a Garuḍa[-mounted] Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa) […]" (Bodhgaya inscription of LS 74, Pant 2009, 300–301). Aśokacalla's grandson Akṣayamalla (r.ca. 1271–1280) is noted as "a royal Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa) against Kaṃsa" in a 1271 CE inscription from Dailekh district (ŚS 1192, Pant 2009, 314). Decades later, in 1316 CE, Ādityamalla is depicted in combined Buddhist and Hindu terms in a copperplate inscription dated to ŚS 1238. His tutelary deity (Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*) is Hevajra and he is also "a royal Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa) against Kaṃsa" (Pant 2009, 314–315). We thus see that the Khaśa Malla kings are primarily Buddhist individuals, as indicated by the reoccurrence of Hevajra as a tutelary deity and direct comparisons with the Bodhisattva. It is worth noting that Hevajra is also the tutelary deity (Tib. *kye rdo rje*) of the Sakya school, of which the Yatsé kings were generous supporters. Likewise, Hevajra is one of the most important deities in Newar Buddhism (Alsop 2005). On the other hand, the equation with Viṣṇu appears reflective of the kings' identification in the eyes of their vassals, who were predominantly Hindu Khaśas. This identification also extended to Pṛthvīmalla's two wives, whom the Dullu inscription eulogises as Viṣṇu's wives (Tucci 1956, 48 and Grimes 2023, 7). As panegyrical as they are, both Buddhist and Hindu identifications display an ideal image of the ruler, who embodies the highest values and personalities of both religious systems.

17 Translation provided by S. Grimes (personal communication).

The interest in religious practices related to Avalokiteśvara was not foreign to rulers of Southwestern Tibet, from where the Yatsé aristocracy hails from. It indeed developed there from the eleventh century onwards under the impulse of Bengali master Atiśa Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna (982–1054), who was invited by the king of Guge-Purang, Lha Lama Yéshé Ö. Furthermore, by the thirteenth century the Maṇi Kabum (Tib. *ma ni bka' 'bum*), a text emphasizing on Avalokiteśvara and his six-syllable mantra, had established the identification of Songtsen Gampo (seventh century) as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara (Kapstein 2013, 96).

How far the iconographies of commissioned artefacts can inform us on the donors' personal religious preferences and spiritual aspirations is an open question. The statuary assessed here represents divinities of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism. Some of them are forms of Avalokiteśvara: Caturbhujā Avalokiteśvara, Ṣaḍakṣarī Lokeśvara and a seated form of Avalokiteśvara. Two metal statues of Hevajra, a multi-armed tantric deity and the tutelary god of the Khaśa Malla kings, have been identified by Alsop as displaying a "Khaśa Malla style" (Alsop 2005, fig. 5/6). Yet, besides their styles, no tangible elements (place of collection, epigraphy, etc.) allow us to directly link these objects to the kings of Yatsé.

To this count may be added a *paubhā* kept at the Tibet Museum in Gruyeres, Switzerland (Figure 7). It portrays a central White Tārā with two male donors venerating her. A short text is written below the scene, with the same dedicatory text encountered elsewhere: *śrī ripumalla*[*ci*?]*raṃ jayatu*. The script is an Indic one, while the style of the painting is that of the Kathmandu Valley. The *paubhā* depicts two donors. One of them must be Ripumalla himself, and the other one his son Saṃgrāmamalla. The goddess Tārā is closely related with Avalokiteśvara, of whom she is considered an emanation (in particular the Green Tārā) and an "assistant." Thus, the painting may, to some extent, enter the category of objects manifesting a dynastic interest for Avalokiteśvara.

We have seen that the ostentatious use of Avalokiteśvara's six-syllable *mantra* "*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*" is documented from Ripumalla's reign. The surveyed statuary and epigraphic records seem to support Locke and Douglas' idea of a dynastic cult of Avalokiteśvara by the Yatsé kings. And while Hevajra was a tutelary deity for the rulers, emphasis on the bodhisattva is more at the state level, as kings and ministers alike would have the god's mantra inscribed on their monuments.

Figure 7: Ripumalla and his son Saṃgrāmamalla worshipping the goddess Tārā. *Paubhā* from ca. 1312/13. Pigments on cloth. 29.8 × 24.8 cm. Fondation Alain Bordier (ABP 38), photo: courtesy of the Fondation Alain Bordier.

Concluding remarks

The materials presented in this article agree with Locke's proposal that Ripumalla identified himself with Avalokiteśvara as a Lokeśvara. But this prolific king was merely pursuing a tradition established at least since Aśokacalla's time and that may be rooted in the ongoing interest in Tibet for Avalokiteśvara, his mantra and his visualisation as a manifestation of King Songtsen Gampo (Kapstein 2013). Interestingly, this assimilation of a monarch's image with that of a deity predates by more than a century that of Kathmandu valley kings, where it is first attested with Jayasthitirājamalla (r.ca. 1382–1395). The GRV eulogises him as an incarnation of Buddha, of the "Eight Lokapālas" and of Rāma (GRV, folio 29–30, 131–133). The identification of Malla kings from the valley to both Hindu and Buddhist gods and their open support to both creeds has often been considered as a unique cultural feature in the region. Yet our data shows that this dual king/god(s) assimilation was already in place much before, in the Yatsé kingdom of West Nepal. Although far-stretched and difficult to demonstrate at this point, the likening of temporal rulers with important deities may hence appear as

a cultural borrowing by Newar rulers. And it is probably not a coincidence that this merging of worldly and spiritual powers happens in the Kathmandu Valley once greater political stability was achieved.

That the Khaśa Mallas indeed harboured a dynastic cult of Avalokiteśvara and that the latter held a status of tutelary deity for the kings and their realm is suggested by a few, various elements, mainly in the epigraphic records left by them. As a Lokeśvara, the multifaceted Nepalese god from Buṅga thus occupied an important position in the Khaśa Mallas' religious life from the late thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century.[18] This importance manifested in the Kathmandu Valley by occasional visits at Buṅgadyaḥ. Yet, the worship of this deity seems accidental. With Bodhgaya out of their politico-religious sphere, the kings of Yatsé diverted their attention elsewhere. A Nepalese Lokeśvara with a national stature thus met their own religious aspirations as much as it took them a step forward in asserting their position in the Nepalese and Indic realm. Other temples and gods of high religious and political importance were also given attention amidst the ongoing bloodsheds. Works of art were commissioned from the valley's workshops and some of them were offered to major religious institutions such as Itum Bāhā and, as suggested, to Buṅgadyaḥ's temple.

It is only logical that the Khaśa Mallas' repeated contacts with Nepalese culture manifested in various fields. This is illustrated in the onomastic field, with a shift operated in the second half of the thirteenth century. From Dé (Tib. *lde*) in Tibetan and Calla in Sanskrit, the dynastic names of the Yatsé kings changed for Malla in Sanskrit and its Tibetan adaptation Mel (Tib. *rmal*, *smal*, *mal*). This significant change appears under Jitārimalla (r.ca. 1287–1289), who is the first of his lineage to be recorded in the Kathmandu Valley. There, Malla is a dynastic name used since 1200 with King Arimalla, the founder of the "Early Malla" lineage (1200–1347). It is thus quite reasonable to propose that Jitārimalla borrowed the royal onomastic from the valley.

18 Until today, on the night of the fourteenth day of the bright half of Kārtika (October–November, Skt. *vaikuṇṭhacaturdarśi*), members of the Khaśa community residing in the valley and elsewhere spend the night at Bungamati's Buṅga Bāhā. The Vaishnava-oriented celebrations consist in candle lighting and night-long dancing and chanting (Anil Tuladhar, personal communication). See the page, Awakened Bungamati. 2018. Facebook. November 23, 2018. https://fb.watch/mpPkNuWuRu/. Although the festival's antiquity is not known, locals from Bungamati suggest that it may be linked to the Khaśa Mallas' visits, centuries ago (https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0XWNj2oSjd3NetgMvDe9FA4kgocpxkpa3HiBnnXhzg4fottnb55AovppTdEFxKNCgl&id=1727343834210534&mibextid=Nif5oz).

The actual motives for this change may be explained by the cultural and political motivations of the Khaśa Mallas' temporary stays in the valley. It could have been done to better fit in the Nepalese political game that was unfolding during this unstable period. From another perspective, despite political turmoil, the valley was a dynamic cultural centre with reputed artists and religious master. Thus, borrowing the Malla title was also a way for these western rulers to appropriate themselves the elite culture of the time. This is a recurrent feature of the Khaśa Mallas, whom we see adapting their identity according to where they are and the people they interact with (Andolfatto, forthcoming).

This highlights the role of Nepalese culture on its neighbours, and that of foreigners in the Nepal Valley. Often discarded, the multi-faceted influence of outside forces in medieval Nepal undoubtedly deserves greater attention from researchers. In this perspective, Alfred Gell's theory on art and agency offers a relevant theoretical frame of work (Gell [1998] 2013). Applied to our topic, it poses the Kathmandu Valley as a nodal point of artistic and intellectual productions that attracted foreigners who benefited from it as much as they contributed to its political, economic, religious and artistic life. Thus, art found in the valley or in other corners of the Himalayas, in temples, monasteries, in and underground, can be approached as part of a complex art nexus composed of both endogenous and exogenous agents.

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