

An Iconographic Study of Luri Gompa in Mustang

By Holly Foskett-Barnes
School of Oriental and African Studies

Word Count: 4,235

Mustang, or Lo as it is called locally, is located in the northern Himalayas in the Kaligandaki Valley (see map, Fig. 1). Once belonging to Tibet, it became part of Nepal at the end of the eighteenth century. Lo Manthang, the capital of Mustang, was built in the fifteenth century by King Amepal. At the same time he erected several temples and monasteries, including the *Champa Lhakhang* and *Thubchen Lhakhang*.

Positioned between the Tibetan plateau and South Asia, Mustang is a major trade route and passage for pilgrims, trekkers and scholars. Giuseppe Tucci was the first Tibetologist to record Mustang's culture and Vajrayana Buddhist traditions in his 1952 'Journey to Mustang' (Tucci 1953). Mustang became open to foreigners in 1992, allowing other academics the

opportunity to explore the region and produce detailed studies of its monasteries and temples. In 1994, Helmut F. Neumann published 'The Wall Paintings of the Luri Gonpa'¹ in *Orientalist*, which has become a central text and point of reference within this paper. I have applied Neumann's work as a background to a more in-depth iconographical study of the relationships between deities, sacred structures, and ritual usage of Luri. I will be looking to these elements with an attention to the spatial layers of iconography that are conceived sculpturally within the space. Here I will try to identity the relationships between each 'layer' and explore a sacred hierarchy, then look to how this formula sits within the ritual use of the *gompa*.

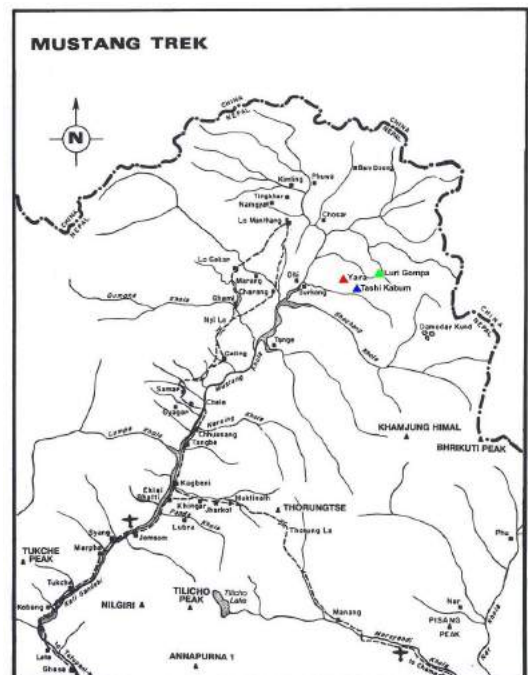


Fig. 1 Map of Mustang

¹ I will use the alternate Tibetan spelling, Luri Gumpa, throughout.



Fig. 2 Luri Gumpa.
Kaligandaki Valley, Nepal

Luri Gumpa sits in the peaks of 100 meter high cliffs, worn with erosion and carved with caves (Fig. 2). The temple is known locally as the “Cave of the White Chorten on the Naga Hill” (Beck 2014: 232), and looks out over the valley of the Kaligandaki river. After ascending the treacherous hillside you access the *gumpa* (monastery) through a courtyard and outer chamber, which contains a shrine of *Padmasambhava*, the eighth century monk and *mahasiddha* who is attributed to helping bring Buddhism to Tibet, surrounded by other lamas (Fig. 3). *Padmasambhava* can be identified by his three-peaked red hat, ‘resembling a lotus-flower, for Padmasambhava is believed to have been born from a red lotus-flower’ (Getty 1914: 158). He is also highly associated with the *vajra* (thunderbolt or diamond) and contributed to its popularity in Tibet, which we will continue to see in the main sanctum. This space is used by a local lama for *puja* (worship) on ceremonial occasions (Neumann 1994: 80). To the left is the main inner sanctum, containing exquisite wall murals, *mandala* and an impressive stupa (*chorten*) (Fig. 4). The darkened chamber is lit only by a narrow window in the South-west corner, which allows daylight to reflect off the highly polished surface of the *chorten* and allows one to navigate the little space around it.



Fig. 3 (Left) *Padmasambhava* shrine in the outer chamber of Luri Gumpa

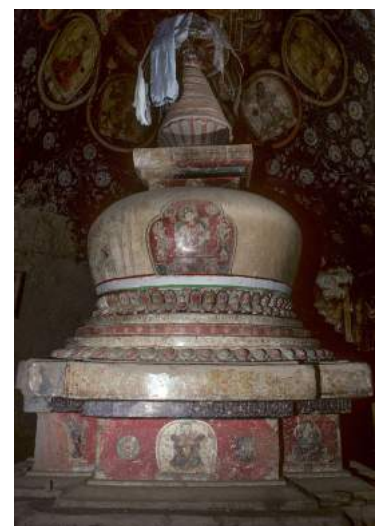


Fig. 4 (Right) *Chorten* in the inner chamber of Luri Gumpa

This setting and composition bear great similarity to another cave temple in Mustang, Tashi Kabum (Fig. 5). However, the *chorten* in the Tashi Kabum cave has sadly experienced severe damage by raids (Fig. 6). It is believed that both date ‘back to the 13th or 14th century’ (Beck 2014: 234) and share stylistic similarities suggesting they were painted by the same artist(s), which will be further explored in due course.



Fig. 5 Tashi Kabum. Kaligandaki Valley, Nepal.



Fig. 6 *Chorten* in Tashi Kabum

The *chorten* is undeniably Luri’s central feature. It’s sacred geographies are aligned with the North, East, South, and West axis, according to principles of Vajrayana Buddhism and the Five Buddhas who guard the cardinal directions. These however intercept at the corners rather than the flat sides of the base (see chorten layout, Fig. 7). Therefore each deity image is aligned with North-west, North-east, South-east, and South-west respectfully.

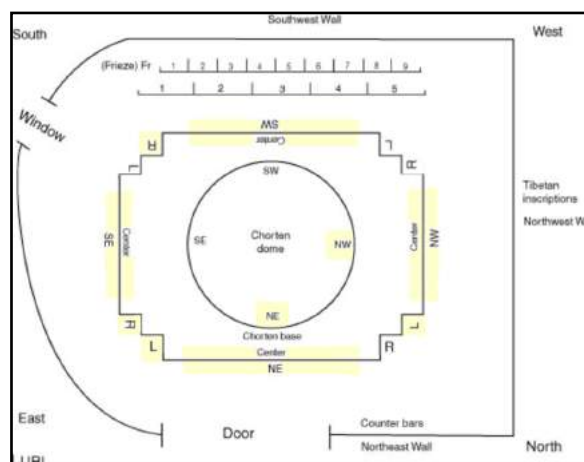


Fig. 7 *Chorten* layout in Luri Gompa

The base of the stupa displays four main protector deities called *lokapalas*, each guarding one of the cardinal directions. Known as “The Four Great Kings” in Tibet, they are typically found in the entrance ways to temples (such as in the *Thubchen Lhakhang*), guarding the four gateways to the celestial realm in thangka paintings, or the four cardinal directions at stupa sites. This tradition began with Indian stupas, where they were placed to guard the sacred relics (Getty 1914: 148), much like they are employed here. Two deities also flank the *lokapalas* on either side, painted on the receding corners of the red base. In between the guardians and these deities are painted two of the eight Buddhist auspicious symbols (*ashtamangala*), encircling the base of the *chorten* in a protective ring.² Of the *lokapalas* and protective deities, Neumann only discusses the North-west side and the flanking deities on the South-west side, noting that the damage to paintings on the South and South-west sides have resulted ‘in the complete loss of all paintings’ (1994: 81). Philip and Marcia Lieberman have provided a useful online photographic exhibition of the *chorten* from all cardinal directions, therefore I will refer to this resource in the hope of developing a more critical iconographic study.³



Fig. 8 *Vaishravana* and *ashtamangala* on North-west face of the *chorten* base

On the North-west side of the base is *Vaishravana* (Fig. 8), the guardian of the North, ‘recognizable by the lance and the jewel-spitting mongoose’ (Neumann 1994: 80). *Vaishravana* is a patronymic form of Kuvera representing wealth, shown by the mongoose (*nakula*), which is

² Beer writes that ‘In Tibetan art the eight auspicious symbols may be depicted individually, in pairs, in fours, or as a composite group of eight. When illustrated as a composite group they often assume the simulacra shape of a vase.’ (2003: 3), a concept I will later return to.

³ See <http://www.brown.edu/Research/BuddhistTempleArt/index.html>

said to show Kuvera's victory over the *nagas* (snakes), as guardians of wealth (Getty 1914: 148). He wears armour typical of the *lokapalas*, which '... recalls mediaeval examples preserved in the *gongkhang* (special chapel for protective deities) of many Tibetan monasteries.' (Neumann 1994: 80).



Fig. 9 *Palden Lhamo* on North-west face



Fig. 10 *Red Goddess* on North-west face

Vaishravana is flanked by *Palden Lhamo* (Fig. 9) and a red goddess (Fig. 10). *Palden Lhamo* is the only goddess among the *dharmapalas* who, like *lokapalas*, guard the Buddhist faith. *Kuvera* is also a *dharmapala* who by contrast is not depicted as a wrathful deity, unlike ferocious *Palden Lhamo*. *Dharmapalas* are directly connected to *Padmasambhava*, as he initiated their worship in Tibet in the 8th century (Getty 1914: 131). *Palden Lhamo* is here depicted astride her 'pink mule' (Neumann 1994: 80) *Vahana*, which is saddled by the skin of a demon - or her son, according to legend.⁴ She carries her typical attributes of a sword, skull cup, trident, the three peacock feathers gifted to her by *Brahma*, and wears a string of severed heads. She is accompanied on the other side by a fierce red 'Jewel Goddess'⁵ (Neumann 1994: 80) also astride a horse, dressed in red robes. In between *Vaishravana* and *Palden Lhamo* is the Golden Fish and on the other side is the Right-Coiled White Conch.

⁴ See '*Buddhism in Tibet*', pp. 112.

⁵ Her identity is somewhat ambiguous here. Gutschow states she may be 'Samkhapali Devi' (1994), a benevolent white goddess who came from the blood-thirsty red goddess Chamundi, associated with fierce Kali, which could further associations with the concept of controlling time, explored later.

The central *lokapala* of the North-east side, facing the entrance, is the Guardian of the East, *Dhritarashtra* (Fig. 11). Like *Vaishravana*, he holds a banner and wears armour and a helmet. In his hands there appears a white object that may be his symbolic ‘stringed instrument’ (Getty 1914: 149). To his left is a fierce, blue-skinned deity standing on a lotus throne (Fig. 12). Half the painting is worn away but in his right hand he appears to have a staff and in his left a *stupa*. These attributes could signify either *Virupaksha*, Guardian of the West, or the two-armed form of Wrathful *Vaishravana*.⁶ To *Dhritarashtra*’s right is another fierce deity, but no close-up photographs deny me from posing a suggestion of its identification here. The *ashtamangala* on the North-east side show the Wheel of the Dharma and the Eternal Knot.



Fig. 12 *Virupaksha*/Wrathful *Vaishravana* on North-east face



Fig. 11 *Dhritarashtra* and *ashtamangala* on North-east face

The South-east face is the most damaged. The central deity can be identified as the Guardian of the South, *Virudhaka*, by his attribute of swords held in both hands (Fig. 13). To his right sits a deity on a white lions back, holding a staff and embellished with jewellery and crown (Fig. 14). Gutschow here suggests that the deity could be *Raudrantaka Mahakala* (1994: 61), which fits as the *Mahakala* is a *dharmapala*. The white lion is also *Vaishravana*’s vehicle and he can often be seen astride it holding a victory banner or staff (see Fig. 15). In this example, he is also holding the *nakula*. On the left hand recess the painting is too damaged, but you are able to see the *ashtamangala* symbol of the lotus on one side.

⁶ See Beer, pp 186.



Fig. 13 *Virudhaka* and *ashtamangala* on South-east face



Fig. 14 *Vaishravana?* on South-east face



Fig. 15 *Vaishravana* thangka, 15th c. Tibet; thangka, gouache on cotton, 45.9 x 38.4 cm. Art Gallery of New South Wales, New Zealand.

On the South-western side of the base is the red-skinned Guardian of the West, *Virupaksha* (Fig. 16). His symbolic attributes are a *chorten*, seen in his left hand, and *naga*, wrapped around his right hand. On the left a *Garuda* is clearly depicted, who Neumann identifies as *Garudendra*, King of the Garudas (Fig. 17). In Tibet, the Indian Garauda was fused with the Bonpo ‘King of Birds’ and the

‘Bird of Fire’, depicted with the torso and arms of a man and the legs and talons of a bird (Beer 2003: 76). He is the enemy of *Virupaksha* (King of the Nagas), which is represented by him sitting atop a *naga* and by the miniature devotee on a *naga* throne at his side. In Tibet, Garudas also symbolise guardians of treasure and, in the Nyingma tradition, personify *Padmasambhava* (Beer 2003: 77). Neumann also adds that ‘The fact that Garuda was particularly popular among the Gelugpa (Red Hat) monasteries, gives a hint as to the affiliation of Lori’ (Neumann 1994:

81).⁷ Assumably, two *Garudas* flank *Virupaksha*, as the Liebermans also photograph the deity but it appears mirrored (Fig. 18). In between the deities The Treasure Vase can be seen, but the remaining *ashtamangala* cannot be distinguished.



Fig. 16
Virupaksha and
ashtamangala
on South-west
face



Fig. 17 *Garuda* on South-west face



Fig. 18 *Garuda* on South-west face

The drum of the *chorten* ascends in three circular ledges adorned in a floral design and circular in shape, with a lotus surrounding the base and a double lotus at the top (Fig. 19). This feature allows the *chorten* to be identified as the Stupa of Complete Victory, the seventh of the eight stupas commemorating major events in Shakyamuni Buddha's life, according to Tibetan

⁷ Neumann's suggestion here does not clarify an indication of the school associated with Luri, as the deities depicted alongside are not strictly from a Sakya lineage.

Buddhism.⁸ The three ledges represent the three months Buddha decided to remain on earth, told by the *sutra* “The Gift of the Monkey”. In Vaishali, India, one of Buddha’s faithful monkeys passed away, allowing the Buddha to realise that he too would die but designated 3 months until this passing. Thus the stupa is also known as the Stupa of the [ability to] “Control the Life Span” (Lin & Moore 1998). The identification of the *chorten* as the Stupa of Complete Victory gives rise to Luri’s ritual associations and possible ceremonial use, reflecting life span and attaining rebirth, that will be further unpacked throughout this study.



Fig. 19 *Chorten* ledges and lotuses

The highly polished dome (*anda*) of the *chorten* is painted with four deity images at the North-west, North-east, South-east, and South-western points above the *lokapalas* on the base. The North-western deity is a wrathful form of *Vajrapani*, identified as ‘*Nilambaravajrapani*’ by Neumann (1994: 83) (Fig. 20). Here *Vajrapani* has wide open eyes, blue skin and wide-set stance, representing a fierce aspect. He holds his typical attribute of the *vajra* high in his right hand and also carries a *ghanta* (bell) against his left hip, resembling *Vajrasattva*’s *mudra*. Neumann states that this *ghanta*, along with the small *nagas* that writhe in his hair, define him as *Nilambaravajrapani* (1994: 83), which could also be true of *Acarya-Vajrapani* in his *Dharmapala* aspect. Neumann writes that ‘No explanation can be given concerning the charming deity between his legs, sitting in *lalitasana* (the meditative sitting posture of relaxation) on a white elephant - a symbol of the male principle comparable with the *vajra*.’ (1994: 83). The sacred white elephant is the vehicle of several Vajrayana deities, including *Akshobya*,⁹ ‘the Unshakeable

⁸ See Beer, pp 188.

⁹ *Vajrapani* is also *Akshobya*’s corresponding *bodhisattva* in Vajrayana tradition.

blue Buddha of the center or east and Lord of the Vajra family' (Getty 1914: 62) - although this doesn't explain his red skin - and *Indra*, the original owner of the *vajra* thunderbolt, who is often connected with *Vajrapani*.



Fig. 20 *Nilambaravajrapani* on North-west of *anda*



Fig. 21 *Ushnishavijaya* on North-east of *anda*

The North-eastern deity facing the entrance to the cave is *Ushnishavijaya*, 'An emanation of the white Buddha Vairocana, and often regarded as a female *bodhisattva*' (Neumann 1994: 82). She is here depicted in her most common form, seated in *padmasana* on a lotus throne (Fig. 21). Her three faces each have a third eye and are adorned by a crown and jewels 'symbolizing *sambhogakaya* (body of pleasure)' (Neumann 1994: 82). Her attributes or *mudras* include, in her right arms, the *visvavajra* (double *vajra*), *varadamudra* (giving gesture), an arrow and lotus supporting an image of the Buddha. On her left she holds a bow, *tarjanamudra* (gesture of menace), *abhayamudra* (no fear) and a vase, 'which is believed to contain a particle of the essence of Vairocana' (Getty 1914: 33). The 'vase of abundance' (Neumann 1994: 82) or 'vase de fortune' (Foucher, cited in Getty: 120) is emblematic of Infinite Life and signifies longevity. It is also carried by *Amitayus*,¹⁰ Buddha of Eternal Life, who is the *sambhogakaya* form of *Amitabha*, the red Buddha of the West. *Ushnishavijaya* joins *Amitayus* and White Tara to form a trinity representing long-life. Neumann writes that:

¹⁰ Interestingly, the vase is also connected to *Padmasambhava* and can be seen depicted in his skull-cap, filling it with *amrita* (blue nectar), see Beer, pp 201.

‘Her representation on a *stupa* reminds us that the adoration of the *stupa* was a fundamental element of the *bhimarata* ceremony, in which gratitude was expressed to Ushnishavijaya when a man reached the canonical age of seventy-seven years, seven months and seven days; such long life allowed him the accumulation of a great number of merits to ensure a better incarnation.’

Neumann 1994: 82

This observation allows entry to the potential ritual use of the Luri Gumpa and the ceremonies that may have taken place and continue to be practiced. The connection between *Ushnishavijaya*’s vase of longevity, *bhimarata* ceremonies, and the Stupa of Complete Victory create a remarkable link that begins to expose Luri’s sacred value, as a ceremonial space dedicated to longevity, extended life-span and health.

Ushnishavijaya is flanked by two *bodhisattvas*; the white *Avalokiteshvara* on her right and the blue *Vajrapani* on her left. Both carry a fly whisk, which is ‘much rarer for *Vajrapani*’ (Neumann 1994: 82), and a lotus. On *Vajrapani*’s lotus also sits a *vajra*. Getty clarifies this triad is common in depictions of *Ushnishavijaya* (Getty 1914: 120), which Neumann refers to as her ‘*mandala*’. Below her lotus throne a vine encircles four protective deities known as *krodhas*, ‘wrathful aspects of the *dharmapalas* that protect the *Ushnishavijaya* mandala.’ (Neumann 1994: 82). Each *krodha* holds a weapon in their right hand and noose (*pasa*) in their left. There also appear two attendants hovering above the throne, suggesting *Ushnishavijaya*’s symbolic prominence on the *chorten*.

The South-east facing part of the *anda* is the most damaged, thus Neumann does not include a description of the deity. However, there are some features to help decipher its identification. The upper part of the image is damaged to the extent that the painting is no longer visible, but you can see that the deity sits on a lotus throne in *padmasana* (Fig. 22). The simple, wide petals and ornate folded tips, shared by all the lotus thrones, suggest the paintings are from the 12th or 13th century, as they became more ornate later on. Three (of four) arms are distinguishable, with the secondary left and right hands holding a bow and arrow. From this, I would deduce the image to be *bodhisattva Manjushri* in his tantric *Namasamgiti* form. In human form, *Manjushri*’s attributes are the blue lotus (or lily), Sword of Wisdom and the book of *Prajnaparamita*. As *Namasamgiti*

Manjusri, he also holds the bow and arrow, which can be seen held in his outer arms. The two other attributes are more difficult to spot; half of the *Prajnaparamita* is shown supported by the *utpala* lily at his left shoulder and the sword is lifted to his right above his head(s).



Fig. 22 *Namasamgiti Manjusri* on South-east *anda*



Fig. 23 *Shadakshari Lokeshvara* on South-west *anda*

On the South-west side, *Avalokiteshvara* appears in his four-armed form, *Shadakshari Lokeshvara* (Fig. 23). He sits in *padmasana* on a lotus throne with his hands together at his chest in *namaskaramudra*, a gesture of adoration typical of the compassionate deity. In his secondary hands he holds a rosary and lotus, emblematic of his role as head of the lotus family. Within the lotus sits a diamond, ‘characteristic of this form of *Avalokiteshvara*’ (Neumann 1994: 83) and the diamond path of the *vajra*. *Shadakshari Lokeshvara* is embellished with elaborate jewellery and wears a rich crown set with jewels. His throne is also draped with cloth, which falls in pleats with curled edges, stylistic of Newari craftsmanship ascribed to the 12th or 13th century, along with the Newari trait of highlighting the nose with an accent white line, appearing in Newari painting from the 13th to the 15th centuries.

Above the *anda* sits the *harmika* (the box at the top of the stupa), which displays the Five Buddhas facing their respective cardinal directions; *Amogasiddhi* (North), *Vairocana* (East), *Ratnasambhava* (South), and *Amitabha* (West). In Tibetan Buddhism, *Vairocana* (the fifth Buddha) can be interchangeable with *Akshobhya*, as we shall see in the mandala painted on the

ceiling. The Five Buddhas appear in their *sambhogakaya* form, which correlates to *Ushnishavijaya*'s body of pleasure, or enjoyment.

Fig. 24 Medicine Buddhas on the *chorten* parasol



At the top of the stupa is a parasol supported by a lotus. On the parasol's underside are the eight Medicine Buddhas, each individually framed by a lotus petal (Fig. 24). Like all Buddhas, they are all endowed with the

ushnisha (the protuberance on the top of the head), a symbol of enlightenment, and *urna* (mark between the eyes on the forehead), similarly representing illumination. They sit in *padmasana* showing individual *mudras*. Neumann writes that 'the supreme physician, Bhaishajyaguru Buddha, holds the *myronbalan*, a dried fruit that is a symbol for healing, while also making the *varadamudra*.' (1994: 83-84). Sixteen lotus petals hang down from the parasol, the interior of each alternates between a painted goddess and flower blossom design. Despite the small scale, each is rendered beautifully in detail, displaying attributes and *mudras* accordingly.

Within this composition, one must take a moment to consider where the Medicine Buddhas sit within the delineation of a hierarchical structure. A spatial analysis of the *chorten* shows the *lokapalas* and protective deities guarding the base, the central *bodhisattvas* encircling the *chorten* itself, before reaching the celestial Five Buddhas at the *harmika*, all of which progress in a sacred hierarchical order. The parasol with the Medicine Buddhas, and goddesses, then interpose before reaching the ceiling mandala. There are indeed several connections here,¹¹ however I would deem the parasol to be more of an addition to the *chorten*'s sacred composition, in support of longevity via their healing properties and attributions, rather than a definitive 'layer' in itself.

¹¹ The Medicine Buddha was taught by Shakyamuni in Vaishali, India - the same place as the Stupa of Complete Victory - which emanated from the Eastern pure land.

Fig. 25 *Akshobya* mandala with eight *ashtamangala* goddesses



In the mandala on the ceiling of the *gompa* (Fig. 25), Neumann cites the central figure as ‘a buddha’ (1994: 84), but it is in fact *Akshobya*, the blue Buddha of the East, typically shown in *bhumisparsamudra*. As previously mentioned, *Akshobya* is interchangeable with *Vairocana* in Tibet and can therefore take his place in the center of the *mandala*, whilst white *Vairocana* replaces him in the East (Beer 2003: 236). *Akshobya*’s presence here asserts links within the *vajra* family and reflects the aforementioned associations with *Vajrapani*. *Akshobya* is surrounded by an eight petaled lotus with a goddess in each petal.¹² Each of the eight goddesses hold one of the *ashtamangala*, identifying them as the *Astamangala Devi*. An interesting parallel here is that the ceiling of the Tashi Kabum, similarly painted with a mandala, has each of the eight *ashtamangala* in the surrounding petals of a lotus (Fig. 26), reinstating its auspicious name.



Fig. 26 *Ashtamangala* mandala in Tashi Kabum



Fig. 27 *Mahasiddhas* surrounding *Akshobya* mandala in Luri Gompa

¹² The eight goddesses are not mentioned by Neumann.

Surrounding the outer flame of the mandala are eight *mahasiddhas* (Fig. 27). *Mahasiddhas* are tantric adepts from commonplace Indian society blessed with extraordinary powers and the ability to perform magical feats. I believe their presence here relates to their ability to transcend the laws of nature; ‘Through the magical power of *siddhi*, even the laws of nature can be surpassed’ (Neumann 1994: 84). This manipulation of nature corresponds to the idea of bending time to extend ones life-span, perhaps here encouraging a miraculous environment for such ceremonies to take place.

The *mahasiddhas* sit on thrones with their appropriate attributes and *mudras*, each with a round bowl symbolising ‘the holy Buddhist scriptures’ (Neumann 1994: 84). Each portrait is framed by a creeping vine, like the four *krodhas* seen under *Ushnishavijaya*’s lotus throne (see Fig. 21), connecting them all together. The *siddhas* are here depicted as *yogin*, in humble loincloths and their hair in chignons, rendered delicately and with exceptional individuality and expression.¹³ Beginning in the North-west is Nagarjuna, the student and teacher, in red robes on a throne of seven *nagas* (Fig. 28). Next is Dombipa, born of royal descent, sitting on a tiger referring to when he lived in the forest with his consort and the animals (Fig. 29). Along from Dombipa is the exquisitely beautiful Kalapa, the only *siddha* not to sit on a lotus throne, in *lalitasana* (Fig. 30).



Fig. 28 Nagarjuna, cave dome



Fig. 29 Dombipa, cave dome



Fig. 30 Kalapa, cave dome

¹³ Neumann’s article focuses on the wall murals, therefore I suggest looking to this for a more in-depth study of the *mahasiddhas*, to which I could contribute little. See pp 85-89.



Fig. 31 Savaripa, cave dome



Fig. 32 Kukkuripa, cave dome



Fig. 33 Luyipa, cave dome

Savaripa can be seen with his bow and arrow in *dharmacakramudra* (Fig. 31). Next to Savaripa is Kukkuripa with his dog he adopted in Lumbini, Nepal, the place of Shakyamuni Buddha's birth (Fig. 32). Luyipa then appears eating fish intestines found on the banks of the Ganges (Fig. 33). Ghandapa is next holding two *vajras* over his chest in *Vajradhara's mudra* (Fig. 34). Lastly is a figure that 'cannot be identified with certainty' (Neumann 1994: 89) but, by a process of elimination, suggests Kanhapa, who is depicted with various attributes here holding the *vajra* and *ghanta* (Fig. 35). Surrounding the mahasiddhas, on a blue background, is a floral design similar to that of Tashi Kabum.



Fig. 34 Gandapa, cave dome



Fig. 35 Kanhapa, cave dome

Also on the cave walls are portraits of a monk in *dharmacakramudra* that ‘could well be of the monastery’s founder’ (Neumann 1994: 89), *Shakyamuni Buddha*, *Vajradhara* (the thunderbolt bearer), *Vajrasattva* (Adi-Buddha of the Five Buddhas) and an *acala* protector deity. These large portraits are characteristic of Tibetan Buddhism and continue to exhibit stylistic Newari craftsmanship of the 12th and 13th centuries corresponding to the deity paintings on the *chorten* and ceiling *mandala*.

Through this iconographical study of Luri Gumpa, one can visualise a sacred hierarchy, transcending from the *chorten* to the ceiling *mandala* and murals. Within this order there is a sense of ascension, which really begins in the valley before scaling the hillside to reach the *gumpa*.¹⁴ This remote access is true of most of Mustangs temple sites and represents the esoteric nature of Vajrayana practices. Within this study, I hope to have alleviated Luri’s potential ritual associations, through an investigation of the iconographic program, with regards to ceremonial practices invoking longevity. This premise is founded on the form of the Stupa of Complete Victory, *Ushnishavijaya*’s ceremonial associations with longevity (emphasised by her position in the entrance to the chamber and multitude of surrounding protective deities, *bodhisattvas* and attendants), Neumann’s account of the *bhimarata* ceremony, the Medicine Buddhas connections with health, the Five Buddhas in *sambhogakaya* form, the *mahasiddhas* associations with miracles and the auspicious *ashtamangala*.¹⁵

¹⁴ This is also shown in the architectural structure of the *Champa Lakhang*, as the floors ascend in order of prominence with the most esoteric Yoga tantra mandalas on the highest floor.

¹⁵ Here there is perhaps also a connection between the Treasure Vase in Amitabha’s Western land, strengthening these associations in connection with *Amitayus*, Buddha of Eternal Life.

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