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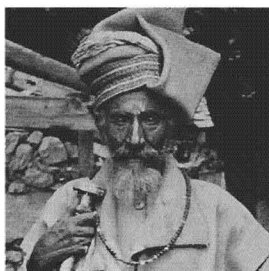
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VERSCHEENING

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De Vereniging van Vrienden der Aziatische Kunst is opgericht in 1918 met het doel grotere bekendheid te geven aan de kunst van Azië. In de loop der jaren heeft zij een veelzijdige collectie kunstvoorwerpen bijeengebracht, die internationale bekendheid geniet. De verzameling, die voortdurend wordt uitgebreid, is in bruikleen bij het Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam en vormt daar het hoofdbestanddeel van de afdeling Aziatische Kunst. De Vereniging organiseert tentoonstellingen, lezingen en excursies. Zij geeft het tijdschrift Aziatische Kunst uit, dat viermaal per jaar aan de leden wordt toegezonden.

# AZIATISCHE KUNST



## Van de redactie

Het detail op het omslag is deze keer uit een recente aanwinst van de afdeling. Een overzicht van de aanwinsten vindt u in het verslag van de conservator. In het april-nummer kwam al een groep aanwinsten aan bod; in het volgende nummer kunt u er meer over lezen. In deze aflevering richt de blik zich hoofdzakelijk op Centraal Azië, ook ditmaal wederom in kleur. Tot slot nog een rectificatie: in nummer 1 van dit jaar staat bij het artikel 'De zeven bronzen vaten', afbeelding 2a op de kop afgedrukt.

## Inhoud

- 2 Early Tibetan Clay Sculpture  
*Christian Luczanits*
- 16 Met nieuwe ogen: de historische fotocollectie van het Instituut Kern ontsloten  
*Gerda Theuns-de Boer*
- 34 Verslag van de Conservator over het jaar 2002

TIBETAN ART CAN be viewed and remembered in many different ways. For the traveller who has visited one of the regions of Tibetan culture, Tibetan art may signify the colourful interiors of the monasteries he or she has visited with sculptures of different sizes, walls covered with murals and practically every corner of the structure decorated in some form, an interior that contrasts markedly with the soft tones of the high altitude desert landscape outside. The collector will tend to think of the colourful scroll paintings or thangkas, and dazzling bronze sculptures of different ages and quality offered by auction houses and art dealers all over the world. The visitor to a museum may also think of everyday products of skilled craftsmanship and often somewhat crude appearance found in many museum collections in addition to thangkas and bronzes. All of them will certainly also have some of the aspects in mind that are so strange to a western beholder with a Christian background, in particular the fierce deities, often with multiple heads – some of them animal heads – arms and legs, or those in sexual embrace, the so-called father-mother (Tib. *yab-yum*) images.

Few people, however, will consider clay as an important artistic medium in Tibetan art. Nevertheless, in Tibet clay has always been the sculptural material *par excellence*.<sup>2</sup> That said, some may now remember the small relief sculptures of this material which are found all over Tibet and occasionally seen in museums. These are mass-produced with the help of moulds, contain a relic, and are often deposited in the so-called chörten (Tib. *mchod-rten*, Skt. *stupa*), those votive structures of different sizes deriving from a funerary monument that are found all over the Tibetan landscape and are particularly abundant in the Western Himalayas. The practice of making and depositing these relief sculptures, called *tsha-tsha* in Tibetan, has its roots in Indian Buddhist practice as is proven by the baked clay tablets of Burma and the moulded clay tablets found at Nalanda (a Buddhist University excavated in present-day Bihar), together with the so-called Gilgit *stupa* (Northern Pakistan) and Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup>

Although mass-produced, some of these *tsha-tsha* are very sophisticated and a number of them are even painted, such as the one shown in Figure 1. This c. 13th-century *tsha-tsha* from Shalu monastery in Central Tibet shows a four-armed form of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the 'Lord of the six syllables' (Skt. Sadaksaralokeshvara; Tib. sPyan-ras-gzigs yi-ge-drug-pa), the name referring to the mantra *Om mani padme hum* that is engraved on almost any flat stone in the region. Indeed, Tibet is considered the special field of activity of this deity.<sup>4</sup> These Bodhisattvas are beings that have taken a vow to become a Buddha, postponing their own enlightenment for the benefit of all other beings.

Like the practice of making and depositing *tsha-tsha*, much of Tibetan art derives from India, either directly or via mediators such as Nepal. However,

Figure 1  
Painted *tsha-tsha*,  
c. 13th century,  
Shalu monastery  
(photo C. Luczanits)



as the Tibetans transformed Buddhism according to their own needs, they also transformed Indian art to suit their own purposes and tastes. Apart from these mass-produced votive objects, there are actually many large-scale sculptures in monasteries of Tibetan culture that are made of the same material as the *tsha-tsha*. The main substance of these sculptures is dried clay (and not, as is often claimed, stucco, which would be far more resistant), which has been used in varying techniques during the course of the history of Tibetan art. Although sculptures made of this material can easily be damaged and exposed parts can easily break off, many of them have lasted for more than 700 years, and frequently many of their original features have been preserved.

Large-scale clay sculptures of the highest quality are particularly characteristic for the earliest Tibetan monuments preserved. This fact can quite easily be explained by the abundance of clay sculpture in almost all neighbouring regions during the time when Tibet was absorbing Buddhism from India as well as – albeit to a far lesser degree – China and Central Asia.

During the second half of the first millennium of our era major sculptures were being made of clay in all these regions, those preserved in the famous cave-temples of Dunhuang in the Gansu corridor in China being the most well known.

Of the clay sculptures made during the Tibetan Monarchy from the 7th to the 9th century, a period known from the Buddhist perspective as the Early Spread of Buddhism in Tibet (*snga-dar*), only references remain in the historical literature. Interestingly, the '*Testimony of sBa*' (*sBa-bzhed*), one of the earliest Tibetan historical texts, in its description of the foundation of the first monastery in Tibet, the monastery of Samye (bSam-yas) in the Brahmaputra valley (called Tsangpo (gTsang-po) in Tibetan), refers to the technique of making sculptures out of clay as being specifically Tibetan. The sculptures in the Keru Lhakhang (Ke-ru lHa-khang at Ke-ru or Kwa-chu) in Central Tibet are said to be the only ones to have survived from the period of the Tibetan Monarchy.<sup>5</sup> However, there is no actual proof of the age of these sculptures as they are of a unique and rather crude style and there is no reliable contextual evidence.

In fact, we know almost nothing of what the art of the Tibetan monarchy looked like, as very little has been preserved that can safely be attributed to that period. Here the carved wooden doors in the holiest temple of Tibet, the Lhasa Jokhang (Jo-khang) are of particular interest.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the exact date these woodcarvings are attributed to, both their origin in the time of the Tibetan monarchy and their dependence on the Indian cultural sphere, in particular Nepal, is undeniable.

LATER ON, DURING the Later Spread of Buddhism in Tibet (*phyi-dar*) that followed the monarchy after an intermediary century considered by Buddhists as a Dark Age, numerous temples were established in Central Tibet that until recently had preserved their original clay sculptures. These sculptures, representing the main images of temples attributed to the 11th century such as Kyangbu (rKyang-bu; also called Samada after the nearby village) and Yemar (g.Ye-mar; also called Iwang), display an extremely sophisticated technique.<sup>7</sup> The sculpting of the clay surface is particularly superb, with the folds of the heavy garments executed in an almost realistic fashion. The Bodhisattvas on Figure 2, secondary images in a chapel dedicated to the Buddha of long life, Amitayus (Tib. Tshe-dpag-med), wear the dress of the Tibetan royal elite of the time, a heavy coat with intricate medallion patterns and thick boots all executed in minute detail. Note also the characteristic turban behind the fragile crown.

As far as technique is concerned, the Yemar sculptures are constructed with a core of stone slabs piled on top of one another for the main body of the image while the limbs, the head, and even the halos of all the figures have a wooden armature supporting the clay. This is the technique used for the seated images; the standing images must be based on an armature only.<sup>8</sup> However, most of the sculptures from the early temples did not survive the Cultural Revolution and are only preserved in photographs taken by early visitors to Tibet. The Yemar sculptures were recorded by Fosco Maraini who accompanied the outstanding Italian scholar Giuseppe Tucci to Tibet in 1937.<sup>9</sup>

The sculptures and paintings preserved from the 11th and 12th centuries in Central Tibet appear to support the descriptions in historical texts. At Yemar, the sculptures of different chapels are made in the idiom of different artistic

Figure 2  
 Three Bodhisattvas  
 of the Amitayus chapel  
 in Yemar, Central Tibet,  
 late 11th century (after  
 Lo Bue, *Tibet - Templi  
 scomparsi*: fig. 79)



schools. While the sculptures, or at least their dresses, in Figure 2 are executed in a Tibetan artistic language, others are dependent on the Central Asian, Chinese and Indian cultural heritage. It still remains uncertain to what extent these differences can be accounted for as being due to artists of different cultural background and to what extent they are merely different modes of representation by the same artists. Apart from wishing to decorate their temples in the most appealing manner possible, the Tibetans of both the Monarchy and the Later Spread certainly also wanted to stress their cosmopolitan worldview by condensing their cultural connections within the walls of a monastic compound.

REGARDING THE WESTERN Himalayas it is even uncertain if much of the region was Buddhist at all during the time of the Tibetan monarchy, as little evidence remains. However, during the Later Spread numerous centres of Buddhist scholarship and art were constructed there from the late 10th century onwards. At the turn of the millennium a descendant of the Central



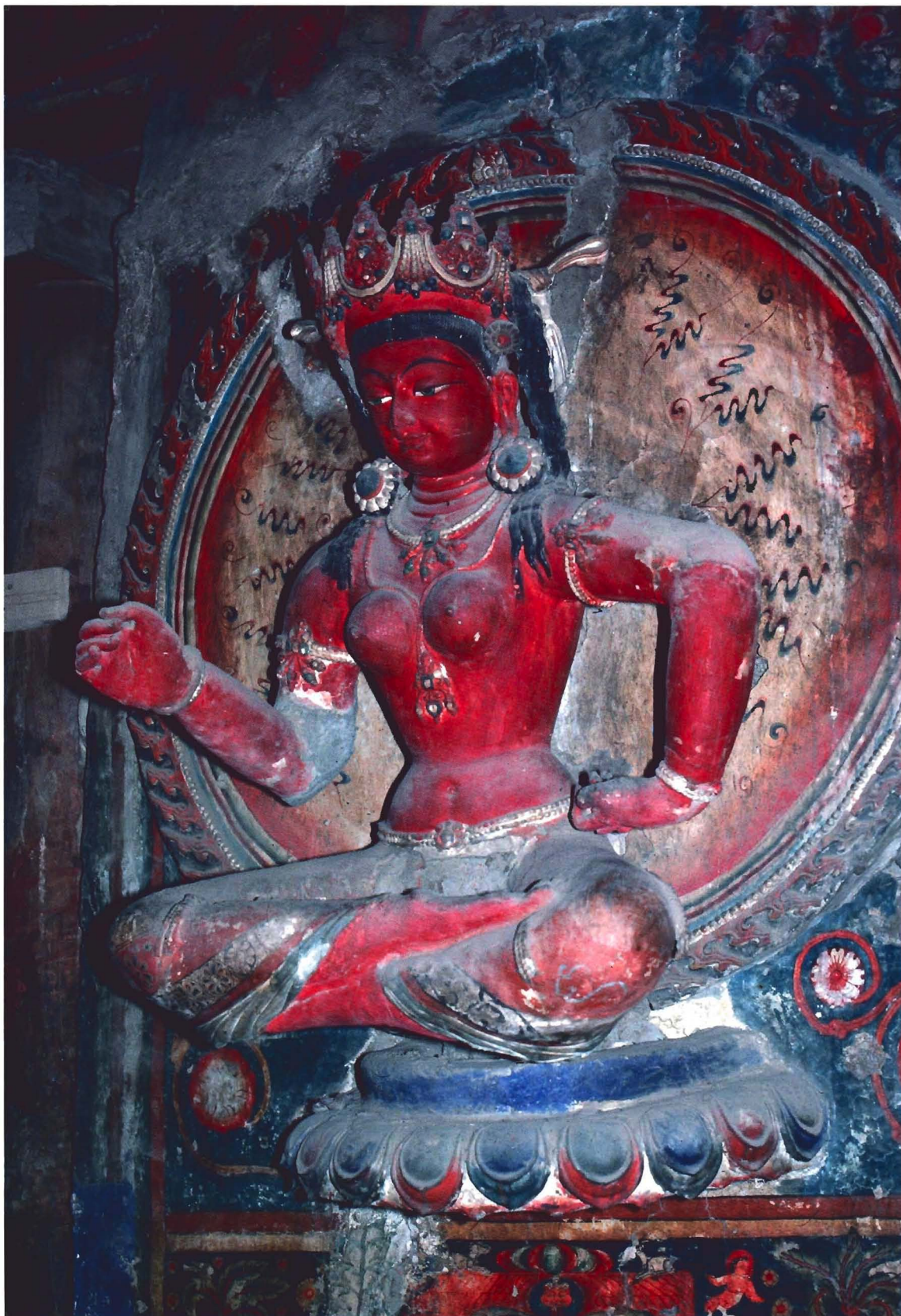






Figure 3 (page 6)  
Offering goddess of  
the Tabo mandala  
group, c. 1040  
(photo J. Poncar 1984,  
WHAU)

Figure 4 (above)  
Two Bodhisattvas of the  
Tabo mandala group,  
c. 1040  
(photo J. Poncar 1984,  
WHAU)

Tibetan monarchy established a kingdom in the region south of the holy mountain Kailash in West Tibet and was soon ruling over a considerable portion of the Western Himalayas, including parts of present-day Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh, both in Northwest India. As the name of this king, Yeshe-ö (Ye-shes-'od, 'Light of Wisdom'), indicates, he was a devout supporter of Buddhism. He not only founded numerous monasteries during his reign but also successfully instigated the elite of his realm to follow his example. The centres of Buddhist learning established at that time were extremely important for the development of present-day Tibetan Buddhism, due to the immense translation work done there in cooperation with Indian Buddhist scholars from Northwest India and Kashmir.

The monasteries of the 10th to 13th century preserved in the Western Himalayas are equally important for the art-historical treasures they contain, their simple clay brick exteriors concealing a wealth of sculptures and murals that often go back to the foundation of the monument or an early renovation. The art they contain is commonly called Indo-Tibetan, a term that takes both the assumed Indian origin of the artists who decorated them and the Tibetan-influenced content into account. In contrast to contemporaneous Central Tibetan art there are no obvious other artistic influences.<sup>10</sup> Different stylistic branches of this art are dominant in the region until the early 13th century when the Central Tibetan schools of Buddhism became also dominant in the west.







Figure 6 (page 10)  
Buddha Amitabha,  
Sumda Assembly Hall  
(photo C. Luczanits,  
WHAU)

Figure 7 (page 11)  
Bodhisattva Vajraraksa,  
Sumda Assembly Hall  
(photo C. Luczanits,  
WHAU)

WHILE TABO MONASTERY is well known among connoisseurs of Tibetan art, the temple of Sumda Chung in the lower Zanskar valley, in Ladakh, part of Jammu & Kashmir, has attracted very little attention until now. The temple is located above the tiny three-house hamlet of Sumda Chung (gSum-mda' chung, Small Sumda; at 3850 metres) that can be reached by a four-hour walk from the closest road.<sup>14</sup> The Sumda temple is the last remnant of a larger monastery that once extended over the whole hill behind the houses of Sumda Chung. It contains the present-day Assembly Hall as well as two high side chapels housing monumental clay sculptures of the Bodhisattvas Maitreya (Tib. Byams-pa) and Avalokiteshvara (Tib. sPyan-ras-gzigs). The Assembly Hall at Sumda contains the most astonishing array of sculptures in the Western Himalayas (Figure 5). The niche at the back of the temple is crowded with 37 figures in a well-balanced composition representing the deities of another variant of the Vajradhatumandala. In addition, almost all sculptures are original and have suffered only minor damage during the almost 800 years that have passed since their construction. Despite their fresh appearance this also includes the painting and gilding of the sculptures. Thus, both the gilded face as well as the red upper body of the figure of Buddha Amitabha (Tib. 'Od-dpag-med) on Figure 6 are original, the gilding only being used for the main images of the configuration. The richly bejewelled Buddha is seated in meditation upon three peacocks.

With certain body colours, additional coarse shading has been painted on the sculptures, giving them an almost grotesque appearance, as in the case of the white Bodhisattva Vajraraksa (Tib. rDo-rje-srung-ba) in Figure 7, which is shaded red. Given the fresh quality of the colours, Sumda must be considered as the only place where an idea of the original appearance of the sculptural decoration of an early Western Himalayan temple shortly after its construction can be obtained. As comparison with related monuments in the region suggests, the Sumda Assembly Hall can be attributed to the first decades of the 13th century.

WHILE EARLY CENTRAL Tibetan clay sculpture was made using a variety of different techniques, the technique of early Western Himalayan sculptures conforms most closely to the Indian technique described in the texts. After the 13th century clay sculptures continue to be made throughout Tibet, but the techniques used for making them become simpler, and they are in many cases far removed from the quality of the earlier sculptures. However, there are exceptions, such as the expressively modelled lineage of successive teachers of a certain teaching tradition (*lam-'bras*) in the Lamdre Lhakhang (Lam-'bras lHa-khang) at Gyantse (rGyal-rtse), in Central Tibet, which was executed around 1425.<sup>15</sup>

Later sculptures are often made with a core of straw wrapped around the armature and a relatively thin clay surface, such as the sculptures of the later West Tibetan kingdom. This technique can best be seen in the sculptures of temples of Tsaparang (rTsa-hrang), built at the foot of the royal castle from which the later Guge kingdom was ruled during the 15th and 16th centuries.<sup>16</sup> These sculptures were damaged during the Cultural Revolution, thus revealing their construction technique. In the case of the enormous gatekeeper Vajrapani (Phyag-na-rdo-rje) in Figure 8 the straw core is visible where the clay surface has been opened up by force and the arms broken off.





Figure 8  
Gatekeeper Vajrapani,  
White Temple,  
Tsaparang (after  
Aschoff, *Tsaparang*: 34)



CLAY CONTINUES TO be used as a sculptural material even after the Cultural Revolution. Modern-day sculptures appear to be generally hollow with paper added to the clay.<sup>17</sup> If they are not larger than life-size such sculptures need not be constructed *in situ* as in the case of the techniques mentioned above, since they can still be moved after they have dried.

This brief survey certainly does not do justice to the importance of clay as a sculptural medium in Tibet, but the highlights introduced may be sufficient to prove that these sculptures are an important aspect of Tibetan art that deserves attention. This is particularly true, as the sculptures often represent the main topic of a temple's decoration and the monument thus can only be understood by taking them into account. However, dressed in lengths of cloth and covered in swathes of ceremonial scarves (Tib. *kha-btags*) and garlands, these sculptures are often barely visible and thus do not make a lasting impression on the visitor.<sup>18</sup>

## Notes

1. Christian Luczanits is researcher and lecturer at the Institute for South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at the University of Vienna. The author is grateful to Jaroslav Poncar, Cologne, for providing his beautiful pictures of Tabo. The research on clay sculptures in the western Himalayas was generously funded by the Austrian 'Fonds zur Förderung wissenschaftlicher Forschung', while the present publication was made possible by an APART (Austrian Programme for Advanced Research and Technology) grant from the Austrian Academy of Sciences.
2. Cf. A. Chayet, *Art et archéologie du Tibet*, Manuels d'archéologie d'Extrême-Orient: Civilisations de l'Himalaya, Paris, 1994, p. 203.
3. The first and only major work dealing with *tsha-tsha* is G. Tucci, *Stupa – Art, Architectonics and Symbolism*, Translated by U.M. Vescei, Indo-Tibetica I, Edited by L. Chandra, New Delhi, 1988 (being a recent translation of the Italian original of 1932).
4. On the possible origin and rise of the cult of Avalokiteshvara in Tibet cf. the summary in M.T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism. Conversion, contestation, and memory*, New York, 2000, pp. 144-155. Atisha (982-1054; in Tibet from 1042 onwards) was apparently the first to actively promote the practice focusing on Avalokiteshvara in Tibet, as three major systems of instructions can be traced back to him. Cf. Kapstein, *op.cit.*, p. 148; references in note 53 on page 263.
5. Cf. R. Vitali, *Early Temples of Central Tibet*, London, 1990, pp. 1-35.
6. For the most recent and most comprehensive discussion of these carvings cf. U. von Schroeder, *Buddhist Sculptures in Tibet*, 2 Vols., Hong Kong, 2001, pp. 406-31.
7. For the clay sculptures of Kyangbu, Yemar and other temples of similar age containing clay sculptures cf. among others E.F. Lo Bue, *Tibet – Templi scomparsi fotografati da Fosco Maraini*, Ananke, Torino, 1998 and von Schroeder, *op.cit.*, pp. 832-869.
8. These details have been revealed through damage to the sculptures inflicted during the Cultural Revolution; cf. Vitali, *op.cit.*, pls. 16-28.
9. Cf. Lo Bue, *op.cit.*
10. The only exception in this regard are the clay sculptures of Gumrang, a village in Lahaul, Himachal Pradesh, which have characteristics reminiscent of Central Asian clay sculpture. Cf. C. Luczanits, 'Another Rin chen bzan po Temple?', *East and West* 44/1 (1994), pp. 83-98.
11. In his fundamental study on 'The Indian Technique of Clay Modelling' K.M. Varma recounts the technique of making clay sculptures as described in various Southindian Sanskrit sources. His main source is the *Kashyapashilpa*, a Shaiva text attributed to the 12th century (K.M. Varma, *The Indian Technique of Clay Modelling*,

- Santiniketan, 1970, pp. 2-3). The only Buddhist text describing the same technique and of approximately the same date, the *Citrakarmashastra*, has been preserved in Sri Lanka (E.W. Marasinghe, *The Citrakarmashastra ascribed to Mañjushri*, Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica, Vol. 81, New Delhi, 1991, pp. xvii-xix). The *Citrakarmashastra* is in fact not a separate text but the second section of the *Mañjushribhasitavastuvidyashastra* bearing this name. It deals exclusively with the making of clay images while the first part is concerned with architecture (M.H.F. Jayasuriya, *Mañjushri Vastuvidyashastra*, Bibliotheca Zeylanica Series, I, Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka and the Central Cultural Fund, Colombo 1995 and E.W. Marasinghe, *The Vastuvidyashastra ascribed to Mañjushri*, Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica, No. 67, Delhi, 1989. Ruelius (H. Ruelius, *Mañjushribhashita-Citrakarmashastra: A Mahayanistic Shilpashastra from Sri Lanka*, in: H. Bechert (ed.), *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries*, Göttingen, 1978, pp. 98-99) considers the *Kashyapashilpa* to be one of its sources. The latter is usually dated to the 11th to 12th centuries and the *Mañjushribhasitavastuvidyashastra* is probably not much later. The earliest surviving text describing the technique of clay sculpture is apparently the *Vimārcanakaḷpa*, which is attributed to the 8th century and is also cited by Varma (Varma, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4).
12. On the Tabo Main Temple and the clay sculptures there cf. D.E. Klimburg-Salter, *Tabo – a Lamp for the Kingdom. Early Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Art in the Western Himalaya*, Milan & New York, 1997.
  13. On the inscriptions of the Tabo Main Temple, including the Renovation Inscription cf. L. Petech & C. Luczanits (eds.), *Inscriptions from the Tabo Main Temple. Texts and Translations Serie Orientale Roma*, Vol. LXXXIII. ISIAO, Rome, 1999.
  14. Sumda Chung should be differentiated from the larger village of Sumda Chen (gSum-mda' chen, Great Sumda) further up the valley to the west. For the most detailed account on Sumda cf. D.L. Snellgrove & T. Skorupski, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh, 2. Zangskar and the Cave Temples of Ladakh*, Warminster, 1980, pp. 61-69.
  15. von Schroeder, *op.cit.*, pp. 874-881.
  16. G. Tucci, *I Templi del Tibet Occidentale e il loro Simbolismo Artistico, Parte I, Spiti e Kunavar, Parte II, Tsaparang*, Indo-Tibetica, Vol. III, Roma, 1935; J.C. Aschoff, *Tsaparang. Tibets grosses Geheimnis*, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1987; J.C. Aschoff, *Tsaparang - Königsstadt in Westtibet: Die vollständigen Berichte des Jesuitenpaters António de Andrade und eine Beschreibung vom heutigen Zustand der Klöster*, Eching vor München, 1989.
  17. Cf. the description in L.S. Dargyab, *Tibetan Religious Art. Part I: Texts; Part II: Plates*, Asiatische Forschungen 52, 2 Vols., Wiesbaden, 1977, pp. 46.
  18. The sculptures of some of the Central Tibetan sites are discussed in von Schroeder, *op.cit.*, while the early western Himalayan sculptures up to the 13th century are the subject of a book by the author currently in print (C. Luczanits, *Buddhist Sculpture in Clay: Early Western Himalayan Art, late 10th to early 13th centuries*, Chicago, in print).