A PROBLEMATIC CAST IRON SCULPTURE:
FROM TIBET

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by
Janice L. Dundon, B.A.

The Ohio State University
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Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of History of Art
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Chapter 1: Introduction

A rare Tibetan iron sculpture, the focus of this present study, presents in many ways an extreme demonstration of the difficulties often encountered when dealing with the art of Nepal and Tibet (Figures 1-4). The image, made of solid cast iron and measuring eight and half inches tall, has a short, stout body with two arms and one head. Iconographically, the sculpture represents some form of wrathful Buddhist deity as the face is contorted into an angry expression with bared teeth, bulging eyes and flames. The crown of five skulls, the garland of freshly severed heads and the kartri and kapāla held in the hands also indicate the wrathful nature of the figure portrayed. The image is further adorned with nāga ornaments on the arms, wrists, legs and ears; with a vajñopavīta made of a nāga and five nāgas forming a hood at the back of the head. A dhoti incised with a flower scroll design is the only garment that is worn.
The image is totally problematic as its style and iconography preclude an easy chronological placement and identification. Difficulty arises because elements of the style and the iconography of the image as well as the cast iron material out of which it is made seem unique among known surviving images on which a comparative analysis can be based. While the focus of this present study is to deal specifically with the problems present in this iron image, it can also be viewed as a general exposition of the problems common to many sculptures from Nepal and Tibet. The work will be generally dealt with as an example of both Nepalese and Tibetan idioms as it is not feasible to separate the art of these two countries in relation to this iron image.

The problems encountered in the study of Buddhist art are often difficult, but those present in the fields of Nepalese and Tibetan Buddhist art especially include some of the most complex issues possible. While as fields of study, Nepalese and Tibetan art have received the
attention of scholars since the late nineteenth century, work in these areas remains limited. Although in recent years there has been an increase in exhibitions, research and publication of this material, knowledge of many aspects of these Buddhist traditions still eludes scholars.² Several factors have thus far prevented scholars from attaining a complete understanding of the stylistic idioms of Nepal and Tibet. Much of the art still in these countries has yet to be systematically described, photographed or even recorded. Also, the paucity of published information and illustrations of Nepalese and Tibetan art now in collections outside these countries, the rareness of dated images and the scarcity of known, early images (crucial to understanding the formation of styles) add further difficulty. In the case of sculpture, the concern of this study, the present state of knowledge regarding the stylistic development of Nepalese traditions is more complete than for these of Tibet. Several scholars have dealt with Nepalese sculpture, but the most notable and extensive efforts in this area are those
of Dr. P. Pal. A number of dated images have aided the attempts of these scholars to provide a chronological framework; however, the conclusions are not definitive solutions to all issues of Nepalese styles. While the art of Tibet may be currently more popular than that of Nepal, perhaps due to the increased interest in Tibet's form of Buddhism that is known as Lamaism, much less is known about the stylistic evolution of Tibetan Buddhist images. Most published works dealing with the sculpture of Tibet have either been in the form of exhibition catalogues or general surveys. While such works are valuable, they offer little indepth information on Tibetan sculpture, and thus the stylistic developments of this sculpture tradition have been dealt with only superficially. Many authors have succeeded only in distinguishing early images from late ones, and have not attempted to establish a detailed chronological sequence or development. The issue of regional developments and schools has likewise been generally avoided, except for the acknowledgement that it is an important problem in this field,
One of the most important problems concerning the sculptural traditions of Nepal and Tibet is the determination of foreign influence on these styles. Authorities have found from extant texts and the images themselves that different areas of these two countries were affected stylistically by the art of India, China, Kashmir and Central Asia, yet little has been done to ascertain exactly when and how these influences were manifested. Admittedly, this issue of stylistic strands is one of the most difficult in the study of Nepalese and Tibetan art, for in addition to outside influences, Nepal and Tibet repeatedly influenced each other. Thus, unravelling and identifying these individual sources is quite complicated. Adding further difficulty is the fact the external styles themselves are frequently not well understood. It is not surprising to find that those who Rave attempted to deal with this problem of stylistic sources for Nepalese and Tibetan art, have often arrived at different conclusions.
Other problems which occur somewhat separately from stylistic considerations are matters relating to iconography. It would seem from the religious function of these images that the iconography for these various deities would remain fairly constant. Yet, even a casual perusal of illustrations of these sculptures indicates that there was some development of the iconography of the different forms as well as a conscious preference for some forms of deities rather than others during different periods. A greater understanding of the different forms of the deities and their iconography would add to the knowledge of religious practices during different periods (as the content of the images was directly dictated by the needs of the rituals in use). Such information might also prove useful for furthering the understanding of stylistic developments. However, the general treatment of the iconography of these images has been focused primarily on identifying the deities depicted, ignoring for the most part any implications inherent in the various forms or
their possible placement within the iconographic development of the art of Nepal and Tibet,

The investigation of the iron image will be divided primarily into two parts: the first a study of its iconography, the second, an analysis of its style. The problem of its cast iron material cannot be dealt with adequately due to the lack of comparative examples and the lack of information on such use, Tibetan texts sometimes discuss the proper metals to be used in the creation of Buddhist images, but these do not mention the sole use of iron, although it is used in combination with other metals.' The chapter devoted to the problems of iconography, while establishing the unique combination of elements, will attempt to pinpoint through textual descriptions and actual images, the identity of the deity which is portrayed by the iron sculpture. The major emphasis of this study, however, centers on the analysis of the style of the image, which displays a combination of features that
that almost seem indicative of different dates ranging from the ninth to the fourteenth century, The purpose of the stylistic analysis is to attempt to establish the actual date of manufacture of the image and the sources for its stylistic treatments,
Footnotes to Chapter I

1 For examples of these early works, consult the bibliography.

2 Again, the bibliography contains a number of these more recent works published since the 1950s', but most are rather general in content.

3 There are a few notable exceptions like Giuseppe Tucci's work, *Indo-Tibetica*, I-IV (Rome, 1932-41).

4 Dr. Pal has published a number of works on Nepal, the most extensive work in which he discusses the chronology of Nepalese sculpture is *The Arts of Nepal*, vol. 1: Sculpture (Leiden, 1974).

5 There are, of course, exceptions to this general approach to the problems of chronology, and as well, some scholars like C. Tucci have attempted to deal with the problems of regional developments.


Chapter II: Iconography

The study of Buddhist art should include consideration not only of stylistic elements present in an image, but also its iconographic content. Since the art of Buddhism arose to serve the religious needs of its devotees, the iconography of Buddhist images is a significant factor in the understanding of Buddhist art. In addition, there are other reasons why an understanding of an image's iconography is important to the scholar.

In order that these Buddhist images fulfill their religious function, matters of gesture, attributes, attire, ornaments, etc. were not left to the discretion of the individual artist, but were specifically prescribed in various religious texts. Thus, the most effective stylistic analysis of Buddhist art would be based primarily on comparative material of a similar, if not identical iconographic type. The closer the comparative material is in iconography, the easier it is to distinguish purely stylistic elements.
It is also important to realize that the religious function of these images often created long enduring traditions for the treatment of iconographic elements. The religious texts, which contained iconographic descriptions of the various deities, pictorial collections of the pantheons and the early images themselves, by being closely followed if not directly copied by the makers of religious icons, were responsible for a standardization in treatment of any iconographic elements of these images.

This has important implications not only for the understanding of stylistic developments, but also for the determination of the possible sources and influences which affected these developments.

Finally, as there is some development in the overall treatment of the various forms of deities, as well as a development in the treatment of specific or individual iconographic elements, investigations into the iconography of images is useful. As previously noted, this provides not only valuable information about the religious practices
of different periods and regions, but also aids in the understanding of stylistic developments and sources. The fact that there often seems to be more than one tradition or manner of treatment for different iconographic elements used at any one time, might illustrate the importance of such investigations. It may be possible, for example, to determine that these different traditions reflect either variations in regional schools or appear as the result of distinct outside influences.

The image’s short, stout body and angry countenance are iconographic characteristics, along with his attributes of the kartri and kapala and his ornaments: the necklace of severed heads, his naga jewelry and nagaayajnopavita and the crown of five skulls, The hood of five naga, also an iconographic characteristic, proves the greatest problem in the determination of his identity.

All of the iconographic elements, except for the hood of naga relate this image to some form of Mahakala, originally an angry form of Siwa, a known Indian deity
from a fairly early time, There are images depicting Mahākāla types Pram at least the Gupta period as seen in a terracotta relief from Abhīcchātra of the fifth century (Figure 5). There are also descriptions in the Indian iconographic texts like the Sādhanamālā and the Nischānavacāvalī, which describe two-armed, four-armed and sixteen-armed forms of Mahākāla, and generally refer to him as one of the terrible deities with ornaments of snakes, canine teeth, protruding belly and garments made of tiger-skin. B. Bhattacharyya states in his work, The Indian Buddhist Iconography, that Mahākāla is a ferocious deity who is generally worshipped in the tantric rite marana, a magical ceremony aimed at the destruction of enemies. Among the descriptions from the Sādhanamālā that Bhattacharyya has translated, one is exceedingly close to the iconography present in the iron image. This description states that Śrī Mahākāla Bhattārakā:

"is two-armed and one-faced and has blue color, He is three-eyed, has fiery radiance, and carries the Kartri and Kapala in his right and left hands respectively. He bears five skulls on his brown hair which rises up
on his head, and is decorated with a chain of severed heads. He looks terrible with bared fangs, and is decorated with ornaments of serpents and a sacred thread made out of a snake. He is short and from his mouth trickles blood..."3

Mahākāla eventually came to be a popular deity in Nepal and Tibet, as there still survive numerous images from these regions which depict his various forms. In Tibet he was known as one of the chos skyong, a dharma-pāla who was a protector of the religious law, belonging to the group known as the jig rten las 'das pa'i srung ma, those who have passed beyond the six spheres of existence. 4

Tibetan iconographic texts state that there are either seventy-two or seventy-five forms of Mahākāla, and R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz has translated in his work, Oracles and Demons of Tibet, portions of these texts which describe some of these forms. 5 Most dharma-pālas are described as having figures with stout bodies and limbs, sometimes having multiple limbs. 6 The ferocious forms of these deities are supposed to have ornaments made of human bones and garlands of fifty or fifty-one freshly severed human heads. Further, the headdress most frequently worn by the higher-ranked
deities is a crown decorated with five human skulls, while those of lesser rank wear a crown with either one or three skulls. The faces of the ferocious types should possess a wrathful expression with the mouth shown in an angry smile, while the eyes are protruding and bloodshot with a third eye in the middle of the forehead. All of these general aspects, similar to Indian descriptions and present in the iron image, substantiate the identification of this sculpture as some form of Mahākāla.

It is interesting to note, since the medium of this sculpture is iron, these texts frequently indicate that parts of the wrathful deities should be made of iron. Some of these deities are described as having hair made of iron, others have teeth of iron, etc. One interesting form of Mahākāla worshipped by the Saskya sect, which corresponds to the form of the iron image in having two arms, one face and the attributes of the kartri and kapāla, is supposed to have a face of a raven with a beak of iron. Perhaps, if iron as an element is more closely associated
with wrathful types of deities then with other forms, this might partially explain the use of this material in the creation of the image under study.

While Nebesky-Wojkowitz has not provided the translations of all the forms of Mahākāla, he does give a number of them in *Oracles and Demons of Tibet.* Many of these descriptions of the various forms, like Kṣetrapāla, mGon po gri gug dpa' gcig and mGon po trksad gri gug sbrag mā are iconographically similar to the iron image with the kartri and kapāla, the crown of five skulls, etc., but they are not identical. A number of other forms of Mahākāla that the iron image partially relates to are illustrated in a variety of publications of iconographic collections like Lokesh Chandra's *A New Tibetan-Mongol Pantheon* and Clark's *Two Lamaistic Pantheons,* as well as a number of catalogues and other works on Tibetan art. Figure 6 includes illustrations of some of these forms contained in the iconographic collection of three hundred icons, but none of the forms except that of Gur gyi mGon po are very close to the iconography of the iron image. In
fact, among all the different forms illustrated in art, Cur gyi mGon po seems the most closely related form. Cur gyi mGon po was a very popular deity who is represented by a number of published images: Figures 7 and 8 show an example of this form in a Tibetan painting of the fifteenth century, Figure 9, also a Tibetan work, is a bronze sculpture of the seventeenth century and Figure 10 shows the Nepalese treatment of this form in a stone stele from the seventeenth century, His description has been given by a number of scholars including Nebesky-Wojkowtiz who states:

"The texts also call this form the "lord of the tent" and claim that the god resides on the top of defeated enemies, in the center of a great cemetery. The color of Gur mGon po is black: he has one face and two hands, the right one is lifting a chopper and the left one is holding in front of the breast a skull-cup full of blood. A magic club rests across his bent arms, The black "lord of the tent" has three eyes, he bares his teeth and his yellow hair stands on end, His ornaments are: a diadem of five skulls, a garland of fifty blood-dripping heads, the "six kinds of bone ornaments" and snakes. He wears a loin cloth of tiger-skin as well as a cloak of silk, and his whole body is enveloped in flames..."15

Although this description shows that the form of Cur gyi mGon po is similar to the iron image, these are differences in dress and the presence of the magic club, the khatvänge.
There does not seem to be any further information in any of the published material which gives the exact identity of a Mahākāla form identical to the form portrayed by the iron sculptura, The greatest problem in the identification of the particular form of this iron image is the presence of the hood of nāgas. None of the descriptions of the forms of Mahākāla nor the illustrations seem to contain such a feature. In fact, the nāga hood is characteristic of another group of deities, the Nāgarāja. The Nāgarājas were popularly depicted in Buddhist art, fulfilling various roles, most often shown as devotees, guardians or holders of treasure. While in their human form they always have a hood of nāgas as seen in the example from Nepal of the fifteenth century (Figure 11), there does not seem to be any tradition of depiction or any iconographic descriptions which ascribe to them the short, stout figure, angry expression and fearful ornaments present in the iron image, most commonly, like the image depicted in figure 11, the Nāgarāja in the Buddhist
context, is shown as a princely Figure, of slender build with quantities of jewelry and frequently either holding some treasure or in namaskāra mudrā. The fact that the iron image has nothing in common with such typical representations of the Nāgarāja, except for the Rood of nāgas would seem to limit, though not completely dismiss the possibility that the identity of the iron sculpture is some form of Nāgarāja.

There are, thus several possible solutions to the problem of the identity of the iron image. It is conceivable that he is some rare form of Nāgarāja, or more likely, Mahākāla, whose iconographic descriptions has not yet been found or translated. It is also possible that the creator of the image consciously made this work a syncretized deity for some reason. However, perhaps the most reasonable explanation is that the image was created before an established tradition of Mahākāla forms existed, so that the artist, perhaps following iconographic descriptions stating that Mahakala should have nāga ornaments, gave
this image a hood of nāgas as a type of nāga ornament. This last solution would seem most attractive if the date of the image could be ascertained as early. It is also a reasonable solution since nāgas in general were a usual part of Mahākāla iconography. Nāga ornaments, as it has been seen were often prescribed as the jewelry, and are often mentioned in the descriptions of Mahākāla forms as adornments for the hair. For example, many form, are described as having hair bound into a tuft by a ribbon made of a snake, as can be seen in the Tibetan painting of Mahākāla from the fifteenth century (Figures 7 and 8), while a few minor deities are supposed to have snakes instead of hair.17 At least one form of Mahākāla, the lha chen mgon po lcam dral, wears a headdress of snakes in addition to his crown of five skulls.18 Although this particular deity does not provide the solution to the identity of the iron image, it does show by the use of nāgas for a headdress, the possibility of the use of nāga
hoods with certain forms of Mahākāla. Further separating the nāga hood of the iron image as an attribute of a Nāgarāja, is the fact that this nāga hood is comprised of five separate nāgas, whereas in the usual treatment of Nāgarāja images, the hood is formed by one polycephalous nāga.

Thus, it clearly seems that this iron sculpture is some form of Mahākāla, although the exact form cannot yet be determined. The best comparative material for the stylistic analysis of this image will be works which depict Mahākāla and also, (although less close) images which depict any of the wrathful types of deities and the wrathful or non-wrathful dharmapāla types.
Footnotes to Chapter II


2 B. Bhattacharyya, p. 347.

3 B. Bhattacharyya, p. 345. The original Sanskrit text is published in the *Śādhanamālā*, ed. B. Bhattacharyya, Gaekwad's Oriental Series, no. 26, 2nd ed. (1925, Baroda: Sadhana Press, 1968), I. 585. This description of Mahākāla is one of seven forms described in this text.


5 R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 38. The texts which he translates are *Yidam rgya mtsho'i* _sgrub thabs rin chen 'byung gnas* _kyi_ _lhan thabs rin 'byung don gsal bzhugs_ and *Yidam lha srung ma dang bcas pai sgrub thag s dang rjes gnang zuz kha brya rtsa dngos grub 'byung gnas zhes bye ba bzhugs so*.

R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 6.

8 R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 12.

9 R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 6.

10 R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 6.


12 R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, see Chapter III; The Group of the mGon po, pp. 38-67.

13 R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, pp. 40, 54 and 59 respectively,

14 See bibliography for selected works.

15 R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 50.

17 R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 6.

18 R. Nebesky-Wojkowitz, p. 57.

19 This deity differs from the iron image in having four hands, two faces, different attributes and dress, etc.
Chapter III: Style

When a work of art is not inscribed with a date nor directly related to a dated work, as is the case for this iron image, one must rely upon stylistic analysis to place it into its proper historical context. This process involves analyzing the various elements of an image and attempting to find similar treatments in other works. Such a process is rarely absolute in its accuracy, and can be especially tenuous when dealing with certain forms of iconographically determined Buddhist art.

Buddhist art, as previously mentioned, is entirely functional. Once the iconography has been established for a particular form, it is desirable not to deviate greatly from that form, as that might diminish the religious effectiveness of the image. Often such forms were not only maintained, but the styles first used for the early images of these forms were also continued.

The complete stylistic rigidity inherent in the
maintenance of such traditions seems to have been only rarely realized. More often the styles used for these images did change through time and difference in location, although the changes were frequently limited to minor elements such as the decorative motifs on garments, treatment of headdress, etc. Sometimes these minor changes are all that allow the detection of a late period work created in an consciously archaized style from a genuinely early image. Thus, the stylistic analysis of a work should be thorough by taking into account all features of the image, so the resulting attribution will be as complete and accurate as possible,

There are other conditions besides thoroughness that aid the accuracy of a stylistic analysis. It is always preferable to make stylistic comparisons with dated images of similar iconography, which are also created in the same material since each medium puts certain restrictions upon the execution of style. Further,
the results of an analysis are made stronger when the points of comparisons can be found in a number of images, not just one. Unfortunately, the seeming uniqueness of the iron sculpture does not permit the fulfillment of these conditions, for the comparative material available is extremely limited.

Stylistic Comparisons

The form of the iron Mahākāla might initially point to a later period of Tibetan and Nepalese art, where iconographically similar images are quite numerous. Figure 9, a seventeenth century bronze image and Figure 10, a seventeenth century Nepalese stone stele, although rather late in date, are typical of the treatment of Mahākāla images after the thirteenth or fourteenth century in Nepal and Tibet. Certain stylistic elements present in the iron image immediately separate it from such late treatments, for works like that in Figure 9 and 10 display a more elaborate treatment of dress and ornaments than seen in the iron work. However, the most distinctive
and definitive difference between the iron Mahākāla and later Nepalese and Tibetan images of Mahākāla is in the treatment of the body forms. The short, stout and angry characteristics are not stylistically defined, as these are dictated by the iconographic requirements for images of Mahākāla, but certain modifications of these elements such as the proportions of the figure are stylistic considerations. Notable aspects in the treatment of the body forms of the iron image include: the breadth of the chest and shoulders, the oversized and elongated character of the arms, hands and fingers, the compact and shortened torso and legs, the very 'set' stance of the figure and the contained modelling, especially in the buttocks and stomach. These aspects are not present in late Tibetan and Nepalese images like Figure 9 and 10, where the emphasis is on an elaborate and sometimes even fussy treatment of the dress and ornaments, while the body forms are more summarily rendered. The treatment of the body in such late images is neither as contained
nor precise in modelling as seen in the iron image, and instead has a rather flabby, losse appearance resulting from a more abstract and smoother delineation of the forms. If the iron Mahākāla actually dates to the post-thirteenth century period, it is certainly not a manifestation of the prevailing style of its period, but must represent an instance of conscious archaism by its creator. Although this is a feasible possibility that cannot be ruled out for the moment, the problem of identifying its stylistic source still remains.

As the iron sculpture does not closely relate to the styles present in later Nepalese and Tibetan images, the next logical place to look for works more similar is in the early, formative periods of the art of Nepal and Tibet. Unfortunately, the lack of many known images from an early date makes it difficult to assess the relationship of the iron image to these initial traditions. Although not iconographically close, some of these early images do contain treatments similar to those present in the iron
Mahākāla. Most importantly, Figure 12 and Figure 13, both tenth century Nepalese works, show deities with a similar body type to that of the iron image. The figure of the iron sculpture is more compact and more concisely modelled than Figures 12 and 13, but it is still closer in treatment to these two images than it is to later, post-thirteenth century works. Other early images like Figure 14, a Nepalese or Tibetan image of the tenth century and Figure 15, a ninth or tenth century Nepalese image (both depicting forms of Vajrapāṇī) relate to the iron work in similar treatment of nāga ornaments, the shape of the face and in Figure 15, a close but not identical treatment of the facial features. Perhaps the greatest similarity between the iron image and these early Nepalese and Tibetan works lies not in the treatment of individual features, but the overall simplicity in the rendering of the images, which was not continued in later periods. Thus, there does seem to be a strong relationship between the iron image and the early styles of Nepal and Tibet, although the scarcity of early images does not permit a
complete analysis of such a relationship. This lack of comparative material from the early periods of Nepalese and Tibetan art can be somewhat filled by referring to certain styles of Indian art, as most scholars agree that the early art traditions of Nepal and Tibet were extremely dependent on styles manifested in India.

The period of the eighth to the twelfth centuries was one of active contact between India, Nepal and Tibet. Records survive which document numerous journeys undertaken at this time by Indians to Nepal and Tibet. Further, the Nepalese and Tibetans themselves made many pilgrimages to India, searching for Buddhist teachings. Certainly the rise of Buddhism in these countries was paralleled by a proliferation of image-making. It is known that Indian images along with Buddhist texts and other religious paraphernalia were brought to Nepal and Tibet at this time. As the texts were immediately copied, so too, new images must have been made based on the Indian models. Examples of these Indian styles survive in a somewhat
greater number than these early Nepalese and Tibetan works, thus at least enabling comparisons between the iron image and the stylistic sources for the early art traditions of Nepal and Tibet. These comparisons will clarify which aspects present in the iron image are ultimately derived from India and which are not. The determination and differentiation of these aspects will also be helpful in indicating chronological possibilities for the creation of the iron Mahākāla.

The Indian art tradition most influential on the early art of Nepal and Tibet was probably that created under the Pāla empire, which lasted from the eighth to twelfth centuries. The art of the Pāla period was produced in the Bihar and Bengal regions of northeast India, one of the most active strongholds of late Buddhism in India, and a major focus of many pilgrimages undertaken by Nepalese and Tibetans. The large amount of Buddhist art which still survives from this area further testifies to its strength as a Buddhist center. Because of its ample
remains, the art of the Pāla period provides a good source for comparative material. There are, however, drawbacks to using this material as comparative works for the iron image: most of the surviving images are made of stone, rather than metal, and in addition there are only a few extant images of Mahākāla types in this corpus of works. This latter problem is somewhat alleviated by numerous examples of attendant figures, which share certain features with the iron piece, especially in the body type.

The extent of Pāla period influence on the Buddhist art of Nepal and Tibet can be clearly seen in a late Pāla work of the twelfth century, a stone stele depicting Bhairava (Figure 16). Images of this type, which represent the last important stage of stylistic development in the Pāla school, served as a basis for a long preserved and popular tradition in the art of Nepal and Tibet. When this particular Pāla period work is compared to the iron image, however, little similarity can be found in the treatment of the forms. The Bhairava figure does not show the same sense of compactness and containment of form as the
proportions are more elongated and lack the firmness of modelling that is present in the iron image. In these aspects, the Pala icon is much closer to the later Nepalese and Tibetan works than it is to the iron piece. While a large amount of influence from the late Pala period can thus be found in some of the stylistic treatments of later Nepalese and Tibetan images, it would not appear that this last stage of Pala period art could provide the prototype for the style of the iron Mahākāla.

Eleventh century images, likewise do not appear to be the stylistic source for the treatment of the figure of the iron image. An eleventh century bronze image of Hayagrīva and a similarly dated stone stele, also containing an image of Hayagrīva (here as an attendant to Khasarpana) show the typical conventions used in this century for the short, fat figure (Figures 17-19). Both of these images are similar in treatment to that seen in the twelfth century Bhairava image with elongated proportions and a hose modelling of the forms.
Pāla period images of the tenth century contain a different treatment of the body than that seen in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The tenth century seems to be the latest date at which this occurs. In fact, the earlier the example, the greater the difference from the fate Pāla period examples. Dr. S. Huntington has shown that the art of the early Pāla period (and that immediately preceding it), especially in the Gaya district was heavily influence by Central Indian Gupta styles. This influence accounts for the heavy, stocky quality found predominately in the Brahmanical, but also occasionally in the early Buddhist art of this period. While Dr. Huntington has not specifically associated this phenomenon with the treatment of the dwarf type figure in early Pāla period art, it seems to be both true and and applicable for these types of Figures as well. Several examples of stone stele of the tenth century show the early conventions used for such figures (Figures 20-22). The pertinent figures are all attendants to the main image depicted in these stele; all are short and stout in
build, although not all are angry:forms of deities, 

Generally, the treatment of the bodies in these images is shorter and more compact than that seen in the eleventh and twelfth century examples. A comparison of one of these tenth century images such as that in Figure 22 to the eleventh century image of Hayagrīva in Figure 19 clearly shows the difference in the treatment of the bodies. The tenth century image does not contain the elongation of the torso and legs present in the eleventh century image, nor is it as flabby in appearance as the later work. These early images are much closer counterparts to the treatment of the figure of the iron image than are the later Pāla period works. The differences found between the ninth and tenth century images and those of a later date in the Pāla period are the same differences which separated the iron image from not only later Pāla period works, but later Nepalese and Tibetan works of the post-thirteenth century. Other characteristics that ninth and tenth century Pāla period images have in common with the figure of the iron image are: the same breadth of the chest and shoulders
which is lessened in later Pāla period images, and the oversized and elongated character of the hands and fingers, which occurs in the early images but also persists to some degree in the later, eleventh and twelfth century examples (compare Figure 22 to Figure 19). Thus, the immediate source for the figure treatment of the Iran image seems to be early Pāla period works which date no later than the tenth century.

It is not possible to conclude with as much certainty whether the same period is also the direct source for the treatment of other aspects in the Iran sculpture. For example, the nāga ornaments on the ears, arms, wrists and legs of the image can frequently be found in Pāla art, but are not unique in their treatment to the art of the Pāla period. The treatment of these ornaments is definitely less elaborate than that found in the attendant figure of Hayagrīva of the eleventh century (Figure 19), relating more to that of the tenth century (Figure 21). However, this simplified treatment can also be found in many
Tibetan and Nepalese images of both early and late date, Thus, the manner of depicting these nāga ornaments as seen in the iron sculpture, relate to a rather long enduring tradition (unlike the treatment of the body). Although the source for such nāga forms may be generally taken back to the Pāla period, the immediate source for its appearance in the iron image cannot be determined as either early or late in date. The same situation occurs for the treatment of the kartri and kapāla that the fran Mahākāla holds. Again, these attributes are present in Pāla period images, similar in both their form and the manner in which they are held, as can be seen in two Pāla period examples in Figures 23 and 24. Yet, this treatment is not distinctive solely of Pāla period art, as the form is continued in the post-Pāla period art of Nepal and Tibet. The garland of severed heads, once more presents the same problem. Again, like the kartri, kapāla and nāga ornaments, the immediate source for the treatment of the severed head garland cannot be determined as early
or late in date, although its ultimate source seems to be found in Pāla period art. This treatment of the severed head garland in Pāla period art seems to be somewhat rare and late in date, occurring in works from the eleventh and twelfth centuries like the bronze image of Samvara of the eleventh century (Figure 25). Apparently, there was more than one tradition of treatment of the severed head garland as a comparison between the Samvara figure and the twelfth century sculpture of Bhairava illustrates (Figure 16 and Figure 25). The type of treatment seen in the Bhairava image seems to have been the more popular and earlier of the two, as it can be found in the few surviving tenth century images which include such an attribute. Interestingly, both traditions or forms of treatment were preserved in later Nepalese and Tibetan works (like Figures 7 and 9).

Other characteristics of the iron image do not show as close an adherence to Pāla forms as did those just discussed. One such feature is the treatment of the skull
crown. Certainly skull crowns existed in Pāla images of angry deities, as can be seen in the twelfth century image of Bhairava (Figure 16). However, the band beneath the skulls on the crown of the iron image is distinct from that of the Bhairava figure, as well as from most other types of crowns of Pāla period images. Although a close counterpart to the crown of the iron image cannot be found in Pāla art, there are crowns of a more similar type in some early Nepalese images, for example that of a female deity dated to the ninth century (figure 26).

While the general form of the crown may be derived from Indian types, the specific treatment of the beading and the manner in which it lays upon the head, similar for both the iron image and the ninth century Nepalese figure, are distinct from Pāla period examples. This type of crown seems to have been used in Nepalese art until about the thirteenth century, but was never as popular as types more closely resembling Pāla farms.

There are general parallels in Pāla period art for the depiction of the facial features of the iron image:
the bulging eyes, bared teeth and flame motifs, etc., corresponding in both treatment and degree of simplicity (e.g., Figure 24). However, the shape of the face of the iron sculpture is quite distinct from that found in Pāla period images with its narrow forehead and full lower jaw. A few early Nepalese and Tibetan works like Figures 12 and 15 depict faces with a similar shape to that of the iron mahākāla. Like the form of the crown, the shape of the face would seem to have originated outside of India, and interestingly, both appear at an early date in Nepalese and Tibetan art traditions.

The final aspect of the iron image to be considered is the decorative motif incised on the dhoti. This type of motif does not appear in the Indian art of the Pāla period where decorative patterns are usually medallions or lozenge shapes randomly distributed over the surface (Figure 27). The floral motif of the decoration also does not seem to belong to the repertoire of early Nepalese motifs, as these echo quite closely the Pāla forms.
However, this type of floral motif was extremely common in later Tibetan art, and can be occasionally found in early Tibetan works as well, like the twelfth century bronze image of Padmapani (Figure 28). The exact date of the introduction of this motif into Tibetan art is not known, but the ultimate source seems to lie in Chinese art. The Tibetans were in active contact with the Chinese numerous times throughout history, the earliest occurring around the eighth century. As these types of motifs appear quite early in Chinese art, it is possible that they were passed on to Tibet at an early date. There is in fact, some historical information that may have provided an opportunity for this, as during the reign of the Tibetan king, Trisong Detsen in the eighth and ninth centuries, it was recorded that the Chinese were forced to pay a yearly tribute of fifty thousand rolls of silk to Tibet. It is quite possible that Chinese decorative motifs were absorbed by the Tibetans from these rolls of silk. However, the popular use of such motifs as decoration
Buddhist images like that in Figure 29, does not seem very widespread until the fourteenth century. Perhaps, this seemingly late appearance is do only to the present lack of many known pre-fourteenth century Tibetan works.

**Dating the Iron Image**

The discussion of the iron image's stylistic characteristics involved a large number of works, which varied greatly in country, material, data and subject. Yet, this conglomerate of material does seem to indicate a definitive date for the manufacture of the iron work, as there was only a limited period when all the previously discussed characteristics were in use. The date when all the aspects, both stylistic and iconographic, could have coalesced into the form of the iron Mahākāla would seem to either be the tenth or eleventh century. It was already noted that the figure style of the image indicated a prototype no later than the tenth century, while the specific date for the immediate source of the treatment of the nāga
ornaments, kārtri and kapāla could not be exactly pinpointed, they did exist in early Pāla period images of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The treatment of the crown and the shape of the face, shown to have probably originated outside of India, were found in similarly early works of Nepal and Tibet. The simple nature of the image's iconography, (not the particular form of the deity, but the lack of extraneous details) relates to both tenth and eleventh century images of the Pāla period and to similarly dated images of Nepalese and Tibetan manufacture, adding further support to a tenth or eleventh century attribution. Finally, the historical situation supports this attribution. In the second half of the tenth century and throughout the eleventh century, the rise of Buddhism in Tibet was characterized by extremely close contacts with India. It has hopefully been shown how extremely dependent the style of the iron image is on Indian styles manifested in the early Pāla period, a phenomenon most likely to
occur during a period of great Indian influence, like that which existed in the tenth and eleventh centuries in Tibet.

There are two aspects which might belie an attribution to the tenth or eleventh century for the iron Mahākāla. One of these is the treatment of the garland of severed heads, which did not seem to occur until the eleventh century, thus making at least a tenth century date somewhat suspect. The other difficulty is caused by the decorative motif on the dhotī of the iron image. The problem with this motif is that although it was certainly popular in later Tibetan art, the initial date when it is used in Tibetan Buddhist art simply cannot be determined. The importance of this unanswerable question is significant, as this motif is the type of change that would occur in consciously archaized works. The questions presented by this motif and the treatment of the severed head garland, as well as the possibility of a time lag during the transmission of tenth century Gāla styles to Nepal and
Tibet make the conservative choice of attributing the image to the eleventh century seem wise. The uncertainty caused by the presence of the decorative motif raises the possibility that this image might be a late work in an archaized style. However, the overall simplicity of the image and the very finished character of the back of the image (which does not appear in later works) makes this possibility rather remote. Such matters are always subject to personal interpretation, but the presence of so many common features in the iron image with the art of the Pāla period and early Nepal, which at least determined its stylistic sources, also seems to be strong evidence for the date of its creation,
Footnotes to Chapter 111


5. S. Huntington, p. 182.


10. See K. Khandalavala, "Nepalese and Tibetan Bronzes," Marc, IV, 1 (1951), 21, regarding the treatment of the back of images, he and several other authors have pointed out that the finished state of the back of late images is usually rudimentary.
Chapter IV: Conclusions

Briefly stated, the results of this study were mixed in their fruitfulness, While the iconography of the image was found to indicate some form of Mahākāla, the exact form was not identified. The stylistic analysis proved more successful. Not only were the sources for a number of the elements present in the image located, but it was also possible to assign a date to the work, although admittedly, there remains some uncertainty about its accuracy. Most probably the attribution to the eleventh century is a conservative estimate, but the unique character of the image makes an earlier dating too tenuous. The important consideration lies more at this stage of knowledge, not in locating the exact century in which the work was created, but the stage of development to which it relates, and the iron Mahākāla would certainly seem to belong to the early period of Tibetan sculptural traditions.

Besides the specific results already mentioned, some interesting issues were encountered in the course of this
study. One such issue concerns the **exact** relationship of Indian art of the Pāla period to that of Nepal and Tibet. Many scholars have previously cited Pāla period art as the major **source** for the early styles of these two countries, but none have dealt with such a relationship in detail. This study has shown that the extent and manner of such influence should be neither dismissed nor summarily treated. The evidence of Pāla period influence in only one object is not enough on which to base any major conclusions about such a relationship, but the ability to discern Pāla period influence in this iron image does seem to indicate that a treatment of this matter on a larger scale is a feasible and potentially promising endeavor. It may even be possible to ascertain which areas or workshops of Pāla art influenced Nepalese and Tibetan art, as Dr. S. Huntington has shown that there are distinctive stylistic features manifested in different areas of Bihar and Bengal. In fact, although it cannot be
conclusively determined due to the unique character of the work, the image seems most closely related to the styles manifested in the Gaya district of Bihar, as all of the Pāla period examples used in the stylistic analysis were either from the Gaya district or reflected aspects also contained in the styles of the Gaya district. At the very least, an investigation of the relationship between the art of the Pāla period and that of Nepal and Tibet should aid on the identification of the early indigenous elements in the art traditions of Nepal and Tibet; comprising one step towards unravelling the mix of influences present in those styles.

Another interesting outcome of this study was the discovery that more than one tradition frequently existed for the treatment of the same element (e.g. the severed head garland). Again, it would require an examination of many more images than those dealt with here, in order to arrive at any conclusions or understanding of this phenomenon, but it does seem to be an important aspect in the understanding
of this art, both stylistically and iconographically, and would appear to be another feasible endeavor.

Finally, one of the most interesting issues that came to mind when dealing with the elusive iconography of the iron sculpture, is the far-reaching problem of the origin of the short, stocky, qana-type figure as an iconographic characteristic. There is a wide range of deities who possess this characteristic, but scholars in general do not discuss the reason for its existence nor do texts seem to provide an explanation for its meaning and manifestation. The evolution of deities with this form, their iconographic meaning, and the determination of which deities should possess this characteristic would probably prove to occur somewhat systematically, making a study of this topic at least potentially quite interesting.
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Figure 1, Mahākāla (Nāgarāja). from Tibet.
Figure 2, side view of Māhakāla, from Figure 1.
Figure 3, back view of Mahākāla from Figure 1.
Figure 4, detail of face of Mahākāla, Figure 1.
Figure 5, Bhairava, from Ahiochatra. Gupta Period, 5th c.
Figure 6. Six forms of Mahākāla from the 300 Icons, a Tibetan xylograph.
Figure 7, Painting of Mahākāla, from Tibet. 15th c.
Figure 8, detail of Figure 7.
Figure 9. Bronze sculpture of Mahākāla, from Tibet, 17th c.
Figure 10, Mahākāla, from Nepal. 17th c.
Figure 11, Nāgarāja, from Nepal, 15th c.
Figure 12, Vajrapurusha, from Nepal. 10th c.
Figure 13, Bhairava. from Nepal, 10th c.
Figure 14, Vajrapāṇi, from Nepal or Tibet. 10th c.
Figure 15, Vajrapani, from Nepal, 9th or 10th c.
Figure 16, Bhairava. Indian. Pāla period, 12th c.
Figure 17, Hayagrīva. Indian, Pāla period, 11th c.
Figure 18 Khasarpana Lokesvara. Indian. Pāla period 11th c.
Figure 19, detail of Hayagrīva from Figure 18. Indian, Pāla period, 11th c.
Figure 20. मान्जुरी. Indian. Pāla period, 10th c.
Figure 21, Mañjuśrī. Indian, Pāla period, 10th c.
Figure 22. Mañjuśrī, Indian. Pāla period, 10th c.
Figure 23, Angry female deity. Indian, Pāla period, 11th c.
Figure 24, Nairātmā. Indian, Pāla period, 11th c.
Figure 25. Šamvara. Indian. Pāla period, 11th c.
Figure 26, female deity, from Nepal, 9th c.
Figure 27, Drawing of decorative motif incised on dhoti of iron image in Figure 1.
Figure 26, Padmapani, from Tibet. 12th c.
Figure 29, Mahāsiddhi Nāg po pā. from Tibet. 15th c.