MYTH AND REALITY:
LHASA'S JOKHANG TEMPLE AND THE LEGEND OF WENCHENG

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the history, myth and physical reality of the Jokhang in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. This Buddhist temple is the most important and very likely the oldest Buddhist building in Tibet. The events explaining its founding are largely mythical and remain factually uncertain. This study will attempt to clarify the motives and events that relate to the founding of the building itself and to the legendary ‘history’ of the building that developed later.

Using various archaeological, architectural and artistic investigations this study will examine the structure of the building and its decorative program. Through a series of comparisons it will attempt to establish the foreign precedents from which the building and decorative style stem.

Through the use of various scholarly works, this study will analyze the political history of the Yarlung king, Songtsen Gampo, to show the specific political realities of the Tibetan rulers during the temple’s founding. This will explain the essentially Nepalese character of the building.
A further investigation of the Jokhang’s later history and the central place it came to occupy in Tibetan culture will reveal the unique cultural significance of the temple and help to explain the highly structured cultural perception that surrounds it. Additional research into the nature of Tibetan historiography will show the overtly religious and political nature of the Jokhang founding myth and Tibetan history in general.

The Jokhang myth, which seems to negate physical and historical evidence, is a later construct that reflects the central religious and political position that the Jokhang occupies in Tibetan culture.
Dedicated to my mother and father
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

The Jokhang (Jo-khang) is the premier Buddhist temple of Tibet. It is central to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. It is the only establishment that transcends all sectarian boundaries. It houses the precious Jowo statue of Sakyamuni (Jo-bo), Tibet’s most sacred image, and is visited and revered by all classes of Tibetans, monks and laity alike, for it houses the. This statue is the main sacred presence in the temple, bringing spiritual life and awareness to the space. It is also the vivifying presence of the city of Lhasa (Lhasa) and by extension to the lands of Tibet, as Lhasa is its spiritual and political capital. The Jokhang is located in the heart of Lhasa within the Tsuklakhang (Ra-sa gtsug-lag-khang) complex (figure 1-4), surrounded by the medieval warren of the Old City and circled by concentric pilgrimage routes. It is very likely the first Buddhist temple to have been built on Tibetan soil and one of the earliest permanent structures of the Lhasa
region. In fact, the name “Lhasa” means “place of the gods” in Tibetan and refers specifically to the temple itself.¹ For these reasons it has been called the “Cathedral of Lhasa” by Western scholars.

Despite its signal importance to Tibetan culture and religion, the origins of the Jokhang remain obfuscated by its legendary beginnings and a lack of reliable historical sources. The temple is believed to have been built under Songsten Gampo (Srong-btsan sgam-po), a king of the Yarlung dynasty, in the 7th century. The impetus for the construction of the building is traditionally ascribed to the presence of two foreign queens in Lhasa, a Chinese and a Nepalese queen, both of whom were Buddhist. In fact, this temple is distinctly associated with the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet, which in the highly religious atmosphere of later Tibet was understood to be the inescapable divine destiny of the people. The king, Songsten Gampo, is also credited with the introduction of a written Tibetan language, but no text or inscription survives from his reign. The story of the founding of the Jokhang then rests on what must have been a religiously oriented oral tradition. A few stone pillars with inscribed edicts from the century following mention the Jokhang and its founder but with little detail. Most of the story is found only in later texts that postdate the founding of the temple by at least three hundred years.

The traditional legend of the Jokhang’s founding is entertaining but unsatisfying. It tells of the divine nature of the king, the coming of the two queens and their joint efforts to build the first Buddhist temple in Tibet. The story leaves scholars with a sense

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of unease, for it seems to cover and gloss what surely was a complex and specific political reality. Due to the overwhelming mystical nature of the story, some Western scholars have discounted it as entirely fictitious. The existence of the queens, the dating of the building, and Songsten Gampo’s involvement in the building have all been questioned at one time or other. One may begin to wonder what, if anything, may be said for certain about the Jokhang. Most of all, curiosity leaves us with a single fundamental question: who really built the Jokhang and for what purpose?

Despite the lack of contemporary sources, the background of the Jokhang can be ascertained through various means. The building itself, which retains portions of its original form, provides the greatest insight. Through several recent architectural surveys, the building may be accurately dated and the original methods of construction and decoration are made apparent. The most significant survey, conducted by André Alexander and his team for the Tibet Heritage Fund, covered many of the most important historical buildings of Lhasa in the past decade. The chief aim of the project was to assess the damage and possibility of conservation of the old buildings, but it also provided much incidental information on the construction methods used in Lhasa in different periods. Alexander’s recent publication, *The Temples of Lhasa: Tibetan Buddhist Architecture from the 7th to the 21st centuries*, provides a very detailed account of his findings at several important buildings, including the Jokhang and the Tsuklakhang. Narrative descriptions of the temple by various art historians also prove useful. Roberto Vitali’s *Early Temples of Central Tibet* offers a useful artistic analysis of the building’s decorative elements. Through various scholarly works, artistically, architecturally and
historically based, we may analyze the physical elements of the Jokhang and by comparison to other architectural traditions begin to assess the cultural sources for the building.

Some of the specific events of 7th century Tibet can be coaxed out of the historical annals of neighboring countries, principally those of China. Various scholars, principally Vitali, have drawn upon the Dunhuang Annals and Old T'ang Annals to deduce the political and historical occurrences of Songsten Gampo's reign. Translations of Tibetan histories, although more apocryphal, may also provide some historical insight. Per K. Sorenson, Hugh Richardson and others have contributed greatly to the translation of many of these histories. Of course, insight into the intertwined Tibetan notion of history, myth, and spirituality remains vital to the understanding of the Jokhang legend. Through the thoughtful analysis of many scholars on the nature of Tibetan culture and storytelling, the curious nature of Tibetan cultural and religious history becomes clearer.

By a careful analysis of structure, history and cultural significance, we may begin to arrive at a clear understanding of the Jokhang's initial purpose and meaning. The special place occupied for centuries by the Jokhang in the heart of the Tibetan cultural sphere, dictates that the Jokhang be understood always in a specifically religious context. However, it seems apparent upon a critical examination that the Jokhang is not only the nucleus of Tibetan religion, but also one of the cornerstones of Tibetan politics.
1.2 THE JOKHANG LEGEND

The traditional tale of the building of the Jokhang is a mix of plausible and implausible events. It probably evolved in the centuries long after Songsten Gampo’s reign and it may have been passed down orally, embellished with supernatural occurrences to underscore the divine nature of the king and his endeavors and the inevitable triumph of Buddhism. This version of the story can be found in nearly every Tibetan history and is often reiterated by Western scholars who accept the plausible parts as fact and largely ignore the rest. The version I recount here is a basic form of the story based principally on the retelling by Anne-Marie Blondeau and Yonten Gyatso,² Per K Sorensen,³ the writings of the Fifth Dalai Lama (17th century)⁴ and others.⁵

The Yarlung dynasty, one of the many valley kingdoms that existed in early Tibet, rose swiftly to prominence in the 6th century. Through direct warfare, political subterfuge and feudal alliance the Yarlung kings became the heads of the first unified state of Tibet. In the early years of Tibetan history, a Yarlung ruler, TrisongtSEN, known as Songsten Gampo (“the Wise”), inherited the vast expanses of land and unparalleled

⁵ Nearly every scholar who mentions the Jokhang, Songsten Gampo or the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet recounts some version of this story. There is some variation in the events and details of the story in every telling and scholars also vary in the degree of skepticism they assign to the tale, but the essential nature of the legend remains fairly clear and I believe most would agree with the version I have laid out here.
power won by his father Namri Songtsen (gNam-ri srong-btsan), ascending the throne after Namri’s assassination. As the first Dharma-king of Tibet, it was Songsten Gampo’s divine mission to bring Buddhist thought and learning to Tibet. He is credited with the creation of the Tibetan alphabet (invented for the purpose of translating Buddhist text into Tibetan), for the implementation of Buddhist law and, most importantly, for the initial conversion of the Tibetan people to Buddhism. He is believed to be an incarnation of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Chenresi in Tibetan) and to have obtained through his great religious merit a miraculously self-manifested Buddhist image (possibly an eleven-headed Avalokitesvara) that was eventually placed in the Jokhang. His spiritual interests notwithstanding, Songsten Gampo was an effective military leader and under his guidance Tibetan rule extended into the territories of the neighboring kingdoms of Nepal, India and even encroached upon the borders of China.

Thus when Songsten Gampo sent emissaries to China and Nepal to request, in marriage, a princess of each royal court his wish was immediately granted, although admittedly with reluctance on the part of the princesses. Both the Chinese and Nepalese

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6 “Dharma-king” is chögyel in Tibetan or dharamaraja in Sanskrit and roughly translates as a king who follows and promotes Buddhist law. Pommaret, 16
7 according to Blondeau and Gyatso in Pommaret, 16; others call it a mahakarunika and describe it as a collection of holy substances (Alexander, André, et al. Lhasa Old City, vol. 2. Lhasa: Tibet Heritage Fund, 1999, 15); it is unlikely that this image still exists and it has never been identified with certainty by any scholar. The “self-manifest” object may also be the miraculous stupa that arose in the center of the Ö-tang lake as discussed below.
courts were Buddhist at this time and the princesses, believed by Tibetans to be incarnations of the deity Tara, are credited with the initial introduction of Buddhism to Tibet.

The Nepalese court sent princess Bhrikuti (Lha-gcig Khri-btsun), known as the Balsa to Tibetans, to marry the king. Amongst her entourage and train of goods, she brought with her several Buddhist images and texts, including the Miktö Dorje (Mi-bskyod rdo-rje), an image of Shakyamuni Buddha at age eight which was believed to have originated in the Buddha’s own time. Upon arrival, Bhrikuti set to work to establish a temple to house her sacred objects but every attempt to build a temple proved unsuccessful and when the Chinese princess arrived there was still no Buddhist structure in Tibet.

Wencheng Kongjo (Wen-ch’eng kung-chu), had set out from the Chinese court with her own dowry of treasures, which included the famous Jowo statue, said to be an image of Sakyamuni at age twelve from dated to the Buddha’s own lifetime. On her journey to Tibet, the princess had a miraculous vision of Tibet. She saw the land as a prone demoness hostile to the introduction of Buddhism. She understood that for Buddhism to flourish in the ‘Land of Snows,’ the demoness would have to be quelled by pegging it through the heart and other vital spots with the building of Buddhist temples. Once in Lhasa, using her geomantic skills, Wencheng was able to redirect Bhrikuti’s building program and to make it successful. According to the story, it was princess Wencheng who indicated the prime spot for the Jokhang, directly over the heart of the

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8 Bhrikuti is often connected with Green Tara and Wencheng with White Tara. N. R. Banerjee Nepalese Architecture. Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1980, 176
9 Geomancy is the art of finding the mystical forces present in the landscape.
inhospitable demoness. This area was in the middle of marshy land or perhaps even a lake, known as Lake Ö-tang (‘O-thang-mtsho), near the Marpori hill in the Lhasa valley. Unsure how to build in this area, Bhrikuti appealed to the king.

The wise king offered prayers to his principal Buddhist deity, Avalokitesvara, and by this devotion a miraculous light arose out of the center of the lake where a stone stupa soon appeared. At this point the workmen were able to build upon the site, either by draining the lake, filling it in with earth carried on the back of goats, or by building directly over it using the stupa as a platform for the foundation. In fact, this area has an unusually high water table\(^\text{10}\) and was prone to flooding by the Kyichu River. Tibetans believed that until the mid-twentieth century there was a secret access door through the floor of the Jokhang that led to the still extant lake below.

The building proceeded, according to legend, following the plan laid out by the king himself. He may have even directly assisted in the construction and is said to have hidden treasures throughout the structure to be found by later generations and used in the upkeep of the temple. At its completion, the Balsa moved her sacred images and objects into the building and it became her main place of religious devotion. The king was duly

\(^{10}\) As discovered by the Tibet Heritage fund when installing new water supply lines; Alexander, *Temples of Lhasa*, 31; According to Anne-Marie Blondeau and Yonten Gyatso, dykes were built under Songtsen Gampo’s direction to keep the Kyichu in check, an effort that required constant attention and renewal. The British stationed in Lhasa in the 19\(^{th}\) and 20\(^{th}\) centuries described the area as ‘marshy.’ And the Chinese have installed drainage systems to ensure the safety of the city (Pommaret, 29-30).
impressed by the finished structure and pronounced it a ‘miraculous vision’, thus the building was named Rasa Trülнang Tsuklakhang, the ‘Miraculous Apparition Temple of Rasa.’

The Chinese wife, Wencheng, built her own temple for the Jowo, at a place north of the Jokhang where the chariot carrying the statue had stuck in the sand. This temple, known as the Ramoché (Ra-mo-che) also stands today. Before his death the king, with the help of his queens, built many more temples (a supposed 108), geomantically positioned to further subdue the demoness. To ordinary Tibetans it appeared that all three royals died of a fever, but it is said that a few spiritually adept witnesses saw the king (and possibly the queens) disappear directly into the statue of Avalokitesüvara at the moment of apotheosis.

After the death of the king and queens, the Jowo was moved to the Jokhang as the Chinese queen had requested. It was placed on the first floor behind a screen painted with an image of the bodhisattva Manjusri. This, Tibet’s most precious image, gives the temple its most common name: Jo-khang, the house of the Jowo, the “House of the Lord.”

While this typical rendition of the coming of the Buddhist queens and the building of the Jokhang is an entertaining and magnificent tale, it is obviously problematic for the modern scholar. What to do with the numerous mystical aspects of the story? How much

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11 Rasa was an early name for Lhasa, and this location name has always been directly associated with the Jokhang. The word rasa may refer to goats (which may be connected to the goats that were used to fill in the lake) or, probably more accurately, to a ‘walled place.’
13 Pommaret, 19
of this story is "true"? To what extent can we re-create the actual motivations behind the construction of the Jokhang using this story? One of the vaguely unsettling parts of the story is the preponderance of the Chinese queen. The Nepalese queen appears weak and ineffectual in the establishment of this Buddhist edifice and thus even in the introduction of Buddhism itself. But the Chinese queen, arriving in Lhasa with her divine vision and extensive knowledge of geomancy\textsuperscript{15}, is quickly able to right the situation. Was the Chinese queen as instrumental to the building of the Jokhang as this story indicates? Were the Chinese perhaps more essential to the establishment of Buddhism in 7\textsuperscript{th} century Tibet than the Nepalese?

Laying this legendary history and the questions it raises aside for a moment, we turn to a close inspection of the Jokhang’s original structure. Here one finds a very different story.
CHAPTER 2

A PHYSICAL EXAMINATION OF THE JOKHANG

2.1 THE ORIGINAL JOKHANG STRUCTURE

As it appeared in the seventh century, the Jokhang was a very simple building (figure 5). 15 A thick square outer wall enclosed a central square room that was open in the center. The inner walls were lined completely with twenty-three small rooms or niches of varying sizes, all of them open to the center with doorways oriented toward the main central space. The entrance door with its niche-vestibule faced due west and was aligned opposite a niche of matching dimensions. These are the largest cells in the ground plan. Medium-sized niches placed at the center of the north and south wall indicate a design emphasizing the cardinal directions, rather in the manner of a mandala (a Buddhist ‘blueprint’ of a heavenly palace), as will be discussed later. The doors to the corner rooms do not face into the center. They open into the adjacent corner niches in a clockwise fashion (figure 6). As André Alexander points out, this alignment forms an

15 This analysis of the original temple is based largely on the findings of André Alexander and the Tibet Heritage Fund in their recent surveys; Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 33-39
internal swastika-like design, which is helpful when comparing the Jokhang to other Buddhist buildings. A walkway or portico around the interior was created by an overhanging rafters supported by wooden posts and brackets.

The Jokhang currently has four floors. However, only the first two floors appear to be original. The third floor rooms were constructed mainly in the seventeenth century and the fourth level is little more than a roof covering and walkway with four small chapel structures situated on each corner. The Chinese-style hip and gable roofs on this top level are certainly of a much later date than the original construction. Thus the immediate discussion will ignore the upper floors and concentrate only on the layout of the first and second floor (figure 5 and 7).

The second level was reached by two staircases located in the southeast corner niche and the niche next to the northwest corner room. The second floor corresponds directly to the first floor, with twenty-three rooms and a twenty-fourth over the first-floor entrance vestibule. This floor likely also had a walkway around the interior to provide access to all the niches. The original building was probably open to the sky in the center.

The current façade of the Jokhang is now quite ornate with exposed decorative bracketing, niches for metal images, sloping eaves, and large metal sculptures (figure 8). We can take most of this decoration to be of a later date as the temple was significantly extended several times after the eleventh century, projects which would certainly have

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17 Alexander, *Temples of Lhasa*, 38
18 Alexander, *Temples of Lhasa*, 35
effected the exterior of the building. In an interesting discovery in 1993, the Tibet Heritage team found that the building had a double-layered exterior wall. Upon examination, the interior wall layer and the niche walls seem to be constructed (perhaps entirely) out of baked brick, while the exterior wall-layer is stone. There is a slight gap between the layers. This is an intriguing find. Traditional Tibetan walls are constructed of stacked stone and rammed earth. The use of baked brick is much more typical in India and Nepal. In fact, this temple seems to be the only example of baked brick used in any central Tibetan monument. Perhaps Tibetan restorers added this outer stone layer in a later phase to shore up the building, to enlarge it or to recast it in a more traditional appearance. In fact, despite the elaborate decorative bronzes and brackets of the current exterior, from the outside the temple looks very much like a standard Tibetan building with its whitewashed battered walls and dark penbey (sPan bad) frieze (the traditional brown-purple bundles of stick ends that are stacked and painted to create a thick dark line at the top of religious buildings). Due to this, later change, we may never know what the original exterior looked like.

Along with the baked brick covered with mud plaster, in the core structure of the Jokhang various timber elements are used to support the interior structure and to define spaces. Timber is conspicuously used for the walkway supporting pillars, brackets, door-jambs and lintels. This wood is traditionally described as juniper or as gla wood (a direct English translation for this word is unavailable). Upon selective testing, Alexander’s team has found many of the wood pieces to be of juniper. Juniper posts and beams are a

19 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 45
20 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 45
21 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 45
staple of traditional Tibetan construction, but due to the scarcity of local trees they were generally imported, a difficult and expensive undertaking in this mountainous region. In fact, untreated timber was so valuable that it made a worthy gift between heads of state. The timber elements that were carbon-tested by the Tibet Heritage Fund were found to have come from trees felled in the seventh century, thus showing that the wooden elements are very likely original to the structure. Unfortunately, the origin of the trees is undetermined. The fact that the timber elements have remained can be credited to the cool, dry climate of the Lhasa valley, the high altitude location that does not support many insects, and to the curious tradition of spreading butter from the shrine lamps on the wooden posts and jambs, a very old practice that has effectively preserved the wood from cracking.

2.2 STRUCTURAL SOURCES

The Jokhang, in its original form, is not a typical Tibetan building, but it does bear a strong resemblance to viharas of neighboring cultures. In India there emerged two major types of early Buddhist construction, the stupa and the vihara. The first, the stupa usually surrounded by the caitya hall, were created for purposes of worship and circumambulation of the stupa. Stupas are relic repositories that are associated with the body of Sakyamuni and other important religious figures. The other form, the vihara structure, was created to meet the needs of the monastic community. The vihara was a

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22 Larsen, 46
23 Larsen, 46
24 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 45
25 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 48
space designed to provide a shelter, a meeting place, and a rather simple devotional space for Buddhist monks. The early Buddhist sangha (religious community) was expected to be itinerant and thus had no permanent structures. But during the monsoon season this was hardly viable and monks turned to shelters that became increasingly lavish. Vihara structures from as early as the second century CE can still be found in India today. They are generally part of rock-cut cave complexes. These viharas may provide evidence of contemporaneous free-standing Buddhist structures that are no longer extant having been built out of non-permanent materials. Often the rock-cut structures include features that would be more typical of wooden architecture, for example, rafters and beams that are technically unnecessary in the rock-cut constructions. The typical Indian vihara is square or rectangular in shape with an entrance that leads into an open area lined with small cells. Viharas have one or more shrine rooms, generally located opposite the entrance. In time, these early viharas developed into large monasteries and academic centers, such as Nalanda, Vikramasila and Ratnagiri. The vihara concept was exported to all countries that received Buddhism. Most scholars draw a direct comparison between the Jokhang and the classic rock-cut viharas of India.\(^6\)

Notable similarities of layout, design and image placement can be found between the Jokhang and the viharas of Jaulian, Ajanta, Ellora, Aurangabad and Nalanda, as pointed out by André Alexander. Upon a close inspection, the resemblance between the various ground plans and that of the Jokhang is striking. The earliest example, Jaulian monastery 2, is a Gandharan vihara that dates from the first century (figure 9). This monastery is square in shape, with thirty cells arranged along the walls. Again, the

\(^6\) Alexander, *Temples of Lhasa*, 35-36 and 46-52
quadrangular space open in the center and lined with doorways to niches aligned toward the center mirror the Jokhang. Also like the Jokhang, the corner rooms do not open to the center of the main space but rather into the adjacent cell producing the swastika-like pattern. From other examples, such as Cave 1 at Ajanta from the early fifth century, we see other elements seen at the Jokhang, such as the walkway outside the cells delineated by a square colonnade of posts with ornate brackets (figure 10). A comparison with monastery 1a at Nalanda (6th century) shows that this form also existed in India as a freestanding structure (figure 11). Certainly then the Jokhang is a vihara-type structure out of the Indian mold. According to André Alexander, the Tibetan sources all state that the Jokhang was based on an Indian vihara and that this was even remarked upon by Songsten Gampo himself. Alexander says, "In Lhasa, this [Indic] blueprint was copied by Newar artisans without apparent local modifications."27

The Jokhang is certainly situated within the vihara tradition of the Indic sphere. While it shares a general similarity with Indic viharas from a variety of sites, it is even more similar to the viharas of Nepal. In fact, Nepal was at the time very much a part of the Indic sphere and, as such, integrated Buddhism and Buddhist architecture into its local culture. Buddhism has been present in Nepal practically from its very inception. The third century B.C.E. Indian king, Asoka, famous for his expansive conquests and his conversion to Buddhism, is believed to have visited the Kathmandu valley, perhaps building major monuments there. It is said that his daughter, Charumati, even married a Nepalese prince and, eventually becoming a Buddhist nun, established a monastery in the

27 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 36
valley, the Charumati vihara.\textsuperscript{28} Certainly, from an early date, a large number of stupas, temples and monasteries were erected in Nepal echoing the abundant Buddhist construction projects in India.\textsuperscript{29}

The Indian and Gandharan monastic spaces, known as viharas, became the bahis and bahals of Nepal. The bahal is a later iteration of the older bahis, which are traceable perhaps to the Licchavi dynasty of the 5\textsuperscript{th} to 9\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Bahals, since the Malla period,\textsuperscript{30} have taken on an increasing social role for the Newar community. They developed out of the need to accommodate the increasing number of 'householder-monks.' These were monks who married and maintained a relatively normal social life while also remaining a member of the monastic society. Eventually this became a socio-religious custom that was passed through the generations by patrilineal descent, each son taking on the role of monk for a short period to ensure his family's symbolic connection with the bahal.\textsuperscript{31} The bahal structures tend to be more ornate, more complex and somewhat higher off the ground than the more austere bahis. Both bahals and bahis are built in a basically square format around an inner courtyard known as a chok.\textsuperscript{32} There is also a hybrid bahi-baha form that combines features of both building types.\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{28} Banerjee, 174  
\textsuperscript{29} Banerjee, 166  
\textsuperscript{31} Huntington, \textit{Circle of Bliss}, 29 and Hutt, 59  
\textsuperscript{33} Nippon Institute of Technology, 27
\end{flushleft}
*Bahis* remain slightly distinct in function and minimally different in architectural setup from the *bahals*. A small handful of *bahis* can still be found today in the Kathmandu valley. A comprehensive documentation of the *bahis* has yet to be published, but some basics can be surmised. Traditionally, *bahis* are built by an individual patron, often a king or high religious figure.\(^\text{34}\) The buildings are possibly intended for the celibate monastic community,\(^\text{35}\) and some scholars believe that they were traditionally built outside of main thoroughfares and human settlements.\(^\text{36}\) In form they remain closest to the classical Indian *vihara*. They tend to be very simplistic, usually a rough square plan often surrounded by rooms, with an open central courtyard and a second floor lined on all sides by a wooden verandah. The main shrine is most often dedicated to Sakyamuni\(^\text{37}\) and tends to be located opposite the main entrance on the ground floor. A second, esoteric shrine (*agam*), generally located above the main shrine contains a secret, probably Tantric, image. The courtyard usually contains a small *caitya* (*stupa*-form)\(^\text{38}\) and is a place for conducting religious services, for social gathering and performing household chores. Clearly these are structures that are part of the Indian *vihara* idiom and are still being used as they may have been so long ago in the greater Indic sphere as living and devotional spaces for the religious community.

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\(^{34}\) Hutt, 59 and Nippon Institute of Technology, 27

\(^{35}\) The original intentions of the *bahi* are rather vague. It has not been conclusively proven that there was a celibate monastic community in Nepal, according to oral communication by John Huntington.

\(^{36}\) Nippon Institute of Technology, 27 and Hutt, 59

\(^{37}\) Huntington, *Circle of Bliss*, 32 and Hutt, 59

\(^{38}\) A replica of the Swayambhu Mahacaitya; Huntington, *Circle of Bliss*, 32.
Licchavi inscriptions mention at least fifteen *bahi* or *vihara* structures present in the Kathmandu valley during that dynasty (roughly concurrent to Yarlung rule).\textsuperscript{39} Unfortunately, the oldest surviving *bahi*s that currently exist seem to date no earlier than the Malla era, the kingdom after the Licchavis.\textsuperscript{40} However, Nepal, like much of South Asia, has a tradition of artistic continuity. Preservation and upkeep of religious works and monuments is important for accruing and retaining religious merit. Banerjee states that religious practice stipulated the leaving of endowments for the upkeep of buildings and ritual curses were often laid should anyone attempt to prevent the upkeep of the building.\textsuperscript{41} The Licchavi kings, Shivadeva and Anshuvarman (6-7\textsuperscript{th} centuries), were involved in restoration projects themselves and stipulated by inscription the importance of upkeep of monuments to the maintenance of cultural tradition.\textsuperscript{42} Perhaps the story of Songsten Gampo leaving treasures in the Jokhang to be used for future upkeep of the building stems from this shared notion. This emphasis on upkeep and the desire for artistic continuity may mean that little has changed in *bahi* construction since the time of princess Bhrikuti. Despite this, reconstructing the Licchavi-era *bahi* poses something of a problem as we are forced to work from slightly later models with the hope that they are at least roughly approximate to those that came before.

In reconstructing the Licchavi-era *bahi* perhaps the best monument to draw on is the Charumati *vihara*, or the Chabahil, located in Deo Patan in the eastern suburbs of Kathmandu (figures 12-14). As mentioned above, popular belief attributes a *vihara*
structure at this location to Charumati, the daughter of king Asoka of the third century BC. The bahi that stands there today appears to be very old indeed. The presence of a Licchavi Buddha and caitya\(^3\) give it some credibility as an old structure.\(^4\)

The layout and construction of the Chabahil bears a striking resemblance both to many of the classic Indian viharas of earlier date and especially to the Jokhang. The Chabahil is comprised of two levels built around a basically square open courtyard.\(^5\) The first floor is built slightly above street-level and is entered by a simple flight of stairs. The exterior of the building is very plain apart from a simple decorative relief plaque over the entrance door. The inner courtyard is slightly lower than the walkway that surrounds it. This covered walkway, supported by two rows of wooden posts in peristyle arrangement, gives access to the rooms that line three of the four sides of the building. The rooms open toward the center of the building, but two of the corner rooms open instead into adjacent cells as they do at the Jokhang. The main shrine on the first level is detached from the exterior wall of the building and the adjacent rooms thus providing a place for the circumambulation of the sanctifying image. A staircase leads from the northeast corner to the second level. The second floor layout echoes the first. It has a roofed verandah and cells on all four sides of the building. The room directly above the main shrine of the first floor protrudes forward beyond the other rooms.

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\(^3\) During a recent restoration project, a 12\(^{th}\) century brick inscribed with Asokan brahmi characters and naming Charumati was found in the caitya. According to Dina Bangdel and John Huntington this brick must have been a direct copy of a previous brick and may indicate a very early Buddhist designation of the site. Huntington, *Circle of Bliss*, 30

\(^4\) Nippon Institute of Technology, 28

\(^5\) This analysis of Chabahil is based mostly on the findings of the Nippon Institute Research Project, which set out to survey historical royal buildings in the Kathmandu valley beginning in 1978. Nippon, p29-30, and foreword.
The material used in the construction of Chabahil consists principally of burnt brick. Timber was used as a secondary material for posts, rafters, the verandah and balustrade and for the gabled turret perched on the roof, directly over the main shrine. Brick is the ubiquitous building material of Nepalese temple construction.46 Wooden elements are also very commonly used for architectural detailing although in the temperate and slightly humid climate of Kathmandu they are susceptible to insects, dry rot and decay.47 Brick and timber construction is also used at the Jokhang, but as this is very unusual in Tibet, the Jokhang seems to be foreign-built.

By comparing the Chabahil structure back to Indian examples, such as Cave 1 at Ajanta (figure 10) or monastery 1a at Nalanda (figure 11), we see that the bahi, although built later, is situated squarely within the Indic vihara type. It may, in fact, be indicative of those hypothesized pan-Indic viharas built of non-permanent materials of which we have no direct evidence. Though it may be of the Indic tradition, it is however a Nepalese translation of that idiom and certainly the form that went directly to Tibet.

It is advisable to check for other influences on the architectural form of the Jokhang, beyond the strong stimuli of Indian and Nepalese viharas, but there are virtually none to be seen in the seventh century structure. That is not to say that other countries did not have an impact on Tibetan architecture. In Lhasa, the Ramoche temple, believed to have been built by princess Wencheng during Songsten Gampo’s lifetime, is an amalgam of several foreign and indigenous styles (figures 15-16). According to André Alexander

47 Banerjee, 160 and Slusser, 5

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the earliest part of the temple can be strongly linked to Indian prototypes and also to the Tibetan temples Tsantang Yu’i Lha-khang (bTsan thang gyu’i) near Tsetang and Jampa Lha-khang (Byams pa lha khang) in Bhutan (Bumthang). These two temples are thought to be a part of the geomantic plan Songsten Gampo used in placing temples across his territory, which included parts of the modern independent Bhutanese kingdom. The canopy-type roof on the third floor may be original and is certainly Chinese. In fact Alexander states that the entire third floor of the Rāmoché is so distinctly reminiscent of T’ang Chinese Buddhist temples, that “the original builders…must have had intimate knowledge of Chinese architecture.”

If the legend is to be believed, it would seem that the Chinese wife dictated the positioning of the Jokhang and it is not inconceivable that she may have contributed to the planning and the construction of the building. However, there appear to be no Chinese elements in the original Jokhang structure. In the T’ang era, Chinese viharas displayed uniquely Chinese architectural elements that were common to palace architecture, such as the hip and gable roof construction, double eaves, exterior colonnades, extensive construction in wood, longitudinal arrangement of buildings and the inclusion of ponds and bridges. None of these elements can be found at the Jokhang and only speculatively at other sixth century buildings.

48 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 84
49 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 85
The Newar *bahi* and the Jokhang share such distinctive similarities in planning, construction, material and layout that the Jokhang may be said to be of the Newar idiom. Thus the Jokhang can be called a *vihara*-type structure as known from classic Indic examples, and as translated through Licchavi Nepal. The decoration of the Jokhang also seems to support this claim.

2.3 THE DECORATIVE ELEMENTS OF THE JOKHANG

It is the rich interior of Tibetan temples, rather than the austere exterior, that provides visual excitement. Inside the building comes alive with vibrant color and opulent materials, reflecting the sanctified nature of the temple blessed with the presence of divinity. As Tibet’s premier temple, the Jokhang boasts one of the most stunning and unique decorative schemes. A visitor to the Jokhang today is overwhelmed by luxurious hanging textiles, large gilded statues, the ubiquitous murals and the myriad luxurious religious accoutrements. Every inch of every surface, it seems, has been decorated in some fashion. Much of this is obviously quite modern, part of the restorations of the late 20th century, for the temple was used for other purposes in the middle of the century. Some of the mural painting and architectural pieces may be dated as far back as the 11th century, but what are of interest to this study are those pieces that can be dated to the founding of the Jokhang.

The only forms of decoration that are plausibly original to the 7th century construction are the Jowo image and some of the carved wooden pieces. The murals, some of which may be quite old indeed, have not been surveyed in any complete form, making a comprehensive study of them very difficult. Sadly, many of these murals have
been recently removed for preservation but were badly damaged, many irretrievably, in the process.\textsuperscript{51} Most scholars have dated what little they have seen to the eleventh century but not earlier.\textsuperscript{52} Possibly the original structure was not painted, despite the mention of mural-paintings in the traditional histories. Or, it may have been repainted as a devotional gift in later generations, perhaps even multiple times over the centuries. Without a complete investigation, it is impossible to be certain.

The statue known as the Jowo presents another problem. Due to the practice of giving coverings and coats of paint to images as devotional offerings, the Jowo statue is now so obscured by layers of paint and gold that it is unreadable (figure 17). Its smooth, mask-like gold face is painted to highlight the elongated eyes and delicate brows while a large diamond adorns its forehead.\textsuperscript{53} It wears an enormous bejeweled crown draped with silk. Heavily beaded coverings and ornaments cloak its body. It is placed before a large metal torana-like throne-back filled with fanciful figures from the Buddhist iconographic pantheon. The fifth Dalai Lama attributed this throne to the famous Nepalese artist, Arniko, of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century,\textsuperscript{54} who is said to have also carved and inscribed the copper plaque behind the Jowo.\textsuperscript{55} This would indeed be exciting if true, however Arniko’s style is very distinct and here one does not see the unique scrolling patterns that one would expect in his work (particularly in the makkara tails which are rather too simple on this piece). According to some traditions this statue was created in India, later transported to

\textsuperscript{51} Heather Stoddard, in Alexander, \textit{Temples of Lhasa}, 56
\textsuperscript{52} Alexander, \textit{Temples of Lhasa}, 55
\textsuperscript{54} Alexander, \textit{Temples of Lhasa}, 35
\textsuperscript{55} Chan, 83
Chang'an, the T'ang capital, and finally brought to Lhasa. The image sits in the main niche directly across from the entrance. This small chapel is the "principal shrine in Tibet," before which the butter-lamps never go out.36 Its cultural and religious importance notwithstanding, the art historian may wonder exactly what artistic significance this image may be given. With all the added substances it is impossible to discern a date or style from a cursory glimpse. Giuseppe Tucci mentions seeing a Tibetan text that claimed the image was destroyed in 1717.37 Roberto Vitali also questions its early provenance.38 No western scholar has ever been allowed to inspect the Jowo, nor is permission likely to be given in the near future. The origin of this image must remain a mystery for the present.

Fortunately, the carved timber elements are available for inspection and provide a clear insight into the crafting of the early temple. The three types of wooden pieces that appear to be original to the building include beam-ends carved as lions, two types of pillars with brackets and nine elaborate doorframes.

The carved doorframes are the most spectacular (figures 18-19). On the first floor these adorn the entrances to the Jowo chapel (directly across from the temple entrance), the two niches flanking the main chapel, the main chapel niche on the south wall and the opposite niche in the north wall. Upstairs, with the exclusion of the room directly above

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36 Chan, 82
37 Chan, 82

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the Jowo shrine, the corresponding four rooms also have decorative entrances. All the
doors are shallowly carved with decorative motifs and small relief scenes placed within
sets of recessed jambs, flanking pilasters and several stacked lintels.

There are two main door-forms. The T-shaped doorways decorate the north and
south chapels of both floors. These doors are rectangular with single jambs and flanking
pilasters (figure 18). A small lintel supports two stacked forms surmounted by bracket-
shapes that come away from the flat background. Panels are appended to either side of
this area overreaching the pilasters below and producing the long top of the T-shape.
Above this a row of protruding beams is carved with human-like images. All the T-
shaped doors are painted.

The other doors are unpainted and the wood has a very dark, reddish appearance
(figure 19). The doors that flank the main shrine both upstairs and down are rather
simple. They have two sets of recessed jambs and two main lintels. On the second floor
the frames enclose entryways that are not rectangular but arched.

Much of the doorway to the Jowo chapel has been covered in sheet metal,
presumably to prevent wear on the woodwork (figure 20). Thin pilasters flank the double
jamb. The outer jamb is decorated with six panels on each side with standing figures,
possibly bodhisattvas. The first lintel contains four scenes with a single figure and a
central panel with two figures. The second lintel has six small scenes and a dharmacakra
motif in the center. An elaborate upper panel containing many Buddha images forms part
of the open frame around the front of the chapel. The frame corners contain mythical
animals with riders. Above this five blind niches are filled with unidentifiable faces.
2.4 DECORATIVE SOURCES

André Alexander suggests a parallel between these carved doorframes and similar structures in Indian temples (particularly at Ajanta).\(^{59}\) I have found that these forms do seem to have precedence in the Gupta period, and become even more prevalent in the rock-cut temples of the fifth century and later. The T-shape form can be seen in an early iteration at Cave 6 at Udayagiri, Bhopal (figure 21). Above the partial pilasters, two appended shapes containing goddess standing on makkara's jut beyond the lower frame. This shape can be compared to the similar appendages to the doors at the Jokhang that most often contain lions. The doorway to the Visnu Temple at Deogarh, in Uttar Pradesh (figure 22), shows an early example for the series of recessed jambs and lintels with vertical spaces for figures on the jambs and horizontal scenes across two lintels that we find at the Jokhang. The three architectural-looking forms between the lintel-scenes that project from the surface of the Deogarh doorway are also reminiscent of forms on the Jokhang doors. Many of the decorative patterns carved into the timber entries can be found at fifth century Indian viharas. The alternating swirl motif seen around the doorframes that flank the main shrine on the upper level is present at Ajanta in various forms, perhaps most clearly in the bright ceiling paintings from Cave 2 of the late 5th century (figure 23). Also, the outer ring of the ceiling roundel contains an alternating pattern of two flower types and is comparable to the topmost lintels of the upstairs doors at the Jokhang that contain a row of alternating, although highly stylized, flowers.

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\(^{59}\) Alexander, *Temples of Lhasa*, 46-47
At the Jokhang there are two types of timber columns that can be compared in terms of carving and layout with Indic prototypes. The first type, termed "type A" by Alexander, are found on the first floor in the corners of the main space and before the Jowo chapel (figure 24). These columns are thick, with octagonal shafts, a round band in the middle of the shaft, and a series of decorative carved bands, including a stylized lotus cap, leading to a square capital. Between the ceiling beam and the capital is a bracket-type form (called 'bows' by Tibetans) that extend along the beam to either side of the column. They are carved with apsaras and other figures. Many of the "type B" posts have been restored or altered (figure 25). They are slightly more slender with more surface carving. These also have 'bow' brackets.

There are many comparative examples in Indian rock-cut architecture to show the similarity of column design. The Jokhang bears the basic Indic concepts of the polygonal shaft, the decorative carved bands, a stacked appearance and the bow-shaped brackets carved with figures that fit into the odd space. Again, the best comparisons can be found at Ajanta in Cave 2, of the fifth century (figure 26), and also at cave 19 (figure 27). It is one of Alexander’s particularly compelling insights that the columns are arranged so as to frame the main image, a feature that can be noted at Ajanta Cave 4 (5th century) as well (figures 28-29).

Finally, the first and second floor beam-ends have all been carved into lion forms, with the exception of one on the west wall of the second floor that is carved with the face of a human (figure 30-31). Various scholars have noted Gandharan precedents for this
practice; as, for example, the lions on the AliMasjid stupa from the Peshawar Basin, of the 3rd to 5th centuries (figure 32). Carving the beam-ends may have been a practice used in wooden structures in India. It seems that this notion has been translated into stone in the small protruding forms seen at Ajanta Cave 19 and 26, both of the late 5th century, (figure 33-34) that appear to emerge from the wall and retain a squarish composition as though carved from a square ended beam. The squat, simple form of these lions with bulging eyes and bared teeth (that seem to smile) can be compared to the lions at Ajanta Cave 6, of the late 5th century (figure 35).

Clearly then there are numerous elements of the Jokhang’s architectural decorative mode that may be traced back to India. However, it is popularly believed that Newar craftsmen under the employ of the princess Bhrikuti completed the woodwork in the Jokhang. Many modern scholars, including Roberto Vitali, Ulrich von Schroeder, Giuseppe Tucci, Victor Chan, Mary Slusser and Amy Heller, support this notion. As Roberto Vitali says, “the decorative style adopted for woodwork [in the original Jokhang], which is definitely foreign (Newar), …deviates conspicuously from the Tibetan standard, if such a standard ever existed at that time.”

Comparing the relief scenes from the Jokhang with Nepalese (Licchavi) reliefs, the similarities of sculptural style may best be seen. At the Jokhang, the ancient wooden doors that flank the upper shrine of the Jokhang are each topped with a series of carved lintels two of which contain figural relief panels (figures 36-39). The upper lintel contains five panels each with a single human figure. Due to a lack of detail, perhaps caused by

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60 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 52
61 Slusser, 3
62 Vitali, 74
wear, these figures have not been identified. The middle three appear to be buddhas or bodhisattvas and the outer two may be female. The central figures are seated upon a platform or throne that appears to be constructed of rough quadrangular blocks and they are placed in an abstract setting of twisted, pointed, arcing forms that suggest mountains. The lower lintels are carved with three scenes that contain one large figure and other smaller human and animal figures. These are placed within a ‘landscape’ composed entirely of boxy, block-like forms.

These smooth, simple figures centered in a blocky landscape meant to suggest mountains are standard features of Licchavi sculpture. The Licchavi rulers of Nepal were a Buddhist and Hindu dynasty that ruled in the Kathmandu valley from the 5th century to the 9th century and beyond. The Licchavis had a close connection to the cultural and political events of contemporary India. Licchavi sculptors, while certainly using Indic-inspired iconography and even stylistic typologies, developed their own artistic manner that was unique and distinctive. Licchavi sculpture comprises some of Nepal’s greatest artistic masterpieces. Looking at only a few of these one begins immediately to see the stylistic basis for the Jokhang’s reliefs. In a seventh century relief found at Darbar Square, two figures pay homage to a dharmacakra flanked by two deer representing the First Sermon of the Buddha in the game-park (figure 40). The deer repose on platforms made of quadrangular blocks nearly identical to those found in the Jokhang lintels. The figure types at the Jokhang are also found in Licchavi art, notably in a few of the Siva

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63 Amatya, 19 and Banerjee, 175
64 Banerjee, 175

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reliefs (Kathmandu, ca. 5-6th century⁶⁵), which are similar in the pose and proportion of
the figures and the situation of the figure within a rocky landscape (figure 41). This
abstracted landscape background is rather odd. It fills the space entirely from the obvious
ground line at the bottom of the relief to the top. It is formed of geometric slabs full of
angular groves that define each chunk of rock and which radiate around the bodies at an
angle, perhaps to leave space for the carving of the intricate figures. The human bodies
are rendered with grace and sensitivity. Their forms are smooth, rounded and full. The
details are clear, although the figures are not overly carved. All of these features are
present in the Jokhang reliefs, including the twisted and pointed mountain forms seen in
several Licchavi examples.

The stone caityas of the Licchavi era that can still be found scattered throughout
the Kathmandu Valley today are also excellent sources of comparison. The small caitya
structures, which usually stand in bahal courtyards, are of stone and carved with
decorative niches in the polygonal base. These niches appear to be architectural and
reflect the architectural components that divide the Jokhang reliefs as well as the actual
architectural elements present within the building. A 7th century example from the Sibaha
in Patan, used by Slusser,⁶⁶ is carved with niches framed by pilasters that have several
decorative bands including a lotus capital, with a plain cube supporting a decorative
bracket above (figure 42).

⁶⁵ Huntington, John C. and Susan L. et al. *The John C. and Susan L. Huntington Archive
⁶⁶ Slusser, figure 7
While most Licchavi art remains only in stone, a few early wooden examples survive. Mary Slusser has found a carved wooden torana that dates from the 10th or 11th century.\textsuperscript{67} Although later than the building of the Jokhang, its similarity in style to Licchavi stone sculpture indicates that Nepal must have had a rich woodworking tradition that was similar to that which was done in stone. This indicates the likely possibility that Nepalese woodworkers were directly involved in the creation of the Jokhang's decorative reliefs.

The decorative program of the early Jokhang is so close in style to Licchavi art as to form an almost indisputable connection. The aspects of Indian decorative motifs and layout show that there was an Indian precedent of vihara decoration that was absorbed into the Nepal bahi form. It is clear that Licchavi artists were working from greater Indic prototypes and but recasting them into a unique regional form. This relationship is retained in the Jokhang by the Newar artists who must have been present in Lhasa at its creation. The sculptural style of the Jokhang reliefs, including the soft, graceful figures, the geometric, block-like mountain setting and the architectural framing is clearly of Nepalese origin. Such a style is seen at no other temple in Tibet, but it is ubiquitous throughout Licchavi era Nepal.

\textsuperscript{67} Slusser, 2
CHAPTER 3

A HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL EXAMINATION OF THE JOKHANG

3.1 HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is apparent from the evidence gathered here that the Jokhang was either built by Nepalese craftsmen or at least overseen by them. There is no evidence of Chinese, or indeed any other, influence in the early structure. Where is the touch of the Chinese bride, Princess Wencheng, of the stories? Is her involvement in the establishment of the Jokhang entirely apocryphal? It would appear that the physical traces borne by the Jokhang negate some of its traditional story. And, indeed, this is borne out to some extent when one examines the historical evidence.

Before the era of written histories, the various peoples and territories of the Tibetan region were governed by independent groups of kings and overlords.68 The Tibetan people comprise a diverse range of ethnicities but the Tibetan language stems from the Yarlung spoken language, its archaic forms promulgated and preserved by the

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recitation of oral traditions. This phenomenon must be explained by the political and cultural prominence of the Yarlung rulers. The origin of this dynasty is uncertain. Possibly of nomadic stock, the Yarlings arose suddenly in the 6th century from their stronghold in the southern agricultural valley of the Yarlung River of Tibet. The early Tibetan rulers were given a great deal of political and martial maneuvering. Through a series of shrewd feudal alliances, coups and militaristic machinations, the Yarlung king, Namri Songtsen, began to extend the reach of his control, which before his death fell over much of central Tibet and included the region very near the present site of Lhasa. His son, Songsten Gampo, who was probably born in 617 and who ascended the throne in 629 after his father’s death by poisoning, carried on the project of the expansion and unification of Yarlung holdings. He and his army cut large swathes out of the foreign territories surrounding Tibet in all directions. His empire was soon very vast. Tibet’s neighbors, particularly the Chinese, found this show of militaristic strength extremely unnerving.

The T’ang dynasty, begun in 618, was barely over a decade old when Songsten Gampo and the Tibetan military began to advance on the Chinese frontiers in the 630s. This was surprising and unsettling for the Chinese ruling elite, for whom “[the Tibetan’s]

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70 A tributary of the great Tsangpo or Brahmaputra River; Pommaret, 16
71 Beckwith, 11
72 Beckwith, 14
73 Pommaret, 16
74 The dating of various events of Songsten Gampo’s life is highly problematic and scholars vary somewhat. This, Roberto Vitali’s estimation, seems reasonable and is rather similar to that of other scholars working from Tibetan, Chinese and Dunhuang texts. Vitali, 70

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sudden appearance as a truly formidable military power became one of the most perplexing concerns of early T'ang foreign policy." The Tibetans under Songsten Gampo swiftly subdued the mighty Tuyuhun, the Turkic-Mongolian kingdom of the Kokonor (Ch'ing-hai Lake) region, as well as several other border tribes, quickly closing the distance between Tibet and the T'ang capital, Ch'ang-an. Then, with 200,000 troops, the Tibetans captured Sungchou in the modern Szechuan province. Rather than attempt serious battle with the Tibetans, the Chinese acquiesced to Songsten Gampo’s request of a princess from the Chinese court. Although the Tibetans did soon develop a taste for Chinese culture, the Tibetan state under the Yarlings remained, not only politically independent, but stood as equal to the Chinese. Indeed, as Charles Backus points out, "on a purely military basis...Tibet was probably a stronger and more dangerous adversary than T'ang China itself." Thus at this time, Tibetans probably did not need to curry political favor with the Chinese. Sino-Tibetan relations were minimal, based mostly on militaristic contact.

76 Backus. 25
77 Shakabpa, 26
78 Backus, 25
79 Backus, 29

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In contrast, it seems that Tibet had a more direct diplomatic relationship with Nepal. The exact nature of the Nepalo-Tibetan relations in the 7th century are less historically certain, based mainly on anecdotes from Chinese sources. Yet, as pieced together by Roberto Vitali principally, it appears that the royal courts of Nepal and Tibet were in direct contact with one another.80

In the late 6th century81 Anshuvarman took over the Licchavi rule of the Kathmandu valley. He had been minister to the previous Licchavi king, Shivadeva, who likely took the throne upon Shivadeva’s retirement to monastic life. Anshuvarman’s reign lasted well into the following century and probably ended between 621 and 624.82 He had appointed Shivadeva’s son, Udayadeva, as heir to the throne, but he was overthrown and possibly killed by Jisnugupta. Narendradeva, grandson of Shivadeva and rightful successor of the Licchavi dynasty, was forced into exile by a political coup. He fled to Tibet, with his loyal supporters, where he stayed with the court of Namri Songsten and Songsten Gampo between the years of 624 and 641. His choice to go to Tibet bears witness to bonds probably already in existence between the previous Licchavi ruler (probably Anshuvarman) and the Yarlung.83 These facts do not seem to be widely known, but they are borne up by anecdotes in several reliable Chinese histories, including the Old T’ang Annals and the Dunhuang Annals.84 With the Licchavi court actually residing on Tibetan soil it is in no way surprising that Nepalese influence is particularly

80 Vitali, 71-73 and Sorenson, 174
81 576 according to Vitali’s estimates; Vitali, 71
82 Vitali, 71
83 Vitali, 72
84 Vitali, 71

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strong in early Tibet. It is certainly plausible that Narendradeva brought Newari craftsmen along with his court and that they produced some of the earliest Buddhist artwork known in Tibet.

Most Tibetan accounts state that Songsten Gampo sent an envoy to Nepal to request a royal bride and that the Balsa came to Tibet around 633. The Balsa, Princess Bhrikuti, was probably the daughter of Anshuvarman or of Gunakamadeva, a puppet-prince used as a figurehead during Anshuvarman’s reign. As such, during the coup she would have been allied with Narendradeva. It is therefore likely that Bhrikuti was already living with Narendradeva’s exiled court in Tibet and that she was simply married to Songsten Gampo in 633. By 641, according the Dunhuang Annals and the Tibetan Annals, Narendradeva and his court had left Tibet. In that same year the Chinese princess, Wencheng, arrived.

Some scholars see Songsten Gampo’s reign as containing two phases: the first, a strongly Nepalese phase dictated by the presence of the Licchavi court; the second phase saw an increase in Chinese influence through the ties created by the king’s marriage to Wencheng in 641. Vitali, reasoning that the Jokhang must have been built by Nepalese crafters before the withdrawal of the Nepalese court, dates the building to 639, consequently placing it within the Nepalese era of Songsten Gampo’s reign and making its construction too early for Wencheng’s input. Thus the scanty historical evidence

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Vitali, 72
Vitali says sixteen was probably the marriageable age for Yarlung kings. Vitali, 71
Snellgrove, 371
principally Roberto Vitali; Vitali, 73
Vitali, 72
gleaned from foreign histories seems to support the overwhelming physical evidence that the Jokhang was built under the supervision of Nepalese craftsmen and to negate the integral role of the Chinese wife assigned by tradition.

Roberto Vitali makes an intriguing point that the initial failure of Bhrikuti to establish a temple on Tibetan soil, as claimed in the legend, may actually reflect the Tibetans’ hostility toward the new religion.\(^9\) As H.E. Richardson says, Buddhism “was a foreign introduction restricted probably to a few noble families, including that of the king.”\(^9\) Indeed, most Tibetans were adherents of the Bön tradition and active, widespread propagation of Buddhism in Tibet did not truly take place until Padmasambhava’s time in the eighth century.\(^9\) Songsten Gampo is often claimed as a follower of Bön and Vitali suggests that perhaps his assignation as a Buddhist king is a later religious rendering of what were elaborate secular titles and associations given him by the emperor of China. \(^9\) One wonders if, in fact, the Jokhang was built, not for the Tibetan king and his queens, but rather for the pious Nepalese king and his court.\(^9\) Perhaps the Jokhang has so strong a Newar design because it was not only built by Nepalese artisans, but because it was intended to function as the vihara of the Nepalese court while in Tibet. This notion is rather unconventional and may be impossible to

\(^{90}\) Vitali, 73

\(^{91}\) Richardson, 38

\(^{92}\) Shakabpa, 13

\(^{93}\) Vitali, 73

\(^{94}\) Vitali points out that Narendradeva is credited with the introduction of an important religious cult to Nepal and who ended his reign early to retire to a Nepalese vihara. Vitali, 73

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substantiate fully. Even if it is true, the departure of Narendra Deva not long after the Jokhang’s construction would have left the temple open for use by Songsten Gampo and his queens and any other early Buddhist converts.

3.2 THE LATER HISTORY OF THE JOKHANG

The Jokhang is the most enduring monument of Tibetan Buddhism. It remained intact for centuries as the city of Lhasa grew around it. As time went on, the physical structure of the building expanded, as did its purpose and significance in the minds of the Tibetan people.

The early Yarlung rulers, including Songsten Gampo, did not have a fixed capital, but moved their court with the seasons. From the establishment of the Jokhang, Lhasa became a popular place for political activity; royal residences were made and kept there and diplomatic meetings were convened in the valley. Though it was still not considered a capital, the area did continue to host a population of Buddhist monks and it was here that the early Buddhist travelers, including Padmasambhava, first came. The site continued to hold significance for Buddhists, but the Buddhist religion itself fell in and out of favor throughout the following centuries. Under Langdharma (gLang-dar-ma), the last Yarlung king, Buddhists were heavily persecuted. This 9th century king dismantled many Buddhist institutions, and the monastic community fled for outlying areas or went into hiding. After the assassination of the king, central Tibet was reduced to a state of

95 Pommaret, 22
96 Pommaret, 24
97 Chan, 27
continuus civil war and social unrest. During this time it appears the Jokhang fell into
disuse. Some scholars even suggest that beggars moved in and that their kitchen fires
blackened the murals, an interesting explanation for the apparent lack of 7th century wall
paintings.\textsuperscript{98} Though the temple fell into disrepair, it did remain standing through this
chaotic period.

The 11th century saw a second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet; an effort that
would finally find popularity at all levels of society and that would become permanent.
At this time, the important Buddhist teacher, Atisa of India, was invited to come to Tibet.
It is said that when he arrived in the Lhasa area in 1042 and saw the Jokhang he
recognized its sanctity immediately and began to enquire after its history. No one knew
the background of the Jokhang, but upon an exploration of the building Atisa came across
the "Testament of Songsten Gampo." This ‘treasure text’ recounted the story of the king
and the building of the Jokhang, and is the source material for many Tibetan accounts of
the Jokhang’s founding, though modern scholars doubt its authenticity.\textsuperscript{99} Under Atisa’s
direction a new community of monks moved into the Jokhang and refurbishment efforts
were begun. A few significant changes to the building date to the late 11th century. These
include the enlargement of the main shrine of the first floor, which was extended back,
thus protruding from the main building.\textsuperscript{100} In the 12th century, a violent dispute between

\textsuperscript{98} Pommaret, 27
\textsuperscript{99} Pommaret, 28
\textsuperscript{100} Alexander, 44
several monastic sects caused damage to the interior, which was repaired by two of students of Gampopa (Dwags-po Lha-rje sGam-po-pa). This was possibly when the Jowo statue was moved into the main shrine on the first floor, the room that it still occupies.\(^{101}\)

Though Lhasa during the ‘Middle Ages’ (the 9\(^{th}\) to 15\(^{th}\) centuries) remained mostly out of the political and cultural spotlight, the Jokhang continued to lend importance to the area as a sacred site and pilgrimage destination. A modest town sprang up around the Jokhang, used by pilgrims and monks as well as traders who found this a convenient stop along several important caravan routes.\(^{102}\) The buildings of the town clustered around the Jokhang, for as Larsen says, “once built, the Jokhang became auspicious, a site considered desirable to live near.”\(^{103}\) The Jokhang was the heart of the town and its raison d’être.

In the 14\(^{th}\) century a skylight was created over the central space with the addition of a matrix of twelve tall posts.\(^ {104}\) The building must certainly have been fully roofed by this time. The entrance was extended outward, ten more posts were added to create a second aisle along the west side of the Jokhang, the courtyard in front of the building was established and the Nangkor passage delineated.\(^ {105}\) The second exterior ‘skin’ of the temple may have been added at this time. These changes might have been a substantial part of the preparations for the ceremony held there by Tsongkapa during the same century.

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\(^{101}\) Pommaret, 28
\(^{103}\) Larsen, 43
\(^{104}\) Alexander, *Temples of Lhasa*, 44
\(^{105}\) Alexander, *Temples of Lhasa*, 44
Tsongkapa, the founder of the Gelukpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, was a 14th century Buddhist monk known for his skill in debate and teaching. He came to Lhasa from his native Amdo to study, and quickly began to amass a following. The Jokhang must have held a great significance for him, for he often made visits to see the Jowo. He eventually determined to establish a celebratory ceremony (a ‘Great Prayer,’ *Mönlam chenmo*) there and sent for donations to restore and redecorate the Jokhang. The entire building was thoroughly cleaned, the murals repainted and the images refreshed with new gilding, clothing and crowns. The celebration was a sixteen-day lavish affair run by Tsongkapa and attended by an enormous crowd of monks and laypeople.  

This ceremony, known as the Great Prayer of Lhasa, has been performed nearly every year since, though it is now directed to Tsongkapa’s image, which is also housed at the Jokhang.

The next major phase of building occurred in the 17th century under the auspices of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The Gelugpa leader, Sonam Gyatso, making a timely friendship with the powerful Mongols, who followed Tibetan-style Buddhism, was given the Mongol title of “Dalai Lama” (Ocean of Wisdom). He was the Third Dalai Lama, the title being retroactively assigned to the two Gelugpa predecessors. The fifth Dalai Lama was placed by the Mongols as the religious and political head of Tibet, thus establishing Tibet as a Mongolian protectorate of sorts. The fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang, brought peace, stability and prosperity to Tibet. He built his palatial residence on the Marpori hill of the Lhasa valley and restored many of the temples and important

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106 Pomnare, 33-35
107 Chan, 30
buildings of the Lhasa valley. The Jokhang complex was greatly expanded at this time. Many of the buildings to the west of the main temple were added and the formal walls of the Western side of the building and the Nankor (nang-skor) were erected.\textsuperscript{108} The final form of the Jokhang, including the Nangkor chapels and the government offices, was established by the mid-18\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{109} This enormous and labyrinthine complex is known as the Tsuklakhang.

The tumultuous events of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century had a direct effect on the Jokhang complex. During the 1960’s the Chinese army and the Red Guard occupied the temple. Much of the precious materials and metalwork were removed and sent to the Beijing. The building was even used as a pigsty and granary for a brief period.\textsuperscript{110} The Jokhang had been designated a Nationally Protected Monument by the Chinese government in 1962, but several restoration attempts conducted between the 1970’s and the 1990’s, did more harm than good, permanently damaging many of the old murals. More recent renovations have been conducted with greater care and the building is now in fairly good condition. In 2000, the complex was proclaimed a UNESCO World Heritage Site.\textsuperscript{111} This prestigious designation is indicative of the unique central position that this temple occupies within Tibetan culture.

\textsuperscript{108} Alexander, \textit{Temples of Lhasa}, 44
\textsuperscript{109} Alexander, \textit{Temples of Lhasa}, 44
\textsuperscript{110} Alexander, \textit{Temples of Lhasa}, 33
\textsuperscript{111} Alexander, \textit{Temples of Lhasa}, 33
3.3 THE CENTRALITY OF THE JOKHANG

The Jokhang temple can be considered a centralizing and unifying point for Tibetan spirituality and identity. As Roberto Vitali says, “The Jokhang [Lhasa Tsuklakhang] became the symbol of Tibetan culture in its role as a gallery of Tibetan Buddhism that transcended sectarian divisions.”112 The building has been patronized by all religious sects and political rulers. It is visited by Tibetan pilgrims of all walks of life. It is the heart of the Tibetan psyche not only ritually but also politically and even physically.

The Jokhang’s continuous history of restoration and enlargement can be attributed to its important position at the center of Tibetan culture. As André Alexander puts it, the renovation of the Jokhang complex became an important leitmotif of Tibetan history, as nearly every important leader and religious teacher undertook some form of refurbishment or donation to the Jokhang temple over the centuries.113 In fact, under the Ganden Po-trang government (17-20th centuries), leaders “regularly began their tenure with a restoration of the Tsukla-khang and a handful of other significant monasteries.”114 Such restorative efforts were used to bestow legitimacy on various political and religious movements. As the building of the Jokhang was believed to have been instrumental to the founding of Buddhism in Tibet, a public demonstration of dedication to the building was a show of support for the Buddhist identity of Tibet befitting its prodigious history of

112 Vitali, 69
113 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 32
114 Alexander, Temples of Lhasa, 32
spiritual leadership. Such an act also proved the religious devotion of the individual donor, thereby legitimizing all his other efforts. The Jokhang thereby provided a unifying symbol of Tibetan religious-political identity.

The Jokhang is also a physical axis of Tibetan culture. The fifth Dalai Lama made Lhasa his capital and it remained the political, religious and cultural capital of all Tibet since the 17th century. From the reign of the early Dalai Lamas on, the city grew substantially in both size and importance. It swiftly became the hub of the Tibetan national state and the prime designator of its cultural identity. At the heart of it all remained the Jokhang. The physical centrality of the Jokhang within the city was preserved even with the major building projects of the following centuries. As one looks down on Lhasa today, the Jokhang still stands at the center of the old city and the widest streets radiate out from the building as spokes from a wheel’s hub.

The Jokhang is further situated at the center of the concentric pilgrimage routes that circle the city, the kora. These circumscribe all of the holy sites of Lhasa and posit the Jokhang, the house of the Jowo, as the central focus of Lhasa’s sanctity. The Nankor, or “inner kora,” circles the immediate Jokhang building. It is a simple passage, square in shape and lined with prayer wheels and murals. The “intermediate kora,” the Balkor, surrounds the entire Tsuklakhang complex of the Jokhang. This route is composed of wide streets that are now filled, as they may always have been, with myriad shops and street vendors. The outermost ring, the Lingkor or “continental kora,” encircles all of the major temples of Old Lhasa and moves around the original confines of the city including
the three hills, Chakpori, Bhamari and Marpori.\textsuperscript{115} Still today, pilgrims may be seen walking these kora in clockwise fashion and performing prostrations along them in the hopes of gaining religious merit.

In the minds of most Tibetans, the Jokhang is located at the physical center of the entire country for it lies over the heart of the supine demoness, Srin Mo, who embodies the Tibetan landscape. This concept, visualized in wall murals dating to the 17\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{116} and in textual histories written after the 11\textsuperscript{th} century,\textsuperscript{117} is traditionally attributed to Princess Wencheng in the story of the Jokhang. Wencheng recognized the demoness through her knowledge of geomancy and dedication to Buddhism, as inherent in the very configurations of the Tibetan environment. Srin Mo is understood to be the source of chaos and wildness, an active destructor of peace and forestaller of advancement and spiritual liberation. Her effect on the people of Tibet has been averted through a suppressive act of pinning and immobilization achieved by the physical presence of architectural structures on specific points of the landscape, her very body.

The practice of geomancy, or the mystical art of reading the hidden spiritual forces within the landscape, has been a long-standing tradition of Tibetan temple building. Virtually every temple in Tibet has been erected after a careful geomantic consideration of the site and the performance of rituals designed to appease the animistic

\textsuperscript{115} Larsen, 43 and Alexander, \textit{Temples of Lhasa}, 21
\textsuperscript{116} Sorenson, \textit{Thundering Falcon}, 181
spirits of the terrain. This practice is foundational to the famous Chinese science of *feng-shui*, traces of which may exist before the Common Era. In Tibet, geomancy may have been employed even before Buddhist times in the planning of the royal tombs. Through this methodical positioning, "temples and other sacred sites are not simply places within a landscape; they act as a focus of sacred energies and commemorate the very rising of order out of chaos," as Michael Kowalewski says.

A few scholars have noted the similarity between the founding myth of the Jokhang and that of Nepal's Kathmandu Valley and the Svayambhu Mahacaitya. The Newar foundational myth tells of a great lake from which a divine lotus arose which emitted a sacred self-arisen light. This lake was drained by the bodhisattva Manjusri and the light-form was encased in the great *stupa*, Svayambhu Mahacaitya. This monument is the premier location of the sacred Buddhist character of the Kathmandu valley and the center to which all Newar shrines refer. It is the vivifier, or bringer and locator of divine presence, that allows for the practice of Buddhism within the region. This is of course very similar to the function of the Jokhang, also a divinely arisen monument that has come from a lake. It too serves as a center of Buddhist divinity that imbues the

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123 Huntington, *Circle of Bliss*, 30-31
region, indeed the country, with sacred power. Thus the Jokhang is the premier center of sanctity that vivifies all subsequent Buddhist endeavors in Tibet. It is located at the heart, both literally and figuratively, of Tibet's overtly Buddhist identity.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

4.1 A RE-EXAMINATION OF THE JOKHANG LEGEND

As it appears now, Tibetan culture is inextricably linked to the seemingly ubiquitous practice of Buddhism. Traditional Tibetan textual histories and legends reflect this tendency. They are all informed by their authors’ views that place the world into a distinctly Buddhist context. Though Songsten Gampo allegedly brought writing to Tibet, few surviving written documents pre-date the 11th century. Nearly all traditional histories seem to have been formalized after the second advent of Buddhism. In light of this upsurge of Buddhism, the old history of the Tibetan region was recast in a manner that made Buddhism the rightful and inevitable historical force. In the minds of the Tibetan historians, the “destiny of the Buddha’s teaching and that of the Tibetan people themselves [were] realized to be inextricably linked.” 124 Thus the ‘historical’ texts written between the 12th and 14th centuries tend to bear the marks of “the religio-historical


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polemic that was elaborated by Tibetan Buddhists in the early post-imperial period.”

This overtly Buddhist redefinition of history may partially explain the legendary story of the Jokhang, as Vitali notes, “since the time of its foundation, the history of the Jo.khang [Jokhang] has been related with the legendary overtones that are so typical of Tibetan culture.”

The traditional legend of the Jokhang places the temple and its founders in an overtly Buddhist context. Eva Dargyay, in her essay “Srong-btsan sGampo-po of Tibet: Bodhisattva and King,” discusses the mystical nature of traditional Tibetan histories and biographies. As she says, “Tibetans felt that the very nature of a ruler’s personality did not come forth in his political deeds but in his spiritual aspirations,” and thus in textual accounts, political and temporal acts are irrelevant “compared with the manifestation of the divine,” and “sacred reality [dominates] over the temporal sphere.”

Songsten Gampo’s role in the creation of the Jokhang is therefore rendered divine rather than simply political or diplomatic. He is elevated in Tibetan belief to a high religious status equated with the Buddhist bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and connected directly to the sacred founding of the temple. Therefore in traditional accounts, Songsten Gampo was given the consciously Buddhist title of the “First Dharma-king” and the Jokhang was described as the first physical marker of the coming Buddhist era.

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125 Kapstein, 33
126 Vitali, 69
The story of pinning the demoness with the Jokhang edifice is another religious contextualization of the Jokhang and its importance within Tibetan culture. This story closely resembles the tale of Padmasambhava, who not long after the building of the Jokhang is supposed to have further quelled the spirits inhospitable toward Buddhism. He is believed to have ritually cast the *kila*, a dagger-like religious implement, thereby pinning all the hostile demon forces present in Tibet and allowing Buddhism to flourish. Both stories describe the pre-Buddhist state of Tibet as one of chaos and immorality, an intrinsic quality that is dispelled by the coming of the Buddhist order. The reality is that the first Buddhists entering Tibet may have encountered resistance to the new religion from the Bön adherents who dominated the religious landscape. Buddhism was a initially a foreign tradition, but through later retellings it was made to appear Tibetan. Thus, traditional stories recast the early times in a light that proclaimed the eventual triumph of Buddhism. As the Jokhang became central to the region in the 11th century and rose to a national centrality in the following centuries, the notion of its geomantic positioning can be understood as an attempt to reassign its later cultural significance to the date of its founding, thereby knitting the burgeoning national identity together with Buddhism. As André Alexander says, "the contribution of Wen-cheng’s geomancy [as understood in traditional histories] was to ‘Tibetanize’ the foreign Tsukla-khang (and thus the foreign Buddhist religion) by linking it through her cosmological scheme with a Tibetan national ideology that helped to define the [later] empire.” The Jokhang’s central place in Tibet’s religio-cultural identity was thus borne out by its supposed divine origins.

128 Alexander, *Temples of Lhasa*, 69
The mystical aspects of the Jokhang legend, ignored by many scholars, seem to be a product of later attitudes that placed all earlier events into a Buddhist context. Religious contextualization is however, not the only motive behind the development of the story. Much of it would seem to be subtly political in nature. From the physical and historical evidence it is clear that the Jokhang is primarily Nepalese in fashion and that the Chinese princess was very likely not yet in Lhasa at its completion. It would seem that Wencheng had little to do with the establishment of the Jokhang. Why then would Tibetan historians give her a role so fundamental to the temple’s creation? It may be that promoting Wencheng’s participation, as a vital part of the establishing of Tibet’s Buddhist identity was a politically motivated choice, a possible attempt to carry favor with the Chinese and to proclaim early connections between Tibet and China.

Political relations between Tibet and China have been sporadic through the centuries. After the end of the T’ang dynasty in the early 10th century and for the next three centuries, direct exchange between the Chinese government and Tibetan rulers was virtually nonexistent.129 According to H.E. Richardson, “the link between Peking and Tibet came into being only through the conquest of China by a foreign power which had already been accepted by the Tibetans as their overlord.”130 These were the Mongols, who, as mentioned earlier, established Tibetan fealty by appointing the fifth Dalai Lama as head of state. During the Ming dynasty, relations between China and Tibet were fairly close, each exerting a certain amount of political influence over the other. At this time Tibetan ‘tribute missions’ were sent to the Chinese government with gifts, and the

130 Richardson, Short History of Tibet, 36
Chinese court reciprocated with gifts of silks, tea and porcelain (technically of greater worth). These were not only diplomatic ventures but commercially profitable ones for Tibetans, finally the Chinese were eventually forced to curtail the frequency of such missions for financial reasons. These missions, as a display of friendship between Tibet and China, showed the importance of Tibet as China was traditionally viewed in Asia as a civilization of “ancient prestige” and grandeur. During the Qing dynasty Tibet fell gradually under the direct control of Chinese authority. Because of the increasing political closeness of Tibet and China, it seems likely that Wencheng’s role was enhanced as a way of promoting Chinese participation in Tibetan history. Though the traditional legend is a beautiful and fascinating story, it is actually a heavily politicized one that has been constructed according to later cultural and political needs.

4.2 CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Upon hearing the legend of the Jokhang, one might assume, as many have, that the tale has some historical merit scattered amongst its multiple mystical occurrences. The tradition ascribes the building to Songsten Gampo and his two queens, each of whom allegedly played a direct role in the building process. The supernatural aspects used by these persons, chiefly Songsten Gampo and Wencheng, leaves one with a sense of historical unease. While the traditional story is integral to the Tibetan understanding of the temple, it may reflect later cultural and political biases rather than represent a historical reality. Though there are basically no contemporaneous Tibetan sources to use

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131 Richardson, *Short History of Tibet*, 36-37
132 Richardson, *Short History of Tibet*, 37
for historical evidence, one may turn to the building itself. The structure and decoration of the building provide, by comparative examples, a clear indication of foreign building methods and stylistic influences.

The Jokhang is essentially an Indic vihara. As was shown here, it most closely resembles the Nepalese vihara, or bahi, exemplified by the ancient Chabahil of Kathmandu. The carved wooden decorative elements, proved to be original to the Jokhang, further substantiate the Nepalese connection. As several scholars have indicated, the doorframes, posts and beam-ends resemble general Indic decorative schemes, but the specific method of relief carving is nearly identical to that of Licchavī-era Nepal. Thus, by its physical appearance, the Jokhang would seem to be built by, or under the supervision of, Nepalese craftsmen.

This is substantiated by historical facts, gleaned mostly from foreign historical accounts. These facts show that during Songsten Gampo's reign, while Tibet maintained only rather distant relations with the Chinese, an extremely close relationship existed between the Nepalese and Tibetan courts. According to Roberto Vitali, the Nepalese king and his court even stayed in the Lhasa area for a number of years as exiles. The Jokhang, almost certainly built during this stay, may have therefore been erected by Nepalese court craftsmen for the express use of the Nepalese court while in Tibet.

Having assembled these facts, the story of the building of the Jokhang, which gives primacy to the Chinese queen, therefore appears to be apocryphal. It is a reflection of the later attitudes that came to be associated with the Jokhang. Over the years the temple complex grew as did the temple's significance. The Jokhang was originally a Buddhist building of the vihara-type, intended for monastic activities. Clearly, it had
become, at least since the eleventh century, a place for veneration and pilgrimage, more along the lines of a traditional *stupa*. Important teachers arriving in Lhasa, including Atisa and Tsongkapa, promoted the sacred character of the Jokhang through veneration and ritual. Tibetan leaders used Jokhang renovation projects to enhance their public status and to show their own religious devotion. The temple became central to the national Buddhist identity of Tibet. It was physically at the center of Lhasa and Tibet, and it was also understood to be central to the establishment of Buddhism.

The central place occupied by the Jokhang in Tibet’s national political-religious identity may have informed the tellings of its mythical foundation. It is likely that in the intervening years between the erection of the Jokhang and the coming of Atisa and the second diffusion of Buddhism, the original purpose of the building along with its more accurate history was lost and its early history was recreated, one that placed the Jokhang at its rightful place in the center of Tibetan politics and religion. The founding myth therefore took on a specific religious nature. The Jokhang became integrally connected to the establishment and florescence of Buddhism in Tibet. The miraculous happenings of the story explained the Buddhist nature of the event, the sacredness of the building itself and the divinity of the people involved in its creation. The story justified and explained the religious and cultural centrality of the building. It also fulfilled changing cultural and political needs by highlighting the Chinese Princess Wencheng and downplaying the Nepalese Bhrikuti. This may have been due to the changing political climate. China had steadily become the more dominant force in the region and the Nepalese connection to the Jokhang faded somewhat in the memory of Tibetans.
The legendary story of the Jokhang, initially unsettling to the suspicious scholarly mind, actually provides profound insight into the evolving attitudes that form the traditional perception of the temple. As Roberto Vitali says, “Though full of fantastic narrative, its history well demonstrates the peculiar role that the temple has played in Tibetan tradition. If the Jokhang is the holiest of the holy from a devotional point of view, it is the epitome of Tibetan religious life from the historical perspective.”\footnote{Vitali, 69} And so the story becomes clear. The Jokhang, certainly a Nepalese creation, has taken on the role as primary unifier of Tibetan religious, cultural and political identity. It is a building of massive import, which through its legend, history and appearance tells the tale of Buddhism in Tibet.
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APPENDIX:

FIGURES
1. Jokhang, exterior, current state.

2. Plan of the Tsuklakhang complex, roof level, current state.
3. Plan of the Tsuklakhang, first floor, current state.

4. Jokhang, main entrance, current state.
5. Jokhang, plan, first floor, 7th century.

6. Jokhang, plan, showing the swastika pattern.
7. Jokhang, plan, second floor, current state.

8. Jokhang, exterior façade, current state.

10. Ajanta Cave 1, India, plan, 5th century.
11. Nalanda 1A, India, plan, 6th century

12. Charumati bahi, Nepal, plan, first floor, date uncertain
13. Chabahil, Nepal, courtyard and South wing, date uncertain.

15. Plan of the Ramoché, first floor, current state.

16. Ramoché, exterior façade, current state.
17. Jowo statue, Jokhang, Lhasa, date unknown.

18. T-style door frame, Jokhang, Lhasa, 7th century.
19. Door frame flanking main shrine, Second floor, Jokhang, Lhasa, 7th century.

20. Door frame to the Jowo shrine, Jokhang, Lhasa, 7th century.
21. Door, Udayagiri cave 6, India, 1st century.

22. Door of Visnu temple, Deogarh, India, 6th century.
23. Painted ceiling, Ajanta cave 2, India, 5th century.


27. Column from façade, Ajanta Cave 19, India, 5th century.

28. Interior elevation, Jokhang, Lhasa, present state.
29. Interior, Ajanta Cave 4, India, 5th century.

30. Lion balustrade, interior, Jokhang, Lhasa, 7th century.
31. Lion beam-ends, interior, Jokhang, Lhasa, 7th century.

32. Lion decoration, Ali Masjid, exterior, Gandhara, 3-5th century.
33. Interior of Ajanta cave 26, India, 5th century.

34. Interior and “beam-end” balustrade detail, Ajanta Cave 26, India, 5th century
35. Lion detail from sculptural relief, Ajanta Cave 6, India, 5th century

36. Carved doorframe, upper floor, Jokhang, 7th century.
37. Relief panel from second floor door lower lintel, Jokhang, Lhasa, 7th century.

38. Relief panel from second floor door upper lintel, Jokhang, Lhasa, 7th century.
39. Relief panel from door lintel, Jokhang, Lhasa, 7th century.

40. Relief panel, Darbar Square, Nepal, Licchavi, 7th century.
41. Siva relief panel, Nepal, Licchavi.

42. Stone caitya base, Patan, Nepal, Licchavi.

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43. Plan of the Jokhang, 7-9th centuries.

44. Plan of the Jokhang complex, late 11th century.

45. Plan of the Jokhang, 17-18th centuries.
46. Aerial photo of Old Lhasa, taken by satellite in 1965, red box indicates the Jokhang complex.

47. The Balkor and Nankor, Lhasa.
47. The outer two kora routes of Lhasa (the star indicates the Jokhang).

48. The Sûrine Demoness (srin mo); * represents the Jokhang.