

Representing Prajñāpāramitā in Nako Himachal Pradesh India

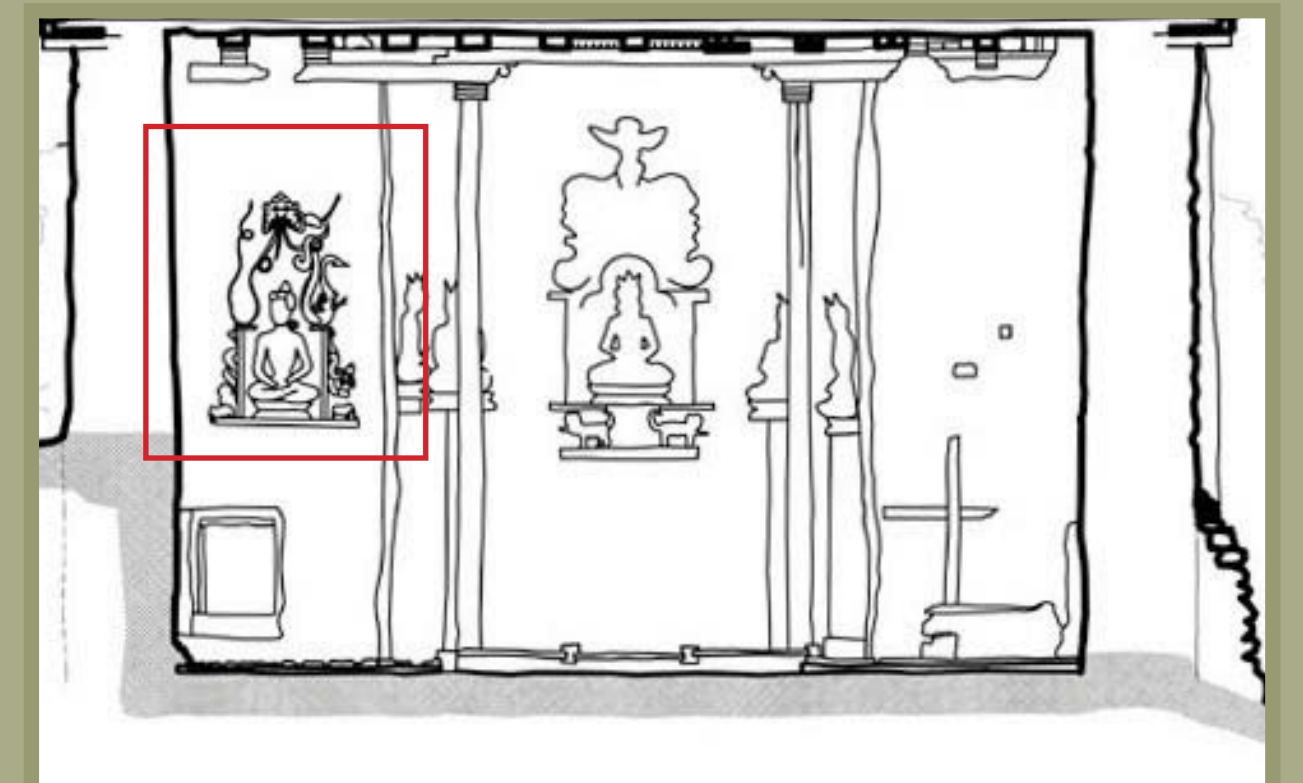
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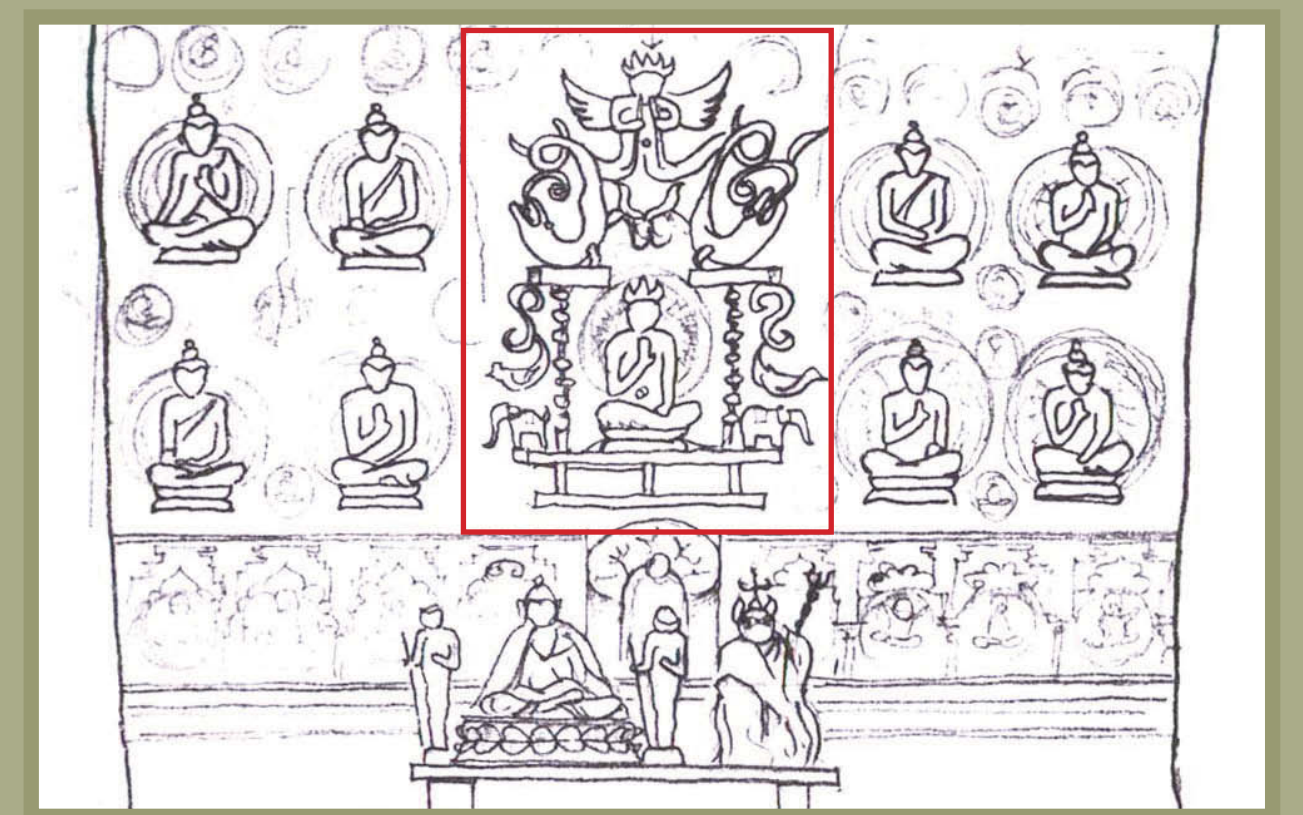
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Description

The village of Nako lies in Upper Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh, India, 3.550 m above sea level. The Buddhist compound consists of four temples. Two of these temples, the Lo tsa ba lha khang and the Lha khang gong ma, still preserve painting and sculpture from the period of their founding. The main walls of both temples show monumental images of a goddess.

The clay sculpture (figure 1) in the Lo tsa ba lha khang was first identified as Prajñāpāramitā by Tucci (Tucci and Gherzi 1934: 146). The image of the goddess in the Lha khang gong ma (which lies opposite the Lo tsa ba lha khang) was identified as Prajñāpāramitā by Luczanits (2004: 84, 215).

Iconographic Concept

In both temples, the monumentality of the statues of Prajñāpāramitā, the power of their visual language and their iconography are unusual (figure 3, figure 4).

Conceptual parallels between the images at Nako and the iconography of the configuration from the temple of rKyang bu in South-/Central Tibet (figure 2) are especially remarkable. Both show two related representations of Prajñāpāramitā within the temple compound.

The aim of this poster is to present and discuss the iconographic concept whereby two related images of Prajñāpāramitā are displayed together. Surviving sculptures of this Goddess in a similar iconographic context have not yet been identified. Comparable depictions can only be found in manuscript illumination.

Conclusion

At Nako, the representations of Prajñāpāramitā, their specific forms and their unique iconography and position must have been to some extent related to developments not only in India and West Tibet – as has been already outlined in past research – but also to developments in central Tibet.

A central Tibetan connection requires further investigation that focuses not only on the historical significance, but also – as has been made clear here – on the diffusion of religious ideas and their corresponding iconographic models.

Pictures:

- 1 Nako, Lo tsa ba lha khang, after Luczanits 2004, p. 81.
- 2 rKyang bu, after Von Schroeder 2001, p. 848.
- 3 Nako, Lo tsa ba lha khang, NRPP, RKDS 2002.
- 4 Nako, Lha khang gong ma, NRPP, RKDS 2002.