

Franz-Karl Ehrhard & Petra Maurer (Hrsg.)

NEPALICA-TIBETICA
FESTGABE FOR CHRISTOPH CÜPPERS

BAND 2



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IITBS

International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies GmbH

Franz-Karl Ehrhard & Petra Maurer (Hrsg.)
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FESTGABE FOR CHRISTOPH CÜPPERS
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Herausgegeben von
Franz-Karl Ehrhard & Petra Maurer

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ALTERING THE IMMUTABLE:
TEXTUAL EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF AN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF THE
SVAYAMBHŪ CAITYA OF KATHMANDU

Alexander von Rospatt

This paper is a small, largely text-based contribution to the architectural history of the Svayambhū caitya (nowadays commonly known as Svayambhūnāth) located about a mile to the west of Kathmandu on top of a hillock known in Newari as *Seṃgu* or *Segu*, or a variation thereof (see plate 1). It draws upon my extensive research of priestly records and inscriptions documenting past renovations of Svayambhū,¹ as well as my study of architectural drawings and select Tibetan sources, notably biographies (*rmam thar*) and descriptive guides (*dkar chag*). This research was guided by my interest in the rituals performed when renovating the caitya, and my concern for the historical circumstances and social dimension of these renovations, extending to such areas as local and Tibetan sponsorship, the organization of the priesthood, the participation of the local Newar community, the control exercised by the king, and so on (see von Rospatt, forthcoming). Here, by contrast, I want to focus on the structure of the Svayambhū caitya, and on the ways in which it was physically modified over the centuries. Instead of offering a comprehensive architectural history (which the sources do not allow for), I want to draw upon my mentioned studies² and discuss some of the changes the caitya underwent, and shed, to the degree possible, light on their circumstances. I will focus on the considerable increase in height of the Svayambhū caitya during the Malla era, and on the addition of a fifth Buddha image set in a niche of its own in the dome some three hundred years ago. This is to offer a different perspective and supplement with new data Bernhard Kölver's (1992) study of a set of 18th and 19th century architectural drawings of the Svayambhū caitya, which provide minute measurements of the different parts of the caitya. I have chosen this topic as a small tribute to the jubilarian Christoph Cüppers—to whom I am grateful for his support and friendship ever since he first welcomed me to Nepal 25 years ago—and his enduring interests in art and architecture, and Newar culture.

* * *

The Svayambhū caitya is the most important shrine of the Buddhist tradition of the Kathmandu valley, where—uniquely—Indic Buddhism survives in its original South Asian setting with Sanskrit as its sacred language. The beginnings of Svayambhū are not recorded, but it seems likely that the caitya dates back to the middle of the first millennium,³ and possibly beyond to the early centuries of the Common Era, for it is likely that the hillock was an important sacred place that was transformed into a Buddhist sanctuary upon the advent of Buddhism in the Valley.⁴ We

¹ I use the term “renovation” in a non-technical way to refer to a radical intervention in the process of which almost all of the caitya but the dome was newly rebuilt.

² For all primary sources cited in this paper—except for “manuscripts A, B and C” published in Kölver 1992 and the versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* adduced below—see von Rospatt 2011 and von Rospatt forthcoming. I here reference these sources in the way I do in those two publications, and for want of space refrain from offering bibliographical details in the notes or in the bibliography at the end.

I studied most of the sources adduced here with the help of Kashinath Tamot, a seasoned expert of Newar language and culture, whose generosity and learnedness has been a constant source of inspiration not only for me but also for other Western scholars, including Christoph Cüppers, who collaborated with Mr. Tamot in the publication of *A Tibetan-Newari Lexicon Cum Phrase Book* (1996). I am also much indebted to Brandon Dotson for proofreading this paper and for providing valuable feedback and suggestions. Likewise I thank Niels Gutschow for his fruitful comments on parts of this paper and for acquainting me with Kurt Boeck's little known travelogue and its valuable photos taken at the very end of the 19th century. Furthermore, I am grateful to Hubert Decler for providing feedback and corrections to an early draft of this paper.

³ See von Rospatt 2011, pp. 161-3, and Bangdel 2011, 275f.

⁴ I have argued this point in detail in von Rospatt 2009.

have no records from the first millennium that would reveal how the caitya initially looked. However, there are four stone panels surviving on the drum of the caitya's dome. Art historians have dated them to the 7th and 8th centuries (see plates 2a, 2b, and 3).⁵ Since the renovation of 1918 these panels are concealed below the niches of the five Buddhas, which were then rebuilt and extended outwards beyond the plinth. However, the panels are visible below each of the four Buddha niches in the cardinal directions, in openings left for that purpose. In the east, south and west the panels depict in bas-relief a pair of flanking deer framing the central object, namely a *vajra* in the east below Akṣobhya, an eight-spoked wheel in the south below Ratnasambhava (plate 2a), and a lotus flower, nowadays barely visible, below Amitābha. In the north there is a deity with his partner seated upon coiled serpents (plate 2b). The right hand is broken off but might have displayed the protection granting gesture (*abhaya mudrā*), which would be in conformity with the iconography of Amoghasiddhi, the Buddha of the north whose niche has been built over this panel. Also note that in the Newar tradition Amoghasiddhi is often identified with the lord of serpents—so, for instance, in chronicle 2 (163r8), where he is identified as Vasikadeva, i.e. the serpent deity king Vāsuki. As Bangdel (2011) has pointed out, the presence of the lineage symbols for Akṣobhya and Amitābha, the *vajra* and lotus, and the theme under the Amoghasiddhi shrine suggests that already at the time of the panels' installation, possibly in the 7th/8th century, the iconographic program of the caitya had been tantrically configured, though the slab below Ratnasambhava with the wheel of the dharma flanked by two deer is a much older, pre-tantric theme representing the preaching scene at Sarnath where the Buddha set the wheel of teaching in motion (see plate 2b).

The oldest visual representation of Svayambhū I am aware of dates back nearly a thousand years. It comes in the form of an illuminated manuscript from 1071 C.E. that bears depictions of sacred Buddhist sites across the Indian subcontinent. The miniature looks like the generic depiction of a small caitya, built of solid stones, of the kind commonly labeled “votive” in academic parlance (see plate 4). It bears no resemblance to the caitya's present appearance and can only be identified by way of its caption *nepāle śvayambhūcaitraḥ*. Judging by its script, the manuscript looks to be a Nepalese production. Even so, it seems that the image does not capture the appearance Svayambhū had back then, but instead depicts the generic form of a small caitya built of carved stones. At any rate, it is clear that the caitya as it has appeared since at least the 13th century—relevant extant records do not date back beyond that century—could hardly be more different from the depiction in the illuminated manuscript.

As we learn from the Tibetan account of the mid-13th century renovation of Svayambhū (for details see von Rospatt 2011, pp. 163-167), the caitya already then had as its central feature the pole (known in Tibetan as “life tree” [*srog shing*] and in Sanskrit as *yaṣṭi*, whence Newari *yaḥsi*) traversing the structure from the dome to the crowning parasol (*chattra*), which is also mentioned in that account. The *yaṣṭi* newly installed during that renovation was a replacement—supposedly of the pole set up originally by 'Phags-pa Klu-sgrub, i.e. Ārya Nāgārjuna—which suggests that already before the 13th century the Svayambhū caitya looked more like the present-day structure than the depiction of the illuminated manuscript. Reinforcing this impression, we learn from the Nepalese inscription recording the 14th century renovation (cf. von Rospatt 2011, pp. 168f.) that the caitya was also fitted with gilded rings (*cakrāvalī*) and adorned with a crystal (*sphuṭita*) and a staff surmounted by a gem (*ratnoṣṇīśadaṇḍa*) and studded with every kind of jewel (*viśvamaṇikhacita*), as well as a golden (that is, gold-plated) finial (*suvarṇakalaśa*), banners (*dhvaja*), and golden struts (*suvarṇadaṇḍa*), presumably to support the crowning honorific parasol (*chattra*) also mentioned.

These descriptions suggest that already at the beginning of the Malla era (which starts at 1200 CE) the Svayambhū caitya had assumed the principal features that still define its appearance today. It is also noteworthy that none of the records from the 13th and 14th century (nor, for that

⁵ See Bangdel 2011: 278 and the plates of the four panels reproduced on p. 280, Slusser 1985: 7, and Wiesner 1976: 175f. It is noteworthy that the caityas of Tukam Bāhā in Kathmandu (cf. Gutschow 1997, pp. 38f.), and of Cā Bahī to the east of Kathmandu are adorned by similar panels below the niches of the four Buddhas of the cardinal directions.

matter, any later or earlier Newar sources I am aware of) make any mention of relics that might have been enshrined in the Svayambhū caitya.⁶ Arguably this could have to do with the mythical origins of Svayambhū and the belief that the divine principle of buddhahood that manifested itself spontaneously in the form of light upon a lotus flower is now encased within the Svayambhū caitya. However, the *Svayambhūpurāna* in which this myth is related presumably dates back only to the early 15th century, though it incorporates materials earlier than that.⁷ At any rate, rather than pointing to the myth as a substitute for relics it is more pertinent and to the point that caityas/stūpas in the Newar tradition in general do not house relics. Instead of corporeal remains or contact relics or dharma scriptures, the principle of buddhahood is made manifest by employing elaborate tantric rituals that imbue the given caitya with the presence of the five Buddhas of the Yogatantras, who collectively embody the qualities of buddhahood and render it present.⁸

While we can assert with some confidence that the Svayambhū caitya as it stood some eight centuries ago resembles the present-day structure, it is also clear that the caitya underwent major modifications and changes during these 800 years and now looks very different from what it must have looked like then. Just consider the difference in appearance between the caitya now and at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century (cp. plates 1, 3, 5 and 8), even though the intervening renovation of 1918 that changed its face did not even involve an exchange of the *yaṣṭi* and left much of the structure intact. Typically major changes and alterations were effected at the time of renovating the caitya.⁹ Extensive renovations lent themselves to this because they involved the replacement of the *yaṣṭi*. This in turn entailed the dismantling of the entire structure above the dome, which after the installation of the new *yaṣṭi* was rebuilt from scratch with new materials. The relevant handbooks on renovation (*jīrṇoddhāra*) as found in Newar Buddhist works as well as in Śaiva, Śākta and Vaiṣṇava scriptures allow for change though they stipulate that the replacement structure may not be inferior but has to be of equal size or bigger, and needs to be made of the same or more valuable materials.¹⁰ This prescription has opened the door for upgrading the caitya, so that renovations came to serve as windows of opportunity to introduce changes to the design and update the structure, i.e., to accommodate it to doctrinal and other developments. In the following I want to turn to some specific instances exemplifying this

⁶ In a talk delivered in 2011 in Nepal Prof. John Huntington has proposed to identify the Svayambhū caitya with the stūpa of Rāmagrāma. This stūpa is believed to be the sole of the eight original stūpas, bearing the corporeal remains of the Buddha divided up by Droṇa, that was not opened by Aśoka. Huntington is currently preparing a paper in which he lays out his argument, but he has generously shared the power point presentation of his mentioned talk. Whatever the merits of his hypothesis may be, the accounts of the periodic renovations of the Svayambhū caitya I studied bear out that at least since the 14th century the Svayambhū caitya has not been conceived of as a relic shrine. The absence of any mention of relics is particularly significant given that the caitya's renovations entail the dismantling of the entire superstructure above the dome, and the opening of the dome itself in order to allow for the exchange of the *yaṣṭi* planted in its innermost core. Also, the cross section of the dome offered by the drawing of manuscript C shows that the dome is built up out of alternating layers of brickwork and earth, without allowing for space that could serve as a relic chamber. At any rate, the ritual accounts of the Svayambhū caitya's past renovations attest that since at least the 14th century it has been treated as a Vajrayāna caitya that functions as a shrine of buddhahood (*buddhālaya*) not because of the relics it contains but because of the qualities with which it is infused through mantras and by other ritual means.

⁷ Cf. von Rospatt 2009, pp. 50-8.

⁸ Cf. von Rospatt 1999.

⁹ The most important exception to his rule, at least for the Malla era, is Pratāpa Malla (reigned 1641-1674) who, though not involved in a renovation of the caitya, transformed the face of the site of Svayambhū (but not of the caitya itself). His activities include the establishment of the two *sikhara* style temples that flank the Svayambhū caitya and give the site its distinct appearance (see plate 7). He also set up the dharmadhātu maṇḍala with the superimposed *vajra* on the eastern side of the caitya, crowning the steep staircase that leads up to the top of the hillock (see plate 3). Less visible but even more important is his intervention at the tantric shrine of Śāntipur, where he had the walls of the vestibule painted with the *Svayambhūpurāna* (see von Rospatt 2013).

¹⁰ For details and pertinent textual material see von Rospatt, forthcoming, § 4.1.

process. The focus here is on interventions that altered the structure of the caitya rather than on more peripheral changes such as the shields (Newari: *halampati*) attached to the cube (*harmikā*) above the dome, which were redesigned at the mid-18th century renovation, or the enlargement and refurbishing of the niches and the installation of prayer wheels at the renovation of 1918. I also do not deal with alterations to the caitya's design that I cannot document. An example is the number of massive rings mounted above the *harmikā* and extending to just below the honorific *chattra*. I regard it as certain that the Svayambhū caitya was not always crowned by thirteen rings. This is also suggested by the prominent examples of archaic caityas having fewer rings, such as the Pulāṃ Semgu caitya (see plate 6), which only has nine rings (and which also lacks the images of Vairocana and of the four goddesses of the intermediate directions who are only represented by way of empty niches). However, I have no material that would document on which occasions the number of rings was increased to reach the standard number of thirteen also found in the case of most other Newar caityas. Hence, I do not pursue this theme here.

I will first deal with the increase of the caitya's size, which in circa the 14th/15th century was apparently more than a third smaller (lower) than in the second half of the 17th century, by which time it had assumed its current height. My starting point for this is an undated note in the Newari language added in a second hand to the colophon of an undated palm leaf Sanskrit manuscript, with the title *Stūpalakṣaṇakārikāvivecana*, preserved in the National Archives of Kathmandu.¹¹ It records the measurements for the *yaṣṭi* of the Svayambhū caitya as given in the table below. Significantly, it does not only provide the total length of the *yaṣṭi* (35 cubits, 5 fingers and 7 barley grains), but also gives a breakdown of its segments, correlating it to the portions of the caitya enclosing it.¹² This starts with the portion resting inside the dome; it continues with the segments traversing the cube above the dome, the *harmikā*, and the plaster cornice just above; and it finishes with the *yaṣṭi*'s upper half, rising above the *harmikā* and the cornice.¹³ This allows for a rough approximation of the overall proportions of the caitya at that time, as rendered in the drawing below. The measurements recorded in this note can be supplemented by two similar measurements, both likewise undated, which have been added from an unidentified source to a more recent *thyāsaphū* manuscript (possibly dating to the late 18th or early 19th century) belonging to the late Puṣparatna Bajracharya of Kathmandu. The two measurements from the *thyāsaphū* give the length of the *yaṣṭi* respectively as 34 cubits and 2 fingers (recto p. 9, line 7), and as 33 cubits and 9 fingers (verso p. 10, lines 2f.). The latter measurement is accompanied by a breakdown of the different portions that also identifies the length of the *yaṣṭi* protruding beyond the rings.¹⁴ The former measurement is added in a different hand to a gap in the manuscript and

¹¹ This text, but not the gloss with the measurements, has been studied by Gustav Roth (1980, 193-196).

¹² For a detailed description of the structural elements of the Nepalese caitya see the section "A guide to terms and structural elements relating to a caitya" in Gutschow 1997, pp. 16-24.

¹³ Post-colophon note to *Stūpalakṣaṇakārikāvivecana* (National Archive, Kathmandu Accession no. 3-366, NGMPP reel no. A 969/13): "[The length] of the *yaṣṭi* of Syemgu [measured] with the thumb [as base unit] is 35 cubits, 5 fingers and 7 barley grains in total. [Of this] 9 cubits are in the dome (*pvāta*), 5 in the *harmikā* (*gala*), 3 in the plaster cornice (above) (for *damade*), and the height above this (i.e. the segment corresponding to the rings and the section towering above) (measures) the (remaining) 18 cubits, 5 fingers and 7 barley grains." (*syamgu-yā yitasi-yā jeṭana ku 35 aṃguli nā 5 yava hṃasa 7 sa-aṃkana ghāva*|| *pvāta-sa ku 9, ku 5 gala-sa, ku 3 damade, thaṃ dhu ucaku 18 aṃ 5 yava hnata 7 pramāneti madhyamādi-kramena*|| I have not translated *madhyamādi-kramena* after *iti*; my reading of this phrase is uncertain. It may refer to the method of giving the *yaṣṭi*'s length by segments.)

¹⁴ *Thyāsaphū* of Puṣparatna Bajracharya p. 10,1-3: "The size of the twice glorious Svayambhū with the thumb (as unit) is 33 cubits 9 fingers. Breaking it down in segments: (the part) above the plaster cornice (between the *harmikā* and the lowest ring) equals half (of the *yaṣṭi*'s length); 9 cubits are in the dome (*pvāta*), 6 in the *harmikā*, 3 in the plaster cornice (above), and 3 cubits (measures the *yaṣṭi*'s segment) above the myrobalan ring (which leaves 12 cubits and 9 fingers for the section traversing the 13 rings." (*śrī śrī syamguyā yitasiṃ pramāṇa jeṣṭhāgulina śuyasva ku 33 aṃgu 9*|| *thvatena bhāga the damade phūsana vachī pvāta ku 9, gala ku 6, damade svamku 3, aṃvasālāna thaṃ svaku 3*||)

cannot be dated. By contrast, the latter measurement is given in the same hand on the same page as a brief record of the renovation of the caitya and the raising of a new *yaṣṭi* in 1412 (see von Rospatt 2011, 169-171). Given that the measurement is registered in conjunction with the renovation's record, and given that the language employed for the record and the measurement match closely—they both refer to the *yaṣṭi* as *śrī śrī syaṃguyā yitasim/yilasim*—it is most likely that the measurement refers to the *yaṣṭi* erected in 1412.

While the breakdown of the different segments of the *yaṣṭi* of 1412 confirms that the lower nine cubits of the *yaṣṭi* were inserted in the dome, the other details are not in close agreement with the measurements offered by the note added to the *Stūpalakṣaṇakārikāvivecana* manuscript. Possibly the measurements recorded in the palm leaf manuscript and the *thyāsaphū* deviate from each other because they were taken at different stages in the caitya's history and refer to different *yaṣṭis*. If so, the early script of the note to the *Stūpalakṣaṇakārikāvivecana* points to an earlier rather than later renovation than the one of 1412. A plausible candidate would be the renovation completed in 1372 when the caitya was extensively rebuilt and refurbished after it had been raided and torched by the troops of Shams ud-dīn in 1349 (see von Rospatt 2011, 168f.).

These older measurements can be compared to detailed historical measurements of the Svayambhū caitya dating to the renovations from the end of the 17th, the beginning and middle of the 18th, and the beginning of the 19th centuries. They are recorded in historical architectural drawings and in priestly accounts of these renovations. One drawing (Kölver's "manuscript A" and its copy "manuscript B")¹⁵ gives, part by part, the measurements of the caitya taken after the renovations completed in 1712 and 1817 C.E. (see the table below).¹⁶ The total length of the *yaṣṭi* given, viz. 48 cubits and 7 fingers,¹⁷ accords with the measurement given in chronicle 3 (18r4f),¹⁸ which records the renovation completed in 1758 (and which I have reproduced and translated in my monograph on the renovations of Svayambhū). There is another closely related set of measurements that gives the length of the *yaṣṭi* as 47½ cubits and 4 fingers; i.e., it has the *yaṣṭi* being 15 fingers (= 28.6 cm) shorter.¹⁹ It is found in manuscript YB54 chronicling the renovation of 1681–1683 and hence precedes the records of mss. A and B by thirty years. It is likewise found in chronicle 2 (156v2) recording the renovation completed in 1712, and in Kölver's "manuscript C" recording the measurements taken at the renovation concluded in 1758,²⁰ as well as in a further chronicle of that latter renovation.²¹ In addition it is recorded with a slight deviation of 2 fingers in a *thyāsaphū* of the Norwegian Schøyen Collection (manuscript number 2460) that bears the date *saṃvat* 960 (= C.E. 1839/40).²² Despite the (maximum) deviation of 15

¹⁵ There are two copies of this drawing. They have been transmitted in two different manuscripts published in Kölver 1992, as "manuscript A" and "manuscript B."

¹⁶ In manuscripts A and B the *yaṣṭi*'s length is given in total (L&R 51) and by four portions (L&R 2, 37, 49, 50), which add up to the same total. Hence the portions must cover the entire length without overlapping or leaving a gap. The measured portions are 1) the top portion above the tiers (L&R 2, 4½ cubits, 8 [7] fingers), 2) the portion below which is surrounded by the thirteen tiers (L&R 37, 21 cubits, 1 finger), 3) the portion below this down to the point where the dome and neck meet (L&R 49, 11 cubits, 5 fingers), 4) the portion within the dome (L&R 50, likewise 11 cubits, 5 fingers). Cf. Kölver 1992, pp. 45-51.

¹⁷ Manuscripts A and B, L&R 51 as given in Kölver 1992, pp. 48 and 51.

¹⁸ There is a difference of a few millimeters but this owes to the fact that chronicle 3 breaks down the measurement to barley grains (48 cubits, 6 fingers and 4 barley grains).

¹⁹ This set of measurements is at odds with Kölver's claim (1992, p. 72) that "the mss unanimously give (the length of the central beam) as 48 cubits 7 fingers." It is unclear whether the (slight) deviation owes to different modes of calculating and working with a single original measurement and possible inexactitude in that process, or whether there were actually two separate sets of measurements taken at different times independently of each other.

²⁰ Manuscript C, E 15 as given in Kölver 1992, p. 58.

²¹ Svayambhūvajradeva's chronicle 27,6-28,1.

²² The drawing of the Svayambhū caitya in the Schøyen *thyāsaphū* has the measurement inscribed in the following way on the dome: "the length of the *yaṣṭi* is 47 cubits and 18 fingers" (*yarasisa du ku 47 tu 18*). I am grateful to Martin Schøyen for making the manuscript available to me, and to Jens Braarvig for helping to arrange for this.

fingers between these different measurements, it is clear that they have the same referent, viz. the *yaṣṭi* installed at the renovations between the late 17th and early 19th centuries. Moreover, since the *yaṣṭi* was not replaced after the measurements for the drawings mss A and B and the Schøyen *thyāsaphū* were recorded,²³ it follows that the present-day structure corresponds in size to these measurements, with the *yaṣṭi* having a total length of circa 22 meters.

The different measurements of the *yaṣṭi* discussed here are captured in the following table and the accompanying drawing produced on the basis of the table.²⁴ In accordance with manuscript C, the drawing shows that the *yaṣṭi* rests on a rock encased in the dome. According to Kölver (1992, 99) the dome has a height of 848 cm, which results in a height of 335.5 cm for the rock upon which the *yaṣṭi* rests. Factoring in this rock and the crowning structure rising above the *yaṣṭi* it follows that the overall height of the structure is some five meters higher than suggested by the length of the *yaṣṭi*. The metric cm equivalents of the Nepalese measurements given here have to be taken with many grains of salt. It is far from certain that the basic Nepalese unit, viz. the thumb width, remained constant and always equaled $\frac{3}{4}$ inch as it did since the 19th century. On the other hand, given the practice of using actual thumbs for measuring, human anatomy should guarantee that deviations between thumb measurements at different time are only moderate.²⁵

²³ The identity of the present *yaṣṭi* with the one installed in 1817 was confirmed by the inscription on the copper cover of the *yaṣṭi* discovered in the course of renovation work in 2009. This inscription (which is an integral part of the copper cover and has not been attached later) dates to 1817, the year when the copper cover was made.

²⁴ I am grateful to Mr. Padma Maitland who prepared this drawing on my behalf, and who also gave valuable feedback on parts of this paper.

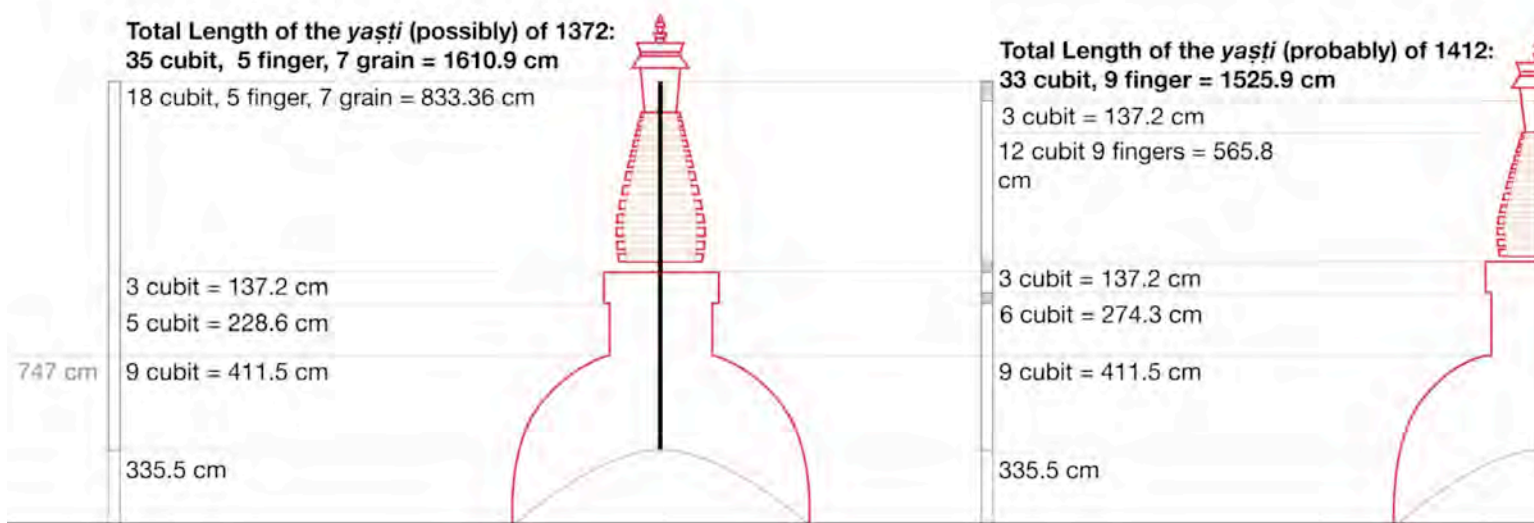
²⁵ The base unit with which the measurements are taken is the breadth of the thumb (*jyeṣṭhāṅguli*) or, less frequently, of the narrower middle finger (*madhyamāṅguli*). Twenty-four fingers (New. *aṅgu*, also *tu*) are calculated to equal one cubit (New. *ku*), so that the cubit's measure depends upon which finger is used. The standard measure of 1 "finger" as corresponding to the width of the upper segment of the thumb is given as $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (= 1.905 cm), which results in 18 inch, i.e. $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet, (= 45.72 cm) for 1 thumb-measured cubit. There are 8 barley grains (*yava*) in one finger, which amounts to 0.24 cm in the case of the thumb-based measurement. These units and their equation with metric meter measurements can be found in Pandit Gopaldatt (!) Pande's *Vyaktacandrikā* (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, [C.E. 1914/15]). They refer to the Rana period, but Pande traces the equation of 24 fingers to 1 cubit (literally "hand") to Jayasthiti Malla, that is, the time from which our oldest *yaṣṭi* measurement may date, but we cannot be sure that the unit of one thumb width then was equal to the thumb width equated with $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in the Rana period.

One of the measurements of Puṣparatna's *thyāsaphū* (verso10, 1-3) gives two computations for the *yaṣṭi*'s length, one measured with the thumb and one with the middle finger. Presuming (as seems very likely) that these two measurements capture the same length, this allows us to compute the smaller middle finger's width as 1.665 cm, with the corresponding cubit consisting of 24 such fingers measuring 39.95 cm. Here is the math: 33 cubits and 9 fingers according to the thumb-based calculation yields 801 fingers = 1525.9 cm; this corresponds to 38 cubits and 4 fingers and 5 barley grains, when the *yaṣṭi*'s length is measured with the middle finger, which yields 916.625 fingers; dividing 1525.9 cm by 916.625 we obtain 1.6647 cm for one middle finger breadth, which amounts to 39.95 cm for one such cubit. I have not been able to crosscheck this calculation with other references to middle finger measurements, which are rare and do not feature in Pande's account.

Date	<i>yaṣṭi</i> possibly installed at the renovation of 1372	<i>yaṣṭi</i> most likely installed at the renovation in 1412	the current <i>yaṣṭi</i> installed in 1817, ²⁶ and the <i>yaṣṭis</i> installed at the preceding three renovations in 1671, 1712 and 1757
Sources	note added to <i>Stūpalakṣaṇakārikāvivecana</i>	Puṣparatna's <i>thyāsaphū</i> (p. v10,1f.)	Drawings mss A & B (18 th and 19 th cent.). See also the sources cited in the next row.
Total length of the <i>yaṣṭi</i>	35 cubits, 5 fingers, 7 grains (= 1610.9 cm)	33 cubits, 9 fingers (= 1525.9 cm (further measurement on p. r8,7 gives—without breakdown—34 cubits, 2 fingers = 1558,3 cm.)	48 cubits, 7 fingers = 2207.9 cm; (almost the same length is given in chronicle 3. Drawing ms C, and the three other mentioned chronicles deviate by 15 fingers (= 28.6 cm), the Schøyen manuscript by 13 fingers (= 24.77 cm); the breakdown given in this table is for the measurement of 48 cubits, 7 finger.
final segment from the “myrobalan ring” upwards	included among 13 rings	3 cubits = 137,2 cm	4.5 cubits, 8 fingers = 221 cm
Segment traversing the thirteen rings	18 cubits, 5 fingers, 7 grains = 833.36 cm	not mentioned, but from the measurements provided it follows that the segment covering the <i>cakrāvalī</i> is of 12 cubits, 9 fingers (= 565.8 cm).	21 cubits, 1 finger = 962 cm
Segment traversing the plaster cornice above the <i>harmikā</i>	3 cubits = 137,2 cm	3 cubits = 137,2 cm	included in the <i>harmikā</i> measurement
Segment traversing the <i>harmikā</i>	5 cubits = 228.6 cm	6 cubits = 274.3 cm	11 cubits, 5 fingers (= 512.5 cm)
Segment inside the dome	9 cubits = 411,5 cm	9 cubits = 411,5 cm	11 cubits, 5 fingers (= 512.5 cm)

Table: Historical measurements of the *yaṣṭi* of the Svayambhūcaitya

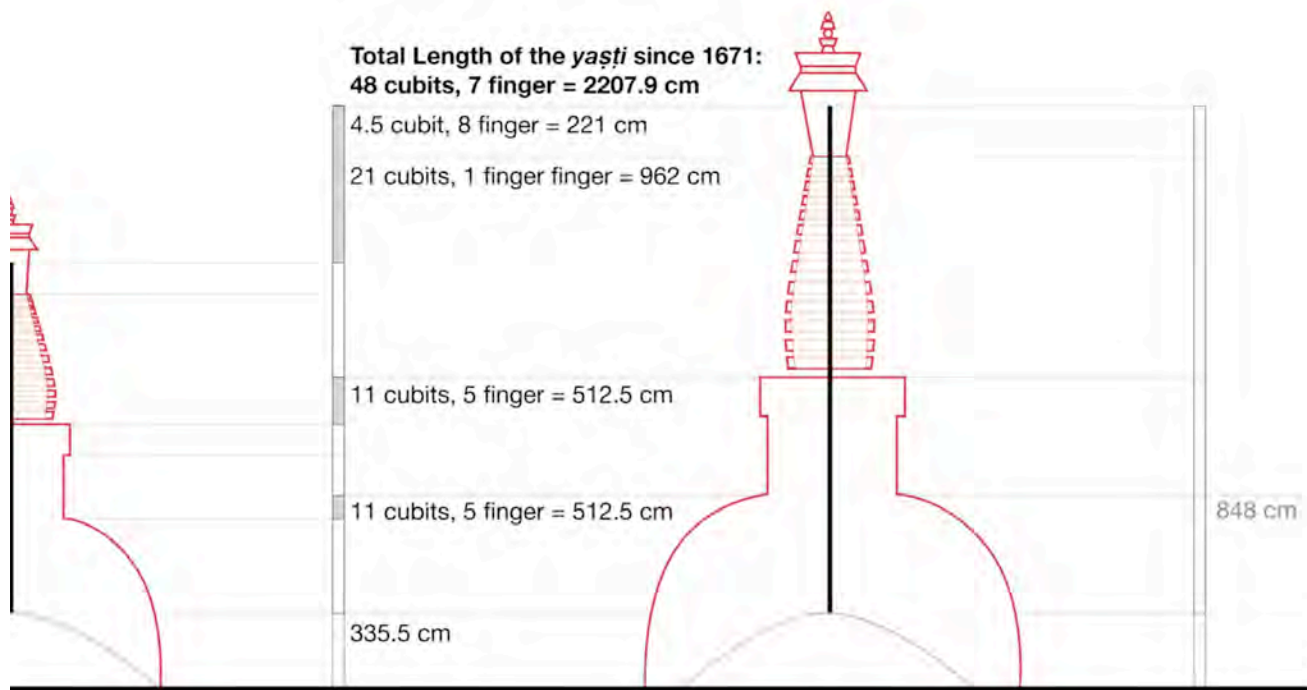
²⁶ At the recent renovation of the Svayambhūcaitya completed in 2010—the focus was on re-gilding all copper parts, though the work extended beyond this and took almost two years to complete—the Department of Archaeology took measurements of the caitya, but not the *yaṣṭi*. Chief Archeological Officer Suresh Shrestha who served as the Department's representative during the renovation generously communicated these to me, namely 26 feet (792.5 cm) for the dome's height, 16.5 feet (502.9 cm) for the *harmika* and the plaster cornice above, 34.5 feet (1051.6 cm) for the thirteen rings, and 25 feet (762 cm) for the crowning structure above, resulting in an overall height of 102 feet (3108.96cm). The deviation of these measurements from the historical ones can only be partly explained by the fact that they are not broken down beyond half feet, and I suspect that they are less reliable.



A comparison of the two earlier measurements recorded in the manuscript and *thyāsaphū* with the later ones recorded in the mentioned drawings and related textual materials (and corresponding to the present-day structure) shows that in the time between those measurements and 1682 the *yaṣṭi* was increased in size by roughly 37.5%. Note that the dome did not grow at the same rate. Presuming there were no changes to the encased rock and the way it supports the *yaṣṭi*, the height of the dome grew by only 2 cubits and 5 fingers, i.e. by roughly a meter. If we presume a height of 336 cm for the encased rock, the height of the dome is 848.5 cm (so Kölver 1992, p. 99) and its earlier height was 747 cm, so that it grew only by 13.5%. As for the width of the dome, the oldest measurement I am aware of dates to the middle of the 18th century, that is, to a phase after the enlargement envisaged here had taken place. It gives the diameter as 44 cubits (= 20.17 meters),²⁷ which yields a circumference of 63.2 meters, a measurement in basic conformity with the present-day caitya, as I was able to ascertain when roughly measuring the drum of the dome without the projecting plinth in June 2013. Regrettably, none of the renovation accounts I studied records explicitly that the caitya was enlarged. Also, it is uncertain how significant the deviations between the older measurements are, and whether the increase in size since these older measurements was effected in one go, or was spread out over several renovations. However, I believe there is good ground to presume that a major enlargement of the caitya and *yaṣṭi* happened at the renovation from which we have the earliest measurement of the large *yaṣṭi*, namely the renovation that saw the *yaṣṭi* installed in 1682. For, by qualifying the *yaṣṭi* as new when providing its measurements the chronicle recording that renovation (YB54) might have stressed that its length distinguished the new *yaṣṭi* from the old one it replaced.²⁸ Moreover, there is a plausible motive for the increase of the caitya (and with it the *yaṣṭi*) at that renovation,

²⁷ Chronicle 3, 23r3f. The same measurement is also given in chronicle 4, 11v5f. The measurement of 44 cubits is given for both the distance between Akṣobhya and Amitābha, and between Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi, i.e. it refers to the east-west and the north-south axes. The measurement is accompanied by the remark that the dome was evenly shaped, i.e. round.

²⁸ Chronicle YB54, 12,3f: “Taking the length of the new *yaṣṭi*: 47½ cubits 4 fingers.” (*hnula yirasi yā du jonā ku 47½ aṅguli 4*)



namely the establishment of the two *śikhara*-style temples of Pratāpur and Anantāpur at the eastern side of caitya barely 23 years before the renovation was undertaken (see plate 7). Their establishment changed the face of the site of Svayambhū in a major manner. If we presume that the *yaṣṭi*'s height had not been increased since the older measurements were taken the caitya would not have towered above the *śikhara*-style temples in quite the way it does now. Instead the temples might have been perceived as inappropriately high, undermining the caitya's dominance over the site and diminishing its stature. If so, the increase of the caitya's size could have been a response to such a sentiment, serving to address the perceived imbalance and to reaffirm and accentuate the caitya's preeminence.²⁹ Besides provoking such a response, Pratāpa Malla's

²⁹ It is tempting to frame such a scenario in terms of Buddhist-Hindu rivalry. The argument would run something like this: even while housing Buddhist tantric deities—respectively Saṃvara and Vajrayoginī, though the inscription at Anantāpur mentions Sarasvatī, Ugratārā and Ekajātī—the *śikhara*-style temples have the appearance of Hindu temples and bear the names of the Hindu king Pratāpa Malla and his favorite wife Anantā. They are alien to the site of Svayambhū, and as attested by the ritual chronicles and confirmed by contemporary practice, they have always played a negligible ritual role in the cultic life of the site. Tellingly, in the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* they go unmentioned, unlike other ancillary shrines that are incorporated into the narrative, notably the five *purā*s dedicated to the deities associated with water, fire, wind, and earth, and to Cakrasaṃvara. Equally revealing, the two *śikhara* temples are not reproduced at the Kāṭhesimbhu caitya in Kathmandu, which otherwise closely mimics the appearance and configuration of the Svayambhū caitya. Following this line of reasoning the establishment of the two *śikhara*-style temples provoked a Buddhist response to reassert and reclaim the site as quintessentially Buddhist, and the significant increase of the caitya's size would have been precisely that response, putting the “Hindu” temples in their place as decidedly lower and lesser.

However, such a line of reasoning is fraught with problems. It presupposes formations of religious identity that were probably alien to the Newar Buddhists of that time—though they are certainly not to contemporary Newar Buddhists—and to king Pratāpa Malla whose numerous interventions at Svayambhū are complex (I treat them in a paper under preparation) and cannot be reduced to the Śaivite appropriation of a Buddhist site. The difficulties of invoking religious identity extend to the *śikhara*-style temples themselves. As Niels Gutschow has informed me, this style has been embraced by Buddhism in Nepal from

various interventions at Svayambhū (see note 9) may also have lowered the bar for making changes and eased the way for the radical enlargement considered here. In favor of such an argument one may point to the renovation three decades later that saw yet another intervention, namely the addition of an image of Vairocana, the Buddha of the center, at the periphery of the dome. To be sure, the foregoing is speculative, and it cannot be excluded that the increase in size I point to here was effected in incremental steps over several renovations.

* * *

We are on firmer ground when we turn to the next alteration of the Svayambhū caitya I here want to discuss, namely the just mentioned representation of Vairocana by way of a permanently installed image in a niche of its own, just next to Akṣobhya on the eastern side of the dome (see plates 3 and 8). Keeping with the logic of the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala where Vairocana occupies the center, this Buddha had originally not been made present in embodied form at the dome's periphery in the way the four Buddhas of the cardinal directions were. Thus the records for the renovation of Svayambhū from 1681 to 1683 only mention four Buddha statues. This is confirmed by the account in chronicle 2 of the subsequent renovation, when it describes how the four old statues of the Buddhas in the niches were ritually removed to make place for new ones, thereby indicating that there was no previous Vairocana statue that would have needed removal (163v4f). Similarly, the Sixth Zhwa dmar Rin po che Gar dbang Chos kyi dbang phyug (1584–1630) mentions in the travelogue of his pilgrimage to Nepal in 1630 that there were four niches in the dome of Svayambhū for which he offered gilded shields (*torāṇa*).³⁰ This corroborates that there was no prominent fifth niche fitted with a Vairocana image when he visited Kathmandu. It is also noteworthy that the aforementioned panels commonly dated to the Licchavi period are only found beneath the four Buddha niches of the cardinal directions and not beneath the niche of Vairocana.

Chronicle 2 records that at the end of the renovation Bhuvanalakṣmī and her adolescent son, King Bhāskara Malla, on whose behalf she acted as regent, ventured to have the Buddha images in the niches of the cardinal directions replaced by new ones. They sponsored and participated in the rituals accompanying the production of the four statues, which were produced sequentially, starting with Akṣobhya, continuing with Amitābha and Amoghasiddhi, and ending with Ratnasambhava. Upon this a Vairocana statue of smaller size was also made (162v7-163v4.). The chronicle reports that one year ahead of the production of the images the regent mother and her son worshipped and ritually handed over to the workers the wax for making the molds for the lost-wax casting method traditionally employed by the Newars (162v5-7). In this context there is only talk of four Buddha images. This suggests that initially it was only planned to replace the four Buddha images, and that only then Bhuvanalakṣmī (and her son) decided to add an image of Vairocana. Regrettably, the chronicles do not offer explanations for the events they report, and so we are also here missing any clues as to the motives. However, the chronicles stress the key role Bhuvanalakṣmī and her son played in this, depicting the casting of new Buddha images, including that of Vairocana, as their personal initiative. Likely it was Bhuvanalakṣmī rather than her minor

the 17th century onwards, with the Mahābaudha temple in Patan—a local adaptation of the Bodhgaya temple in India—being the most prominent example. Also the close participation of Pratāpa Malla's sons, Pārthivendra and Mahīpatendra Malla, in the renovation of 1681-1683 becomes difficult to account for if this renovation is viewed in opposition to their father's activities at Svayambhū. It follows that it is better not to complicate the hypothesis advanced here, namely that the *yaṣṭi*'s size may have been increased in response to the establishment of Pratāpapur and Anatāpur, by framing this response as the Buddhist repulsion of Hindu advances on the site of Svayambhū.

³⁰ *Bal yul du bsgrod pa'i lam yig nor bu 'phreng ba* fol. 32a. I owe this reference to Navina Lamminger who edited and translated this text as part of her dissertation submitted in 2012 at LMU Munich.

The donation of these golden *torāṇas* is also noted in a *thyāsaphū* (NGMPP reel no. E 1874/2) that records the performance of a variety of Buddhist rituals, the establishment and repair of caityas and images, and other religious events spanning the period from 1591 to 1631. The entry there (pp. 22,6-23,3; cf. Śākya 1978/9, p. 172) records that the copper for the gilded shields was provided by king Lakṣmīnaraśiṃha. However, the text does not specify the number of niches.

son who was the driving force, and accordingly chronicle 4 (48r3) identifies the Vairocana statue as having been set up by Bhuvanalakṣmī. Though the addition of Vairocana was an intervention by the Hindu rulers of Kathmandu, this was clearly not a hostile intervention but an attempt to crown the renovation of Svayambhū that had been achieved with royal support. Possibly there was also the wish of the regent mother and her son to inscribe themselves in the caitya as Pratāpa Malla had done with his numerous interventions some 60 years earlier, and as Pārthivendra Malla and the other sponsors of the renovation thirty years earlier may have done—following the hypothesis offered above—by raising the caitya’s height.

The Buddha Vairocana occupies the center of the five-Buddha maṇḍala of the Yogatantras, the Vajradhātu maṇḍala, which serves as the underlying matrix of the Svayambhūcaitya. The installation of a statue of Vairocana in a niche next to Akṣobhya at the periphery of the dome violates this configuration of the maṇḍala. This begs the question of how to account for this innovation. I have problematized the suggestion that Pratāpa Malla’s installation of two *śikhara*-style temples should be viewed as a Hindu appropriation of a Buddhist site, and the related suggestion that the raising of the caitya’s height might be interpreted as a Buddhist measure to counteract this. Also in the present case it is tempting to read the intervention of revealing the central deity on the caitya’s surface as an expression of the “Hindu” and, more particularly, Śaivite sentiments of the responsible rulers, i.e. Bhuvanalakṣmī and her son, King Bhāskara Malla. For Śaivite temples typically afford direct access to the innermost sacred core, with the *līṅga* in the center visible from all four sides (that is, when the doors are opened) and accessible for *darśan* and worship through ritual officiants. This probably informed or at least influenced the regent queen mother’s (and her son’s) understanding of caityas such that it was perfectly reasonable to make the caitya’s inner core manifest. However, installing a Vairocana image on the caitya’s southeastern side may not have been as stark an intervention as might appear from a doctrinal perspective. For it is possible that next to the niche of Akṣobhya there had already before been a smaller, much simpler niche with a hole in the center dedicated to Vairocana, just as still found at some old caityas, such as the Pulāṃ Segu caitya (see plate 6), the Mahābauddha caitya of Kathmandu, or the Cā Bahī caitya.³¹ Adding a Vairocana image may then have appeared as simply upgrading the representation of Vairocana and ensuring that the complete set of five Buddhas be bodily represented. In support one could point to the four goddess statues in the intermediate directions. As I will show below, they were (in 1918) similarly added in place of preexisting empty niches.

Empty niches are a prominent feature of Nepalese caityas and can already be found in the case of Licchavi caityas from the first millennium. Ian Alsop (no date) is no doubt right that the absence of images in these niches cannot be explained by spoilage brought about by Muslim or Hindu intruders. Rather, the evidence he adduces (to which more could be added) bears out that in many cases such niches were left empty so as to be fitted on special occasions with small and valuable images (often made of silver) that would have been susceptible to theft had they been left in place permanently. However, I am not sure that there is supporting evidence for such an explanation also in the case of empty Vairocana niches. Rather, it might be better to explain the absence of Vairocana images along doctrinal lines: Conceptually speaking Vairocana resides hidden and inaccessible in the core of the caitya, and the niche and its opening point to his concealed existence in the center. On this reading the niche would have been left empty in order to avoid representing Vairocana in embodied form at the periphery of the dome in a move that would have violated the logic of the maṇḍala. Hence the addition of an image to the niche would have been an intervention at odds with the niche’s true import. However, even if the supposed preexisting niche had been left empty out of doctrinal rather than pragmatic considerations, adding an image of Vairocana would still have appeared as less an anomalous and dubious break with the standard

³¹ The hypothesis of an empty preexisting Vairocana niche is not at odds with the Zhva dmar pa’s mention of only four niches in his visit of 1630. For given that such a niche would have been much smaller and empty it makes sense that the Zhva dmar pa would not have fitted it with a *torāṇa*, so that it would have gone unmentioned in his travelogue. Note that also nowadays empty niches are typically not furnished by *torāṇas*.

pattern of the maṇḍala as the entirely new creation of a Vairocana niche would have done. In support one could point to the four goddess statues in the intermediate directions. As I will show below, they were (in 1918) similarly added in place of preexisting empty niches.

In this context it is also worthwhile to consider that the Vairocana statue was originally executed in smaller size than the other four Buddhas. While this may reflect the smaller size a preexisting niche next to Akṣobhya would have had, the difference in size might also have served to signal that Vairocana is not represented in violation of the standard maṇḍalaic configuration as part of the five-Buddha constellation, but separately as a deity in its own right. In other words, while the addition of a Vairocana image may at first sight seem a gross violation of the maṇḍalaic constellation of the caitya, it may have actually been perceived as a much less dramatic, primarily aesthetically motivated step and not a non-Buddhist (Śaivite) imposition. In support one can point out that the embodiment of Vairocana at the periphery of the caitya was not rejected by the Buddhist community. Rather, at the renovation a hundred years later two sponsors from Kathmandu, Jujumuni of Oṃ Bāhāl and Manaju of Jhochem, had no qualms to have the original Vairocana statue replaced with a larger version (cf. chr. 4, 48r2f). When yet a further hundred years later at the renovation concluded in 1918 the Vairocana image was still considered to be lacking in size, another affluent trader, Rāmsundar Sāhu, replaced it by one that finally had the same dimensions as the other four Buddha images (Śākya 1978/79, pp. 323f.). Interestingly, the new image installed in 1918 (which is still in situ; see plate 9) was not only larger, but it also rectified a mistake in the hand gestures (apparently the hands had previously been inverted) that had marred the image installed in 1817. It is not clear whether the image of 1817 had replicated a mistake of the originally installed image, or whether this was a newly introduced error, but the confusion speaks to the relative novelty of introducing an iconic representation of Vairocana.

Whatever the precise motivations for the addition of a Vairocana image may have been, it is clear that it did not end up disrupting the maṇḍalaic structure of the caitya in a fundamental way. Thus even after Vairocana had been embodied in a niche at the periphery, the Buddha Amitābha on the western side of the Svayambhū caitya continued (and indeed continues to this day) to function as the main Buddha image of the caitya, which serves as the principal recipient of offerings (see plate 10), and in front of which one performs all rituals addressed to the caitya. Accordingly, the chronicles have continued to refer to Amitābha as Svayambhū's main deity (*mūla deva*) also after the addition of Vairocana. In other words, while the representation of Vairocana in a niche at the periphery has changed the appearance of the caitya, this has not translated into a change in rituals. Fittingly, even after the upgrade of the Vairocana image in 1918, the niche for Vairocana continues to be slightly smaller than the niches of the other four Buddhas—for instance, it is narrower by 20 inches, i.e. a little over half a meter (see plate 8). It is also noteworthy that unlike in the case of the four other Buddhas, the tantric goddess paired with Vairocana (in the caitya's constellation taken to be Vajradhātṛīśvarī) is not represented by an image but only by a smaller empty niche pointing to the caitya's center (see again plate 8). This adds to the perception that the addition of Vairocana was more of an aesthetic than a doctrinal move and did not undermine the maṇḍalaic structure of the caitya. Such an interpretation can also explain why the addition of a Vairocana image, though copied at numerous sites such as Kāṭhesimbhu, has by no means become the standard, with numerous caityas, including the aforementioned caitya of Pulāṃ Semgu at Svayambhū (see plate 6), preserving the older setup without the embodied representation of Vairocana.

There are quite a few historical paintings of the Svayambhū caitya and this invites a comparison between those paintings executed before and after the addition of the Vairocana niche in 1713. However, this is a precarious undertaking because the artists often chose to represent the caitya not in the way it looked at their time. We have already encountered this tendency in the illuminated manuscript mentioned above. This continues in the case of paintings executed after the addition of the niche with Vairocana. While this niche is occasionally depicted, in the paintings I examined this is the exception rather than the rule. A notable example is a *paubhā* kept in the collection of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (item 21.1659). It is dated to *nepāl*

samvat 839, i.e. it was made only six years after the addition of Vairocana, but yet in his representation of the dome the artist ignored Vairocana and chose to depict only the niche of Akṣobhya flanked by the niches of Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi.

While my foray into visual depictions of the Svayambhū caitya did not succeed in documenting succinctly the addition of the Vairocana niche, I fared better when turning to literary depictions of the caitya as found in the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. The *Purāṇa* describes the original erection of the caitya encasing Svayambhū, that is, the self originated *dharmadhātu* that manifested itself on a lotus flower above the waters covering the Nepal Valley (see von Rospatt 2009, 58f.). While earlier versions of the *Purāṇa* identify solely Śāntikara (or Śāntaśrī) as establishing the caitya, in the long version of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* in eight chapters (which was published by Haraprasād Śāstrī under the title *The Vṛihat Svayambhū Purāṇam*) Śāntikara assumes the role of a *vajrācārya* priest overseeing the caitya's construction and its consecration upon completion, whereas the construction work itself is carried out by deities acting on the behest of Śāntikara. More precisely, based on the understanding that the caitya's structure above the dome is a cosmic representation of the heavenly realms above the earth, the deities of a particular realm assume responsibility for the specific part of the caitya with which that realm is identified. This starts with the *harmikā* above the dome (which is built by the moon and sun) and the shields crowning the *harmikā* (which are identified with the guardian deities called the Four Great Kings (*caturmahārāja*), then continues with the thirteen rings (which are each identified with a particular class of deities) and ends with the crest jewel and the honorific parasol (*chattra*). The *Purāṇa* then adds that:

“The Lord of Gods Viśvakarman established with joy the Tathāgatas (set in niches in the dome) in the four cardinal directions as well as the set of the four Tārās.

In the east Akṣobhya, in the south Ratneśa, and Amitābha in the west, and in the north also Amoghasiddhi — (these) Jinas (were established).

Locanā, Māmakī, Pāṇḍarā and Āryatārā were established in the intermediate directions, and then Śāntikara installed (*prasthāpitam*) (the Buddha and Tārā images).”³²

While there is no mention here of Vairocana this is different in a later verse version of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* in eleven chapters.³³ There the text dedicates a *śloka* each for the establishment of the five Buddhas (chap. 9, 198-201). It begins with Akṣobhya, continues with Ratnasambhava, Amitābha and Amoghasiddhi, and concludes with Vairocana in the following manner:

“(Śāntaśrī set up) in the east (of the dome) an image (*mūrtikā*) of Vairocana of middle size, born of the syllable *om*, (displaying) he *dharmacakra* gesture, white and resting on a lion.”³⁴

³² *Bṛhat Svayambhū Purāṇa*, ed. Śāstrī p. 420,12-17: *viśvakarmā devanāthaś caturdikṣu tathāgatān|sthāpayām āsa modena catutārāgaṇā api ca|| pūrvve 'kṣobhyañ ca ratneśaṃ dakṣiṇe cāmītābhakaṃ|paścime cottare cāpy amoghasiddhijinān api|| locanā māmakitārā pāṇḍarā āryatārikā|caturvidikṣu samsthāpya prasthāpitam śāntikaraḥ||*

I here reproduce the text as published by Haraprasād Śāstrī. Despite the philological imperfections of Śāstrī's edition, the text is intelligible enough to allow for translation. However, a principled re-edition remains an important desideratum. Part of the challenge is the intrusion of Newar syntax. For instance, the alternative reading *śāntikaram* at the very end of the quote is in my opinion preferable as the nasalization may mark the agent in Newari. This theme has been explored in more depth in Kölver 1999.

³³ The version available to me—which I owe to the kindness of Dr. Miroj Shakya and his father, the much lamented late Min Bahadur Shakya—was scribed in 1977 (C.E.) by paṇḍit Ratna Bahādur Vajrācārya of Patan. He has furnished his copy with a learned Newari translation in prose. Brinkhaus' (1993) survey of *Svayambhūpurāṇa* manuscripts does not cover this version. In the post colophon note it is characterized as *bṛhat* (“large”), but as the few verses adduced here bear out it differs fundamentally from the *Bṛhat Svayambhū Purāṇa* published by Śāstrī.

³⁴ *Svayambhūpurāṇa* in 11 chapters (ms paṇḍit Ratna Bahādur Vajrācārya) 9.202: *madhyapramāṇā[m] pūrvasyām vairocānīyamūrtikāṃ | praṇavajāṃ dharmacakramudrāṃ śubhrāṃ hīrasthitāṃ ||202||* The

It is noteworthy that the text accurately records that the Vairocana image was not of full size. It does so not only by the qualification “of middle size” (*madhyamapramāṇa*), but also by use of the *ka* suffix for the image of Vairocana, which is in immediate contrast to the term *mūrti* used in the preceding four *ślokas* for the images of the other four Buddhas. Incidentally, we can use the treatment of Vairocana here to propose that this version of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* assumed its present form sometime between the installation of the Vairocana niche in 1713 and the establishment of a full-size image in 1918.

By way of concluding this little exploration of textual evidence attesting to architectural changes of the Svayambhūcaitya I would like to turn to the niches of the goddesses set in the dome. The preceding quote from Haraprasād Śāstrī’s *Brihat Svayambhū Purāṇam* captures exactly the configuration now in place, with these four goddesses occupying the spaces between the Buddha niches, starting with Locanā in the northeast, continuing with Māmakī in the southeast and Pāṇḍarā in the southwest, and ending with Āryatārā in the northwest (see plates 1 and 8). As I have discussed elsewhere (von Rospatt 2010, 221-224), they feature instead of the four vajrī goddesses, namely Sattvavajrī, Ratnavajrī, Dharmavajrī and Karmavajrī, who surround Vairocana in the cardinal directions of the innermost circle of the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala as recorded for instance in the Niṣpannayogāvalī. This departure is very common in Newar Buddhism, and—according to art historian Christian Luczanits (personal communication)—came to the fore in the iconographic program of Alchi and related sites around 1200. However, it is noteworthy that the *Kriyāsaṃgrahapañjikā*, a foundational ritual compendium of the Newar tradition dating to circa the 11th century, preserves the older scheme with the vajrī goddesses as standard in the Vajradhātumaṇḍala. We can hence conclude that the niches for the goddesses were added to the dome long after the Buddhas of the cardinal directions. Reflecting that they are alien to the original configuration of the Vajradhātumaṇḍala, Locanā and the other three goddesses play a minor role in the ritual records chronicling past renovations. However, chronicle 2 (154r9f and 164v7f) mentions them—calling them the “four Tārā goddesses” (*tārādeo pehmaṃ*)—alongside the Buddha statues when reporting the extraction of the divine essence ahead of the renovation and its reinsertion upon the renovation’s completion. This suggests that these goddesses had been a firm fixture of the caitya by the 17th century. However, it seems that they were not represented in embodied form by permanently installed images. Rather, the metal cast images set in the niches nowadays were apparently only added at the renovation of 1918, when the niches were newly refurbished with a triple roof and gained their present form.³⁵ In the 19th century, by contrast, the goddesses were only represented by empty niches—possibly to be filled on occasion by portable images—just as this may have been the case for Vairocana prior to the addition of an image in 1713. This is documented for the northwestern goddess niche by historical drawings from the 19th century and by photos taken before the renovation of 1918.³⁶ A detailed drawing of an empty goddess niche of the Svayambhū caitya was made in the mid-19th century by Henry Ambrose Oldfield, who served as surgeon at the British Residency in Kathmandu from 1850-1863 (see plate 11). Moreover, the aforementioned Kāthesimbhu caitya in Kathmandu, which mimics Svayambhū, has in the intermediate directions only empty niches, and this is also the situation found in the case of the

manuscript reads *madhyapramāṇāt*, but my emendation is supported by the scribe’s Newari translation.

³⁵ Possibly reflecting the novelty of this step, the goddesses installed in the northeastern and the northwestern niche were initially confused and had to trade places when this was discovered (see Śākhyā [1978/9], p. 325, and p. 317 of the English translation thereof).

³⁶ See the drawing made by Rajman Singh in 1844 and kept at the Royal Asiatic Society (which I owe to the generosity of Niels Gutschow), a photo taken by Kurt Boeck at the end of that century (reproduced here as plate 5), a further photo taken in circa 1901 (British Library, photo 430/52(21), and plate 18 of the commemoration volume of Prince Waldemar of Prussia’s travels to Indian and Nepal from 1844-1846. (The volume’s section pertaining to Nepal has been translated from the German original into English by Per Kvaerne in *Kailash*, vol. 7.1 (1979), pp. 35-50.)

Pulām Segu caitya (see plate 6), and other early caityas of Kathmandu such as the one of Mahābauddha mentioned before. It thus seems that the configuration of the Svayambhū caitya with fully developed niches in the intermediate directions bearing permanently installed statues is only an early 20th century development, whereas the representation of the goddesses by simple empty niches with an opening in the center—possibly allowing for the temporary installation of portable images—goes back to at least the 17th century and probably well beyond.³⁷

The select discussions here of architectural and iconographic changes to the Svayambhūcaitya only capture the period since the 14th century, from which time onwards we have a sizable body of sources, particularly in Newari, recording details of Svayambhū and its history. They do not cover the time before—a period that may well have spanned a thousand years and even more—and they are also in no way exhaustive in their treatment of the caitya’s architectural history since the 14th century. Moreover, what I have laid out here is in many ways speculative and preliminary. Still, I hope to have shown that close attention to textual and related sources can shed light on the architectural history of this endlessly fascinating monument and to some extent help fill the gaps that the lack of archeological and related evidence has left. More concretely, I also hope to have given a sense of the changes to which the Svayambhū caitya was subjected in its long history. These changes are not exceptional but speak to the adaptability of Buddhist monuments in the Newar tradition. While making the immutable essence of buddhahood present, the monuments themselves are anything but immutable. Rather they allow for all manner of changes, be they motivated by doctrinal considerations, aesthetic agendas, or the more straightforward desire to upgrade the site. These changes reflect the vicissitudes of the Newar Buddhist tradition and ought to be understood as an expression of them.

³⁷ It is noteworthy that the aforementioned version of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* in eleven chapters (9.203) describes the establishment of the four goddesses as if they were represented in embodied form by way of images:

“In the four intermediate directions he (Śāntaśrī) established Locanā as well as Māmakī, and Pāṇḍarā and Āryatārā, each adorned with their respective gesture.” (*catuḥkoṇeṣu so <'>sthāpal locanāṃ māmakīṃ tathā| pāṇḍarāṃ cāryatārāṃ ca svasvamudrābhyalaṃkṛtāṃ||203||*)

While it cannot be excluded that this verse was only added to the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* after 1918 and the permanent establishment of the four goddess images, it seems more likely that we here have a disjunct between text and monument, that is, while the goddesses niches in the Svayambhū caitya were empty, the text envisaged the caitya with niches bearing three dimensional images just as they were eventually installed in 1918. The text might have done so because it had the caitya in mind in its ideal form as fitted with goddess images in the intermediate directions, even if such images were de facto missing or only temporarily set up on certain ritual occasions.

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PLATES



Plate 1: The northwestern face of the Swayambhūcaitya (in 2002) with the niches (from left to right) of the Buddha Amoghasiddhi in the north, the goddess Āryatārā in the northwest, and the Buddha Amitābha in the west. Photo: Lotus Research Centre, Lalitpur.



Plates 2a and 2b: Stone reliefs adorning the ancient base of the drum of the Svayambhū caitya. The motif with the two deer flanking the eight-spoked wheel is found below the niche of Buddha Ratnasambhava in the south. Referencing the setting in motion of the wheel of teaching in the deer park of Sarnath, this motif functions as a standard emblem of the Buddhist dharma. In the foreground to the left, part of the copper horse is visible that has been installed here at the renovation of 1918 as the mount (*vāhana*) of Ratnasambhava. The other panel with a deity seated upon coiled serpents together with a smaller Nāga-like figure is found below the niche of Amoghasiddhi, the Buddha of the north. Art historians date these reliefs to the 7th/8th century, which makes them the oldest visible component of the caitya. Photos: Alexander von Rospatt (June 2013).



Plate 3: The eastern face of the Svayambhū caitya in 1901 before the extensive refurbishing undertaken as part of the renovation in 1918. Behind the *dharmadhātu maṇḍala* with the superimposed *vajra*, installed by Pratāpa Malla in the mid-17th century, the niches of Akṣobhya (to the right) and—of slightly lesser dimension—of Vairocana can be seen set in the dome. Below the niche of Akṣobhya the panel from the Licchavi era depicting a vajra flanked by two deer is freely visible. The photo was taken in circa 1901 (British Library, photo 430/52(22)).



Plate 4: Illuminated folio of Calcutta Manuscript No. A 15 (see Foucher 1900, pp. 56f). The caption above the text on the left side identifies the object as *nepāle śvayambhūcaitraḥ*. Photo: Jinah Kim.



Plate 5: The northwestern section of the Svayambhū caitya in December 1898 with the niche of the goddess Āryatārā cut into the dome. Photo: Kurt Boeck (as published in Boeck 1903, in the section with images following upon p. 300).



Plate 6: The caitya of Pulām Seṃgu located on the western saddle of the hillock of Svayambhū, viewed from the east. In the intermediate directions between the Buddhas small empty niches referencing the four goddesses Locanā, Māmakī, Paṇḍarā and Āryatārā can be seen. A slightly larger empty niche just next to the niche of Akṣobhya in the foreground references Vairocana, the central Buddha of the Vajradhātumaṇḍala who is concealed in the inner core of the caitya. Photo: Alexander von Rospatt (July 2006).



Plate 7: The Svayambhūcaitya viewed from the west, with the roof of the Hārītī temple in the foreground on the left and the two *śikhara*-style temples of Pratāpur (left) and Anantāpur flanking the caitya's eastern side. Photo: Alexander von Rospatt (May 2009).



Plate 8: The south-southeastern side of the Svayambhūcaitya. The niche on the far right is situated in the dome's east and dedicated to Akṣobhya, while the niche to its side is of Vairocana. Between the latter niche and the niche on the far left (which is situated in the southeastern direction and dedicated to Māmakī) there is a much smaller empty niche without gilded copper work. It is identified with Vajradhātviśvarī, the consort of Vairocana. Photo: Alexander von Rospatt (October 2003).



Plate 9: The image of Vairocana installed in 1918 in the niche on the eastern side of the caitya, which was added to the dome. just next to Akṣobhya, at the renovation in 1711. Photo: Lotus Research Centre, Lalitpur (2002).



Plate 10: Local worshippers make offerings to the Buddha Amitābha set in the western niche of the dome, through whom the Svayambhūcaitya is typically venerated. Photo: Alexander von Rospatt, (October 2002).

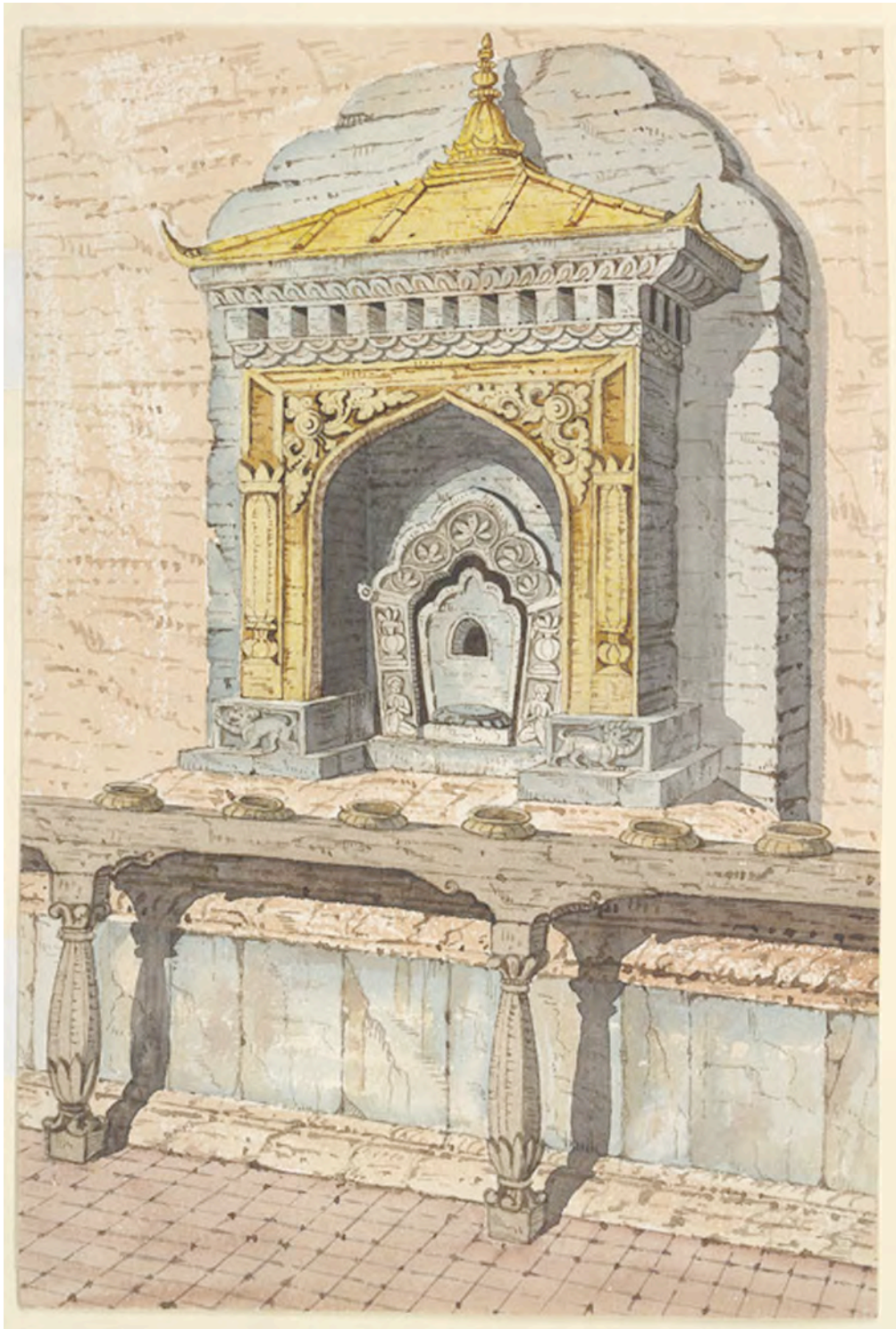


Plate 11: An empty goddess niche in the dome of the Svayambhū caitya as painted in the mid-19th century by Henry Ambrose Oldfield. Collection British Library (WD3293).

