

STUDIES IN INDIAN AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM

HIMALAYAN PASSAGES

*Tibetan and Newar Studies in Honor
of Hubert Decleer*

EDITED BY

Benjamin Bogin and Andrew Quintman



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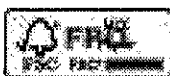
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The Mural Paintings of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* at the Shrine of Śāntipur, and Their Origins with Pratāpa Malla

Alexander von Rospatt

THE *Svayambhūpurāṇa* is a text of seminal importance for the Newar Buddhist tradition of the Kathmandu Valley. It has also captured the imagination of the Tibetans, who produced (at least) two translations—a topic that we are well informed about thanks to the enduring interest that Hubert Decler has taken in this area. In addition to his published writings, most recently the paper “The Tibetan Name of Svayambhu, ’Phags pa shing kun (‘Sacred All-Trees’): What Does It *Really* Mean?” (Decler 2011), Hubert has inspired, encouraged, and supported the research of others in the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* and generously shared his materials, including his excellent (regrettably still unpublished) English translations of the two mentioned Tibetan translations, one by the celebrated Sanskrit savant Situ Paṅchen Chökyi Jungné (Situ paṅ chen chos kyi ’byung gnas, 1700–1774), the other prepared jointly by an otherwise unknown Lowo Lotsāwa Chökyi Gyaltsen (Blo bo lo tshā ba Chos kyi gyal mtshan) from Mustang and a certain (yet unidentified) *ācārya* called Jineन्द्रa (or *Jineśvara) (Rgyal ba’i dbang po) from Nepal.

The present contribution is a small token of gratitude for Hubert’s unfailing encouragement, help, and friendship over the past twenty years. It deals with the mural paintings of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* at the shrine of Śāntipur, which itself features in the *Purāṇa* as a site of critical importance. Śāntipur is located up at Svayambhū close to the *caitya* nowadays known as Svayambhūnāth on the western outskirts of Kathmandu. After a brief introduction to the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, I will discuss some pictorial representation of this text before dealing with the murals themselves. I will describe the narrative murals as they survive and trace their history back to the Malla king Pratāpa (r. 1641–74), whom I credit with their original creation. The present

paper offers a first appraisal that will be followed by a comprehensive study of the murals, a project I began a few years back.¹

The *Svayambhūpurāṇa* is extant in various versions of different length. The shortest and earliest version was composed probably toward the beginning of the fifteenth century. It can be viewed as a response to the loss of the Buddhist heartland on the Gangetic plain in the thirteenth century, though it also incorporates materials that presumably predate that demise.² It consists of only loosely connected legends that relate to the Svayambhūcaitya of Kathmandu and to other sacred places in the valley, thus establishing its sacred topography in Buddhist terms. These legends render the Kathmandu Valley, the historical Nepal, a sacred Buddhist land, independently from India. The principal device for achieving this is the Svayambhū myth. It relates that in prehistoric times (associated with the first two of the seven Buddhas, namely Vipāśvin³ and Śikhin) Nepal was a sacred lake on which the primordial buddha principle (*dharmadhātu*) manifested itself spontaneously (*svayam-bhū*) in the form of light upon the pericarp of a lotus blossom. In a further move, the *Purāṇa* describes the draining of the lake by Mañjuśrī (who comes for this purpose in the form of Mañjudeva from China and as such later settles in Nepal), the subsequent settlement of the valley, and its sanctification by *tīrthas* and other holy places and shrines. Through the tantric goddess Khagānanā, the text also makes sense of the valley's sacredness in

1. This paper was written while serving as visiting professor at the Ludwig Maximilians University Munich under the auspices of the cooperation agreement between the LMU and UC Berkeley. I am grateful to my colleagues at the LMU for their hospitality and institutional support. I am also indebted to Lewis Doney, Brandon Dotsen, Christian Luczanits, Janet Um, Sunita Bajracharya, and particularly Iain Sinclair, who provided detailed and insightful feedback. Likewise I am obliged to Manik Bajracharya, who provided measurements of the Śāntipur murals and related visual material, and to Mary Slusser, who provided me (with the gracious help of John Tsantes of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery) with precious scans of the map of Pratāpa Malla's incursion into Śāntipur. Most importantly, I once again gratefully acknowledge the expert help of Kashinath Tamot, with whom I have read the captions accompanying the murals and the donor inscription reproduced below. Most of the letters are at least partly effaced, and I could not have deciphered and translated them without his indispensable guidance. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation for the care and patience with which Benjamin Bogin and Andrew Quintman have edited the contributions to this Festschrift, including the present article.

2. Cf. my paper "The Sacred Origins of the Svayambhūcaitya and the Nepal Valley: Foreign Speculation and Local Myth" (von Rospatt 2009), where I have argued this point in some detail.

3. Vipāśvin is the name used generally for Vipāśyin in the Newar tradition, including the different versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*.

terms of the cult of Cakrasaṃvara and Vajrayoginī,⁴ and it gives space to the cult of the serpent deities (*nāgas*) and their role in rain-making.

More than any other Newar Buddhist text, the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* has shaped the religious consciousness of the Newars and come to inform their understanding of the history of Buddhism in Nepal and their place within it. Hence, in modified form, its narrative material has also been incorporated into the so-called “Later Chronicles” of Nepalese history (*Bhāṣāvamśāvalī* or *Nepālavamśāvalī*), which were compiled and authored in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the legends of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* remain alive even today in oral lore⁵ and in folk songs.⁶ The *Purāṇa* is known to the larger population not only from such lore and more structured public retellings by Buddhist priests but also from pictorial presentations. There are numerous paintings that capture the principal scenes of the Svayambhū myth, including the draining of the lake. A typical example is kept at Maru Bāhāḥ, a monastery in Kathmandu, where it is displayed once a year on the full-moon day that usually falls in August (see plate 3). This (and the preceding and subsequent days) serves as occasion for *dyahḥ bvayegu*, when the Newar monasteries publicly display some of their religious artifacts in their courtyard, a custom that has regrettably dwindled over the last decades, partly in response to the theft of artworks.⁷ In addition, there have been, as in the case of some other legends of major importance, horizontal scrolls that depict the *Purāṇa*’s principal scenes in chronological sequence. As an aid the scenes of such scrolls are normally identified by captions written below in Newari. Such scrolls, too, are typically displayed in public only once a year on the occasion of *dyahḥ bvayegu*. A part of one such scroll (dating from 1635) depicting the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* has made its way to the U.S., where it is housed in the Cleveland Museum of Art. It has been studied in an influential essay by Mary Slusser (1979), to which I will return repeatedly. A related painting from the early nineteenth century survives in the Musée Guimet, Paris.⁸

4. Cf. von Rospatt 2009, 65ff.

5. For an example see the account recorded in Kivelä 2005, 86–93.

6. See, for instance, the songs 6, 12, and 13 in Lienhard 1974.

7. Cf. Vaidya 1986, 31. For examples of the public viewing of narrative scrolls in Patan, see figures 3 and 4 of Slusser 1979.

8. This painting has been first studied by Alfred Foucher (1897) and then more comprehensively by Sylvain Lévi, whose three-volume work *Le Népal: Étude historique d’un royaume hindou* (1905–8) includes a black-and-white reproduction (at the end of vol. 1) and a treatment (vol. 3, pp. 158–78) that draws on written versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. More recently, the late Siegfried Lienhard has treated the painting in detail in a dedicated monograph (2009).

This painting is 215 cm long and 185 cm wide. It depicts in six registers narrative scenes extracted from the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. These scenes are accompanied by numbered captions in Newari that identify the scenes but are partly out of sequence. Unlike the narrative scrolls displayed in monasteries, this painting was not produced for public viewing⁹ but for the personal uses of Brian Hodgson. Hodgson was stationed in Kathmandu from 1820 to 1843 and served for the last ten years of this period as British Resident.¹⁰ In addition to his official duties he used his residency in Nepal to study Buddhism (and other subjects) and to procure Buddhist manuscripts and also paintings such as the above-mentioned version of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, which he presumably commissioned himself. The Hodgson painting focuses on the Svayambhūcaitya and other sacred sites while largely neglecting the other narratives of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. To privilege the depiction of sacred sites and their accounts over other narratives may have been a deliberate choice, though it is also conceivable that the painter mishandled his subject and ran out of space as Foucher (1897, 21) has suggested, or out of time as Lienhard has speculated (2009, 16). At any rate, the Hodgson painting does not offer a comprehensive depiction of the entire *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, though in the concluding register (which lacks proper captions) there are at least some scenes and figures gesturing toward the unrepresented narratives of the last three chapters.¹¹

I am not aware of any further canvas painting depicting the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*'s narratives (rather than the pivotal scene of the origin myth alone), though such paintings probably once existed and indeed might still survive in one or another (private) collection in Nepal or elsewhere. However, an elaborate mural painting depicting the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*'s various

9. The size of each register and the captions are such that they can only be viewed by a single person at a time, who for this purpose needs to step right up to the painting. This is at odds with the traditional way of displaying narrative scrolls in the courtyards of Buddhist monasteries, where they can easily be admired and scrutinized even from a (little) distance. On the other hand, the format of the Guimet painting is not unique and accords, for instance, with the Kṛṣṇalīlā *paubha* of the Patan Museum (see Lienhard 1995, and <http://asianart.com/patan-museum/e14.html>).

10. Cf. Waterhouse 2004.

11. As the title of Lienhard's monograph (*Svayambhūpurāṇa: Mythe du Népal; suivi du Maṇicūdāvadāna: légende du prince Maṇicūdā*) bears out, he only treats the Guimet painting up to the *Maṇicūdāvadāna* while omitting the remaining two (of the six total) registers. As a result, it does not become clear that the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* is the principal subject of the painting, which encloses rather than precedes the *Maṇicūdāvadāna*. Cf. my forthcoming review of Lienhardt's monograph in the *Indo-Iranian Journal*.

narratives survives partly on the four walls of the vestibule of the Śāntipur shrine up at the site of Svayambhū (see plate 4). The inner precincts of Śāntipur are closed to all but two officiants. One is the eldest (*thakāli*) of the community of caretakers living up at Svayambhū (known nowadays as *buddhācāryas*), the other is a priest from a particular lineage of the Makhan Bāhāḥ monastery in Kathmandu who acts as patron priest (*purohita*) for the *buddhācāryas*, who are technically his *jajmāns*. These two meet here once a month for the secret worship of Cakrasaṃvara, the most prominent esoteric deity of Newar Buddhism.

The vestibule of the shrine, however, is open to the public, and devotees come here on their rounds of worship when visiting Svayambhū in order to leave their offerings at the locked door leading into the inner sanctum of the shrine (plate 5). The murals inside the vestibule are arranged in registers of 38 cm height, including the accompanying captions below each scene. In their original state, the registers added up to roughly seventy meters in length. Going by the surviving parts they originally consisted of some 200 to 250 distinct scenes with their own captions, about three times as many as found in the Hodgson painting or the two Berlin scrolls of the legends of Viśvantara and Siṃhala also published by Lienhard (1980 and 1985). Above the registers on the north and south walls are large-scale depictions of tantric Buddhist deities that are not related in any discernable way to the narrative scenes of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* (see plates 6 and 7). This, no doubt, is the grandest depiction of the *Purāṇa* ever attempted, and it is surely among the most ambitious depictions of any narrative, Buddhist or Hindu, that the Newars produced.

Possibly because of their poor state of preservation and the thick layer of soot with which they are normally covered, these murals have not yet been studied, though they are treated historically in a brief chapter in Hemarāja Śākya's extensive survey *Śrī Svayambhū Mahācaitya* (1978, 442–45). In order to fill this lacuna I began a comprehensive study when the cleaning of the murals in fall 2003 opened a window of opportunity to take reasonably good pictures before the incense offered in the vestibule darkened the murals again. In addition to these pictures, I have studied the murals in situ, though in the absence of a scaffold and with the buildup of a new layer of soot (not to mention defacing graffiti) this has generally not allowed for closer scrutiny than the photos do. I have also supplemented my study with earlier pictures, such as those taken by the Rev. Takaoka Shucho and by the late Bill Wassman, which I owe to the generosity of respectively Manik Bajracharya and (yet again) Hubert Decler. The present paper is a first introduction to the results of this study, which I intend to publish in the near future as a monograph that will

reproduce the surviving scenes together with their accompanying Newar captions in transliteration and translation.

* * *

The registers of the murals of Śāntipur resemble in size and layout the horizontal narrative scrolls characteristically used by Newars for depicting legends. More precisely, they are laid out and distributed over the available wall space as if a long scroll had been unwound in clockwise motion. (It would even be conceivable that they were copied from a scroll now lost, were it not for the unlikely length of such a scroll.) Accordingly, where the height of all four walls allows for this—the vestibule has a pointed roof with the result that the southern and northern walls are taller than the eastern and western ones and provide more space—the narrative is wrapped around all four walls in one circular, sweeping motion. Thus the narrative of a particular register on the northern wall continues on the register of the same level on the eastern wall, and then wraps around farther on the southern and western wall, before returning to the northern wall, where the narrative continues on the next lower level. The impression that the murals are laid out in imitation of a scroll unwound in the available space is reinforced by one serious shortcoming (to which I will return below) that can be partially explained in this way. The registers painted on the walls are uniformly of the same height (just as they are in a scroll). This means that the upper four registers on the northern wall and also the uppermost register on the other three walls are too small to be viewed properly from below. It is hardly possible to discern the scenes, let alone read the captions, which are way too far out of reach to allow for that. This is in marked contrast to the accompanying paintings of deities above the uppermost register, which do not form part of the scroll-like narrative scenes. They are depicted on a much larger scale, so that they can be easily viewed and identified from below (see plates 6 and 7).

The narrative painting commences with three registers that are located on the space of the northern wall created by the gabled roof (plate 6). There are no corresponding spaces on the eastern and western walls that would have allowed for these registers to wrap around. The three uppermost registers exclusive to the north wall are followed by four further registers to be viewed in connection with the registers distributed in a circular motion over all four walls, starting with the northern wall in the above-mentioned fashion. The final portion of the narrative is depicted on the lowest (seventh) register on the north wall and the connecting register on the eastern side, where the narrative ends and the donors of the last renovation of the murals in 1904 are

depicted (see plate 8). Instead of a fourth register, the south wall bears an extensive donor inscription commemorating the murals' repainting in 1904 (see below).

The preserved narrative scenes and the available space indicate that the murals render the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* in its entirety without eliminating or adding narrative materials. This is in stark contrast to the Hodgson painting, which depicts the *Maṇicūdāvadāna* at great length while neglecting the second half of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, most of which is either omitted or represented in the most cursory manner. If we follow Slusser's interpretation (1979, 71) of the Cleveland scroll, the completeness of the murals is also at odds with that fragmentary object. Slusser has proposed that the segment of the scroll surviving in Cleveland makes up the second half of the original. Since the extant segment only depicts a fourth to a fifth of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*'s narrative, she maintains that the painter chose to privilege the themes depicted, namely the tīrtha shrines and the rain-making legend featuring Śāntikara, over other parts of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. She goes on to argue that this choice reflects the particular importance Newars attach to the cult of the tīrthas and nāgas, who play a pivotal role in rain-making legends. We have no way of knowing for sure how large the missing part of the scroll is, and what it depicted, but the murals at Śāntipur suggest a different interpretation. They depict the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* in its entirety and do not seem to take any liberty with the narrative. I see no reason why the same should not apply to the Cleveland scroll¹² and find it inconceivable that the central theme of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, namely the spontaneous origination of the luminous *dharmadhātu*, should not have been depicted. On the contrary, the surviving scenes suggest a rendering of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* that closely follows the literary versions, just as in the case of the murals. This includes the preaching scene in the lower register at the very end of the scroll, which depicts Śākyamuni preaching the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* to an illustrious

12. The upper register ends with the treatment of the twelve tīrthas at a point that appears to correspond roughly to the first half of the fifth chapter of the literary versions. In the middle-length and short versions, this is about the halfway point of the narrative; in the long version it is a little beyond this point. This suggests an even distribution of the whole narrative over two registers, with a fourth to a fifth of the scroll preserved. The preserved segment is 4 feet and 3.25 inches long, so that the total length of the scroll would have measured some twenty feet. Mary Slusser, by contrast, presumes an uneven distribution of the *Purāṇa*'s narrative material with the preserved elements privileged over others that found no or only little representation. She estimates that the preserved part constitutes about half of the scroll, which hence would have measured some 8.5 feet. However, as she notes herself (82n15), this would be unusually short for a horizontal narrative scroll.

assembly of monks, *yakṣas*, *pretas*, and suchlike beings, and deities including Brahman, Viṣṇu, Mahādeva (i.e., Śiva), Indra, and Garuḍa. This scene mirrors the literary versions that likewise return at the end of the text to the frame of Śākyamuni teaching the narrative content of the *Purāṇa*.¹³

With its depiction of the narrative frame, the Cleveland scroll foreshadows the murals, which reproduce the intricate nested narrative frames of the (more evolved) literary versions with painstaking fidelity. This starts with Jayaśrī Bhikṣu instructing Jineśvarī Bodhisattva and continues with the embedded scene of Upagupta teaching Aśoka. That scene in turn leads to the scene of Śākyamuni relating the origins of Svayambhū upon the request of his interlocutor, Maitreya. As in the literary versions, the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* is structured chronologically by correlating the different embedded narratives with the six Buddhas preceding Śākyamuni. This starts with Vipāśvin and the time when Nepal, i.e., the Kathmandu Valley, was a sacred lake attracting divine and other pilgrims (plate 9). It continues with Śikhin and the origination of the illustrious Svayambhū upon the lotus flower in the lake, followed by Viśvabhū and the draining of the lake by Mañjuśrī, who has assumed the form of the tantric master (*vajrācārya*) Mañjudeva for this purpose (plate 10). The subsequent Buddha Krakucchanda, who is tied to the settling of the drained valley, is the last Buddha depicted and identified in captions in the preserved parts of the murals. However, the extant fragments of the murals leave no doubt that Kanakamuni and Kāśyapa are likewise featured, the former correlated with Dharmāśrīmitra's quest of seeking instruction from Mañjuśrī, and the latter with the erection of the protective *caitya* encasing the self-arisen Svayambhū. The six prehistoric Buddhas are not only tied to particular eras in the unfolding history of the Svayambhū and the valley, but they are also connected with particular bodhisattvas whom they instruct about Svayambhū and Nepal. These bodhisattvas, all previous incarnations of Śākyamuni, are identified by name in the caption in a way that accords with

13. The caption accompanying the preaching scene includes the phrase *dharmadhātu-utpatti* ("the origination of the *dharmadhātu*"). It is presumably on this basis that Slusser holds that the preaching scene has as its theme specifically the Svayambhū origination myth rather than the *Purāṇa* as a whole. She concludes that the scene serves to reference the myth without actually depicting it, and interprets this as an "artifice" by means of which "the painter cleverly reserved the rest of his canvas to a secondary legend of the Svayambhu-purāṇa" (Slusser 1979, 76), which he (or his patron) cared more about. However, the phrase *dharmadhātu-utpatti* is better understood as an abbreviated title of the *Purāṇa* as a whole, which in its middle-length version is called *Svayambhūcaityasamutpattikathā* and also *Dharmadhātusvayambhūtpattidharmamāhātmya*, or a close variant thereof. In other words, the preaching scene at the end is not a "clever artifice" but rather the attempt to accurately represent the literary versions and depict on the same canvas the narrative frame and the embedded narrative.

the literary versions. In this way, the murals faithfully reproduce the four nested levels of narration that characterize all but the shortest version.¹⁴

However, this faithfulness comes at a price. It results in the constant interruption of the main storyline by preaching scenes that detract from the embedded narrative and hardly make sense without recourse to the text itself. I regard this as an indication that the murals are grounded in the literary versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* and do not reflect a separate transmission of the *Purāṇa*. It is significant that the creator(s) of the murals treated the scenes of narration as an indispensable part of the *Purāṇa* and did not take the liberty to scale back the depiction of scenes of narration in favor of giving more space to the narrated content, as they could have done for the beholder's sake. To my mind, this reflects the paramount concern of the *Purāṇa* to legitimize and authorize its novel depiction of Nepal as the true homeland of Buddhism. This the *Purāṇa* achieves by integrating all the past human Buddhas (in the standard set of seven "human" Buddhas starting with Vipaśvin) into its narrative as witness, along with the present Buddha of our age, Śākyamuni, and the future Buddha, Maitreya, who acts as the principal interlocutor of Śākyamuni.

The murals' unerring reproduction of this legitimizing device also indicates that it was the murals' primary function to make the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*

14. While it is clear that the murals are grounded in the literary tradition, it is more difficult to identify the particular recension they are following—that is, whether they are based on one rather than multiple recensions. The inclusion of the narrative frames of Jayaśrī and Jineśvarī, and of Aśoka and Upagupta, rules out the shortest version, both prose and verse, in which these two narrative frames do not feature. In accordance with the middle-length version the interlocutor of Śikhin in the murals is first Kṣemaṅkara and then Ratnapāṇi, whereas in the short and long version the former is called Kṣemarāja while the latter does not feature at all. Similarly, Viśvabhū's interlocutor is Gaganagaṃja and (or alias?) Parvata, which matches the middle-length version (chap. 3, verses 13, 35, and 125) but again not the short and long versions, where a Gaganagaṃja does not feature. Moreover, just as in the middle-length version, the *ācārya* constructing the physical *caitya* that encases the manifestation of Svayambhū is called Śāntaśrī—not Śāntiśrī as in the short version or Śāntikarācārya as in the long version. (Note that the shrine named after this *ācārya* is called Śāntipur in the Newar and Śāntapur in the Tibetan tradition.) On the other hand, when Śākyamuni makes his way to Svayambhū, the accompanying *bhikṣus* are led by Kāśyapa, just as happens in the short and long versions (ed. Shastri, p. 32.7) but not in the middle-length version. Moreover, in accordance with the short version, the murals identify the interlocutor of Vipaśvin as Satyadharma and not more simply as Dharma, as happens in the middle-length and long version. Notwithstanding these minor deviations, it seems that the murals are most closely related to the middle-length version. This seems to have been the most prominent version of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, and it alone was translated into Newari, though it should not be forgotten that the two extant Tibetan translations are of the short version.

present in the space of the vestibule in what was regarded its authoritative form, while the effect created upon the beholder was a secondary concern. This I find confirmed in the (aforementioned) lack of any attempt to adjust the size of the uppermost registers for easier viewing from below. To be sure, these remarks do not pertain to the paintings above the narrative registers which are not related to the *Purāṇa*¹⁵ and have to be understood and analyzed on their own terms (see below). Also, the rendition of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* in visual terms cannot of course be reduced to the mechanical transposition of a text into a different medium. Rather, it involved complex choices and strategies of artistic presentation that call for detailed analysis. This, however, would go beyond the scope of the present paper and has to be reserved for a later time.

* * *

Since the renovation completed in 1904 the murals have suffered considerable damage, and by now almost the entire western wall and quite a few other images and captions have been effaced. This is presumably the result of re-occurring (unskilled) attempts to cleanse the murals and free them from the soot that quickly builds up on their surface from the incense and oil lamps offered routinely by worshipers in the vestibule. Comparing the photos from 2003 with earlier ones shows that, in addition to cleansing, the murals have also suffered in the most recent past from coarse attempts to paint over areas that were carefully left blank during prior renovations. These latest forms of repainting do not attempt to recapture lost scenes. Instead they are executed in a nondescript mix of blue and green with floral themes. In this way they are meant to blend in with the rest of the murals so as to convey a superficial sense of completeness. Obviously such efforts of renewing the murals are at odds with attempts to conserve the paintings, such as those undertaken (in the 1960s?) upon the initiative of the then crown prince Birendra (cf. Śākya 1978, 444), or those undertaken in 2003.¹⁶

15. A possible exception might be the two *siddha* figures flanking Vajradhara on the north wall (see plate 6). They could be related to Śāntaśrī, the builder of the physical *caitya* above the self-manifested *dharmadhātu*, and Śāntikara, the master who subdued the *nāgas* and assured rains—that is, if their identification is not presumed. However, as I will argue below, it may well be that the tantric figures predate the narrative murals below them. In this case, it would seem less likely, but of course not impossible, that the *siddhas* represent Śāntikara and Śāntaśrī.

16. The murals have thus in the recent past been subjected to two different approaches to renovation. One approach accords with Western techniques of conservation and aims to preserve the original state as best as possible by conserving the status quo without adding or filling in. The other approach is more in line with local sensitivities and tries to maintain the artwork

None of the attempts to preserve the murals over the last hundred years have been recorded in situ. Rather, in their present state the murals continue to be accompanied by a single historic inscription that records their comprehensive repair in 1904 in the following way:

Success!¹⁷ Om! Obeisance to the the illustrious self-arisen (*svayambhū*) Dharmadhātuvāgīśvara; obeisance to the illustrious *caitya* Tail-Tip (*pucchāgra*);¹⁸ obeisance to the illustrious Guru Mañjuśrī and the goddess Sarasvatī; obeisance to the illustrious Mahāsaṃvara, the lord of Śāntipur; obeisance to the illustrious goddess Cuṇḍā Bhikṣuṇī, obeisance to the illustrious *ācārya* Śāntikara! The formal declaration (*saṃkalpa*)¹⁹ beginning with “In the time of the Tathāgata, the illustrious Śākyasiṃha, the Cloud of Glory²⁰ (*śrīghana*),” . . .

Hail the thrice-illustrious overlord of great kings, Pṛthvī Vīra Vikrama Śāhadeva! The donors, who reside at Manākṣe in the neighborhood Kohiti of Kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa (i.e., Kathmandu), the *citrakars*, the heaven-gone (i.e., deceased) father Sinārāṃ, the heaven-gone mother Kṛṣṇalakṣmī, their son, the virtuous Harśamān (who was initially still) alive, his good wife Daśalakṣmī,

by recreating it in its entirety rather than by freezing it in its current state of preservation. The conflict between these two approaches is well known to any conservationist working in Nepal. It recently came to the fore in the case of Itum Bāhāḥ, one of the venerable old monasteries of Kathmandu. Half of the decrepit monastery was conserved (but also carefully rebuilt with original materials) under Western leadership by the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, while the other half was rebuilt practically from scratch by a rival section of the monastic community. Cf. von Rospat 2010/11.

17. As is customary in manuscripts and inscriptions, the text is prefaced by the *siddham* (or *siddhih*) sign ꣳ, which serves as an auspicious opening marker, and which I accordingly render with “success!” On the symbolic representation of this sign see Pant 1997, note 20.

18. The *caitya* located on the lower, western top of the Svayambhū hillock and associated with Mañjuśrī is known as the *caitya* Tail-Tip (*pucchāgracaitya*). This designation follows from the name Mount Cow-Tail (*gopuccha-giri* or *-parvata*) by which the Svayambhū hillock is known in the *kaliyuga* (i.e., our present debased era) according to the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*.

19. The *saṃkalpa* is recited at the beginnings of rituals to formalize their performance in space and time, and solemnly declare who is undertaking what kind of ritual. The *saṃkalpa* is included in the inscription to mark the renovation of the murals as a formal ritual act. A version of the *saṃkalpa* text recited routinely in Patan has been translated and analyzed by Gellner (1992, 191–92). The text in Kathmandu differs slightly. A version has, for instance, been published by Ratna Kaji Bajracharya (1988, 121–23).

20. On the epithet *śrīghana* see section 2.1.8 of Douglas-Tuladhar 2006.

and (Sinārām's) daughters Harṣamāyā and Harṣalāni. When he (Harṣamān) was (alive), a pious aspiration arose (in him). As all the images previously painted (on the walls) at Śāntipur had become worn out, he conceived the wish to have the complete *Svayambhūpurāṇa-māhātmya* (re) painted in the name of his own heaven-gone father and mother.

When later there were difficulties for the donor (Harṣamān) because of the (astrological) conjunction with (the forces of) fate, he made (the repainting) his definite intention with the thought that it would not be all right if he were not to have the *dharmamāhātmya* (re) painted. Upon this he went to dwell in heaven (that is, he passed away before he could fulfill his pledge).

Afterward the wife of the donor, Daśalakṣmī—may she live for a hundred years—had the pious thought to carry through what her own lord (her deceased husband) had formed the definite intention to do and carried out the renovation.

May it be well! In the year 1024, on the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the month of *śrāvāṇa* (i.e., August 1904), on a Thursday, (the renovation work) was completed.

May the force of merit of making this painting by filling in (those parts that have been damaged or even lost) effect the uplifting of all beings and creatures of the world and realms of existence!²¹

21. To my knowledge the donor inscription has never been published. Hence I provide a transliteration in addition to the translation. As the captions accompanying the murals, the inscription is in parts hardly legible. Hence, the readings offered here are at times conjectural. Angle brackets enclose additions, and square brackets mark text that I have modified. When the sign “:” is not used as a *visarga* (as it is in *namah*), I have reproduced it as a colon.

▪ *om namam śrīsvayambhūdharmadhātuvāgīśvarīyā: śrīpuchāgracaitīyā namah śrīguru-
mañjuśrīśarasvatīdevyai namah śrīśāntīpureśvaramahāsamvarāya <na>mah śrīcumḍā bhik-
ṣuñīdevy[ai] namah śrīśāntīkarācājyaye (!) namah śrīghaṃ-śrīmat-śrīśākyaśimh[a-ta]hāgatsya
paryyāya ty ādi: ||*

|| *svasti śrīśrī māhārājādhirāja pṛth<v>i vīra vikrama sāhadeva dānapate nepālamaṇḍale
kāṣṭhamaṇḍapa kohiti ṭola manāksyegrhādbivāsita citrakāra divaṃgata pitā sinārām mātā
diva<m>gata kṛṣṇalakṣmīm tasya putra saḥjīva puṇyātmā harṣamān tasya satsatī bhājyā
daśalakṣmī putri harṣamāyā harṣalāni juyāva conā velasa dharmmacitta utpatti juyāva
śrīśāntīpurasa hnāpā coyā tavagu mu<r>tti dakva jirṇa juyāva divaṃgatapim thava pitā-
mātā-ya nāmana śrīsvayambhūpurāṇayā khaṃ mahimā samasta cokegu ikṣā juyāva daivayā
samjogana lipatasa: dātāyā samkaṣṭha juva velasa || dharmma <ma>himā cokegu ma yāya
ma gāka dhakam || bhālapāva sakalpa yāya dhusyeli svarggavāsa juyāva vana || || lipatasa
dātāyā strī satajīva dasalakṣmīna thava svāminam samkalpa yānā tagu yāya dhaka dharm-
macitta juyāva jirṇa-uddhāra yāgu:*

The inscription is preceded by the visual depiction of the donors. They are seated in hierarchically arranged order to the right—that is, behind—the officiating priest, who is shown offering into the fire (see plate 8).²² This mimics the structure of *paubhā* paintings, where just above the inscription at the very bottom the donors are typically depicted as ritual agents. Indicative of the ways in which the murals adapt the structure of traditional Newar paintings to the space of the vestibule, its donor scene precedes the inscription horizontally rather than vertically, by being painted at the very end of the narrative scenes in the lowest register on the eastern wall, ahead of the inscription painted on the southern wall. As the identifying captions below the individuals tell, the line of donors starts with the deceased Sīnārām and Kṛṣṇalakṣmī, the parents of Harṣamān, in whose name the latter wanted to repaint the murals. The line continues with Harṣamān, who had likewise died before the renovation was undertaken, and his wife Daśalakṣmī, who actually carried the project through. The donor portraits are concluded by Sīnārām's two daughters, Harṣamāyā and Harṣalāni, and by his grandson Pūrṇalāl. The subsequent addition of Pūrṇalāl's name (*mayelāni pa-utra pūrṇalāla thvote parivāra*) below the donative inscription reproduced here suggests that he was born to Harṣamāyā shortly after the renovation was completed.²³

* * *

seyo stu samvat 1024 sāvana sudi asatami vṛhasapativāra ṣunu sidhayakāgu jula || : || thote citrakāri bhare yānāgu puneyā prabhāvanam jagata saṃsāra sarvasato prāṇipim uddhāra yānā vijyāya māla : || sarvadā kāla śubhma (!) || : || ❀ ||

22. In Śākya's treatment of the colophon (1978, 443) we learn that the murals were repainted according to the instructions of a *vajracārya* from Kathmandu's Taḥche Bāhāḥ called Ratnacūḍāmaṇi. The caption below the officiating priest is illegible, but it appears to be a different name. Presumably the depicted priest is the family priest (*purohita*) (or a further priest officiating when the renovation was concluded) rather than the *ācārya* supervising the repainting.

23. Contrary to Kamal Prakash Malla (2011), who briefly references the Śāntipur murals in his review of Siegfried Lienhard's monograph on the Hodgson painting, I see no evidence that the repainting was undertaken on the occasion of a *bhīmarathārohaṇa* ritual. By contrast, the inscription leaves no doubt that both Harṣamān and his parents had died when the murals were repainted, while the *bhīmarathārohaṇa* rituals is performed not postmortem but for elders who are well and alive, to mark their completion of seventy-seven years, seven months, and seven days. I am grateful to Prof. Malla for drawing my attention to his review and sharing it with me. As for the *bhīmarathārohaṇa* ritual, see von Rospatt 2005. A better-informed and more comprehensive treatment of the rituals of old age (written in English) is under preparation for the *Journal South Asia*.

Besides the above donor inscription, the murals in their current state bear no trace that would yield a date or other historical information. If there were earlier donor inscriptions, as seems likely, they must have been obliterated during the renovation of 1904, if not earlier. However, we have the testimony of Drakar Taso Tulku Chökyi Wangchuk (Brag dkar rta so sprul sku Chos kyi dbang phyug, 1775–1837), who visited the valley in 1792 with his elder brother, the painter Kunzang Trinlé Wangchuk (Kun bzang phrin las dbang phyug, 1772–1812). In his pilgrimage guide to Nepal entitled *Bal-yul gyi gnas dang rten gyi lo-rgyus nges par brjod pa 'khrul spong nor-bu'i me-long*, which was presumably composed in 1816 or 1817, he mentions the murals when dealing with Śāntipur:

On the walls in the entry hall of the *vihāra* (i.e., Śāntipur), the old paintings from former times [depicting] the history of the self-arisen mahācaitya as it has appeared in this sūtra (i.e., the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, summarized just before in the pilgrimage guide), they have been painted together with captions.²⁴

This record attests that at the end of the eighteenth century the murals decorating the walls of the vestibule with the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* were already “old paintings from former times” (*sngon gyi bris rnyings*). Regrettably we learn nothing about their earlier history. However, there is reportedly a written source attesting that Pratāpa Malla had the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* painted, personally providing the captions accompanying each scene. I had no access to this source, namely a *thyāsaphū*-style manuscript belonging (in the seventies) to Sānukāji Buddhācārya of Svayambhū, but the late Hemarāja Śākya provides a brief summary (1978, 442–43). It is precarious to take the isolated report of a single *thyāsaphū* at face value (particularly if only known secondhand), and one would have hoped for other sources confirming this *thyāsaphū*'s record. The absence of such sources is particularly troubling because Pratāpa Malla stands out as the most illustrious of all Malla kings, and his various exploits are typically well documented. Even so, I accept the veracity of this isolated report and presume that the origins of the narrative murals are to be sought with Pratāpa Malla. As I will explain in the follow-

24. *Collected Works of Brag-dkar rta-so sPrul-sku Chos-kyi dbang-phyug* (1775–1837), vol. ta [= NGMPP reel nos. L 376/1–381/8]: *gtsug lag khang gi sgo khang gi log<s> ris su rang byung mchod rten chen poi lo rgyus mdo 'di nyid las byung ba ltar sngon gyi bris rnying khungs dang ldan par bris par yod do*, 16a3–4. I owe this quote to Franz-Karl Ehrhard, who also provided the basis for the translation offered above. Cf. also Ehrhard 2009, 200, where he mentions Drakar Taso Tulku's note of the murals at Śāntipur.

ing, I do so because their creation fits with Pratāpa Malla's other activities and establishments at Svayambhū. In particular, it makes perfect sense as the visual complement to the two literary compositions he set up in stone at Svayambhū, one inside the vestibule of Śāntipur and the other at the drum of the Svayambhūcaitya, just to the left of the niche housing the Buddha Amitābha.

Pratāpa Malla was not only renowned as a poet king (*kavindra*) famed for his literary compositions, but he also took a personal interest in the arts and architecture more generally. In addition to his establishment of Hindu temples and other acts of munificence at Hanumān Dhoka, Paśupatināth, etc., Pratāpa Malla embraced Buddhist sites and was deeply invested in Svayambhū. Indeed, he did more than any other king of the Malla and Śāha eras to change the face of Svayambhū. His activities include the establishment of the two *śikhara*-style temples that flank the Svayambhūcaitya and give the site its distinct appearance. Bearing his and his wife's names, these temples are known as Pratāpapur and Anantāpur. Pratāpa Malla 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 hill-ock. More pertinent in the present context, Pratāpa Malla is credited with a remarkable incursion into the sacred interiors of Śāntipur in June 1658. The poet king commemorated this feat in Sanskrit *ślokas*, entitled *Vṛṣṭicintāmaṇi* ("The Gem Fulfilling the Wish for Rain"), that he composed himself and had inscribed on a stone placed to the left of the door inside the vestibule (see plate 5).²⁵

In that year there was a prolonged drought, and accordingly the need arose to force the *nāgas* held responsible for this to release the rains. According to a popular belief grounded in the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, this is best achieved by displaying in the open a *maṇḍala* kept inside Śāntipur that was painted on the request of the *ācārya* Śāntikara with the blood of the nine *nāga* deities. The task of fetching the *maṇḍala* fell upon the *bare* of Svayambhū (i.e., the most senior member of the buddhācārya community there, the *thakāli*) and the priest of Makhan Bāhāḥ in charge of Śāntipur as the only two individuals authorized to enter the secret interiors of Śāntipur. However, they were not

25. The inscription was first published in *Saṃskṛta Saṃdeśa* (vol. I.12, vs 2010 [1954], pp. 86–93). The accompanying colophon identifies Pratāpa Malla as author and accordingly the *ślokas* of the *Vṛṣṭicintāmaṇi* use the first person to refer to him. The inscription also includes a brief summary written in Newari language. For a treatment of Pratāpa Malla's self-representation in inscriptions (which, however, does not include the inscription of Śāntipur), see the chapter "Pratāpa Malla and the *stotra* mode: intimacy and knowledge" in Bledsoe 2004.

able to accomplish this mission, and so Pratāpa Malla decided to venture himself inside the shrine.

The fascinating account of this incursion is recorded in the above-mentioned *Vṛṣṭicintāmaṇi* and in an annotated map-like drawing of the inside of Śāntipur that captures in pictures Pratāpa Malla's exploits when he ventured inside Śāntipur.²⁶ We learn from these sources (which I have analyzed in detail for a separate article under preparation) how the Malla king overcame numerous obstacles as he penetrated into the innermost chambers of this shrine, where he eventually encountered Śāntikara abiding in timeless meditation with the *nāga maṇḍala* next to him. Pratāpa Malla's successful retrieval of the *maṇḍala* had the desired result of copious rains that saved the kingdom from further drought and famine.

Śākya's account of the mentioned *thyāsaphū* in his monograph on Svayambhū (1978, 442–43) connects the narrative murals (but not the depiction of the tantric figures above) with this episode when it relates that they were painted subsequently to the drawing of the mentioned map-like sketch of the king's adventures inside Śāntipur. This makes sense because the accounts of Pratāpa Malla's exploits in Śāntipur echo the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* in various ways and are notably grounded in the plot of its eighth chapter, as Gautamavajra Vajrācārya (1965, 33–34) also noted. This chapter relates how Nepal was suffering a seven-year drought with the consequences of famine and human devastation. In response king Guṇakāmadeva sought out the *śiddha* Śāntikara, who took it upon himself to summon the nine *nāga* deities held collectively responsible for releasing the rains. He charged Guṇakāmadeva with bringing to Śāntipur by force Karkoṭaka, the one *nāga* not complying. Once all the *nāgas* were assembled Śāntikara propitiated them. This resulted in abundant rains. Before their dismissal Śāntikara also collected blood from each *nāga*, with which he drew a *nāga maṇḍala* for their future propitiation when drought recurs.

26. The drawing of Pratāpa Malla's incursion into Śāntipur is accompanied by the Sanskrit text of the inscription and by a second, more extensive account written in Newari, which offers more (and sometimes conflicting) details than the inscription. A couple of manuscript copies of this unique visual source survive in private collections in Kathmandu (cf. Gautamavajra Vajrācārya 1965, 37) and the United States. One copy was in the private collection of Devahaṛṣa Vajrācārya (1964), who published a description based on the Newari text. A more detailed study has been provided by Gautamavajra Vajrācārya (1965), who correlated the Newari text accompanying the map with the relevant Sanskrit verses from the inscription and provided Nepali translations in the process. Mary Slusser's article reproduces the map and offers a summary of Pratāpa Malla's incursion into Śāntipur (1979, 79–81). Hemarāja Śākya's monograph (1978, 200–204) also treats this episode.

It is this *nāga maṇḍala* painting that Pratāpa Malla went to retrieve in order to coerce the *nāgas* to release the rains. The *Purāṇa*'s narrative of the drought and the release of the rains upon royal intervention clearly served Pratāpa Malla as a model that he drew upon in his account. Against this background, the depiction of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* on the walls of the vestibule assumes its particular significance. It provides the necessary mythological background and context for Pratāpa's exploits and makes them appear as a sequel to the *Purāṇa*, with Pratāpa Malla as the true heir of Guṇakāmadeva and also Śāntikara.

Besides complementing the inscription inside Śāntipur, the narrative murals also match another inscription Pratāpa Malla established at Svayambhū eight years earlier at the drum of the *caitya*, just next to the niche of Amitābha (plate 11).²⁷ This inscription does not commemorate a particular event but records the *Svayambhūbhāṭṭāarakastotra* composed by Pratāpa. The title of this *stotra* echoes the title of the short version of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, i.e., the *Svayambhūcaityabhāṭṭāarakoddeśa*. However, only the first *stotras* match the beginning of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, and before any Buddhist content occurs in the narrative, the *stotra* departs from the *Purāṇa* in order to indulge in an elaborate praise of Śambhū (i.e., Śiva) that leaves no space for the Buddhist identity of Svayambhū. Hence the *Svayambhūbhāṭṭāarakastotra* is in truth a Śaivite poem with only superficial resemblance with the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. Yet its establishment in stone next to Amitābha—from an exoteric perspective the most sacred point of the Svayambhūcaitya, just as Śāntipur is the most sacred point from the perspective of the esoteric tantras—confirms Pratāpa Malla's interests in the *Purāṇa* and lends in my opinion additional plausibility to the attribution of the narrative murals to him.

Tracing back the murals' origins to Pratāpa Malla also helps to make sense of the arrangement of the narratives across the walls of Śāntipur and of their supposed purpose. As explained above, their distribution mimics the unwinding of a painted horizontal scroll. The registers higher up the wall are not enlarged for visibility, and so these scenes can only be made out with difficulty, not to mention their indiscernible accompanying captions. Unlike the narrative scrolls displayed in monasteries, which are didactic in

27. This inscription has been published by D. R. Regmi (1966, 107–11). The text given by Regmi is less than satisfactory, but access to the inscription for the necessary revision is presently obstructed by the iron structure built around the drum of the *caitya* for offering oil lamps. For the mentioned article under preparation, I am currently preparing a new edition of this *stotra* that also draws on manuscript copies (which accord in length with the inscription). Cf. also Bledsoe 2004, 248–52.

purpose, the murals can therefore fulfill this purpose at best only partially. If their primary function had been the education of the faithful about the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, the whole arrangement would have had to be different. Besides, the localization of the narrative murals inside Śāntipur would have been a questionable choice to start with, given how dark a space it is and how incense and oil-lamp offerings inevitably blacken its walls with soot.

However, this choice makes better sense if Pratāpa's primary agenda were different, as I suspect it was. This shrine is the focal point of Pratāpa Malla's exploits, and it is here that Śāntikara *ācārya*—the tamer of the *nāgas* and the builder of the physical *caitya* (that is, if his identification with Śāntiśrī is presumed)—continues to abide to this day immersed in deep, timeless meditation (*samādhi*). The narrative murals serve to provide the mythological context in which Śāntipur is situated according to the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. This does not entail evoking a different space or time.²⁸ Rather, the site of Śāntipur is sacred as it is, and this sacredness extends to the present. The narrative depicted on the walls is not needed to sanctify the site; it merely serves to bring to mind the sanctity that is already a given here. At the same time the murals also provide the mythological context for Pratāpa Malla's exploits. These exploits appear as the natural sequel to the chapter dedicated to Śāntikara and his subjugation of the *nāgas*, which concludes the *Purāṇa*'s narrative and brings it to the point of time closest to the present. In a sense, the narrative murals allow the Malla king to inject himself into the *Purāṇa* and become part of it. The presence of the murals in the vestibule helps to bring this to the fore and visually complements Pratāpa Malla's efforts to claim the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* for himself.

This interpretation of the narrative murals' function has to be speculative, given the lack of supporting evidence that would lend greater plausibility to my arguments. The absence of such evidence has to do with the uniqueness of the vestibule of Śāntipur. Normally in the Newar tradition access to the antechambers of tantric shrines is not open to the public. Only curtains (Newari: *dhakim*) with a prescribed design of their own²⁹ are used to separate

28. In Newar monasteries (and temples) the depiction of deities typically follows a concrete iconographic program and serves to sacralize the marked space (cf., for instance, van Kooij 1977 and Bangdel 1999). Their establishment in painted or carved form is accompanied by elaborate consecration rituals that serve to imbue these images with the presence of the depicted deities. This clearly is not the case with the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* paintings at Śāntipur. They do not serve as two-dimensional consecration images, and they do not serve an iconic function sacralizing the vestibule.

29. I owe the following information regarding the design of tantric curtains to Sarbanya Ratna Bajracharya. Following his account, the curtains reproduce elements of the

this space from the image of the principal esoteric deity (or deities) that only a select few may see and access directly. In the case of Śāntipur such a curtain is replaced by the door. It is decorated with eyes and other facial features just as the mentioned curtains reportedly are. Moreover, the door is flanked by stone sculptures of Kākāsyā and Ulūkāsyā, who serve in the Saṃvaramaṇḍala as protector goddesses of respectively the eastern and northern gates (see plate 5). This mirrors the way these two deities normally feature as a framing device on the lower edge of the mentioned curtains used in tantric shrine rooms. Indicative of the importance of the facial features on the door, they are repainted annually on the full-moon day of the month of Kārtika, usually in October or November. On the same occasion the eyes of the two framing statues of Kākāsyā and Ulūkāsyā are repainted (see plate 12), as are the eyes and other facial marks on the Svayambhūcaitya and on other shrines belonging to Svayambhū, in an effort to renew and revitalize them once a year.

The large-scale figures above the narrative registers also serve an obvious iconographic function and are presumably typical for tantric antechambers. The dominance of Padmanṛtyeśvara's depiction on the south wall (see plate 7) reflects his importance for Buddhist tantric ritual. Padmanṛtyeśvara functions as the presiding deity over tantric dances, which in the Newar tradition serve to enact the presence of initiatory deities of the highest tantras in rituals performed typically upon conclusion of larger public exoteric rituals. These dances are restricted to initiates and hence performed in seclusion. At Svayambhū the vestibule of Śāntipur continues to serve as a venue for performing these dances and singing the related tantric songs. On this occasion the gate leading to the vestibule is locked, transforming its space into an esoteric antechamber.

The depiction of the deities flanking Padmanṛtyeśvara is likewise in accord with the tantric location. The blue, crow-faced Kākāsyā and the green, owl-faced Ulūkāsyā reappear here as guardian deities of the Saṃvara maṇḍala. Vajrayoginī and Nairātmyā are alternate female forms of the highest tantric deity, the supreme manifestation of buddhahood according to the *yoginītantras* (see plate 7). The figures facing Padmanṛtyeśvara on the north wall are likewise suitable for a tantric antechamber (see plate 6). In the center is Vajradhara, who can be regarded as the tantric form of Śākyamuni, embodying the essence of all buddhas. He is flanked by two *siddha* figures. Though I cannot identify them (but cf. note 15), their presence is obviously fitting in a space dedicated to tantric practice.

Saṃvaramaṇḍala and in this way point to the presence of Cakrasaṃvara in the inner sanctum behind.

Given how well the figures above the narrative scenes befit the space of a Vajrayāna antechamber, there is no need to presume that these paintings were also created by Pratāpa Malla. Rather, his aforementioned *Svayambhūbhaṭṭāarakastotra* suggests that as their creator he would have taken the liberty to introduce Śaivite elements, which in fact are conspicuously absent from the murals. This leads me to believe that the decoration of the vestibule with tantric figures may predate Pratāpa Malla, and with him the creation of the narrative murals. Presumably, this earlier decoration with tantric themes would have extended to the whole space of the vestibule, i.e., also to the area covered now by the narrative registers. If this is correct—I know of no corroborating evidence—then Pratāpa Malla must have used his power as king to intervene in the space of the vestibule and claim the major portions of its walls for his project of depicting the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*. Such an intervention would be in continuity with his incursion into the interior of Śāntipur (which, we remember, is in principle only open to two ritual officiants and not the king) and his account of this incursion, which claimed what is arguably the most secret and charged space of Newar Buddhism for his aggrandizement.

Given this account and Pratāpa's other interventions at Svayambhū, it would seem that Pratāpa Malla's project of redesigning the vestibule would have met with no serious resistance, and that he would have had no qualms about intruding upon a space normally reserved for tantric practice. Given Pratāpa Malla's strong investment in the arts and literature, and the way in which he set up his own poetic compositions at Svayambhū, it is even conceivable that he personally directed the project as reported in Śākya's summary (1978, 442). In this Pratāpa Malla might have been inspired by the Cleveland scroll, which was produced only two decades earlier and which he may well have known.

However, I find it hardly convincing that he would have filled in the captions below the narrative scenes himself, as Śākya's account suggests. At least in their surviving form, they are written in plain Newari and entirely lack literary ambition, not to mention the difficulty of imagining the illustrious king climbing around scaffolding in order to add the narrative captions with his own hand. It is also noteworthy that the registers provide a faithful rendering of the literary versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* and are devoid of any gestures toward Śaivism.

In contrast to the door and the tantric figures overseeing the northern and southern wall, the narrative scenes do not point to the presence of Saṃvara inside the shrine and have no apparent tantric function. I presume that the depiction of such exoteric narratives in the antechamber of tantric shrines

(which are inaccessible to me) is unusual. From this I conclude that the addition of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* murals must have changed the nature of the vestibule radically. It is conceivable that the antechamber lost its status as a tantric sacred space reserved for initiates as a result of this intervention and that only afterward did it become a public space that anyone (including present-day tourists from the West) can venture into—that is, except when it is used for its original purpose of esoteric tantric rituals and closed for non-initiates. This is of course hypothetical and far from certain. For instance, it is also possible that at the time of Pratāpa Malla the vestibule had already been used as a public space and that this allowed Pratāpa Malla to decorate its walls with the *Purāṇa* in the first place. In the absence of further evidence I see no way to settle the matter. However, whatever the precise circumstances of their production may have been, I believe it is safe to conclude from the foregoing deliberations that the narrative murals originated with Pratāpa Malla, as the *thyāsaphū* adduced by Śākya has it.

* * *

While the murals date back some 350 years, it is clear that the narrative paintings as they survive bear little if any resemblance to their original appearance at the time of Pratāpa Malla. Rather, the style of the current paintings with their use of perspective and the isometric rendering of buildings betrays Western influence in a way typical for the so-called “Company style.” This style developed in the era of the East India Company during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as Indian artists were exposed to Western techniques and stylistic elements. Also, given the quality of Newar paintings of the Malla period, it seems likely that the paintings in their original state were more refined than the mainly crude depictions of the extant murals. It thus follows that the original paintings (which must have been executed in an earlier, traditional Newar style, such as used for the Cleveland scroll studied by Mary Slusser, which predates the murals by little more than twenty years) were repainted in a manner influenced by the Company style. Repainting the murals involved not only stylistic changes but also updating the dresses, the townscapes (which depict buildings from the late period of Jung Bahadur Rana’s reign that ended in 1877),³⁰ and other aspects of the material culture. Given the daily offerings of incense and oil lamps in the vestibule, and the resultant blackening of the murals, it would seem

30. I owe this observation to Niels Gutschow.

likely that such repainting happened more than once, with the latest layer executed in a particularly crude manner.

However, despite the impression of Western influence, there are elements preserved which—to my untutored eyes—seem to reflect an earlier, purely Indic style with flatter representations. Similarly, the large-scale depictions of deities (and *siddhas*) above the narrative registers (see plates 6 and 7) seem older in style and relatively untouched by the Company style. They also seem of better quality, most notably the dynamic and well-composed depiction of Padmanṛtyeśvara. Possibly, these paintings higher up the walls owe their superior state to their relative inaccessibility—reaching them requires scaffolding—which may have spared them from all-too-frequent renovation attempts and repainting. Another factor might have been their tantric nature and a greater reluctance to touch such figures.

Matching the repainting of the narrative scenes, the current script of the captions, Nagari, is clearly not the original. The Newari script was used during the Malla era when Pratāpa had the murals painted. The obliteration of earlier layers of the murals also extends to the donor inscription. The surviving inscription reproduced above must have replaced earlier such inscriptions, and I presume that the murals in their original state would have included a donative inscription in which the creation of the murals by Pratāpa Malla was recorded.

Even though the narrative paintings in their present form are in the main a mere century old, they deserve close attention not only because of their impressive scale and their location. They mimic earlier forms of the murals and presumably preserve its overall structure and design faithfully. Closely following the literary versions of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, they add valuable material for the study of this important work. In the aforementioned monograph under preparation, I will offer a comprehensive presentation of the narrative murals that will include a transcription and translation of the extant captions and aim to bring image and text into conversation. The extant murals are also of particular interest because they relate to Pratāpa Malla and his activities at Svayambhū. I have already touched upon this in the present paper, but I will pursue this further in an article dedicated to Pratāpa Malla's interventions at Svayambhū and their import for our understanding of the complex relationships between Hindu and Buddhist traditions among the Newars.

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Plate 3. Scroll painting (circa 6 by 4 feet), belonging to Maru Bāhāḥ monastery of Kathmandu, as displayed during the full-moon day in August 1997. The painting depicts the self-origination of the five buddhas in the form of light (*jyotirūpa*) upon a lotus flower made of gems, arisen from the lake then covering the Kathmandu Valley. The five buddhas constitute collectively the principle of buddhahood and here represent Svayambhū. In the foreground Mañjuśrī can be seen with his sword raised for cutting a gorge into the encircling ring of mountains so as to release the lake's waters and drain the valley. (Photo: Alexander von Rospatt)



Plate 4. The southern side of the shrine of Śāntipur up at Svayambhū to the north of the *caitya*. This is the sole entrance to the vestibule with the depiction of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* on its four walls. (Photo: Manik Bajracharya)



Plate 5. The door leading from the vestibule into the inner sanctum of Śāntipur. Entry into this secret tantric shrine is restricted to the most senior member of the *buddhācārya* clan in charge of Svayambhū and their priest. Marked with two eyes, the door depicts Saṃvara, the principal deity of Śāntipur, who is worshiped here from outside. The flanking images of the goddess Kākāsyā and Ulūkāsyā guard the door in accordance with their function in the Saṃvaramaṇḍala. The inscription on the far left commemorates Pratāpa Malla's incursion into the shrine undertaken at the time of drought in order to pacify the serpent deities and bring about rain. (Photo: Manik Bajracharya)



Plate 6. The upper portion of the north wall of the vestibule of Śāntipur. Underneath the gabled roof, once covered by tiles and now by corrugated iron sheet, the primordial Buddha Vajradhara is shown in the center, flanked by two (unidentified) *mahāsiddhas*. Below these presiding figures the *Svayambhūpurāṇa* is depicted. Of the seven registers on the north wall the three uppermost ones can be seen here. They depict the first two chapters of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, which introduce the sacred lake that Nepal once was and relate the manifestation of Svayambhū upon a lotus on its waters. The registers are interrupted by a wooden baldachin-like structure crowning the door leading inside the shrine. The winged face in the center is a *kīrtimukha* (Newari: *chepaḥ* or *chepu*) holding the trunk of two snakes that he is devouring, with their heads visible to the sides of his wings. At the very bottom on each side the upper snout of a *makara* can be made out. Together with the *kīrtimukha* the two *makaras* form a crowning arch over the gate, in the way tymphanea (*toraṇa*) made of wood typically do in the Newar tradition. (Photo: Stanislaw Klimek)



Plate 7. The upper portion of the south wall above the narrative registers inside the vestibule of Śāntipur. The dancing deity in the center is Padmaṅṭyeśvara (Newari: *nāsadyab*), a form of Lokeśvara, who plays an important role in the Newar tradition as the deity presiding over the initiatory practice of tantric songs and dance. He is flanked by two of the guardian deities of the Cakrasaṃvaramaṇḍala, namely the blue, crow-faced Kākāsyā and the green, owl-faced Ulūkāsyā. In turn Kakāsyā and Ulūkāsyā are flanked by three forms of Vajrayoginī and, on the far right, Nairātmyā. (Photos: Stanislaw Klimek. Photoshop processing by Iain Sinclair.)



Plate 8. The donor scene (depicted in the bottom register of the eastern wall) commemorating the renovation of the murals completed in 1904. Behind the priest offering into the fire, the donors are arranged according to age (and gender), starting with Sīnārām and Kṛṣṇalakṣmī, continuing with their son Harṣamān and his wife Daśalakṣmī, and ending with Sīnārām's two daughters Harṣamāyā and Harṣalāni, and a grandson, probably the newly born Pūrṇalāl. Sīnārām, Kṛṣṇalakṣmī, and Harṣamān had passed away before the renovation was performed, but they are depicted to mark them as donors sharing in the merit of the renovation. (Photo: Stanislaw Klimek)



Plate 9. Scene on the northern wall depicting the primordial lake covering Nepal even before the manifestation of Svayambhū. The accompanying captions read "Here, water creatures living in the lake Nāga Abode and forest creatures abiding in the (surrounding) forests" (*thana nāgavāsadabasa jalajamtupanisenam vāsa yānā cogu vanajamtu vanasa cogu:*), and "Here, deities and *apsaras* taking a bath in the lake Nāga Abode" (*thana devaloka-apsarālokapani sakalem nāgavāsa dabasa a[sn]āna yāgu:*). (Photo: Stanislaw Klimek)



Plate 10. A scene on the northern wall (subsequent to plate 9) depicting how Mañjudeva cut a gorge into the encircling ring of mountains in order to drain the lake, an event the murals locate before at Dakṣiṅkāli in the very south of the valley, where the Bāgmatī exits. In his other hand, Mañjudeva holds a book as a marker of his identity as Mañjuśrī, the wisdom bodhisattva. He is accompanied by his two consorts, who can be seen on either side of the lake looking on. The caption reads: “Here, having set up his two (consorts) Varadā and Mokṣadā (lit.: Boon-Granter and Liberation-Granter) on the (surrounding) mountains, the master Mañjudeva cutting (an outlet) with his sword Candrahāsa (so named because its brilliance mocks the moon)” (*thana mañudeva ācāryyāna varaḍā mokṣadā nigulī pararvatasa tayāva candrahāsa ṣaḡe chedana yāka*:). (Photo: Stanislaw Klimek)



Plate 11. Inscription from 1657 set up on the drum of the Svayambhūcaitya next to the niche housing Amitābha. It gives the text of the *Svayambhūbhattāarakastotra* composed by Pratāpa Malla. Despite the title (“Hymn in Praise of the Venerable Svayambhū”) and its resonance with the title of the short version of the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*—*Svayambhūcaityabhattāarakodeśa*—the poem is a thinly veiled hymn of Śambhū (i.e., Śiva) rather than of Svayambhū. (Photo: Manik Bajracharya)



Plate 12. On the eve of the full-moon day of Kārtika (October 24, 1999), the *citrakar* traditionally in charge of Svayambhū repaints the eyes of the crow-faced goddess Kākāsyā, who guards the entrance into the inner sanctum of Śāntipur together with the owl-faced Ulūkāsyā on the other side of the door. Ever year this full-moon day serves as an occasion to revitalize Svayambhū. In addition to repainting the eyes of Kākāsyā and Ulūkāsyā, the *citrakar* repaints the facial features on the door flanked by these two protector goddesses. He also repaints the eyes and other marks on the *caitya's* *harmikā*, the faces of the statues in the niches of the dome, as well as the shrine of Agnipur and other such iconic objects around Svayambhū. (Photo: Alexander von Rospatt)