

ON THE ICONOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN OF LCAM-SRING, THE GOD OF WAR

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In the series of the Defenders of the Faith, in Sanskrit *Dhatma-pala* (धर्मपाल), in Tibetan *Chos-skyong* (), who execute the will of the tutelaries, one of them has a special figure for Tibetan theology : *Lcam-sring* (), the God of War. The representation of these Defenders is of the fiercest kind, *drag-po* () or *drag-gs'ed* (), and there was the problem of the origin of such iconographical conceptions. Some authors think that they are metamorphoses of the Hindu *Kali Devi* (काली देवी); others speak of a Chinese influence or a Tibetan origin, such representations coming possibly from ancient native gods or goddesses of the *Bon* () culture, for instance, The Red-Tiger devil, I shall study here the iconography of the God of War; as in my particular collection of Thankas I have some representations of this *dharma-pala*, they helped me in my work.

The usual representation which is in some of my Tibetan thankas is the following one :

He is red coloured and treads a horse with his right foot, and, with his left one, a naked man. With his right hand he brandishes a sparkling sword and between his lips he mouthes a human heart. In his left hand he carries a bow and a spear with a red flag green cornered. He has a frontal eye. His armour is covered by a floating vestment with sleeves. At his left, accompanying him, is *Srog-bdog* () covered by an armour, sitting on a dark-grey wolf, in his right hand he carries a sword, and in his left one, a noose, At his right side appears *Rig-bu-mo* (), sitting on a light grey lion, with a knife in his right hand, and a *p'ur-bu* () in the left one. He is surrounded by red devils, the "knife holders" (*gri-thogs*) who cut the corpses which cover the battlefield, and who raven hearts, etc. . They all carry a sword in their right hand.

It is a terrible *Dnarmcpala*. His head has the coloury aspect (*K'ro-bo*) of all those divinities, and, just like his hands, it is red coloured. On his three-eyed 'forehead' a skulls' wreath is placed. From his back hangs a chain of severed heads. In another *tanka* (). he is covered by a golden armour, and with his right foot he treads a horse and with the left one a naked man. With his right hand he brandishes

a sword. its pommel *p'ur-bu* () shaped, and between his lips he mousthes a human heart. His left arm carries a bow and a spear. He has a frontal eye, and on his head he bears a crown formed by five skulls. Hanging from his waist we can see the great garland of human heads. symbol of these terrible divinities. He is surrounded by ten emanations of himself. In the upper part there are three lamas; in the middle, *Con-Kha-pa* (), sitting on a lotus in the attitude of meditation-his hands resting on his chest and holding the stems of two lotuses crowned, the right one by the sword, and the left one by the book. He is accompanied by two of his disciples : *Mkas-grub* () at the right side, and *Rgyal-chab* () at the left one.

On another *tanka*, this god is distinct from his usual iconography; he is there on foot on a lotus, and no one is around him. With his right hand he brandishes a sword, he is devouring a human heart and carries a spear. The sun and the moon appear above. The painting is black bluish and yellow, red and white strokes. The divinity is surrounded by flamy clouds. Below, a fantastic background covered by bones.

It is well-known that the *Dharmcpalas* have always a terrific appearance, bordered by flames, with sword, spear and whip. They are always of the fiercest fiendish kind. The *Lha-mo* () or *pal-lban-lha-mo* (), "the queen of the warring weapon", is one of them; she is surrounded by flames, riding on a white-faced mule, upon a saddle made out of the skin of her own son; she is clad in human skins and is eating a human body and drinking blood from a skull; often she has serpents around her. As it is known she is worshipped for seven days at the end of the twelfth month, and the offerings are placed in a bowl made out of a human skull. The identification *Lha-mo* with the *Sri Devi*, (श्री देवी) or the *Kali* (काली) of the Hindu mythology is evident; in the case of *Lha-mo*, there is also a big influence of the prototype of the goddess *Durga*. (दुर्गा)

According to Grunwedel and Pozdneev, *Lcam-sring* belongs to the group of the *arcg-gsed*, the "Terrible Eight" whch are really the following nine gods : *Rta-mgrin* (); *Lcam-sring* (); *Jigs-byed* (); *Gsin-rje* (); *Mgon-po dkar-po* (); *Ts'angs-pa* (); *Rnam-t'os-sras* (); Grunwedel has doubt about the origin of *Lcam-sring*; he is thinking of *Kartikeya* (कार्तिकेय) or *Skandc* (स्कन्द) the God of War of Hinduism, son of *Siva* (शिव) and *Purvati*

(पार्वती) according to most of the Puranic texts. He notes the outstanding part played by the God of War in the *Tsam'* () dance. But I do not see in the Hindu iconography of *Skanda* anything which recalls the Tibetan God of War.

For my part, I think that almost every one of these terrible gods and goddesses, defenders of Buddhism, are coming from the same representations in Hinduism around the great *Devi* (देवी) in her destructive or transforming aspect: *Camunda*, (चामुण्डा) for instance, is an emanation of *Durga* (दुर्गा) and the *Markandeya Purana* (मार्कण्डेय पुराण) gives the description of this black goddess with a sword, a whip, a noose, a collar of skulls and with her eyes full of blood and fury. The *Devi* takes the forms of the *Yogini* (योगिनी), the witches and ogresses who accompany *Durga* and of the *Dakini* (डाकिनी), the demons, eaters of human flesh and companions of *Kali* (काली); we have, in the Hindu demonology, the *Grahi*, witches who come into the body of new borns and kill them, the *Bhairavi* (भैरवी), who assist *Siva* (शिव), and *Durga*, the *Sakini* (शाकिनी) who help the black goddess. All these forms are the female side of the gods of awe and terror, like *Rudra* (रुद्र), *Bhairava* (भैरव), *Bhutesvara* (भूतेश्वर), the 'chief-of-the-phantoms', with the serpents on his head and the collar of skulls. All around these aspects of *Siva-Rudra* (शिव-रुद्र) there is a very rich iconography which has had certain consequences on Tibetan mythology. All the gods of the *Drag-po* kind have their Hindu counterpart: *Rta-mgrin* is *Hayagriva* (हयग्रीव); *Ys'in-rje gs'ed is Yamari* (यमारि); the *Mkah-'gro-ma* are the *dakini*, the demoniacal tutelaries. Surely, all these black Tibetan gods are coming from local and primitive deities but the theological conception and definition issue from Hinduism. The tantric rites from Bengal brought these deities and they were assimilated with local genii, many of them from the *Bon* cult.

I think that our God of War, *Lcam-sring*, belongs to that same class; all his characteristics are coming from the fiercest kind of *Siva* as *Rudra* (रुद्र) and *Kali* (काली); the frontal eye, the sword, the noose, the serpents, the skulls, the eyes full of rage. He is a destroyer, and, in this aspect, a Tibetan masculine copy of *Kali*, the transformer of the World, the "Black" who is symbol of the destruction of the Creation; her black colour represents the darkness of the Void of the Universe, as *Kali* is said "to be clad with Space", *digambari* (दिगम्बरी). She is the Great Mother who unceasingly creates forms but life continues only by Death and Renewal. *Kali* is the goddess of the Infinite Power who creates, transforms and dissolves the manifestation of the Universe. This

aspect of transformation is represented by terrific instruments she carries, as the skulls, the blood, the serpents and the human corpses which surround her. *Lcam-sring* is also a destructive form of god; for this reason, he bears all the iconographical symbolism of the Great Goddess, and his appearance is very close to some representations of the Hindu Black Goddess.