

After several years of attempts to get access to the niche for an entire documentation of the Sumda Chung temple it was not until 2005 when the team of Holger Neuwirth first got permission to enter the niche. A detailed measurement and photographic documentation followed.

The ground plan is a rectangle, 4,10 metres wide and 2,1 metres deep with a height of 4,5 metres. An uncommon roof-construction that covers the niche gives the characteristic outward appearance. The threepartite wooden construction with a gabled roof lantern is once more protected by a flat roof that is higher than the main roof so it emphasises its appearance. Through a triangular window the 37 clay-figures on the inside-walls get daylight.

They form a Vajradhatumahamandala with the central Buddha Vairocana in the middle. The four-headed Vairocana is seated on an elaborate lion throne "framed by triple pillars with composite animals (leogryphs) and their four-armed riders"¹, lions, elephants and a garuda.

"Two apsaras offer a crown just above Vairocana"². "Deities playing trumpets bestride the makaras at the top of the pillars. The tails of these makara are held by another garuda topping the frame. They also branch off into fantastically elaborate and colourful scroll patterns."³

"Vairocana is flanked by the mothers of the families, the Eight Offering Goddesses and the four gate-keepers."⁴ On each side wall there are two Jinas surrounded by four vajra-Bodhisattvas.

Until summer 2009 the niche was closed by a glass-structure and due to the danger of collapsing the interior space was occupied by supporting columns. During the renovation works the roof was renovated so almost all beams could have been removed and the niche was opened to receive the original impression of the interior space of the temple.

Text:
Dagmar Ley/ quotations from "Buddhist Sculptures in Clay", Christian Luczanits, Serinada Publications Chicago
Fotos:
Holger Neuwirth/ Christian Luczanits/ Dagmar Ley



photomontage of the niche



details of lacunars, wood carved capital and lion console

Sumda Chung Gompa

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