

28. LAMPAS CANOPY

Blue and gold-colored silk
Early Ming, Imperial, third quarter of the 15th century
Date supported by C14 analysis
89 x 87 cm (35 x 34.25 in.)



It is an exciting and possibly unique occurrence to be able to show a slightly later version of the same textile.¹ That some fifty years later such a similar, albeit much smaller, indigo blue with yellow silk lampas canopy was made as an Imperial gift from one of the Ming emperors to a Tibetan lama or monastery, underlines the continuing importance of the relationships between the two cultures and the role of patronage. The high level of quality, colors, overall design and individual elements are almost identical to the larger canopy – although careful examination

allows us to see that the articulation of the motifs and the treatment of space are subtly different. Two other identical canopies are known, one with a saffron ground and the other with a red ground (see image above). Why they were made in different colors hitherto remains unknown.²

When compared to the larger canopy, this panel visually has more undecorated space and is less densely embellished. This is achieved through making two changes: the simplification of the design elements and the reduction of the amount of surface space covered by the yellow yarn. The outer band is narrower and the six lotus flowers that run along the outer edge of each side, are all shown open, of the same design, and connected by single stem. If we compare this border to that on the larger canopy, it is striking: there are many more leaves, more stalks, and proportionately, the lotus flowers are smaller and not all the same. The two lotus flowers at the center of each border are shown with a lotus pod at the center, perhaps to indicate each word of a prayer. In the corners ornately decorated gold pots can be seen with scarves shown flying as if in wind off each shoulder like the ribbons on a Yuan or Ming Buddhist figure's crown. It is from these pots the lotus stalks emerge which then travel down the sides with their flowers and leaves. On the large textile the pots are prominent and fill the corner; on the example discussed here, the pots are nearly identical in design, but smaller.

In both canopies, the Eight Auspicious Symbols (Skt. *ashtamangala*; Tib. *bkra shis rtags brgyad*; Chin. *bajixiang*) are woven in yellow silk using the blue ground to create outlines and details.³ The double-*vajras* at the center of this textile make an instructive comparison and allow to better understand the small changes that occurred possibly as a feature of the changes in the style of the times. Although smaller, they can still be understood to be a different and later



form than those of the earlier Yongle period type seen on the larger canopy. Additionally, the vertical pair of *vajra*-heads has a different shape and construction than the horizontal pair, whereas the two pairs are identical in the other canopy. Here, the middle-section of the *vajras* is no longer the *yin-yang* design but has been changed to a small eight petal lotus with pearl roundel around two concentric circles.



NOTES:

1. This textile was acquired in the 1980s in Japan. At that time it was mounted onto a silk panel and put on a stretcher. Recent conservation has revealed that it is complete as woven although the four edges have been folded over. The selvages are complete on two sides and the opposite sides have been cut. The memory of the creases made rebacking it in the same way necessary. The indigo dye has been kindly identified by Arthur Leeper.
2. See: Described as “saffron ground with design in yellow” (black and white photo), 90 x 90 cm, Sotheby’s London: Indian, Himalayan and South-East Asian Art, 13th/14th June 1988, lot 137; the same exact type, and possibly the same textile is in the Amy S. Clague collection, red ground with design in yellow silk, 92 x 92 cm (including fringe and selvage). Brown (et al.) 2000, pp.53-55, fig.7.
3. For a description of the Eight Auspicious Symbols and their use during Ming times on Buddhist textiles see Brown, ed. 2000 p. 47. One banner of a set of late 14th century embroidered and couched gold wrapped thread Buddhist hangings that feature The Eight Auspicious Symbols sitting on individual lotus flowers with scrolling stalks and leaves, was sold at Bonham’s, Images of Devotion, 29 November 2016, lot no. 123. In this example, the order and symbols do not follow those used on the Ming canopies. Further, the Bonham’s example precisely follows the style of similar banners made almost certainly in the same workshop as another similar pair have been C14 dated to 980 – 1290 AD (Spink & Sons Ltd, 1989 nos.20 & 21).