



In the Land of Ghosts and Spirits

Centuries ago, a demon destroyed the foundations of a Buddhist monastery under construction in central Tibet. Then Guru Rinpoche, who had brought Buddhism to the kingdom, pursued the demon west, deep into Mustang. The two fought among Mustang's snow peaks, desert canyons and grasslands. Guru Rinpoche prevailed, and he scattered the demon's body parts across Mustang: its blood formed towering red cliffs, and its intestines tumbled to the wind-scoured earth east of the cliffs. Later, people would build a wall of prayer stones, the longest in Nepal, atop the intestines.





On the fifth day of our journey, we stood above the demon's heart. Here, on a hillside, the people of Mustang had built the monastery of Lo Gekar, one of the oldest in the Tibetan world. A lama showed us around. we found no remnants of a demonic heart, but the walls in a dark room at the rear were covered with paintings of fearsome creatures with fangs and blue skin. Tibetans called them protector deities. Our guide pulled us over into the shadows and pointed to another wall. We squinted, and saw a statue of Buddha that had been carved from the rock.

"They say the statue is natural and was discovered this way," the Lama said. "People in Mustang have many stories. They believe everything. There are spirits everywhere you look."



