

# AESTHETIC META-MOMENTS



NAVIN KUMAR



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**NAVIN KUMAR**

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# INTRODUCTION

This exhibition has been organized around the concept of *Aesthetic Meta-Moments*. It begins with a theoretical and experiential description of what meta-moments are and how they relate to art. Just as exceptional works of art should speak to people of all levels of knowledge, so too should exceptional curation should at once expose accessible themes while challenging viewers to personally grow alongside the exhibition. On walking through the exhibition, one will find threads that link the paintings together, allowing it to be appreciated as a larger unit. And on the conceptual level, the thematic organization around meta-moments is a reminder that the culmination of art lies in the moment of reflexive signification that it induces in the viewer.

As Tantric subjects have always been known to have a significant and lasting impact on viewers, they are highly suited substrates for an exhibition on meta-moments. This exhibition therefore contains a large number of Tantric works of art, with an emphasis on deities belonging to the highest class of Tantras, such as Kālacakra, Guhyasamāja, Vajrabhairava, and Buddhakapala.

In the middle of last year, I was asked what direction future research in Tibetan Art might take. This is not an easy question given the maturity of scholarship in the field. It has progressed a great deal since my father, Navin Kumar, started collecting Tibetan art in the 1960s. Many works of art have now been dated based on inscriptions, and provide solid anchor points for further interpretation of art history. And an even larger set of works can be dated to within a couple of decades by cross-correlating depicted lineages with textual sources. Yet, in stark contrast to these anchoring cases, one finds an incredible persistence of stylistic motifs across the centuries, and that is in addition to iconographic invariance of most subjects. This fact highlights the marvels of our capacity to develop a sensitivity of period and provenance through highly subtle variations in style, as well as the challenges for the field moving ahead.

As a hypothesis, one way in which new insights can be gleaned from a Tibetan works of art is to start looking at the statistical significance of groupings of iconographic and stylistic motifs across carefully constructed data sets. The write-ups for the Vajrabhairava maṇḍala and the Hayagrīva maṇḍala in particular contain examples of what such a process might look like.

And with that, let's dive straight into the discussion of meta-moments, reflexivity and representation!



# REFLEXIVITY AND REPRESENTATION

## I FROM REFLEXIVITY TO META-MOMENTS

The precursors to meta-moments are reflexive moments. Reflexive moments are moments when one feels their presence within moment-to-moment experience. It is recognizably reflexive, with a non-trivial feeling of being witness to the moment. A simple example is to compare the non-reflexive moment of "feeling sunlight" to the reflexive moment of "I am feeling sunlight".

Implicit in the simple feeling of sunlight is the vantage point from which that feeling takes place: the perspective of the observer or experiencer. A reflexive moment implies that some aspect of what it means to be an observer or experiencer is represented within the moment-to-moment observation. It is a kind of recognition of one's participation and presence in a moment. Reflexive moments contain a kind of self-reference.

A meta-moment occurs when a reflexive moment is described. This description, or representation, is not limited to description through language. If you intentionally represent a reflexive moment through drawing, movement, or sound, it induces the experience of a meta-moment. When an object is seen from a new angle, and you feel aware of the invariance of the object despite the variation in perspective, it is a meta-moment. The reflexive moment itself becomes an object of experience that is characterized. Meta-moments are thus an instance of recursion or iteration on a reflexive moment. Embedded in this discussion are the seeds for describing a meta-logic for experience that embraces self-reference, with every description of experience itself a part of experience.

But we're faced immediately with a conundrum: we should be experiencing meta-moments all the time, without ever noticing it! Indeed, these meta-moments happen spontaneously and frequently. As moments, they are by definition momentary and ephemeral. Though if they are too transient to notice in our own lives, it sounds like something of academic interest. But this is not the case...some meta-moments have sufficient temporal coherence and resonance to be recognizable. This resonance is created through depth of recursion of a reflexive experience: a simple, short-lived meta-moment as a part of experience becomes the substrate for representation and another short-lived meta-moment.

When you say something like saying "I'm aware that I'm aware" and reflect on the experience represented by the idea, the echo of this self-reference facilitates coherence in meta-moments. Similarly, when, in the process performing a task, you become aware that you are paying attention to a detail in its broader context, and you then recognize the quality of the attention you are giving to the task, that is a meta-moment with noticeable depth! When we contemplate the quality of the attention with which we perform a task, it is clear that meta-moments are immanently accessible to us. Did we perform a task with care, diligence, appreciation, gratitude, focus? It is surprising how rarely we engage with such questions, even though they are of obvious utility in lived experience.

## II META-MOMENTS IN LEARNING AND IN ART

Reflexive moments seem intrinsically subjective, and to some people, subjectivity may appear to limit what we can come to know. Yet in the construction of meta-moments, one may start to see hints of how that subjectivity itself may play a vital role in constructing a path to insight. For through the recursion of meta-moments, one can understand one's own role in that which is experienced. As is usually the case, what is responsible for this apparent paradox is a flaw in the view itself. Even in a non-reflexive moment, the observation depends on the nature of the observer. It then is obvious that any insight into nature of experience would require recursive action to uncover its structure. The things we can recognize, comprehend, learn from, and grow with, are the things that are most intimate to us! That's precisely why meta-moments are useful: they expose the kinds of new opportunities and possibilities for knowledge and action that we would be most concerned with.

The archetypal description of a meta-moment is derived from meta-moments that we can recognize and describe. It is the feeling viewing oneself and the world at the same time. The shift in the perspectival center of gravity makes it feel like one is looking at oneself from the outside. Certain kinds of transformation in perspective allow us to see beyond limitations that were honestly felt, but only existed as mental appearances. A meta-moment represents a transformation in perspective that itself guides further development of perspectival shifts. There is a kind of beauty to this. As one takes a step back, the picture gets bigger with our world expanding, and coincident with this, it appears as if the detailed inner structure of things begins to unfold and make sense. That meta-moments appear to provide a panoramic view and act as a conduit for insight is a most wondrous phenomenon.

Some works of art have an internal structure that relates various facets of the work to each other. As such, parallel to its surface in space-time, the facets of a work weave a conceptual and aesthetic space for play and exploration. Good art begins with an immediate and rare aesthetic response to the work of art as a whole. From this base substrate, the driver of depth in an aesthetic experience is a sustained engagement within that play-space.

So now for the experiment called Aesthetic Meta-Moments. Each time you view a work of art here, first notice the space between you and the artwork, and then your presence viewing the work. Then engage with the visual stimuli as you let your eye wander through the details in the work. When you encounter an evocation that relates to life concepts, through symbolism or association, return to the feeling of your presence viewing the work, return to the simplicity of the aesthetic evocation, and marvel at how these two aspects anchor and ground the reflection on life. There is no objective or lesson beyond learning about how you engage with yourself and your own world-view.

The works in this exhibition have been chosen due to the evocativeness of their forms, the richness of detail, and the presence of symbolism that can connect you with themes such as time, history, bliss, arrogance, death, and wisdom. For each artwork, at the bottom of the page, you will find the name of a concept that might guide an evocation during the viewing of the work of art.

### III FROM "AS-NESS" TO "IS-NESS"

Anything that is available for us to observe, whether it is sensory perception, thought, emotion, motion or memory, is an appearance. We may intuitively appreciate that the appearance is not equivalent with the thing it represents. For example, the flux of photons on our retina is a representation of some collection of objects, not the objects themselves. The representation is an encoding of information that is generated through some process. In the act of representation, the appearance of objects emerges from an effervescent flux of information. When recognizing that the world around us is seen through transient dynamics, the appearance of a world filled with objects of tangible quality feels like magic.

Instead of seeing an appearance as merely analogous to a conceived object, the appearance is often taken as equivalent to the object. As a simple example, instead of seeing the appearance of an elevated heart-rate as the appearance of frustration, we directly see frustration. That same appearance could have, in slightly different circumstances, been interpreted as fear or arousal. But once the appearance participates in the process of becoming, much of the information opening the potential for alternative interpretations is discarded.

Perhaps we can say that the as-ness of experience is substituted for is-ness. Is-ness being the certainty with which appearances are bestowed with definite identity. It is no doubt a useful approximation that enables us to make subsequent interpretive moves. This process is routine and natural. The process of learning is a process in which we learn a basis set of representations that are mutually consistent and self-reinforcing. In other words, we tend to learn a process of representation that quickly and efficiently moves towards the appearance of ontological certainty.

Existence and ontology in our conceptual apparatus are linked to the idea of space. Even noumena are conceived as that which exist in their own space, though it is not the same as the phenomenal space in which physics takes place. This space is a representation of similarity and distance between things for which representational capacity exists in the system.

During meta-moments, in seeing interconnectedness and in recognizing how things depend on each other, the fixation on the concreteness of individual objects is loosened. Through an appreciation of connectivity, distance promotes recognizing the as-ness of a momentary appearance. This return to seeing things as appearances can open up new possibilities that were closed-off by the limitations of our own preconceived certainties about the world. One kind of experience we can play with is the experience of simply resting in the seeing things as appearances instead of flowing with the interpretive arcs of is-ness.

## IV FROM REPRESENTATION TO SELF-REPRESENTATION

At the intersection of reflexivity and representation, is the question of how a system can have representational capacity for itself (i.e. represent aspects of itself). This phrasing has been carefully chosen for its potential compatibility with both mathematics/physics and the phenomenology of experience. I hope in future the simple concepts here can be explored rigorously in mathematics, physics, and computer science.

Let's start with the example of some system that classifies its inputs, i.e. has representational capacity with regards to the set of possible outputs it produces. In the action of classifying inputs, the as-ness of the input becomes the is-ness of the output. The output of the system cannot be seen independent of the nature of the system performing the action of classification. Therefore, however masked or incomplete it may be, embedded in a system's output is some encoding of its own nature.

A system may be able to develop representational capacity for some aspect of itself if it is able to close the loop. By this, it is meant that the output of the system (its representations) themselves become subsequent inputs (objects for further representation). Being already a system with representational capacity, the system has some internal structure through which it can learn some invariant structure from the information it is presented with. One might even wonder what degrees of loop closure exist with current machine learning algorithms, for it may be that even learning representational capacity requires loop closure. The distinction between self-representation and representation then simply becomes what part of the loop a system learns.

Discursive reasoning is very much like playing a game of chess with oneself. When we have a thought or create a linguistic proposition, it is a representation of internal state. Yet there is an asymmetry between the 'set' of internal states that would generate a thought or proposition and the 'set' of internal states that are evoked on witnessing the thought or parsing the proposition. The informational asymmetry is that not all information used to create a proposition is available for its parsing. As representation is like a many-to-one function, there is ambiguity when parsing infers the co-domain of the representational function used for generation. This asymmetry between generation and parsing drives a kind of internal recursion that may be important for self-representation. Thus, even when one is the source of their own thoughts, we in some sense have to infer why we had the thought in the first place! If we take the perspective of the experience, we can see how the experience gives rise to the proposition. And if we take the perspective of the proposition, we can see what the proposition says about experience.

The notion that linguistic referents are noumenal is a conviction created from representation. When one encounters an unknown pattern of symbols for the first time, one could suspend judgment regarding its meaning. Yet the presupposition that it has meaning is what facilitates resolution of uncertainty and allows a preliminary inference of some meaning based on context and our pre-existing representational basis. This presupposition of prior meaning, required for inference, provides the appearance that it existed prior to our knowing it, and hence, the appearance of noumenal linguistic referents. This may not be the only explanation, but what it hints at is that the appearance that linguistic referents exist independent of our representation of the word should not be taken literally. As-ness need not be confused with is-ness.

## V PHYSICS, ONTOLOGY, AND INFORMATION

One of the motivations for physicists is to uncover a basis set of primitives with well-defined and self-consistent behavior, from which all phenomena can be derived. As a convenient short-hand, the goal of creating a meta-logic is articulated here as "everything is matter". The exact form of this statement depends on which physical theory is used for the underlying structure of reality. In some variations, space-time itself is not a physical primitive, but is emergent from something more fundamental. In string theory, for example, one could loosely say "everything is made of strings". Common across physical theories is that the behavior of all observable phenomenon should emerge from the fundamental nature/behavior of its physical primitives. The near universality of its coverage makes it similar to the meta-logical proposition hinted at in earlier discussions, that "everything is experience".

Physical and experiential descriptions are complementary: physics is a linguistic form of experience in the experiential description, and experiences become phenomenon to be described in physical description. Modern neuroscience is the context through which physics attempts to describe experience. The language of physics has significantly enhanced the accuracy with which we can represent phenomena that occur in nature. Accuracy of representation can always be achieved by creating a more refined language for representation. This refinement, however, effectively creates hierarchy. Starting from an appearance or observation, one has to translate the description of that appearance down to a level compatible with the most fundamental level of the hierarchy, and then translate the implications back up to the level of appearances to check for self-consistency. On the level of appearances, similarity and equivalence relate to accuracy. But what of the level of the deepest layer of the hierarchy: is it self-validating or is there something missing that cannot be captured by the trend towards higher accuracy?

A physical theory is a set of equations (mathematical propositions) that express relationships between the physical primitives and properties that these primitives can have. For example, the properties of particles, such as their position, mass, and charge, stand in relation to the properties of other particles. The success of an equation in describing observable behavior is not the question. Rather, the question is how a particle can know exactly, or with an incredible precision, its own properties and the properties of other particles. In principle, a particle feels forces, however minute, from all other particles in the universe! Similarly, for a partial differential equation describing a field, one can ask how is it that certain aspects of the field (such as its spatial derivatives) can have knowledge of other aspects of that field (such as derivatives in time or another spatial coordinate) and behave according to this knowledge. When we think of it like that, it is hard not to marvel at its great mystery! So on one hand, the system of physics provides explanation for higher orders of the hierarchy, but at its root encodes the capacity for representation into the nature of the physical primitives itself.

From the standpoint of an equation, a physical primitive is merely a convenient placeholder for the appearance of a behavioral pattern in the capacity to synthesize and represent information. In other words, the only concreteness the physical primitive has is indistinguishable from its capacity to present and represent information consistent with the relationships described in an equation.

There could be countless other ways – unimaginable to us now – with which we could have described physical phenomenon with a basis set of equations. The physical primitives that appear in these versions

would be different than the ones we see in theories today. Yet, they might all be equivalent in how they stitch together a fabric of phenomena that appear to us in experience. One can learn, study, and advance the cause of science without conflating a statement about epistemology with a statement about ontology.

This particular aspect was chosen for discussion for two reasons. The first is that the ideas are resonant with the earlier discussions of representation and the conversion of as-ness to is-ness. The second reason is that there is an implication that there may be an invariant property of any system of logic, not even limited to physics or science. The truth of any proposition is ascertained by an agent that represents the objects of the proposition and validates their relationship. For the proposition to be universally true, independent of the agent, the objects of the propositions must have the capacity to present themselves to those objects that they stand in relation to, have the capacity to represent the information that they receive from other objects. Refining our language improves the accuracy of representation, but can never remove the need for the presumption that some things simply "know" as the fundamental nature of their being. Invisible from the vantage point of the meta-logical system is the presumption of an awareness. This awareness is the condition of possibility for information to be represented and presented within the meta-logical system.

So any system of ontology, and any meta-logical theory implies as a fixed point a root awareness. This root is by definition a quality cannot be captured by the pre-existing representational basis. In creating a new representational basis to describe what it means for the previous primitives to synthesize information, we merely shift the same question to a deeper level of representation. So this "root awareness" is kind of a fixed-point and invariant, and in some sense encapsulates the essence of being. This fixed-point is the missing ingredient that may enable a theory to become self-validating. Yet the inability to describe it with a basis of representation may not preclude an appreciation of it. For example, we are able to intuit the existence of something that cannot be described through a handful of pages of self-referential analysis. Perhaps one modality of appreciation of this fixed point is to analyze invariance in self-referential structures. Another modality of appreciation may be imagining the condition of possibility for systems of representation: this process opens up the mind rather than narrowing it with behavioral descriptions. Related to this modality is paying attention to the process of successively refining representations, and imagining the essence of the repeated iteration of that process. The third modality relates to the logical structure of the language required to see this root awareness. The statements in this paragraph may appear paradoxical if one operates in a system of "classical logic", i.e. contain a number of properties such as having an excluded middle, satisfying double negation and non-contradiction.

## VI BEYOND CLASSICAL LOGIC

In the history of philosophy, self-referential statements have been a major source of logical paradox. In the 20th century, modern mathematics has had to confront the issue of self-reference directly, with Gödel's incompleteness theorem and self-containing sets being prime examples. Questions at the intersection of quantum mechanics and self-reference have to be treated carefully, though it seems that there are a number of open questions regarding what logical system quantum mechanics maps to. The idea that an investigation of the deeper nature of reality requires going beyond classical logic is not new: it is at the core of several ancient philosophies, including Mahāyāna Tetralemma, Jaina Anekāntavāda, and the Confucian Doctrine of Means. It is only in the last century or so that we have created mathematical tools to handle this step beyond classical logic, as evidenced by the development of modal and intuitionistic logics.

In the preceding sections, various questions related to self-reference (reflexivity) and representation were considered. As a general heuristic, one might give thought to the following simple statement: whenever there are limits on representation in a system, violations of classical logic can, and often do, follow. For example, in quantum mechanics, the uncertainty principle encapsulates a limitation with which the ontological entities can represent themselves in the quantifiable bases that we use for their representation.

The open question that we conclude on is whether it is possible to find a self-validating meta-logic for experience that provides closure under self-reference. To reach such a destination, we may need to let go of many preconceived expectations! When dealing with self-reference, there are times when one gets lost in cyclicity, and times when one gets stuck because of contradictions. When contradictions arise, it is suggestive of the need to standing outside of one's existing context and presumptions and expanding one's horizons. Dealing with cyclicity is harder, and the challenge is often keeping track of what propositions refer to. In both logic and mathematics, deft use of hierarchy has often provided invaluable assistance. The future is a journey of discovering the depth and fullness of self-reference, reality, beauty, and truth.

The future will require us to think more deeply on many issues: questions of political networks, economics and the abstraction of human activity, the progress in deep learning and quantum computation, the objectification of mental activity by advances in neuroscience, the development of virtual human interfaces that obscure how appearances connect to representational theories, and importantly how we stand in relation to other species, life-forms, and the planet. This will require advances in mathematics, physics, and logic, and creative use of algorithms and visualization techniques to facilitate the learning process. Progress now, more than ever, requires keeping an open mind, seeing beyond appearances. Seeing beyond apparent contradictions. And while this seems technical, it is too soft a skill to fall in the domain of science and technology! These cues are in fact the building blocks for a deeper, more meaningful, and sustained engagement with all those things to which we are connected in our daily lives!





## WORKS OF ART

# ELDERS VAJRĪPUTRA AND BHADRA

4<sup>th</sup> quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Central Tibet  
Distemper on cloth  
59.7 h × 40 w cm

## Provenance:

Private collection, 1970s  
Acquired in 2017

According to the Nandimitrāvadāna, an early Mahāyāna text, the sixteen Elders are a group of teachers to whom Śākyamuni Buddha entrusted his teachings upon his death. The ritual function of artworks depicting the Elders is explicitly specified as the generating merit (puṇya) for donors, a fact which likely played a role in the Elders becoming an enduring theme in material culture across Buddhist traditions.

One of the most challenging questions presented to art historians is tracing the origins and exchange of aesthetic influences through history. The study of inheritance and variation across time is an important theme across many disciplines, including textual analysis. A reflection on history serves the dual purposes of illumining origins and of revealing moments of change and creativity.

Recent scholarship, in particular a fascinating dissertation by Ruixuan Chen, has provided a trove of information and analysis regarding the Nandimitrāvadāna, with versions of the text in Khotanese, Tibetan, and Chinese being used to illumine the temporal evolution of the text<sup>1</sup>. For example, the integration of the sixteen Elders into Buddhist cosmological cycles and the cult of the Maitreya is absent in an earlier Khotanese version of the text. In the Tibetan tradition, the first evidence of the Elders is an 8<sup>th</sup> century painting of the Elder Kālika from Dunhuang bearing inscriptions with both the name and number of the Elder<sup>2</sup>. The account is consistent with the numbering in the liturgical verses by Śākyaśrībhadrā in the 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>3</sup> but different than the 11<sup>th</sup> century translation by Ajitaśrībhadrā and Shākya 'od<sup>4</sup>.

In this set of paintings, the Elders are seated on chairs, with various ritual implements, and accompanied by attendants in landscape settings. Above the horizon line, located roughly three fourths of the way up, each painting depicts one of the eight Medicine Buddhas with their respective Buddhafields, and two figures from the re-incarnation lineage of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. The set of paintings thus becomes part of the program created to legitimize the newly established political hegemony of the Geluk in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Other paintings related to this political program include the *Sole Ornament* murals of c.1694 at the Red Palace<sup>5</sup> and a set depicting the previous lives of 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (HAR Set 2493), published in the recent show at the Rubin Museum, *Faith and Empire*. In that catalog, for that show, Per Sørensen

1 Chen, Ruixuan "The Nandimitrāvadāna: a living text from the Buddhist tradition" PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 2018.

2 "Online Collection" (Object 1919,0101,0.169). British Museum. 3 Feb 2020, [https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/](https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/)

3 Watt, Jeff. "Arhat/Sthavira: Main Page & Arhat/Sthavira Appearance (Elder)". Himalayan Art Resources. 3 Feb 2020, <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=108>

4 Chen, Ruixuan "The Nandimitrāvadāna: a living text from the Buddhist tradition" PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 2018.

5 Lin, Nancy G. "Recounting the Fifth Dalai Lama's Rebirth Lineage". *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 38, Février 2017, pp. 119-156.



writes<sup>6</sup>:

The Fifth Dalai Lama, still a young incarnate novice, found inspiration from reading the *Book of the Kadampa* (*bka' gdams glegs bam*), which soon served as the basis for his lineage sanctification. Until his passing in 1682, the Great Fifth continued working on his former rebirth series in writings and with wall paintings and the manufacture of statues and thangkas, all with the aim of documenting the line's exalted prestige. As head of state, the Dalai Lama personally reflected over whom he considered worthy of being ennobled into his own former rebirth lineage.

Analyzing the paintings as a whole, the organization of the entire set can be elucidated (Table 1). Epigraphic and iconographic evidence confirms that the Elders in each painting are paired according to the numbering system seen in Dunhuang and Śākyaśrībhadrā's liturgical versed. Ordering the paintings with the same numbering system also correctly orders the historical figures in the Dalai Lama's incarnation lineage. The only exception, however, is found in the first three paintings, where it appears that the Indic king Kōnchok Bang has been moved from the 1<sup>st</sup> Elder painting in the set to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Elder painting (present painting) in order to pair him with Songtsen Gampo. Though access to inscriptions on the 2<sup>nd</sup> painting at the Yale University Art Gallery would be helpful, it is clear that two figures are kings. In understanding who these figures might be, and analyzing whether the ordering of the set could be different, the detailed study by Nancy G. Lin on how the rebirth lineage of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama evolved in text and murals over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century has been extremely useful<sup>7</sup>. Overall, the reincarnation lineage depicted in the set is substantially similar to the text, *Yangchen's Lute*, written approximately 1680.

The set can be dated precisely by determining the lineage figure in the last painting of the set. The set would have concluded with two paintings with three figures each: Hvashang, Virūpākṣa (W) and Virūḍhaka (S) in one painting, and Dharmatala, Dhṛtarāṣṭra (E) and Vaiśravaṇa (N) in the other<sup>8</sup>. The addition of a third figure reduces the space available, leaving room for only one historical figure. The last painting of the Elders concludes with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dalai Lama, so the final two paintings would have the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lamas in them. The painting HAR Item 4040 is an exact match in composition and style for what is expected for the last painting in the set, with the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama seated at the top, though the portraiture seems different than the other works of the set. The set of paintings was most likely made in the last quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, though it is unclear whether the set was made during the lifetime of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama or during the intervening years when his death was kept hidden.

The work is made in a classical New Menri style, which evolved from the Menri in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. The composition is endowed with a playful naturalism. Monkeys hangs from a tree over the shoulder of one Vajrīputra, while another one holds a freshly plucked fruit in anticipation. A Garuda dives down from the sky to chase after a fish in the river. There is a sense of connection between the Elders and their attendants: Vajrīputra is seen carefully explaining to his attendant the use of the begging bowl, while Bhadrā is teaching a supplicant the value of equanimity and detachment in the face of great wealth (represented by the bowl of gems). The foregrounds are populated with prominent blue-green rock formations, lavishly shaded in gold, with trees and animals portrayed in the miniature. Figures, whether the Elders below the horizon, or deities and lineage figures above the horizon, are composed to take up the maximum amount

6 Debreczeny, Karl. "Faith and Empire: Art and Politics in Tibetan Buddhism". Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2019.

7 Lin, Nancy G. "Recounting the Fifth Dalai Lama's Rebirth Lineage". *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, no. 38, Février 2017, pp. 119-156.

8 For a composition with Hvashang, see HAR Item 52. For the composition with Dharmatala, see HAR Item 4040 and 13640. Dharmatala and Hvashang are switched in many of the compositions. To maintain the horizon line at 3/4 of the way up, it is possible that the figures would be depicted seated, as in HAR Item # 54442

of space possible.

The Eight Medicine Buddhas at the top center are accompanied with a detailed depiction of their respective Buddhafields, which includes both an architectural setting and the retinue of Bodhisattvas. One modern analysis of the two versions of the *Bhaisajyaguru Sutra* in the Tibetan canon has noted similarities between the Buddhafields of the Medicine Buddhas and descriptions of the Pure Land of Amitabha<sup>9</sup>. It is fascinating to see multiple influences from Mahayana texts blend so seamlessly into a painting that so quintessentially serves the intersection of religion and politics!

9 Shopen, Gregory. "Sukhāvātī as a generalized religious goal in sanskrit mahāyāna sūtra literature" Indo-Iranian Journal. Vol. 19, No. 3/4, 1977, pp. 177-210

Table 1: Comparison of the reincarnation lineage of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama in the present painting set to the text Yangchen's Lute (ca. 1680) and the mural paintings Sole Ornament (ca. 1694) in the Red Temple.

HAR#	Arhats	Medicine Buddha	Reincarnation Lineage	Yangchen's Lute ca. 1680	Sole Ornament ca. 1694
R1	1. Aṅgaja [ <i>'hyung</i> ]	Śākyamuni Buddha <i>g.. pa'i sa(ngs) rgyas</i> (8)	2. Lha'i Gyelpo <i>lha' rgyal po</i>	✓ (37)	✓ (B38)
	2. Ajita [ <i>phams pa</i> ]		3. Gnya' khri btsan po <i>s.. khri [bts]an po</i>	✓ (24)	✓ (B23)
L1	3. Vanavāsin <i>dus ldan</i>	Abhijñaraja (6)	4. ?		
	4. Kālika <i>nags (sa) gnas</i>		5. ?		
R2	5. Vajrīputra, <i>mo yi bu</i>	Ashokattamashri <i>ngan me[d] mchog</i> (4)	1. Konchok Bang <i>dko(n mch)og 'bang&lt;s&gt;</i>	✓ (9)	✓ (A6, B8)
	6. Bhadra [ <i>bzang po</i> ]		6. Songsten Gampo <i>srong b[stan] _</i>	✓ (54)	✓ (A4, B44)
L2	7. Kanakavatsa ( <i>g'ser (be')u</i> )	Suparikirtitanamashri <i>mtshan legs</i> (1)	Trisong Detsen <i>mnga' bdag _u_</i>	✓ (57)	✓ (A5)
	8. Kanaka-Bharadvāja		Tri Ralpacan <i>(mnga' bd)g_ [kh]r(i)</i>	✓ (58)	✓ (B46)
R3	9. Bakula	Svaraghosa <i>&lt;d&gt;(s)gra dby[angs]</i> (2)	Dromtonpa <i>'brom ston</i>	✓ (61)	✓ (B47)
	10. Rāhula		Sachen Kunga Nyingpo	✓ (62)	x
L3	11. Kṣudrapanthaka .. [ <i>phra</i> ] ..	Dharmakirtisagaraghosa (5)	Zhang Yudrakpa Tsondru <i>zhang _</i>	✓ (63)	x
	Piṇḍola-Bharadvāja <i>ba ra (dz)' [dza]</i>		Nyangrel Nyima Ozer <i>nyang nyi ma 'od zer</i>	✓ (65)	✓ (A8, B48)
R4	13. Panthaka	implied: (7) Bhisajyaguru Dharmakirtisagaraghosa	Chogyal Phakpa	(68)	(B52)
	14. Nāgasena		Padmavajra	(70)	(B53)
L4	15. Gopaka ( <i>sbe[d] byed pa</i> )	Suvārnabhadrā Vimalaratnaprabhasa <i>gser bzang dri med</i> (3)	Dalai Lama 1 <i>thams cad mkhyen pa dge dun grub</i>	✓ (71)	✓ (B54)
	16. Abhedā		Dalai Lama 3 <i>thams cad mkhyen pa bsod naM rgya mtsho</i>	(77)	✓ (B56)
R5	Missing	Dharmatala, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Vaiśravaṇa	Dalai Lama 4	✓ (74)	(B55)
L5	Missing	Hvaṣang, Virūpākṣa, Virūḍhaka	Dalai Lama 5, Ngagwang Lodro Gyatso	✓ (78)	(B57)

# VAJRASATTVA

13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> century, Tibet

Gilt bronze with turquoise inlay and colored pigment

17.0h × 12.7w × 9.0d cm

## Provenance:

Collection Dr. Mario Frydman, 1970s

Acquired circa 1978

Vajrasattva's painted face shows him in perfect and serene bliss, the eyes partially closed, with the irises towards the top. His face subtly adds curvature in masterful ways, such as the slightly pronounced chin with a width spanning half the mouth and the slight recesses at the corners of the lips that accentuates the fullness of the cheeks. The design of the necklace is particularly interesting. It has three jewels hanging from it, the central jewel of which has the prominence – but not the shape – of the tiger claws that are typical of earlier Nepalese bronzes. The second necklace has an asymmetry, placing three jewels in the middle of the right side strand, but not the left. Regarding the jewelry more generally, there is a clear resonance with the elongated diamond motifs commonly featured in early paintings and sculpture. The crown is extended in the back with a single prong. The shape of the bell is interesting, as it has an almost flat cylindrical barrel, but ends with pronounced curved ends. On the whole, it is evident that this bronze is rich in stylistic features from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

As for the garments, there is an inscribed band extending across the chest on the front and back, a feature sometimes seen in bronzes of this period. In some early paintings, the cushions on which Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are seated have slight indentations near the arms. This bronze displays a sensitivity towards this, as the scarf flows inwards in a pronounced fashion by wrapping around the



elbow, before falling back out towards the knee. The cast lotus base has been intentionally limited to the front face only, in favor of rendering the lotus with an inscribed pattern prevalent in 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century paintings.

The patterning on the dhoti also shows this complementary usage of casting and inscribing. The rendering of the first six folds of the dhoti alternates between casted and inscribed folds, with an inscribed floral motif within each fold. Thereafter, the remaining folds are inscribed, and the floral motifs become either framed by diamonds or partitioned by a vegetal scroll.

The vajra in the lotus seat is a rare and attractive feature of the bronze. In the lotus seat, complementing the cast vajra are inscribed flowers wrapped in vegetal scroll. The vegetal scroll ends adjacent to the scarf, finished with the same flair as the tips of the inscribed lotus on the back.



# KĀLACAKRA

First half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Central Tibet  
64.5 h × 43.2 w cm  
Distemper on cloth

**Provenance:**

Private European Collection  
Acquired 2018

In name and content, the Kālacakra Tantra evokes and invokes themes of cosmology and history on scales ranging from the personal to universal. A glance at its maṇḍala<sup>1</sup> gives indication of the scope of its ambitions. In stark contrast to the miniaturized depiction of the deity in the maṇḍala, herein the image of Kālacakra dominates the composition and is rendered with an aesthetic sophistication in full bloom.

This painting belongs to a well-known set of paintings, designed in the New Menri style, and based on the Secret Biography of the 7<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. A complete description can be found in last year's exhibition catalog, *Technologies of Self*<sup>2</sup>. The set of paintings, resonating with themes in the Kālacakra Tantra, relates to an intentional act of projecting political and religious authority. In the narrative of this painting set, the 7<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama sets out on a journey to the 24 sacred pilgrimage sites of Buddhism, as a prerequisite for perfecting the meditational techniques of the Cakrasaṃvara Tantra. The scenes around the central figure in this painting depict him visiting eight of these sites.

The deity Kālacakra symbolizes transience, as communicated through the language of change and time, and his consort Viśvamātā represents that which transcends bondage to time. This juxtaposition between transience and timelessness, tangible and intangible, is brought into relief by a particular compositional element used to great effect in this set of paintings. The central figure is depicted as the visualization of a tantric practitioner (the 7<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama) below, as indicated by emergence of the deity from the rainbow colored rays of light. It can be read to mean that even the most tangible and compelling of images are constructed within the mind's eye. In one of the paintings hanging adjacent to this one, this tantric practitioner is depicted as the central figure. And in the other one, the central figure is a King of Śambhala with scenes from the final battle depicted all around: the content of that painting is visualized based on the text of the Kālacakra, and has the deity in its upper right encircled in rainbow light.

An interesting way of engaging with this painting would be to imagine being teleported to the various places depicted. The sweet aroma of fresh fruit carried by a gentle breeze, complemented by a clipper drumroll. Clean and pure water extracted from the rippling stream in front of you quenches your thirst with guzzles that leave a trickle of droplets from the side of your mouth, rapidly evaporated by uplifting warm sunshine. Whether it is through gazing at the clouds from the terrace of a monastery in the mountains, in the cool dampness of a silent cave retreat, or marveling at the beauty and vitality of wildlife, we are capable of effervescent spirits in each mundane moment once we construct the opportunity for it.

1 For some excellent Kālacakra maṇḍalas, primarily from the 14th and 15th centuries, refer to HAR Items 8283, 11547, 55694, 77199, 88706, and 99115.

2 Jain, Tarun Kumar. "Technologies of Self". Navin Kumar Gallery, New York, March 2019. [https://navinkumar.com/2019\\_March\\_NK\\_Catalog.pdf](https://navinkumar.com/2019_March_NK_Catalog.pdf)



# BUDDHAKAPALA

14<sup>th</sup> century, Tibet  
Gilt bronze with turquoise inlay  
26.8 h × 20.8 w × 8.9 d cm

**Provenance:**  
Private Collection, 1970s | HAR 70679

As a subject, works depicting Buddhakapala are extremely rare though several exceptional maṇḍalas were made on account of its inclusion in the complete cycle of maṇḍalas of the Vajravali. This sculpture is an iconic depiction of the subject. Evidenced by the facial physiognomy, the jewelry, lotus base, the inscribed patterns, and other stylistic elements, this piece was made in the 14<sup>th</sup> century according to the style prevalent at Densatil monastery. As both Buddhakapala and his consort are found in a dancing posture with their entire weight on one leg, it is particularly difficult to sculpt a balanced work of this weight and size. The sculptor has innovatively co-opted the long flowing garments typical of Densatil to provide additional support for the piece.

For esoteric subjects, particularly less commonly encountered ones like the present gilt bronze of Buddhakapala, the simplest question for a viewer is to ask what it means! Unfortunately, most answers

one tends to find are inaccessible unless the viewer is additionally well-versed in philosophy and meditative practice. The simplest way of thinking about this deity is that it represents a process of culmination, of bringing a process to fruition.

For those with moderate familiarity, Buddhakapala can be understood through its relation to a more famous esoteric deity, Cakrasaṃvara. Cakrasaṃvara represents an advanced meditation practice often called the Generation Stage. Buddhakapala represents the next stage thereafter, the Completion Stage. The relationship between Cakrasaṃvara and Buddhakapala, emergent from a hierarchical ordering of meditative practices, has been well described by Dina Bangdel and John C. Huntington in their excellent publication, *Circle of Bliss*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Huntington, John C. and Bangdel, Dina. "The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art". Serindia Publications, 2003.





# DECHEN GYALMO

Second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Eastern Tibet  
 Distemper on cloth  
 66.6 *h* × 47.8 *w* cm

**Provenance:**

Sotheby's, New York. September 21, 2001

Dechen Gyälmo, translated as Queen of Bliss, is a wisdom *ḍākinī* in the Dzogchen tradition found within a group of revealed texts called the *Longchen Nyingtik*. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, various lineages of the Nyingtik traditions, including two that came to Tibet in the 9<sup>th</sup> century through Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava, were compiled by one of the greatest Nyingma masters, Longchen Rabjam (1308 – 1364). Yet the *Longchen Nyingtik* itself was revealed in 1757 by Jikmé Lingpa who wrote the text to consolidate prior versions and named it after the teacher whose mind he practiced *guruyoga* to apprehend.

Dechen Gyälmo is one of the principle meditational figures in the *Longchen Nyingtik*. She is considered a deified form of Yeshe Tsogyal, who was a tantric practitioner and a wife of Padmasambhava. Herein, she is accompanied by four attendant *ḍākinīs*, all of whom hold a drum, skullcup, and katvargas, familiar in configuration to the retinue of a Vajrayogini maṇḍala.

At the top right is a lay teacher, wearing a white robes and paṇḍita hat, holding a long-life vase in his lap and lotus stems supporting a sword and bell, with a vajra fastened in his belt. This teacher is likely to be Choggyur Lingpa (1829 – 1870). On the viewer's left is a figure wearing a treasure revealer's lotus hat, holding a dharma wheel in his lap and lotus stems supporting a sword, book, and wish-fulfilling jewel, with a vajra in his belt. This figure is likely to be Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, considered an emanation of Mañjuśrī and the only one of five Tertön Kings that lived after Jikmé Lingpa. The composition of figures on the flat landscape foreground is suggestive of an Eastern Tibetan origin for the work<sup>1</sup>.

1 For more information regarding regional styles of Tibetan paintings in the 17th to 20th centuries, refer to: Jackson, David. "Place and Provenance: Regional Styles in Tibetan Painting". Rubin Museum of Art, 2012. While the landscape and treatment of figures is similar to a Khamri variant of the Karma Gadri in the 19th century, the cloud morphology is more typical of Amdo. Additional study is needed before further differentiation is made in its place of production.

p1	d2	d1	d3	p2	p1	Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo	p2	Choggyur Lingpa
		d4			d1	Samantabhadra	d2	White Amitayus (HAR 52950130)
	g2		g3		d3	Hayagrīva (HAR 52950207)	d4	White Tara
d5				d6	d5	Vajravaraḥi	d6	Simhamukha
		C			d7	Palden Lhamo	d8	Sitatapatra (HAR 52950160)
	g1		g4		d9	Lha Chenpo and Consort (HAR 53653142) with Ganesh		
d7				d8	d10	Red Jambhala and Consort (HAR 53653131) with Yellow Jambhala		
	d9			d10	d11	Vaishravana	g1-4	Four attendant <i>ḍākinīs</i>
		d11			g5-8	Four goddesses		
g5	g6		g7	g8	The initiation cards ( <i>tsakali</i> ) produced for the Rinchen Terdzö has facilitated identification of several secondary deities with non-standard iconographic depictions.			



# HAYAGRĪVA

13<sup>th</sup> century  
17.5 *h* × 13.3 *w* × 5.5 *d* cm  
Gilt bronze with orange paint

## Provenance:

Private Collection, London  
Shirley Day Ltd, London, 2006 | Marcel Nies Oriental Art, Antwerp, 2006  
Bonhams, 2018: The Maitri Collection of Indian, Himalayan & Southeast Asian Art

Prior to its incorporation into Buddhist traditions, Hayagrīva existed as two separate entities in the Vedas. The assimilations of deities and iconographic elements is a leitmotif in the Vajrayāna vehicle of Buddhism. Hayagrīva is an early wrathful deity (*krodha vigñantaka*), and existed as a *yaksha* for Avalokiteśvara<sup>1</sup>. By the time of the first diffusion of Buddhism to Tibet his status was equivalent to that of a Wisdom King, and is most commonly depicted in a various six-armed forms. This particular work is exceptional for its volume, power, and presence. Two-armed forms of Hayagrīva often present a moderation between the royal and wrathful, tempering wrathful elements with ornamentation in the crown and jewelry. Such is the case in this work. Note the delineation of the nose, the large and open earrings. Each of the five-prongs of the crown begins with a skull, followed by large and prominent lotus buds, from which the jewelry emerges. The central element of the crown extends the lotus to the diagonal interstitials on the top as well.

<sup>1</sup> Rob Linrothe, "Ruthless Compassion" Shambhala, 1999. The book documents various literature and early sculptural works from India depicting Hayagrīva as an attendant to Avalokiteśvara.





# HAYAGRĪVA, LIBERATOR FROM ARROGANT ONES

13th century, Tibet  
Distemper on Cloth  
63.5 h × 52.7 w

## Published and Exhibited

*Demonic Divine*. Jeff Watt and Rob Linrothe, Rubin Museum of Art, 2004

This form of Hayagrīva, the Liberator from Arrogant Ones (*rta mgrin dregs pa kun sgröl*), has the rare privilege of having been lost and re-discovered twice. According to its most recent discovery by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the text was originally discovered by a Tertön named Drugu Yangwang (*gru gu yang dbang*) in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in the Paro (*spa gro*) valley in Bhutan. According to a prayer for this deity, the lineage is said to have originated in the ancient Indian Kingdom called Uddiyana and passed to Tibet through Padmasambhava, King Trisong Detsen, and the Translator Vairocana, before its discovery by Drugu Yangwang.<sup>1</sup> Numerous texts were discovered in Bhutan in the 11<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> centuries including by other important Nyingma teachers, such as Nyangral Nyima Özer and Guru Chowang<sup>2,3</sup>.

This painting is one of the masterpieces of Buddhist art, and one of the most powerful images of a wrathful deity to have emerged in Tibetan painting in the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is of extraordinary rarity in artistry, subject, condition, and period. Great detail has been placed on each aspect of the work, as seen, for example, in the sublime ecstatic expressions of Hayagrīva and his consort, the articulation of the jewelry and hand-gestures (*mudrā*), the depiction of the eight Nāga Kings and the respective animal messengers below the feet, energetic articulation of the *mudrās*, and the uncommonly expressive vegetal scroll in the lotus petals.

In the first part of this writeup, the re-discovered text will be used to identify the names of the deities in the painting, which includes the 5 Tathāgathas, the 5 Herukas (Wisdom Kings), the 4 Wrathful Kings with consorts, 10 Wrathfuls, and 4 Female Guardians. The second part takes a fresh look at previous research on the secondary deities present in works of Drigung provenance in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, with the goal of understanding what patterns provide reasonable basis for attribution instead of being merely suggestive. The analysis provides a non-trivial result: the painting can be attributed to a Drigung provenance with a reasonable degree of confidence.

The innermost assembly of the maṇḍala, specified in the text<sup>4</sup>, consists of four Wrathful Kings (*khro rgyal*), Vajrakīlaya holding a dagger, Yamāntaka holding a sword, Vajrapaṇi holding a vajra, and

1 The re-discovered text, as produced in the Rinchen Terdzö, Volume 25, Pages 737-738, Folios 1a1 to 1b3 (<http://rtz.tsadra.org/index.php/Terdzo-RA-035>) lists eight teachers in the lineage supplication, specifically, (1) *o rgyan grub pa'i rgyal po* (2) Maharaja, scholar of Uddiyana (3) Prabhasthi (4) Princess Gomadevi (5) Padmasambhava (6) Trisong Detsen (7) Translator Vairocana (8) Drugu Yangwang

2 Gyaltzen, Dorji. "Early Book Production and Printing in Bhutan." Tibetan Printing: Comparison, Continuities, and Change, edited by Hildegard Diemberger et al., Brill, LEIDEN; BOSTON, 2016, pp. 369–393. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h246.21](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w8h246.21). Accessed 1 Feb. 2020.

3 Nyangral Nyima Özer is specifically chosen here because several 14th century paintings were made based on texts he discovered (see a Hayagrīva Mandala [HAR Item 30911] and a Chemchog Heruka Mandala [HAR Item 89981]).

4 See the re-discovered text, as produced in the Rinchen Terdzö, Volume 25, Pages 737-738, Folios 1a1 to 1b3 (<http://rtz.tsadra.org/index.php/Terdzo-RA-035>) lists eight teachers in the lineage supplication, specifically,



Mahākāla holding a skullcup, in each of the four cardinal directions. They are accompanied by their consorts, the four ḍākinīs (*mkha 'gro*) named Dudulma (*bdud 'dul ma*, holding a vajra), Ratna Ngodrub Pel (*dnagos grub dpal*, holding a jewel), Padma Dro Dechenma (*'gro bde chen ma*, holding a lotus flower), and Karma Trinledag (*phrin las bdag*, holding a skullcup). The color of each ḍākinī determines the Tathāgata family to which they belong, with white being used for the direction East instead of blue for the Vajra family.

The next three figures can be found just above Hayagrīva's tidy flaming orange hair. They are the three Garuda Kings, specified in the text by the Tibetan *mkha' lding rgyal po bya khyung ka ru na*. They are depicted with three pronged crowns, gold jewelry on the wrists and arms outlined in crimson, and with white for the eyes, and a white line to represent a snake in its adamantine lips (*rdo rje mchu*). The black outlines of these figures make the details of the blue Garuda particularly difficult to see, though macro photography confirms that the features are fully intact despite their miniaturized size.

The verso of the painting is inscribed with an inscription written in red ink inside a gold outlined stupa. The inscription begins with a list of deities named in succession, Hayagrīva (*ha ya gri ba*) and his consort Padma Krodeśwari (*pad ma kro te sho ri*), Vajrapāṇi (*badz+ra pa ni*), Vajrakila (*badz+ra ki la ki la ya*), Mahākāla (*ma ha ka la ya ka sha*), and Yamāntaka (*ya man ta ka kala rupa*). The next phrases in the inscription are mantras:

*karma raM ram zala raM zala raM huM phat*  
*oM karuna tsa le tsa le huM phat*

Though not an exact match, these mantras are very closely related to mantras found in the textual source for the four Wrathful Kings (*karma raM raM dzwa la raM huM*) and for the Three Garuda Kings (*khro ka ru na tsa le tsa le huM*). In the remainder of the inscription, the above phrases are repeated, and then followed by two copies of the well-known *ye dharma he tu* mantra<sup>5</sup>.

Next, the text lists a set of Ten Wrathfuls (*khro bo*, 11–20) similar to the list in the Hevajra Tantra<sup>6</sup> with Ṭakkirāja replaced with Trailokavijaya. In this painting, and in the initiation cards (*tsakali*)<sup>7</sup> created from the 19<sup>th</sup> century text, all of the ten deities are depicted with the same iconography, white in color and holding a vajra. Nonetheless, the deities in the painting can be assigned names based on their order in the text, starting in the bottom-left (East), and following a clockwise order. Doing so, the fifth deity would be Hayagrīva, and in the painting, the fifth deity is the only one that is iconographically differentiated with the addition of his iconic horse head. In the text, and confirmed iconographically, the last four deities of the retinue are the female Gate Guardians (*sgo ma*), namely Ankuśa, Paśa, Sphota, and Ghanta.

In the second row from the top are two groups of five deities: the well known Five Great Buddhas (Tathāgatas), and Five Herukas (Wisdom Kings). Neither of these groups are part of the maṇḍala, but are named in the text. This reading of the maṇḍala is confirmed by the 2016 drawing made by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche (recognized as the third incarnation of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo), which includes only 24 deities<sup>8</sup>. The names of the Five Herukas are differentiated based on their family name and the

5 I'd like to thank Karma Gelek for providing a transcription of the Tibetan script in the stupa.

6 Watt, Jeff. "Buddhist Deity: Ten Wrathful Ones (Prints)". Himalayan Art Resources. <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=449>. Updated 12-2019. Accessed 2-2020.

7 "Terzdo-RA-048". Rinchen Terzdo. Accessed Feb 1, 2020. <http://rtz.tsadra.org/index.php/Terzdo-RA-048#tab=Tsagli>

8 "Terzdo-RA-048". Rinchen Terzdo. Accessed Feb 1, 2020. <http://rtz.tsadra.org/index.php/Terzdo-RA-048#tab=Mandalas>

### FOUR WRATHFUL KINGS



3. Vajrakila (E)



4. Yamantaka (S)



5. Vajrapani (W)



6. Mahakala (N)

### FOUR DAKINI CONSORTS



7. *bdud 'dul ma*  
Vajrakrodeśvari (SE)



8. *dngos grub dpal*  
Ratnakrodeśvari (SW)



9. *'gro bde chen ma*  
Padmakrodeśvari (NW)



10. *phrin las bdag*  
Karmakrodeśvari (NE)

### THE TEN WRATHFUL GUARDIANS



11. Cakravartin



12. Niladaṇḍa



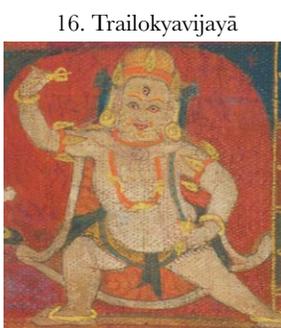
13. Yamāntaka



14. Acalā



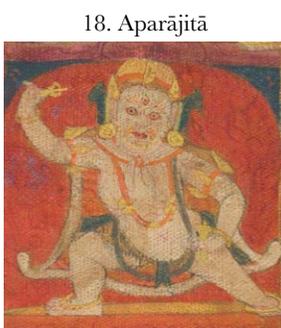
15. Hayagrīva



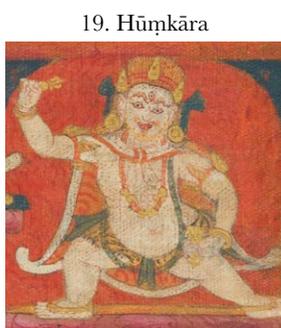
16. Trailokyavijayā



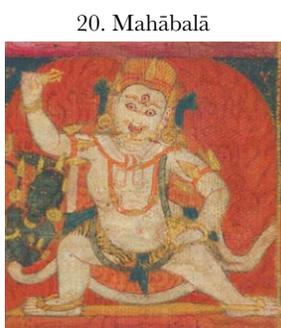
17. Amṛtakuṇḍalin



18. Aparājitā



19. Hūmkāra



20. Mahābalā

### THE FOUR DIRECTIONAL GUARDIANS

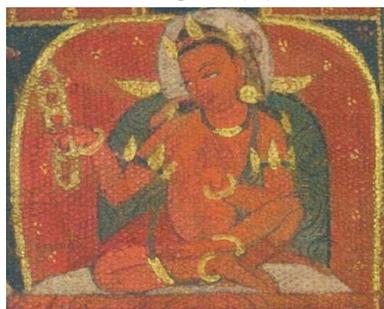
21. Aṅkuṣī (E)



22. Pāśa (S)



23. Sphoṭā (W)



24. Ghaṇṭā (N)



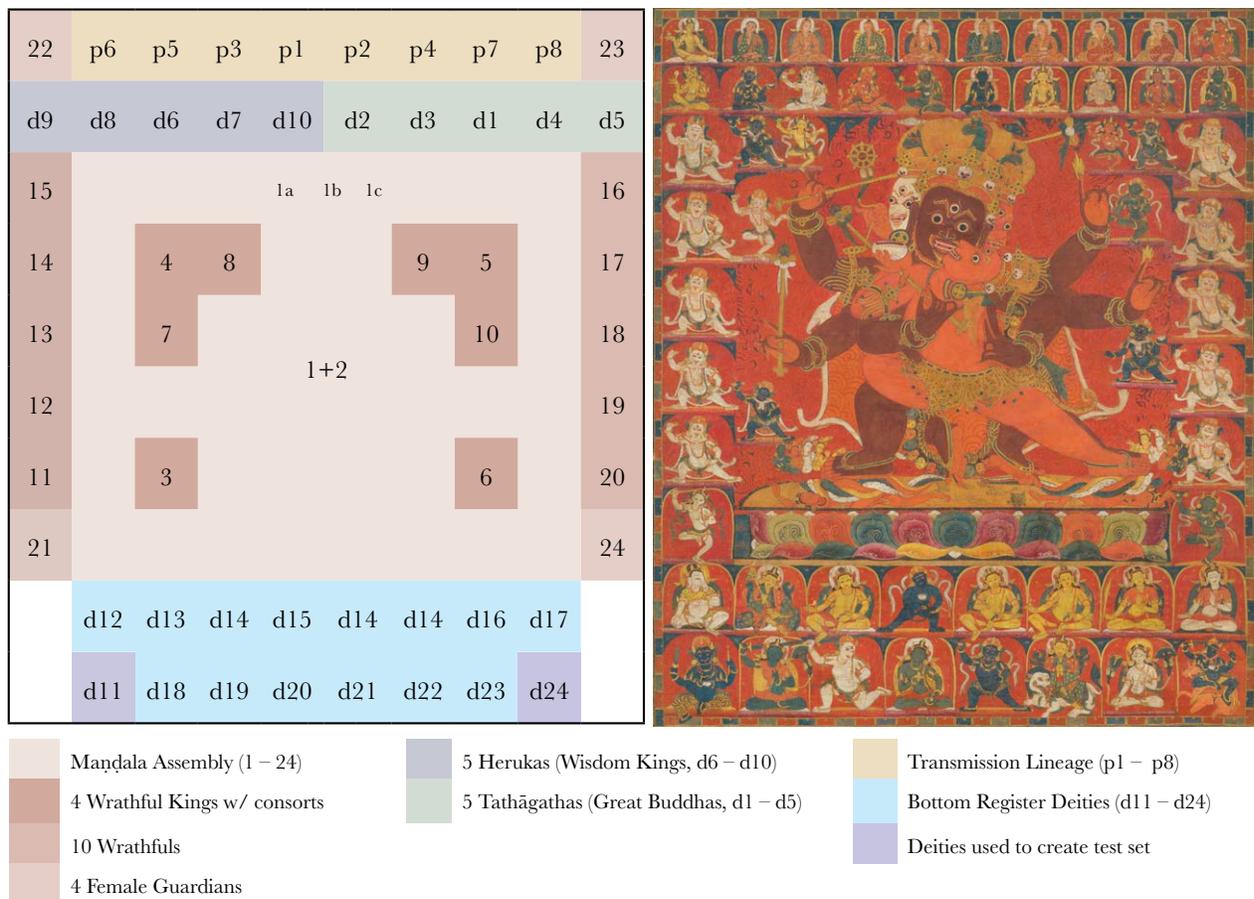
aspect of enlightenment they refer to (body [*sku*], speech [*gsung*], mind [*thugs*], qualities [*yon tan*], action [*phrin las*]). On the whole, I think it would be best to name these figures according to the text (i.e. *gsung mchog padma heruka* = Enlightened Speech Padma Heruka). According to the initiation cards<sup>9</sup>, the Five Herukas hold a wheel of dharma (Buddha family), a lotus flower (Padma family), a vajra (Vajra family), the three jewels (Ratna family), and a *viśva-vajra* (Karma family).

The closest painting to this subject – though not in style or quality – is an early painting of Hayagrīva at the Rubin Museum of Art (HAR 65262). Its central figure replicates the iconography of the ritual implements (six arms, holding vajra hammers in the proper right hands and a flames emerging from the index finger of the proper left hands). However, the glaring differences are in color of Hayagrīva (blue instead of maroon) and the presence of another wrathful deity at the heart center. Given the compelling similarities, the differences are quite confusing. The painting appears to depict Hayagrīva's consort, four wrathful kings, six of the ten wrathfuls, and four *ḍākinī* consorts in the side and bottom registers. The mantra on the back appears to be an abbreviated listing of the inner retinue of Hayagrīva and the Four Wrathful Kings<sup>10</sup>.

From left to right, the eight historical figures in its topmost row include Drugu Yangwang, five teachers wearing red headdress, and two monastic Tibetan teachers. The five figures with red headdress wear red and green robes that are bound around their slim waist by a wide gold belt. This is not usual for Indian *paṇḍitas* or Tibetan teachers. Furthermore, regarding the red headdress, though the overall shape

9 "Terdzo-RA-048". Rinchen Terdzo. Accessed Feb 1, 2020. <http://rtz.tsadra.org/index.php/Terdzo-RA-048#tab=Tsagli>

10 The mantra reads as follows, with missing pieces added in parentheses (missing): *oM ha yang 'gri ba pad ma kro ti sho ri | ba+dzra ki la ya | ma ha (ka la) yag k+sha | (ya man ta ka) ka la ru pa | kar ma ram ram dza la ram huM huM |*



THE FIVE TATHĀGATAS

d2 Akṣobhya (E)

d3 Ratnasambhava (S)

d1 Vairocana (C)

d4 Amitābha (W)

d5 Amoghasiddhi (N)



THE FIVE HERUKAS

d9 Ratna Heruka  
Three Jewels

d8 Vajra Heruka  
Vajra

d6 Buddha Heruka  
Wheel of Dharma

d7 Padma Heruka  
Lotus Flower

d10 Karma Heruka  
Viśva-vajra



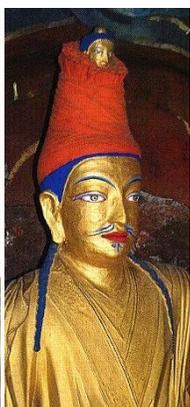
THE FIVE KINGS



HAR 59803  
16th century?



HAR 101501  
~13th century



Lhasa  
Undated



This work  
13th century



HAR 271  
12th century



HAR 51616  
17th century



HAR 9168  
17th century



ARROGANCE



HAYAGRĪVA

resembles a *paṇḍita* hat, it has a hole at the top. From the hole in the headdress emerges a black tuft of hair. I have found no teachers with this design for a hat, whether Indian *Paṇḍita*, Nyingma *rigs 'dzin*, or otherwise.

An alternate explanation for this headdress is that it is not a hat, but the turban of a king. The Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo was considered an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, and is typically rendered with a red head (of Amitābha) emerging from the center of the turban. Early sculptural of the Songtsen Gampo depict his turban as slightly tapered cylinders with simple horizontal striations. Rendering of the turban with naturalistic folds and superimposed with a crown is a later development, usually not seen prior to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The suggestion here is that the artist has adopted the depiction of Songtsen Gampo as the archetypal depiction of a King in this painting. Since the lineage figures are too small to draw Amitābha's face, only his hair is depicted emerging out of the red turban. Adoption of this archetypal depiction ensures that these figures will not be mistaken for a *paṇḍita*, *rigs 'dzin*, or Sakya teacher. One of the kings would be Songtsen Gampo, as it is his iconographic convention that defines the archetypal depiction. And the last king in the lineage is most likely Trisong Detsen, as Drugu Yangwang is considered an emanation of his, and Trisong Detsen is also listed in the transmission lineage for this text. The identity of the other three kings are not known.

The last two figures are Tibetan monastic teachers that are depicted with the volume and presence associated with Kagyu (possibly Drigung Kagyu) teachers. This detail is likely not a coincidence, as will be seen from the analysis of bottom register figures. Likely, the first monastic Tibetan teacher would be the first Kagyu teacher to have received the teaching. This teacher could very well have received the teaching directly from Drugu Yangwang, though this is not certain. Before it is concluded on a statistical basis, it is relevant to note one significant stylistic similarities with Drigung Kagyu art. Early Drigung paintings often depict two Nāga Kings in humanoid form, holding up the throne, one on either side<sup>11</sup>. The artist here has placed Eight Nāga Kings under Hayagrīva's feet as per Hayagrīva's iconography, but has taken the liberty to give them human faces and arms, and to extend their form towards an erect standing position.

11 Jackson, David P. "Painting Traditions of the Drigung Kagyu School" Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2014.



**Left:**

Macro photograph of Padma Krodeśvari's jewelry. The outline is done in crimson and reveals a more elaborate pattern than indicated by the gemstones and their gold settings. In the corners of the square pattern are lotus petals. Further, on the sides, the square pattern has three lotus petals before the final gemstone.

**Opposite Page:**

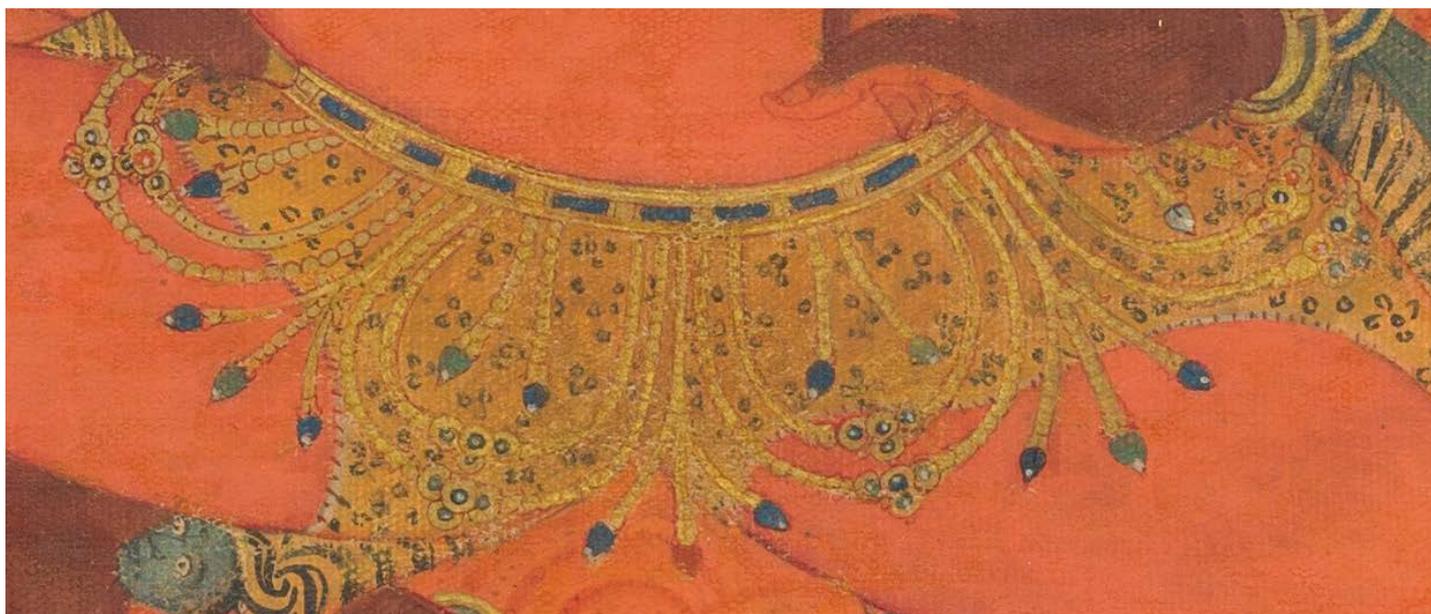
Padma Krodeśvari wears a belt studded with long horizontal gemstones. Four adjacent loop structures hang from the belt. Each loop structure has an inner and outer loop of jewelry with a group of four gemstones interceding at the midpoint. Two strands of jewelry hang down from the belt into the interior of the inner loop, and each of these strands contain only a single gem at their terminus. In the interstitials between the loops is a single strand that branches into three strands.

With the current maturity of modern scholarship in Tibetan art, it is now possible to use statistics on carefully constructed data sets to gain new insights. In doing so, however, one should be sensitive to assumptions baked into the definition of the control sets. In this case, the control set will be chosen as the set of paintings that have been previously identified as originating from a Drigung lineage. The works most securely attributable to Drigung origin are the four paintings of Cakrasaṃvara with Jigten Sumgön's footprints. Based on a particular pattern in which Śākyamuni Buddha and the Eight Great Adepts, several other works were identified as belonging to the Drigung school<sup>12</sup>. It should be explicitly noted that while this arrangement Śākyamuni Buddha and the Great Adepts can be used to attribute a work as Drigung, the negation of this statement is invalid as a basis for inference. In other words, the absence of this group does not imply the work is not of Drigung origin.

The question framed here is whether there is a meaningful way of identifying works of Drigung origin based on the pattern of deities in the bottom register, or whether these deities can only be suggestive of Drigung origin. In particular, one commonality that has been noted is that Caturbhuja Mahākāla and Śrīdēvī are present in the corners of the bottom register in many of these Drigung works, and in between them tends to be a common group of deities, namely Ganesh, Hayagrīva, Vajrapāṇi, and Cakravartin. So to begin, around 150 to 200 works from the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and early 14<sup>th</sup> were examined, and a list with both Caturbhuja Mahākāla and Śrīdēvī in the registers was compiled, resulting in a total of 17 paintings matching this simple criterion.

In only 3 of the 17 paintings, Mahākāla and Śrīdēvī are not in the corners of the bottom register. As one of these paintings is a Taklung maṇḍala of Chemchok Heruka, and another a portrait from the Yazang Kagyu sect, it is immediately clear that one cannot attribute a work to the Drigung school based on their presence alone. Of the remaining 14 works with Mahākāla and Śrīdēvī in the corners, 12 are already of previously confirmed Drigung origin. The two remaining works are a Hayagrīva Maṇḍala based on a Nyingma text (the work itself possibly of Taklung or Karma Kagyu origin), and a small painting of Śākyamuni Buddha with no lineage figures and only four deities in the bottom register. The rainbow nimbus in the Buddha painting is suggestive of Drigung provenance, but nothing definitive can be said.

<sup>12</sup> Jackson, David P. "Painting Traditions of the Drigung Kagyu School" Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2014.



Thus, the two deities in the corners are strong indicators of Drigung origin (12/14), but by itself is not sufficient for attribution.

The next question is whether there is some minimum combination of the four additional deities, Ganesh, Hayagrīva, Vajrapāṇi, and Cakravartin, that can provide definitive attribution to Drigung. While the presence of all four would certainly provide a definitive attribution, this is not an example of a minimal combination. The result, for example, using as a requirement the presence of all four secondary deities misses two paintings that exclude Ganesh but are of confirmed Drigung provenance. This example is also evidence of why the absence of any deities should not be used to infer the negative of the proposition that is being examined. One finds that, having first filtered the data set by paintings with Mahākāla and Śrīdēvī in the corners, the addition of just a single one of the four deities is according to the dataset enough to conclude Drigung origin. Adding any further deities makes the conclusion stronger. In this instance, the present painting has two of the four, namely Vajrapāṇi and Ganesh. However, the painting also raises the question of how exactly should the presence of the deities be counted. The ostensibly missing deities, Hayagrīva and Cakravartin, are not in the bottom register, but they are in the painting, depicted as two of the 10 wrathfuls. So in an alternate interpretation, the painting indeed has all of the four standard secondary Drigung deities. Following the standard four, the next most common deities found in the bottom register are Acala (found in 8/12 of the Drigung paintings in this set), and a Tara (found in 5/12)<sup>13</sup>. This painting has both. It bears repeating that this analysis of the additional figures takes place *after* filtering the data set by the presence of Caturbhuja Mahākāla and Śrīdēvī in opposing corners, and thus the statements about the additional bottom register deities are conditional on this.

Overall, the analysis indicates that the painting can be attributed to a Drigung provenance with a fair degree of certainty. This result is not at all obvious, and it is a fascinating result. It raises the question of how the teaching entered into the Drigung lineage. A brief biography on Drugu Yangwang, indicates that he was born somewhere in Dokham (*mdo 'kham*), and discovered a text at Drakmar (*brag dmar*), a site associated with Trisong Detsen. Thereafter, he discovered the text for this painting at *spa gro*, an important location in Bhutan. Clearly Drugu Yangwang traveled through Tibet, though it is unclear how long he stayed at Paro thereafter. One text, in mentioning Drugu Yangwang, discusses him in context of a group of treasure revealers active in Bhutan between 1147 and 1266<sup>14</sup>, thereby placing him in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Against this timeline, Jigten Sumgön, born in 1147, founded Drigung in 1166. This means that there is a possibility that Drugu Yangwang directly transmitted this teaching to one of the first few Drigung hierarchs. It has been noted that Nyingma related deities feature prominently in the murals at Zangskar. David Jackson has convincingly elucidated how teachings of the first diffusion of Buddhism, normally associated with Padmasambhava and the Nyingma school, were transmitted to Jigten Sumgön, from Sachen Kunga Nyingpo through Phagmodrupa<sup>15</sup>. It has been recorded that Jigten Sumgön held these teachings in high regards. The connection between Jigten Sumgön and Nyingma teachings reveals that there would have been a receptiveness for teachings of this kind. This receptiveness could have been inherited by succeeding abbots of Drigung.

13 Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravahī have been excluded because the data-set is skewed by their presence as central figures in the four paintings with Jigten Sumgön's footprints.

14 Baruah, Bibhuti. "Buddhist Sects and Sectarianism" Sarup and Sons, New Delhi, 2000. Page 240

15 Jackson, David P. "Painting Traditions of the Drigung Kagyu School" Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2014.

The possibility that Drugu Yangwang taught this form of Hayagrīva to Phagmodrupa, and that it was then passed on to Jigten Sumgön cannot be ruled out based on the dates either. However, if the first teacher were to be Phagmodrupa, and the second Jigten Sumgön, it would suggest that the painting was made in the first quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. While the painting is can very reasonably be considered a 13<sup>th</sup> century work, there are few comparable works like this one from the first quarter of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The painting as a whole indicates a rigor and precision that makes abbreviation of the transmission lineage rather unlikely. At the latest, the first monastic figure in the lineage was probably a student of Jigten Sumgön, active in the period 1160 – 1200. Given that there is only one subsequent teacher in the lineage, it would be reasonable to conclude the painting was made sometime in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. It should be noted that dating the work on stylistic basis is especially challenging given that other early paintings of wrathful deities are themselves dated on a stylistic basis without any confirming epigraphic or lineage evidence. Furthermore, scholarship has to be very careful about the logical basis of claims. That certain stylistic motifs are most commonly associated with a particular period in history does not mean that examples using the same stylistic motifs are not found in earlier periods. The relevant question for stylistic analysis is dating the first instance that a motif is used in, or the first instance in which a particular grouping of motifs are used in.

Table 1: Tabulated data on paintings that contain Caturbhuja Mahākāla and Śrīdēvī in the bottom register from the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Subject	HAR	Period	Mahakala 4 Armed	Śrīdēvī	Ganesh	Hayagrīva	Kroda Vajrapāṇi	Cakra- vartin	Tara	Acala	Cakra- saṃvara	Vajra- varahi
This painting			✓	✓	✓	~	✓	~	✓ <sub>g</sub>	✓ <sub>w</sub>		
Chakrasamvara	81410	~1210	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ <sub>r</sub>	✓	✓	✓
Chakrasamvara	99622	~1210	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Chakrasamvara	58301	~1210	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓ <sub>r</sub>	✓	✓	✓
Chakrasamvara	65205	~1210	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Drigung teacher	101334	~1220	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				
Jigten Sumgön	DK Fig. 5.23	~1220	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ <sub>r</sub>	✓	✓	✓
Drigung teachers	19829	Q1 13th	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Dri + Tak Lamas	7847	~1250	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Drigung teacher	92037	~1250	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Lokeshvara	DK Fig 11.30	~1285	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Drigung teacher	22395	~1300	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ <sub>g</sub>	✓	✓	✓
Milarepa	65121	~1300	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ <sub>g</sub>	✓		
Hayagrīva	30911		✓	✓								
Shakyamuni	32048		✓	✓	* As this small painting only has 4 figures, register analysis is necessarily inconclusive							
Heruka Mandala	89981		✓*	✓*	* Not in corners							
Vajrapani	200494		✓*	✓*	* Not in corners							
Yazang Choje	MoB Fig. 1.3		✓*	✓*	* Not in corners							

DK = Jackson, David. "Painting Traditions of the Drigung Kagyu". Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2015.

MoB = Jackson, David. "Mirror of the Buddha". Rubin Museum of Art, New York, 2011.

# VAJRAPĀṆĪ

15<sup>th</sup> century, Tibet

Gilt bronze with turquoise inlay and orange pigment

18.9 *h* × 13.4 *w* × 10.1 *d* cm

**Provenance:**

Private European Collection, 1970s

This image of Vajrapāṇi displays a precision of compositional harmony, with the rhythmic curvature of flesh complementing the powerful and sweeping lines of his posture. His expression is menacing, and his iconic vajra is four-pronged, prominent, and voluminous. By eschewing jewelry on the wrists, arms, ankles, and neck in favor of adornment by coiled serpents, there is a clear intent to bring Vajrapāṇi's relationship with serpents (nāgas) to the forefront. This is reinforced with the earrings acting as a residence for serpents, and emphasized by minimizing the curling of hair at the edges of the mouth and eliminating curling in the eyebrows and orange beard.

His hair is neatly arranged into a hair knot with a serpent hair-tie, rising just above the crown and capped with lotus petals and a vajra. From the front, a simple necklace drapes over the neck into a turquoise-studded clasp at the chest, with a single strand hanging below. From the back, the jewelry forms four loops with a squarish morphology, with single short strands of gold beads decorating the interstitials. The treatment of these features suggests a 15<sup>th</sup> century dating for the work.





# MAÑJUŚRĪ AND LIFE STORY OF SAKYA PAṆḌITA

18th century, Dege  
Distemper on cloth  
70.5 h × 53.7 w

## Provenance:

Private European Collection  
Koller Auktionen, Zurich, 1991

In this painting, Mañjuśrī is seated in his canonical iconographic depiction, orange in color, holding lotus stems with a sword and book emergent on either side. The back of the throne is shrouded by pink clouds, with pairs of elephants, lions, birds, and children hanging from vegetal stems amidst the scent of flowers. A Garuda stands just above Mañjuśrī's halo, accompanied by a multi-colored vegetal scroll.

Surrounding Mañjuśrī are narrative scenes depicting a life story, starting at the top left and moving clockwise. The scenes begin by depicting the birth of the Mañjuśrī emanation (1), his first visit by a monk (2) and his formative education (3). The majority of the scenes (4–13), extending from the top right all the way to the bottom left, show the Mañjuśrī emanation's extensive efforts in teaching others. The last two scenes illustrate his time teaching and advising at the court of a Chinese Emperor. While highly esteemed teachers are often given the iconographic attributes of Bodhisattva (usually Mañjuśrī, Vajradhara, or Vajrapāṇi), depicting a teacher directly as a Bodhisattva as seen here is rare.

Based on the headdress, the monk depicted in the life story appears to belong to the Sakya tradition, and the phrase *ces rkang pa bzhi* that ends the inscription of each scene suggest that he is the 4<sup>th</sup> Sakya hierarch, Kunga Gyeltsen Pel Zangpo, or commonly known as Sakya Paṇḍita. He is the most famous Sakya teacher to be recognized as an emanation of Mañjuśrī, and the time he spent in the last part of his life at the court of Gödan Khan is consistent with the events in the painting.

Prior to the development of the Menri and Khyenri styles in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, scenes of a life story would be depicted in squares or rectangles, arranged edge to edge, that would fill the entire space around the central figure. Following the 15<sup>th</sup> century, landscape elements were depicted in two different ways. One was to enlarge the boxes (often to the whole width of the painting) while incorporating landscape directly into the depiction of scenes, and the other was to convert the boxes into architectural elements that could be seamlessly incorporated a global landscape shared across the entire painting. The former style typically has multiple scenes in each box and resembles the way one would read a Chinese scroll painting, reading horizontally with each scene naturally following the next without partition. The latter style is also particularly elegant as the shared landscape creates movement across hierarchical partition, and one can switch easily between scenes while also appreciating the finer renderings within each scene.

This painting falls into the latter tradition, of which a few existing examples are known, including one fascinating painting of the 3<sup>th</sup> Karmapa currently in the collection of the Hahn Cultural Foundation (HAR 98847). Unlike that work, however, the foreground of each individual scene is not rectangular. Instead, the artist has creatively used diagonal balustrades to create irregular and dynamic shapes for



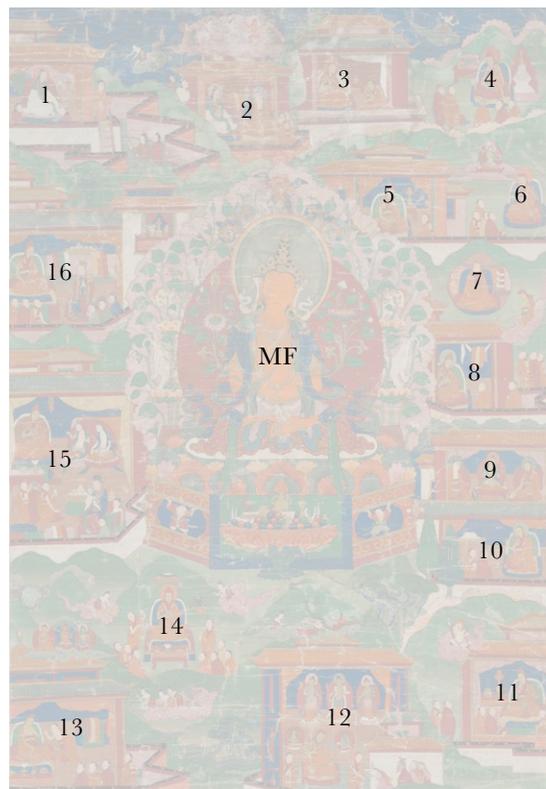


the events taking place. Such diagonal balustrades are not uncommon, but in context of this work, it is relevant to note that it is found in some Karma Gardri paintings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, including, for example, in the painting showing the life story of Sharchen Mingyur Gyeltsen (HAR 89906). That life story is remarkable for its use of perspective and space.

One painting, a life story of Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (HAR 73300) bears such strong resemblance to the present work that it is almost certainly by the same artist. What is surprising about that painting is that it was found at the Dege Gongchen: Dege is not usually associated with paintings of this style. A textual cross-reference of the inscriptions on this painting supports attribution to Dege, as in three instances, the exact wording of the inscriptions are specifically found either in Dege editions of the Tengyur (1737-1744) or Kanjur (c. 1733). Thus, the analysis also suggests a period for its production of sometime in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century in Dege.

In fact, during this specific period, it is known that works were being commissioned at Dege in the Menri style, though few of them have come to light. Most likely, this has more to do with our ability to recognize Dege as the place of origin for works of the Menri style based on the minor variations that its place of production might reflect. This painting, and the work of Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo therefore, provide anchoring examples that may inform future attributions. For example, one could hypothesize a Dege origin for another painting, HAR Item 65644, based on these observations.

	<b>Wylie Transcription</b>	TBRC	Historical Note
1	byang chub sems kyi klu dbang spyi'i bo'i steng	W23681	Compiled in 19th century. Pre-existing Sadhana
5	mi [r]nam[s] mi 'gyur skeyes b[u] nyi shu lnga "skeyes bu nyi shu lnga"	W4CZ5369	Dege Kanjur Circa 1733
8	srid _____ spyang pa		
11	thab kyi lam kyis 'byung bzhi rab tu sbya pas 'thab kyi lam" [gyis] ... "bzhin spyod"	W23703	Dege Tengyur Produced in 1737-1744
12	[r]tog ge ngan pa'i rgol ba thams cad bzlog	W00EGS1017151	Sakya Kumbum Collected works of first five hierarchs
15	bsam pa dag pa'i 'dul bya 'ga' zhig gis "bsam pa dag pa'i"		Sakya Paṇḍita A Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes
16	shid ma spul _ byal _ _____ bzhi		
All	ces rkang pa bzhi	W23703	Dege Tengyur Produced in 1737-1744



# YAMA

16 century, Tibet  
Gilt Bronze and Orange Pigment  
16.0 *h* × 11.0 *w* × 9.0 *d* cm

**Provenance:**

Collection of Thomas Clarke  
Acquired in 1988

Yama, known as the Lord of Death, is seen here in an iconographic form that has been inherited from the Vedas, holding a stick (daṇḍa) and riding a bull. Despite differences across traditions in his significance and function, Yama is often found teaching through Socratic questioning (for example, Kaṭhapaniṣad and the Majjhima Nikāya). The concept of death, if not viewed with instinctual trepidation, creates opportunities to reflect on what makes life meaningful when viewed in hindsight. In the mirror, a reflection on past experience becomes a guide for actions in the future.

This sculpture is particularly special in the context of modern society, given the deeply connected global networks of trade, finance, and information. For Yama's ride shows a resemblance in form to Wall Street's iconic charging bull. The bull is depicted standing tall, without adornment of any kind, comfortable in its own skin and brimming with power and potential. Financial systems have taken on a life of their own. And disruptions to financial markets - as seen in the past few "crises" - seem to create existential threats to civilization. So extrapolating beyond a Buddhist context, this particular sculpture may be taken as a call for us to become masters of the systems that we have created.

The inscription on the back, reading *gshin rje sdom po lho 30*, literally, Yama, blue, south, 30. On the basis of this inscription, this figure was identified by Jeff Watt as part of 51 deity sculptural maṇḍala of the Medicine Buddha, Bhaisajyaguru<sup>1</sup>. In this way, the work relates to the painting of the Elders, as both the sculptural maṇḍala and the set of paintings contain the Medicine Buddhas as secondary figures.

The work is difficult to place in regards to place and period. The style of jewelry (notably the necklace, armbands, and earrings), physiognomic rendition, and overall aesthetic could all well originate in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The style overall appears similar to several known works of the 12 Yaksha generals that are also part of a Medicine Buddha maṇḍala (HAR Set 4137), though the difference in subject type (wrathful deity vs person) limits what conclusions can be drawn from the similarities and differences. The hair, however, is neither as neat as found in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, nor as voluminous as found in the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Therefore, it has been tentatively given a 16<sup>th</sup> century date. Attributions to Mongolia and China, and dates as late as 18<sup>th</sup> century could also be possible for this work.

<sup>1</sup> Watt, Jeff. "Medicine Buddha - Retinue Figure". Himalayan Art Resources. Accessed Feb 8, 2020. <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/70694>



# DUAL MAṄḌALA OF VAJRABHAIRAVA

First half of the 15th century, Tibet  
 Distemper on Cloth  
 74.9 h × 62.4 w cm

## Published and Exhibited

*Demonic Divine*. Jeff Watt and Rob Linrothe, Rubin Museum of Art, 2004

Beyond the benevolence of wisdom, rulers often found the use of force expedient in protection and expansion. So, while kings and emperors actively identified themselves as manifestations of Mañjuśrī, it was his wrathful emanation, Vajrabhairava, that was the subject of many important imperial commissions. These include the stunning cut silk (kèsī) maṅḍala, datable to 1330-1332 in the Metropolitan Museum, a Yongle period embroidery 1404-1424, and a Zhengde period work from 1512. These are the most securely datable works of about a dozen works of Vajrabhairava made within the span of two hundred years following 1330. Compiled data (Table 1) on the corpus of works can be helpful in learning about the relationships between the maṅḍala structure, iconography, transmission lineage, style, and dating.

Vajrabhairava transmission lineages are typically differentiated by the number of deities in the maṅḍala assembly. However, the tabulated data indicates that the maṅḍala assembly alone does not specify the transmission lineage. The most common deity starting the transmission lineage is Vajradhara (11/17), and is followed by a female deity with a skullcup and vajra-chopper of blue color in eight paintings and red in three. Seven of the eight works with the blue female deity are maṅḍalas, and five of them have three or more Yamaris (forms of Rakta Yamari, Kṛṣṇa Yamari, Yama, and Vajrabhairava) in the squinches just outside the maṅḍala (including this one). By comparison, of the seven maṅḍalas without the blue female deity, only a single painting has more than one Yamari class deities in the corners. The correlation of the transmission lineage with secondary deities outside the primary maṅḍala hints at the

s	a24	a25	a26	g4	a27	a28	a29	s
a23	v6			v7			v8	a30
a22								a31
a21			a7	a4	a8			a32
g3	v5		a3	M	a1		v1	g1
a20			a6	a2	a5			a9
a19								a10
a18	v4			v3			v2	a11
s	a17	a16	a15	g2	a14	a13	a12	s

possibility that the transmission lineage is for the entire group of Yamari deities, and not only Vajrabhairava. Two Yamari lineages may be matches, provided that the iconography of the wisdom ḍākinī listed in both sources can be textually validated (TBRC L8LS15337, HAR Set 522). These lineages correctly estimate the date of the Yuan maṅḍala, and are roughly consistent with correlation between lineage length for most of the works in the table.

A rare feature of this maṅḍala is that it depicts both the 13-deity assembly and the assembly of 32 Ayudhas (a1 – a32) implements) and 8 Vetalis, (v1 – v8) depicted in black (see diagram on left). This feature is found in only one other maṅḍala, located in the San Francisco Museum of Fine



Arts. That maṇḍala appears at first glance to be a 17-deity maṇḍala, but is more likely a combination of the 13-deity maṇḍala, with all 32 Ayudhas, and only 4 of the 8 Vetalis depicted. Vajrabhairava is mostly found in solitary form in maṇḍalas of this period, though in this painting, the reason for this may be related to his solitary depiction in the assembly of 32 Ayudhas and 8 Vetalis.

This maṇḍala contains a standard depiction of the Charnel Grounds, though there is a slight variation in the grouping of the 8 Great Adepts. While Virūpa is a minor figure alongside Indrabhūti in the Drigung group, Virūpa replaces Indrabhūti altogether in this painting. In the Sakya standardization, wherein Virūpa replaces Padmavajra<sup>1</sup>. The significance of this variation is not yet known, though perhaps it suggests that one should not rush to attribute this work to a Sakya lineage on account of Virūpa's presence at the West Charnel Ground. Identification of the white robed teachers in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> lineage positions may provide further information relevant to the painting's sectarian origins.

Stylistically, the flames circumscribing the central form of Vajrabhairava have pointed tips with scrolling patterns, of a type most common across the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Two 14<sup>th</sup> century paintings listed in Table 1 have this triangular flame (one at the Los Angeles County Museum and the other in the Pritzker Collection). I have seen no systematic studies till date that differentiates sub-styles in flame morphology for these triangular shaped flames. The figures are rendered with considerable volume, and the jewelry is heavy and prominent with an emphasis on roundels. The style with which the faces and bodies have been drawn is uncommon, and may provide indications regarding the place of production or even the artist. The portraiture is simply phenomenal in this work. Note, for example, Vajrabhairava's long tongue, which extends all the way down to the skullcup at heart center. Future work may illumine more about this incredible painting through these highly subtle stylistic considerations.

Table 1: Paintings of Vajrabhairava from 1300 to 1520

Collection	deities	Period	Date Note	Lineage			HAR	Heads	#yamari
				#	School	Deities			
LACMA	13	14 <sup>th</sup> century	Style + Lineage	14	Sakya	Red Male and Female	85722	Stack	2
Metropolitan Museum	49	1330 - 1332	Confirmed	14	Sakya	Vajradhara + Nairatmya	86530	Circ.	4
Private Collection	49	14 <sup>th</sup> century	Style + Lineage	16		Vajradhara + Nairatmya	77198	Stack	0
Hahn Foundation	13	14 <sup>th</sup> - 15 <sup>th</sup> century	Style + Lineage	17	?	Vajradhara + Nairatmya	98702	Circ.	3
Tibet House	13	14 <sup>th</sup> century	Style + Lineage	17	?	Vajradhara + Red Female	8920	Stack	0
Pritzker Collection	13	Late 14 <sup>th</sup> century	Style	19	Sakya	Vajradhara + Red Female	101365	Stack	0
Private Collection	13	15 <sup>th</sup> century	Style + Lineage	20	?	Vajradhara + Nairatmya	99642	Stack	4
Present Work	13 + 41	15 <sup>th</sup> century	Style + Lineage	21	?	Vajradhara + Nairatmya		Stack	6
Private Collection	n/a	1404 - 1424	Confirmed	16	Geluk	Vajradhara + Nairatmya	35857	Circ.	0
Ernst Collection	13	c. 1435	Tsongkhapa + 1	17	Geluk	Vajradhara + Nairatmya	8003	Circ.	4
Private	13	c. 1465	Tsongkhapa + 3	16	Geluk	Vajrabhairva + Simhamukta	23394	Circ.	0
Private	32	c. 1465	Tsongkhapa + 3	19	Geluk	Vajradhara + Nairatmya	19837	Circ.	1?
Philadelphia Museum	13	c. 1480	Tsongkhapa + 4	21	Geluk	Vajrabhairva + Simhamukta	87103	Circ.	2
San Francisco Museum	13 + 41	Late 15 <sup>th</sup> century	Style	n/a	Sakya?	n/a	69414	Stack	4
Jucker Collection	13	c. 1510	Style	24	Sakya	Amitayus	89197	Stack	0
Rubin Museum of Art	13	1516 - 1535	Confirmed	26	Sakya	Red Female	65463	Stack	0
Private	n/a	15 <sup>th</sup> century	Style	30	?	Vajradhara + Red Female	19050	Circ.	1

1 Luczanits, Christian. 2008. On the Earliest Mandalas in a Buddhist Context. In *Mahāyāna Buddhism. History and Culture*. Edited by Sambhota Series XV, Darrol Bryant and Susan Bryant. New Delhi: Tibet House, pp. 111–36.



# KṚṢṆA YAMARI

11<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> century, Northern India  
Bronze alloy  
9.8 *h* × 8.6 *w* × 3.4 *d* cm

**Provenance:**

Private European Collection, 1960s

Rounding off the exhibition's group of Yamari class emanations of Mañjuśrī, is this exceptionally finely crafted bronze of Kṛṣṇa Yamari, made in 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Pala Empire of Northern India<sup>1</sup>. Kṛṣṇa Yamari holds weapons in his proper right hands, the sword, vajra, and vajra-chopper, while his proper left hands provide a more peaceful counterpoint with a lotus flower, dharmacakra and skullcup.

This is a piece whose aesthetic needs to be understood on multiple scales. Seeing the work up close, each iconographic element takes a life of its own, calling for attention and filling the mind's eye on account of their volume and significance. The body appears well-articulated and brimming with energy. Yet when seen at the distance of several meters, a liveness and grace emerges.

There are several interesting features of this work, including the use of lotus buds to adorn the large topknot, the asymmetry in the earrings (one is hollow, the other contains a serpent). The posture of the serpent in the topknot is noteworthy, as it stands erect like a cobra, with its face emerging just over the tip of the frontal lotus bud.

<sup>1</sup> For some works with a similar aesthetic, see an 11th century sculpture of Hevajra (HAR Item 57148), an 11th century sculpture of Acala (HAR Item 200417), and a 11-12th century Jambhala (Sotheby's, 10 June 2015, Arts d'Asie Lot 168)



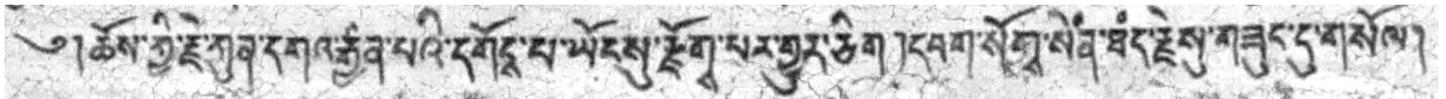


# MAṄḌALA OF MAÑJUVAJRA GUHYASAMĀJA

1557 - 1585, Tibet  
Distemper on cloth  
41.3 h × 33.7 w cm

## Provenance:

Frederick Keppel & Co, New York City, pre-1940.  
Private New York Collection  
Christie's New York, March 2019



chos kyi rje kun dga' rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i dgongs pa yongs su rdzogs par gyur cig | bdag sogs sems can thams cad rjes su gzung du gsol

May the intent of Dharma Lord Kunga Gyeltsen Pel Zangpo be completely fulfilled. May I and all sentient beings be protected.

In an early translation of the Guhyasamāja Tantra into English, the title was read as *The Secret Union of the Body, Speech, and Mind of the Tathāgathās*<sup>1</sup>. There are probably several newer translations of the title, but the flavor of them remains the same. One of the main aims of the rituals and methods in the text is the cultivation of a deeper understanding of reality. The three factors, body, speech, and mind, are immediately accessible to us as central to our lived experience. Yet the question in modern times is how to approach questions regarding the nature of reality through these factors of experience. At the expense of fidelity to the school of thought from which the Tantra originated, one can interpret the factors (*'dus pa*) in the following way: *body* as elementary particles, *speech* as information, and *mind* as representation. With this interpretation, all phenomena embedded in space and time manifest in some way through the union of these three factors. One of the great mysteries is that we are able to see ourselves, and stand witness to phenomena. So, it is when the three work together in a special way, in *Secret Union*, that this witnessing, this capacity for a particular kind of self-representation, arises. The introduction of the 'dual space' of particles, information, and representation allows discussion of the Secret Union either through phenomenology ("subjective") or through modern science ("objective"), with a preliminary dictionary for translating between the two. So Guhyasamāja as a subject in art, can be appreciated as a reflection of how the nature of reality is apprehended through the coordination of differentiated factors.

This 19-deity maṅḍala depicts Guhyasamāja in his wisdom form of Mañjuśrī, aligned with the factor of speech. This form, Guhyasamāja Mañjuvajra is mentioned briefly in Chapter 12 of the Guhyasamāja Tantra, and is elaborated upon in another text called the *Vajrahṛdayālaṃkāra*. This painting is one of the few works that depict Guhyasamāja Mañjuvajra in his solitary form, as opposed to being shown as co-emergent with his consort Mother Mañjuvajra<sup>2</sup>.

For the inner retinue, Mañjuvajra is accompanied by the remaining Tathāgathās on the cardinal directions, Vairocana (2, E), Ratnasambhava (3, S), Amitābha (4, W), Amogasiddhi (5, N), along with their respective

1 Fremantle, Francesca. "A Critical Study of the Guhyasamāja tantra". University of London Library, 1971.

2 The name of his consort is found here: Watt, Jeff. " Buddhist Deity: Guhyasamāja, Mañjuvajra Main Page". Himalayan Art Resources. Updated 6-2017. <https://www.himalayanart.org/items/30833>



1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
12	10							11	13
14		d12		d18		d13			15
			d7	d4	d8				
		d17	d3	d1	d5	d19			
			d6	d2	d9				
16		d11	d10	d16	d15	d14			17
20	18							19	21
30	29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	

consorts on the intermediates: White Tārā (6, SE), Māmakī (7, SW), Pāṇḍarā (8, NW), and Green Tārā (9, NE). Guarding the gates of the maṇḍala are four wrathfuls, and consistent with the directions, they are identified iconographically as being Yamāntaka at the East Gate holding a Vajra Hammer (16), Prajñāntaka at the South Gate holding a Vajra Mace (17), Padmāntaka at the West Gate holding a Lotus Flower (18), and Vajrapāṇi at the North Gate holding a Vajra (19). The remaining six peaceful figures, along the sides of the gates, are more difficult to identify iconographically. Comparing with the Akṣobhyavajra Guhyasamāja maṇḍala, these peaceful deities are most likely members of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas, with Mañjuśrī excluded owing to his presence in the central figure, and Vajrapāṇi excluded owing to his depiction as a wrathful at the North Gate. The present roster would then consist of

Maitreya (10), Kṣitigarbha (11), Sarvanivaraṇaviṣkambhin (12), Ākāśagarbha (13), Avalokiteśvara (14), and Samantabhadra (15). Like the Akṣobhyavajra maṇḍala, all of the figures are six-armed as reflections of Guhyasamāja, holding a sword and flower in the upper pair of arms, and with the bottom pair in Vajradhara mudrā. One of the takeaways from this elucidation is that for the purposes of preliminary comprehension, it is useful to look at a maṇḍala as comprising of groups of several classes of deities instead of just a list of names.

The remainder of this painting contains the transmission lineage for the teaching, and in this instance, each of the thirty teachers in the lineage are accompanied with an inscribed name (Table 1). Paintings with such extensively documented lineages are rare and provide invaluable art historical information that is used not only for dating individual paintings, but also validating methodologies of analysis.

Lineages, like maṇḍala retinues, may at first seem like a list of names, but a bit of digging into that list can add significant depth and appreciation, especially when the contributions of people in the lineage can be recognized. In this work, the transmission lineage depicted in this painting starts with the 8<sup>th</sup> century teacher to whom the oldest Guhyasamāja lineages trace back to, Buddhaśrījñāna. The next teacher, Dipaṅkarabhadra, was an important tantric expert in 9<sup>th</sup> century India, and the author of 39 known tantric texts<sup>3</sup>. Of note here is the presence of Ratnakīrti, an 11<sup>th</sup> philosopher, a student of the significant thinker of pan-Indic repute named Jñanaśrimitra, and who studied logic and epistemology.

Thereafter, the lineage finds its way to the Sakya tradition, starting with Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, passes through a variety of teachers in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and then through a number of Ngor abbots starting with the first, Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo. A transmission lineage for the 19-deity Mañjuvajra maṇḍala (TBRC L0RKL315) recorded by the Sakya Trichen Ngagwang Kunga Sonam (1597 – 1660, TBRC P791) matches the lineage in this painting up until the 6<sup>th</sup> Ngor Abbot Sonam Sengge (1429–1489, TBRC P1042).

On aesthetic level, the relationship of the painting with Sakya and Ngor is apparent in the style of the

3 Chattopadhyaya, Alaka. "Atiśa and Tibet: Life and Works of Dipamkara Srijnana in Relation to the History and Religion of Tibet with Tibetan Sources" Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1996.



artwork. The most relevant comparison is the 1569-1575 set of Vajravali paintings commissioned by the Ngor Abbot Drangti Namkha Palzang (HAR Set 2772) and a maṇḍala of Hevajra formerly in the Lionel Fournier collection<sup>4</sup>. A Ngor/Sakya maṇḍala of Guhyasamāja Akṣobhyavajra Mandala (to be discussed more later), is also stylistically related, though it is slightly larger, and differentiates itself from this work in the final steps of its production with subtle shading of figures and the with the lavish use of gold pigment. What is particularly special about the transmission lineage of this work is that each figure has been given individualized attention, with well rendered facial physiognomy and an awareness of the iconographic depiction of each member of the lineage. This is evident from the yellow hats of Lama Drakpa Pel and Szang Phagpa.

The last figure in the painting, a Kunga Gyeltsen Pel Zangpo (abbreviated as *kun dga' rgyan pa*) is a student of the 10<sup>th</sup> Ngor Abbot, Konchök Lhundrub. This name (*kun dga' rgyan*) is also found in the dedicatory inscription of a maṇḍala of Guhyasamāja Akṣobhyavajra sold at Bonhams in 2014<sup>5</sup>. The present painting depicts both *kun dga' rgyan* and Kunga Sonam in the transmission lineage, confirming that *kun dga' rgyan* is not the Ngor abbot Kunga Sonam (1485 – 1533), and is in fact, a student of Konchök Lhundrub. This painting thus helps confirm that the Guhyasamāja Akṣobhyavajra maṇḍala was most likely made in 1558 for the funerary rites of Konchök Lhundrub.

The donor's use of the name *kun dga' rgyan (pa)* directly associates him with the eminent Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyeltsen Pel Zangpo. As Sakya Paṇḍita (*sa pan*) is the last teacher in the abbreviated transmission lineage<sup>6</sup> in the Guhyasamāja Akṣobhyavajra maṇḍala, the adoption of an abbreviated name allows the viewer to see the donor in lieu of Sakya Paṇḍita as the last teacher in the lineage. How clever! In searching through the TBRC database, five teachers were found with the name Kunga Gyeltsen Pel Zangpo<sup>7,8,9,10</sup>; the only teacher that temporally coincided with Konchök Lhundrub belonged to a Nyingma lineage (TBRC P1703) though it is highly unlikely that this is the person mentioned in the inscription. This suggests that the name is an abbreviation of a larger name. With this consideration, one indeed finds a student and close disciple of Konchök Lhundrub: the Sakya Trichen Kunga Rinchen (1517 – 1584)<sup>11</sup>. Kunga Rinchen served as the head of Sakya for fifty years, and sponsored much construction and restoration of sites in addition to his role as teacher to the next generation of Sakya and Ngor leaders<sup>12</sup>. An attribution to Kunga Rinchen is highly compelling, for the donor must have had a very high level of spiritual accomplishment, wealth, and access to master artists to commission both works of Guhyasamāja. A detailed biography of Kunga Rinchen was written by Ngawang Kunga Sonam (1597 – 1660, TBRC P791), and may contains

4 "Thangka Representant le Mandala de Hevajra". Christie's Paris, Sale 16245, December 12, 2018, Lot 16. <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/thangka-representant-le-mandala-de-hevajra-tibet-6185308-details.aspx>

5 "A Thirty-Two-Deity Guhyasamaja Mandala". Bonhams, Lot 18, 17 Mar 2014, 13:00 EDT. Sold for \$929,000. <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/21423/lot/18/>

6 The transmission lineage is abbreviated to make room for the Guardians of the Ten Directions, dikpālas. This group of deities is found in the bottom register of most Guhyasamāja Akṣobhyavajra maṇḍalas.

7 The first was one of the Imperial Preceptors to the Yuan dynasty, and lived from 1310 to 1356. See Casey, Jane. "Buddhist Initiation Paintings from the Yuan Court (1271-1368) in the Sino-Himalayan Style". Asianart.com. Published June 16, 2014. Accessed Jan 25, 2020. <https://www.asianart.com/articles/tsakli-casey/index.html>

8 The second lived from 1382-1446 (TBRC P4512), and was part of the Sakya *dzong pa* tradition founded by Lama Dampa Sonam Gyeltsen.

9 The third was a student of Lowo Khenchen Sonam Lhundrub who was a royal preceptor at the court of Mangyul Gungthang. See Quintman, Andrew and Bogin, Benjamin "Himalayan Passages: Tibetan and Newar Studies in Honor of Hubert Decleer" Wisdom Publications, 2014.

10 The fourth had the bearing *glang thang spyang snga*, and was a disciple of Thekchen Choje (1349 - 1425) and wrote a biography on his teacher. See Heimbel, Jörg, "Vajradhara in Human Form: The Life and Times of Ngor chen Kun dga' bzang po" Vajra Books, 2018, p395.

11 Only one other teacher was found whose name could be abbreviated as Kunga Gyeltsen Pel Zangpo. This teacher was a Drigung Abbot (1475 - 1527, TBRC P466).

12 Gardner, Alexander, "Ngawang Kunga Rinchen". Treasury of Lives, published July 2010. Accessed Jan 20, 2020. [https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Kunga-Rinchen/TBRC\\_P460](https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Kunga-Rinchen/TBRC_P460)

references to either of these maṇḍalas. It may also be possible that this painting of Mañjuvajra was made for the funerary rites of Kunga Rinchen in 1585, instead of being commissioned by him.

Paintings of Mañjuvajra Guhyasamāja are rare and often of exceptional quality. They are found in some of the most important museum and private collections around the world, including the Cleveland Museum of Art (HAR 59213), the Norton Simon Museum (HAR 59331), the Musée Guimet (HAR 77208), the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology (HAR 518), the Rubin Museum of Art (HAR 100033), the Collection of Donald and Shelley Rubin (HAR 359), and the Collection of Rock Mountain (HAR 30833). Institutions with works of Akṣobhyavajra Guhyasamāja extend this list to the Art Institute of Chicago (HAR 71107), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (HAR 86477), the Rietberg Museum (HAR 200914), the British Museum (HAR 34430).

Table 1: Transmission lineage as described in the painting

	<b>Inscription</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>TBRC</b>	<b>Dates</b>
1	<i>'jam pa'i rdo rje</i>	Mañjuśrī	P0RK1498	
2	<i>sang[s rg]yas ye [sh]es zhabs</i>	Buddhaśrījñāna	P0RK196	late 8th century
3	<i>me mdzad bzang [p]o</i>	Dipaṅkarabhadra	P0RK197	
4	<i>dpal bde</i>	Śrīdevā	P0RK198	
5	<i>bi ma la gu pa ta</i>	Vimalagupta	P0RK199	
6	<i>ra(tna) bdzra</i>	Ratnavajra	P8152	
7	<i>ratna kri ti</i>	Ratnakīrti	P0RK200	11th century
8	<i>dpe 'da' pa</i>	Lama Paṅḍita	P0RK1499	
9	<i>gyan lo tsa ba</i>	Gyan Lotsaba Darma Drak	P2614	11th century
10	<i>gnang kha zhu ba</i>	Dharma Sengge	P0RK1499	
11	<i>sa chen</i>	Sachen Kunga Nyingpo (Sakya 3)	P1615	1092 – 1158
12	<i>rtse mo</i>	Sonam Tsemo (Sakya 4)	P1618	1142 – 1182
13	<i>grags pa</i>	Drakpa Gyeltsen (Sakya 5)	P1614	1147 – 1216
14	<i>sa paN</i>	Sakya Paṅḍita (Sakya 6)	P1056	1182 – 1251
15	<i>'phags pa</i>	Lodro Gyeltsen (Sakya 7)	P1048	1235 – 1280
16	<i>bla ma kun dga' grags</i>	Kunga Drakpa	P2612	
17	<i>slo [dp]on bkr[a sh]is dpal</i>	Tashi Pel	P0RK569	
18	<i>dga' ldan pa kun bsod</i>	Kunga Sonam	P3903	
19	<i>khams pa rdo [rj]e dpal</i>	Khampa Do Pel	P0RK1500	
20	<i>bla ma kri rti sh(nyi)</i>	Pelden Drakpa Pel	P0RK259	
21	<i>kyen gangs pa</i>	Lama Drakpa Pel	P0RK410	
22	<i>ma ti paN chen</i>	Mati Panchen	P151	1294 – 1376
23	<i>sa bzang 'phags pa</i>	Sabzang Pakpa	P3874	1358 – 1412
24	<i>rdo [rj]e 'chang kun dga' bzang po</i>	Ngorchen Kunga Zangpo (Ngor 1)	P1132	1382 – 1456
25	<i>kun dga' dbang phyug</i>	Kunga Wangchuk (Ngor 4)	P1040	1424 – 1478
26	<i>bsod nam[s] seng [g]e</i>	Sonam Sengge (Ngor 6)	P1042	1429 – 1489
27	<i>dko[n mch]og 'phel</i>	Konchok Pelwa (Ngor 7)	P1873	1445 – 1514
28	<i>kun dga' bsod nams</i>	Kunga Sonam (Sakya 22)	P461	1485 – 1533
29	<i>'jam [db]yangs dko[n mch]og lhu[n gru]b</i>	Konchok Lhundrup (Ngor 10)	P783	1497 – 1557
30	<i>kun dga' rgyan pa</i>	Kunga Rinchen (Sakya 23)	P460	1517 – 1584

# AKṢOBHYAVAJRA GUHYASAMĀJA

15<sup>th</sup> century, Tibet

Gilt bronze with turquoise inlay and gold and other pigments

18.9 *h* × 13.4 *w* × 10.1 *d* cm

## Provenance

Private German Collection, before 1976

## Published (front and back cover):

*Buddhistische Kunst aus dem Himalaya*. Ulrich von Shroeder and Helmut Ullig. Kunstamt Berlin-Tempelhof, 1976

An unusual number of masterworks of Guhyasamāja Akṣobhyavajra were made in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, including six works<sup>1</sup> related to the Central Tibetan style recently associated with the sculptor Sonam Gyeltsen<sup>2</sup>. The slender figural articulation present in works of this style is particularly well-suited for depicting multi-armed deities, where it allows for greater harmony and balance between positive and negative space. With such a corpus available for comparison, it is a facile exercise for a viewer to absorb through osmosis the style's quintessential nature. One feature that makes this work stand out is the outstandingly expressive gold painted face. Few works of the period, and only one of the six other works of Guhyasamāja Akṣobhyavajra, have this feature. The artist has bestowed exquisite attention to detail to the work, reflected in the quality with which each finger, toe, iconographic element, and element of jewelry is rendered. One moment of surprise and joy is the discovery of an inscribed floral motif on the edge of Sparśavajrā's dhoti, visible only from a specific angle, and thus easily missed at first glance.

1 One of these works is in the Palace Museum in Beijing (HAR Item 9516), two are in the Rubin Museum of Art (HAR Items 65446 and 65271), with three others in private collections (HAR Items 8050, 34123, and 1745).

2 "A Gilt Copper Alloy Figure of Avalokiteshvara Sahasrabhuja Ekadasamukha" Bonhams, New York, 19 Mar 2018, Lot 3033. <https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/24358/lot/3033/>

