

# BODHICITTA

## Interweaving Buddhist Art Traditions from India across Asia

보디치타 -  
인도에서 아시아를 잇는 불교 미술 전통

VIRTUAL EXHIBITION FROM THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI



National Museum  
New Delhi





## About the Exhibition

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For 2500 years, Buddha and his teachings have been the fountainhead of profound religious and historical discourses in India and across Asia. It was the quest for eternal wisdom that led the young Shakyen Prince, Siddhartha Gautama, to forsake his royal and material gains to become the *samyaksambuddha* or the one who is perfectly self-awakened. The virtual exhibition from the National Museum narrates the development of Buddhist art in India and the making of Buddhist visual culture. To trace the journey of Buddhism in India and its continuity further across Asia, the Museum brings together a unique selection of Buddhist artefacts ranging from stone and bronze sculptures, terracotta and clay votive objects, manuscript paintings, and ritual implements. The exhibition conceptually looks at four themes – the Eternal Buddha and the Bodhisattva, Female Deities and Esoteric Traditions, Spread of Buddhism across Asia, and Ritual Implements. The artistic wealth displayed in the exhibition is embedded within an eclectic historical timeline spanning across the development of Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana schools of Buddhism. Seen through the masterpieces in the National Museum collection, the exhibition focuses on the sacred and didactic aspects of Buddhist heritage in India forging a new outlook on its spread, development, and cultural synthesis over centuries.



# The Eternal Buddha and the Bodhisattvas

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One of the earliest impressions of Buddhist art is expressed through the worship of symbols depicting Buddha's silent yet eternal presence. These symbols continue to hold a sacrosanct value world-wide even today. During the Kushan Period, a new iconic form was ascribed to the Buddha. In addition to the worldly and otherworldly manifestations of Buddha, the concept of Crowned Buddha portrayed the celestial body of the Buddha as per the *tri-kaya* concept of Mahayana Buddhism.

In addition to Buddha's physical presence, the presence of Bodhisattva was seen from the jataka tradition itself. The visual form of a bodhisattva was endowed with a visually stunning persona of a bejewelled princely figure. By delaying his enlightenment to save people from suffering, a Bodhisattva practiced the ten great perfections (*paramitas*), that guided him on the righteous path. From Kushan to Gupta to Pala periods, the cult of Bodhisattvas grew exponentially in early, classical, and medieval phases of Buddhist art in India.





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### **Buddhapada**

2<sup>nd</sup> century CE

Satvahana Period

Nagarjunakonda, Andhra Pradesh

Pale green limestone

H:53 cm., W:45 cm., D:12.8 cm.

Acc. No: 50.24



Buddha's footprint (*buddhapada*) represents his symbolic form and is individually worshipped as one of the markers of Buddha's divine-self. The tradition of venerating *buddhapada* continues till modern-day in Buddhist monasteries across the world. This *buddhapada* from the Nagarjunakonda stupa was used as an object of devotion and a narrative means for the built structure of the stupa. The footmarks are highly ornate and covered entirely with auspicious signs and symbols. The most prominent of these markings are the large wheels of law (*dharmachakras*). *Chakras* on the soles of the feet are said to be one of the thirty-two super-human qualities (*mahapurusha lakshanas*) associated with Buddha. Lotus flowers (*padma*) adorn the center of the wheel, the lotus being a symbol of Buddha's purity. The footprints artistically illustrate some of the auspicious motifs. Starting from the top left corner, we see the *shrivatsa*, *bhadrasana*, *swastika*, *puṇakumbha*, *shankha*, *matsyayugma*, *triratna*, among others.



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### **Worship of Empty Throne**

3<sup>rd</sup> century CE

Satavahana Period, Andhra Pradesh

W: 96.5 cm., H: 106.7 cm., D: 12.7 cm.

Limestone

Acc. No. M.17/1

Antiquity returned from National Gallery of Australia





The Buddhist stupas at Nagarjunakonda and Amravati is known for their unique craftsmanship and a decorative style of detailing. The railing and drum-slabs found from the site have created a vivid portrayal of symbols, jataka tales and significant events from Buddha's life. Placed on the hemispherical dome, the stone slabs circled the entire domical structure with a continuous band of ornamental motifs adorning the stupa. In this casing fragment, an empty throne with a high backing is centrally placed with Buddha's footmarks (*buddapada*) minutely depicted underneath. The empty throne's verticality and the devotees, holding different ritual offerings, are aesthetically pointed at in this compositional fragment. One of the peculiar elements in the fragment is the detailing of the girdle belt and thick strings of anklets around the female devotees' ankles. The fragment reflects on Buddhist worship in ancient India and represents a unique artistic style central to the Satavahana period.



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### **Standing Buddha**

2<sup>nd</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE

Kushana Dynasty, Gandhara region

H: 133 cm., W: 51 cm., D: 21 cm.

Black Schist

Acc. No. 87.1153





Owing to a vast reign spanning from India to Central Asia, the Kushan kings had two capitals, in Mathura in India, and in the north-west frontier, Gandhara, in present-day Pakistan. These capitals also served as important art centres wherein Buddha was given a human form. The Buddha sculpture in black schist stone bears a plain halo. Among the various superhuman qualities (*mahapurusha lakshanas*), he has a broad cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*), supple face with elongated earlobes, a tuft of hair (*urna*) in between his eyebrows, and heavy-lidded eyes. He is draped in a monastic robe covering both the shoulders (*ubhayansikha sanghati*). The robe's heavy folds are a distinct marker of a thick woollen cloth worn in Gandhara's colder climate. His right hand is broken, and the left hand extended along the body holds the monastic robe's hem. He stands on a narrow pedestal flanked by Corinthian pillars depicting two ascetics worshipping Buddha's bowl.



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**Buddha in meditation (*dhyanasana*)**

3<sup>rd</sup> century CE

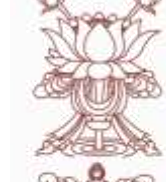
Kushan Dynasty

Taxila, Pakistan

H: 55 cm., W: 38 cm., D: 13 cm.

Polychrome Stucco

Acc. No. 49.20/8





The standing and seated Buddha sculptures in stucco from Gandhara uniquely point at Kushan artists' craftsmanship for imbuing unique portraiture in sculpted images. The stucco sculptures from Gandhara were also polychrome and were used in monastic establishments and stupa niches. In this sculpture from Taxila, the seated figure of Buddha is in the lotus posture (*padmasana*). His hands are in the gesture of meditation (*dhyana mudra*), covered under his ochre drapery (*sanghati*). The thick folds of the drapery schematically fall over the body. He sits on a black stucco base, which compliments the plain black halo covering his head and half of his shoulders. The facial features are pronounced with a rounded face, an aquiline nose, equally arching eyebrows and half meditative eyes in black pigment, and full lips painted in red pigment. The hair's striated waves rise into a cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*), rendered in blue pigment, adding an aesthetic value to Buddha's iconic form.



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**Buddha with Bodhisattvas**

ca. 110<sup>th</sup> century CE

Kushana Dynasty

Ahichchhatra, Uttar Pradesh

H: 72.5 cm., W: 47.0 cm., D: 12.5 cm.

Spotted Red Sandstone

Acc. No. L.55.25



The artist workshops at Mathura and Gandhara produced Buddha images simultaneously, resulting in a rich amalgam of cultural and stylistic features. In this stele, Shakyamuni Buddha is depicted in a triad. The flanking figures of Bodhisattva Vajrapani and Padmapani are shown wearing Greek and Indian dresses and headgears. In the stele, seated cross-legged on a lion throne (*simhasana*) in the lotus posture (*padmasana*), the soles of Buddha's feet display spoked-wheel (*dharmachakra*) motif. His right-hand is raised to the shoulder, making the hand gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya mudra*) while the left-hand rests on his left knee. He wears a diaphanous robe (*sanghati*) covering one shoulder (*ekanksikha*). A clean-shaven head with the cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*) shaped like snail-curls is visible. This type of Buddha image is also known as Kapardin Buddha in Kushan Mathura stylistics. Halo is large, undecorated but only with a scalloped motif around the edge.



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### **Buddha with flying celestials**

5<sup>th</sup> century CE

Gupta-Vakataka Period

Pophnar Kala, Madhya Pradesh

H: 45.5 cm., W: 17 cm., D: 13.8 cm.

Bronze,

Acc. No. L.658



The Museum has seven polychrome bronze images of Shakyamuni Buddha with moulded rectangular pedestals excavated from Pophnar village in Madhya Pradesh. Additionally, five metal parasols were also found from the site. In this sculpture, Buddha stands on a small square pedestal. A full-blown lotus rises out of a thick stalk, which is also balancing the Buddha image. A unique feature of this sculpture are the two flying celestials (*gandharvas*) holding a wreathed crown and a parasol (*chattrā*) above Buddha's head. The sculpture belongs to the Vakataka school of Ajanta art. In the sculpture, Buddha makes the gesture of fearlessness (*abhaya mudra*) in the right hand while the left-hand holds the lower edge. A diaphanous robe covers both his shoulders (*ubhayansikha sanghati*) with prominent folds visible on the muscular arms and the ridges visible in between the legs. The webbed fingers (*jalhastā*), a common feature in Kushan, Gupta, post-Gupta sculptures as part of supernatural features (*mahapurusha lakshanas*).



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**The Eight Great Events of Buddha's life  
(*ashtamahapratiharya*)**

10<sup>th</sup> century CE

Pala period

Nalanda, Bihar

H: 14 cm., W: 8.6 cm., D: 4.5 cm.

Stone

Acc. No. 47.56





In Buddhist art, the eight great miracles (*ashtamahapratiharya*) is widely depicted as per the eight pilgrimage sites epitomizing the life of Buddha and his teachings as mentioned in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*. In Pala art, the life scenes are portrayed compactly, with a central figure surrounded by vignettes of the auspicious sites. This miniature stele represents Buddha's central figure seated under the *bodhi* tree in earth touching gesture (*bhumisparsa mudra*), symbolizing his enlightenment at Bodhgaya. The *ashtamahapratiharya* narrative begins from the right on the lowest row with the nativity scene at Lumbini, in which Mayadevi is represented, and on the opposite side is the seated Buddha holding the bowl containing honey offered by the monkey at Vaishali. In the middle tier, the two preaching Buddhas seated in pendant leg pose (*pralambapadasana*) depict the first sermon at Sarnath to the proper right and the miracle at Shravasti the proper left. Just above can be spotted the identically standing figures discernible for the descent at Sankashya and the taming of Nalagiri at Rajgir. Surmounting all these, the narrative depicts the great demise (*mahaparinirvana*), with a stupa in the background.



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### **Crowned Buddha**

Second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE  
Pala Dynasty, Eastern India

H: 18 cm., W: 12 cm., D: 8.2 cm.

Bronze

Acc. No. 85.407



The physical form of Buddha, depicted in a monk's robe (*sanghati*) and bereft of crown and ornamentation signifies renunciation and acceptance of the ascetic life. To this system, Mahayana Buddhism introduced the concept of crowned and bejewelled Buddha venerating Buddha as a universal monarch (*chakravartin*). In this bronze sculpture, the Crowned Buddha is seen in royal garb with an elaborate crown and jewels, seated cross-legged in thunderbolt posture (*vajraparyankasana*) on an elaborate double lotus pedestal. His right hand is in the earth-touching gesture (*bhumisparsha mudra*). The lower part of the pedestal shows a wheel, a woman, a horse, a man, a general with a sword, an elephant, and a seated lion, which can be further identified as the seven jewels (*saptaratna*) of Buddhism. As treasures of a *chakravartin*, these jewels are mentioned in the *Mahasudassana Sutta*. The seven objects collectively symbolize inexhaustible material and spiritual powers over all obstacles.



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**Panel of Transcendental Buddhas (*panchtathagatas*)**

10<sup>th</sup> century CE

Pala period, Bihar

Chlorite

H: 19 cm., W: 64.5 cm., D: 12.3 cm.

Acc. No. 60.607



Vajrayana Buddhism introduced the concept of Transcendental Buddhas (*panchatathagatas*), leading to a wide-scale expansion of the Buddhist pantheon. The Transcendental Buddhas represent the beatific, or celestial body (*sambhogakaya*) of Buddha. Known as Amitabha, Akshobhya, Vairochana, Amoghasiddhi, and Ratnasambhava, the *panchatathagatas* are believed to be the emanations of the primordial Adi Buddha. The Buddhas are recognizable by characteristic iconographic attributes, hand gestures (*mudras*), and postures (*asanas*). They appear in this panel from the proper left to the right: Amitabha in deep meditation (*samadhi mudra*); Vairochana displays the gesture of teaching by turning the Wheel of Law (*dharmacakrapravartana mudra*); Akshobhya appears in the earth-touching pose (*bhumisparsha mudra*); Amoghasiddhi displays the gesture of assurance (*abhaya mudra*), Ratnasambhava displays the gesture of meditation (*dhyana mudra*).



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**The Eight Great Bodhisattvas (*ashtamahabodhisattvas*)**

10<sup>th</sup> century CE

Nalanda, Bihar

H: 18.7 cm., W: 63 cm., D: 11.3 cms.

Chlorite

Acc. No. 60.982



Both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism paid great attention to the Bodhisattvas. Envisioned as saviours of sentient beings, the Bodhisattvas sacrificed their own salvation and immediate the goal of nirvana to help those in need. In this sculptural depiction from the Pala period, all the eight Bodhisattvas (*ashtamahabodhisattva*) appear alike, in the same posture. They all are dressed in princely attire and decked with ornaments, and their hair is drawn up in the form of a tall conical crown. At the center, Buddha is shown seated in an earth-touching pose (*bhumisparsha mudra*), covering only one shoulder (*ekansika sanghati*) with his robe. On his proper right, the group of Bodhisattvas has - Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, Maitreya, and Akashagarbha. The other group on the left consists of Sarvanivaranavishkambin, Vajrapani, Samantabhadra and Kshitigarbha. All these bodhisattvas make different *mudras* as their iconographic features that sets them apart from each other.



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**Bodhisattva Avlokiteshvara**

5<sup>th</sup> century CE

Late Gupta

Sarnath, Banaras

H: 135.5 cm., W: 38 cm.

Stone

Acc. No. 49-113







This figure of two-armed Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara is carved in the round, standing in a graceful stance. His left hand, now partly broken, formerly clasped the stem of a lotus. The body halo is broken. The pedestal base is intact, displaying two emaciated figures with heads turned upwards, receive the nectar of immortality flowing from Avalokiteshvara's right hand. The bodhisattva's torso is bare and rendered with ornaments, such as a fillet, earrings, bracelet, a single strand necklace of beads with an oblong pendant, and a sacred thread (*yajnopavita*). His matted coiffure (*jatamukuta*) is neatly arranged and adorned with an image of Buddha Amitabha, his spiritual sire. The base of the sculpture has an inscription of two lines in Sanskrit. The translation runs - 'Om. This is the dutiful gift of the most devoted layman, Suyattra, the chief of a district. Whatsoever merit may accrue from this, let it be for attaining supreme knowledge by all sentient beings. '



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### **Manjushri**

Pala, 8<sup>th</sup> century CE

Nalanda, Bihar

H: 116.0 cm., W: 38.0 cm., D:17.0 cm.

Stone

Acc. No. 59.528





Manjushri is worshipped widely for wisdom, intelligence, and eloquence. He is recognized as one of the eight Bodhisattvas (*ashtamahabodhisattva*) and is, therefore, represented like a princely figure. This is a unique sculpture of Manjushri indicating features of the Hindu deity Karttikeya. The Bodhisattva stands with a slight flexion on the double lotus pedestal (*vishva-padma*). The right palm of Manjushri displays the boon granting gesture (*varada mudra*), the left-hand holds the lotus stalk. He is attended by two-armed male attendants, standing on guard near the left foot of the figure. The deity is dressed in a diaphanous garment (dhoti) held at the waist by a beaded girdle (*katisutra*). His headdress resembles that of Karttikeya with neatly tied hair thrown to the back of the head, forming the *trishikhandakakapaksha* coiffure. He is adorned with a necklace of tiger claws (*vyaghranakha*) with an amulet box in the center. This is another typical attribute of Karttikeya, which started appearing in Manjushri images from the 7th century CE onwards. A long beaded sacred thread (*yajnopavita*) is prominently visible.



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**Lokeshvara**

11<sup>th</sup> century CE

Pala, Bihar

H: 80 cm., W: 40 cm.

Stone

Acc. No. 66.46





Khasarpana Lokeshvara is a widely depicted two-armed form of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. He is seated in a graceful pose (*lalitasana*) with left leg flexed and drawn upwards, and the other leg pendant resting on a lotus cushion. His right hand is in boon-bestowing gesture (*varada mudra*), and the left hand is holding a full-blown lotus stalk. He is flanked by Tara's graceful figure on the right holding a water lily (*utpala*), and a four-armed Bhrikuti on the left holding different attributes. A part of Khasarpana's retinue, Sudhanakumara, and Hayagriva are carved on the pedestal base. An ornate trefoil-shaped stele frames his body. An effigy of Amitabha Buddha, usually placed on his coiffure, is absent. Instead, he is represented at the upper part of the black slab at the apex, among other transcendental Buddhas (*panchatathagatas*). From left to right, they are Amoghasiddhi, Akshobhaya, Amitabha, Vairochana, and Ratnasambhava.



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**Simhanada Lokeshvara**

12<sup>th</sup> century CE

Gahadwal Dynasty

Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh

H: 9.1 cm., W: 5.9 cm., D: 2.8 cm.

Stone

Acc. No. 59.527/9





Simhanada Lokeshvara, a form of Avalokiteshvara, is identified by the presence of a crouching lion as the bodhisattva's mount. The bodhisattva is shown resting in the regal posture (*maharajalilasana*) on a cushion, his left-hand holds the stem of a lotus, while the right hand is elegantly poised over the raised right knee. A snake-entwined skull head and a trident (*trishula*) rise from the seat-cushion to his right shoulder, partly broken. A flower-filled skull-cup (*kapala*) issuing from the pedestal is depicted to his left. The bodhisattva is clad in a tiger skin, tied at the waist, secured with a girdle. The youthful deity wears a flower-patterned sash and a sacred thread (*yajnopavita*). The elaborate coiffure (*jatamakuta*) is adorned with an effigy of Amitabha Buddha. The deity has a third eye on his forehead, signifying a strong Shaivite influence. The upper section of the pointed stele displays figures of the five transcendental Buddhas (*panchatathagatas*).

# Female Deities and Esoteric Traditions

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In Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, many deities were assimilated, resulting in a widespread expansion of the Buddhist pantheon. Most significantly, several female deities were given due reverence as their cult grew widely, starting from the caves of Ellora to eastern India's monastic centres. The sutra and the tantra traditions also contributed to establishing a network of esoteric practices in the monastic centres. Yidams or tutelary deities, Heruka, or wrathful deities, assisted by guardian deities, were essential for worship. Worshipped in a union or individually depicted, meditational practices of the mandalas as cosmological representations also became central to the esoteric practices as a quick way to seek enlightenment.







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**Lokanatha with Tara and Bhrikuti**  
9<sup>th</sup> century CE  
W:12 cm., H:20 cm.  
Nalanda, Bihar  
Acc. No. 47.45





Lokanatha or Lokeshvara is one of the most popular form of Avalokiteshvara. This bronze icon of Lokanatha from Nalanda depicts the bodhisattva standing in a graceful style on a lotus pedestal placed on a high plinth. He is attended by two female deities, Tara and Bhrikuti. Lokanatha's right hand is outstretched in a gesture of boon bestowal (*varada mudra*), though partly broken, while his left clasps the meandering lotus stalk. Though the figure of Lokanatha is masculine and well-proportioned, it is endowed with feminine grace. The matted coiffure bears a stupa instead of an effigy of Buddha Amitabha. Standing on his right, goddess Tara displays the *vitarka mudra* and holds a lotus in her left hand. On his left stands four-armed Bhrikuti making the *varada mudra* and holding a water pot (*kamandalu*) and a rosary (*akshamala*). Both the female deities stand on separate pedestals, and their figures are smaller in scale as compared to Avalokiteshvara, indicative of their subservient rank.



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**Tara**

9<sup>th</sup> century CE, Pala Period

Nalanda, Bihar

Bronze

Casted, Gilded

H: 50.1 cm., W: 14.6 cm.

Acc. No. 47.35





This bronze icon of two-armed Arya Tara, from Nalanda site no.8, is one of the best-preserved metal images of the deity belonging to the first half of the eighth-century CE. The radiant ornamentation and delicate rendition heighten the somber portrayal of the goddess. Displaying the boon-bestowing gesture (*varada mudra*) with her extended right hand, she stands on a full-blown lotus. She is holding the long stem of another lotus that sinuously rises from the same base. The goddess wears a lower garment, the folds of which are indicated through a series of oblique ridges at regular intervals. The upper half of the body is draped in a striated shawl (*uttariya*) that forms a looped knot over the left shoulder. Her coiffure is tied as a sizeable bun (*dhammila*) that is hardly overshadowed by the tiara. The most significant aspect of the sculpture is the lavishly designed aureole. Its outer rim is decorated with puffy flames capped by a circular gem at the apex. Tara's figure is supported with floral struts fixed to the halo. Several circular sockets indicate the extravagant use of gemstones (or enamel work).



**Worship of *Prajnaparamita Sutra* and *Vajrasattva* by devotees**

Pala, Bengal,

11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century CE

H: 43 cm., W: 18.4 cm., D: 9.2 cm.

Stone

Acc. No. 60.567



This relief panel depicts the representation of esoteric rituals in a unique manner. The rectangular pedestal has a row of Transcendental Buddhas (*panchatathagatas*) seated in a meditative posture (*dhyanasana*) at the top. The lower panel has the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, kept on a high-rise throne pedestal. On the right are the seated figure of the primordial Buddha, Vajrasattva, and two kneeling female devotees. The *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra* describes simple ritual activities surrounding a book (*pustaka puja*) performed as a process of merit-making by the devotees. In this stele, Vajrasattva is visualized as the ritual master, seated cross-legged, and shown with a thunderbolt (*vajra*) and a bell (*ghanta*). On the other side of the pedestal, lay devotees are shown meditating on the book. The role of Vajrasattva as the ritual master is here emphasized through the ritual practices associated with the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*.



***Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra***

c.1350 CE

Eastern Indian

W: 5.5 cm., H: 32 cm

Wooden Manuscript Covers

Acc. No. 51.212



A pair of the painted cover of the *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra* for a palm-leaf manuscript belongs to the Pala-Nepalese tradition. The manuscript was transcribed in Nepal Samvat 470 (1350 CE) by Vajracharya Bandhugupta during the reign of Jayarjunadeva. The front cover has two panels in the center with a two-armed, green-complexioned Mahashri Tara and an enshrined Buddha in a russet robe. The two panels at the corners depict Buddha's *mahapariniravana* on the right, and the left panel shows his Buddha's sojourn to the mango grove of Amrapali, the courtesan, at Vaishali.

The back cover of the manuscript displays episodes from the Vessantara Jataka, depicting the virtue of charity and generosity (*dana*), in four panels. The *jataka* starts from left, the Prince is shown gifting the magical white elephant to a brahmin. As they set out from the palace on a chariot, the Prince with his wife Madri and children Jali and Kanhajina encounter a brahmin, Jujaka, who asks for the horse. Pleased by the generosity of Prince Vessantara, the last episode shows Indra bestowing his blessings on the Prince and his family.





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**Eighteen Armed Chunda**

10<sup>th</sup> century CE

Pala Period

Nalanda, Bihar

Bronze Casted

H: 33.5 cm., W: 15.2 cm.

Acc. No. 47.34





The goddess is a manifestation of the Chunda *dharini*, worshipped as an incantation deity, uttered for purificatory and protective purposes. In this bronze figurine, eighteen armed Chunda is shown seated cross-legged on a double lotus pedestal (*vishva-padma*), supported by two anthropomorphic *nagas*, rising from the water. Her front right hands display the preaching gesture (*dharmachakra mudra*), while in the remaining hands, she holds various emblems. Some of the particular ones are, a rosary (*akshamala*), thunderbolt (*vajra*), a partly broken sword, bell (*ghanta*), manuscript (*pustaka*), ink-pot, flame, wheel (*chakra*), banner (*pataka*), lotus stalk, noose (*pasha*), and waterpot. She is surrounded by an oval halo decorated with beaded motifs, a series of the two-pronged thunderbolt (*vajra*), and floral motifs. The inner surface of the halo is plain, resembling a solar disk. A pair of semi-celestial flying deities (*vidhyadharas*) is represented on the ornamental flamed aureole.



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### **Marichi**

11<sup>th</sup> century CE,  
Bhaumakara period

Odisha

H: 97 cm., W: 61 cm., D: 24 cm.

Stone

Acc. No. 80.1351





Marichi is praised as the all-conquering warrior goddess of dawn, who is bejewelled and illuminated by the Sun's radiance. She brandishes powerful weapons to annihilate the demonic forces. Her chief attributes are the needle, thread, *ashoka* bough, bow, arrow, vajra, elephant goad, and a noose. This rather large stele shows the three-headed and six-armed Marichi in high relief. The goddess stands in a warrior pose (*alidhasana*) on a chariot drawn by seven horses. Her principle right-hand brandishes a scepter (*vajra*), and the left hand is held near the breast in a threatening gesture (*tarjanipasha mudra*). Rahu, the ominous god, sits at the bottom flanked by three galloping horses on each side. Her chariot is drawn by either seven galloping horses or pigs. Her association with pigs can be seen through the sow faces on the sides, connoting power and emphasizing her role as a warrior and protectress. Flanking Marichi are the figures of Transcendental Buddhas (*panchatathagatas*) on the stele.



**Eight armed and four-  
faced Mahapratisara**

12<sup>th</sup> century CE

Bengal or Bihar, Pala Period

Bronze

W:7 cm., H:10 cm.

Acc. No.74.95





Goddess Mahapratisara is a manifestation of the magic spell and powers expounded in the text *Mahapratisara-vidyarajni*. As a guardian figure, Mahapratisara guards the north direction. This bronze depicts the four-faced and eight-armed goddess seated in deep meditation in a yogic posture (*vajraparyankasana*) over the double lotus pedestal (*vishva-padma*). According to the text, her complexion is yellow in color, and her four faces are of different colors, such as - her central face is yellow, the right one is white, at the back is blue, and the left one is red. She displays a conch, arrow, bow, lasso, and the sacred manuscript in her eight arms. Her lower right-hand holds a rising lotus, blooming above her shoulder. Her primary upraised right-hand holds a thunderbolt (*vajra*) and the left hand held near the chest is in a teaching gesture (*vitarka mudra*), probably held a bell (*ghanta*).



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**Hariti**

9<sup>th</sup> century CE

Nalanda, Bihar

H: 13 cm., W: 17.7 cm.

Bronze

Acc. No. 47.50





Hariti is invoked as a protectress of children in Buddhism. Associated with the mother-goddess cult in early Indian art, her worship was later popularized during the Pala period. In early textual traditions, she was an ogress who stole and devoured infants. With Buddha's intervention, she became a protector of children, shielding them from disease and harm. This bronze image from Nalanda depicts the goddess seated in a graceful pose (*lalitasana*). She holds a myrobalan fruit in her right hand and holds a child in her lap with her left hand. Hariti's calm countenance and benign smile are reassuring instead of her earlier form of an ogress. Her upper body is adorned by a long floral garland and a necklace (*urah sutra*) that falls between her breasts. Her high projected throne has a square plinth (*pitha*) with the throne posts embellished with leoglyphs, a cross-bar with stylized ends, supporting a partly broken halo (*prabhavali*).





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**Vajrahumkara with Sattvavajri**

9<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> century CE

Nalanda, Pala Period

Stone

H: 17.3 cm., W: 10 cm., D: 4.6 cm

Acc. No . 49.149



Vajrahumkara is a three-headed and six-armed deity accompanied by his female consort, presiding in mandala practices of the *Nishpannayogavali* and the *Vajramrtamahatantra*. The Pala sculpture from Nalanda depicts a rare iconic form of Vajrahumkara and Sattvavajri. The main deity has six arms, in which the upper right and left hands hold a rosary and a bow respectively, while the second right hands display an arrow, but the left hand is overlapped by the female consort. His principal hands hold a thunderbolt (*vajra*) at his chest and a bell (*ghanta*) held in *vajrahumkara* mudra. His consort, Sattvavajri is two-armed, her right arm is resting on Vajrahumkara's leg, while the other hand is in a teaching gesture (*vitarka mudra*). In the Buddhist context, this is an unusual pose substituting union (*yuganaddha*), showing the deities in an embrace. Her left leg is bent and raised, rests on the pedestal, while the right leg is pendant.



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**Twelve-Armed Chakrasamvara**

11<sup>th</sup> century CE

Bhaumakara period

Odisha

H: 12 cm., W: 8.4 cm., D: 4.5 cm.

Stone

Acc. No. 82.221





A large stele representing the four-faced and twelve-armed Chakrasamvara standing in warrior posture (*alidhasana*) on a double lotus pedestal (*vishva-padma*). As a wrathful deity, Chakrasamvara's standard iconography depicts the submission of non-Buddhist practices within the fold of esoteric Buddhism. He tramples Kalaratri with his right foot, and the left foot vanquishes a pot-bellied Bhairava. With the two principal hands crossed at the chest, he poses in *vajrahunkara mudra* as he carries the thunderbolt (*vajra*) and bell (*ghanta*). With the second pair, he stretches the elephant hide (*gajachamra*) over his head. In the remaining hands, he holds a drum (*damaru*), battle-ax (*parashu*), ritual knife (*katri*), and a trident (*trishula*), skull-cup, noose (*pasha*), and *khatavanga*. He is fierce-looking, has bulging eyes and an open mouth with fangs, and skulls are visible in the tall *jata-mukuta*. The deity is decked with bone ornaments and a garland of severed heads (*manushamunda*).



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**Trailokyavijaya**

9<sup>th</sup> century CE

Pala Dynasty

Nalanda, Bihar

H: 17.3 cm., W: 10 cm., D: 4.6 cm

Stone

Acc. No. 47.53



Trailokyavijaya is the protector of the three worlds and conqueror of the evil spirit. A wrathful deity, Trailokyavijaya annihilates ignorance while aiding the sentient beings to follow the Buddhist path. The *Sarvatathagatagtattva Samgraha Tantra* mentions the wrathful form of Trailokyavijaya. This stele from Nalanda shows a two-armed form of Trailokyavijaya, holding the *vajra* and *ghanta* against the chest exhibiting the *vajrahumkara mudra*. He stands in warrior pose (*alidhasana*) while subduing Maheshvara and Umadevi. The back slab acts like the body aureole of the figure, decorated with prominent scarf-like flames. The cult of Trailokyavijaya gained eminence in the Far East and Southeast Asia as the iconography travelled by way of scriptural translations and secret esoteric practices. The votive stele is inscribed at the back with a hymn praising the deity, along with the name of the donor, Udayabhadra.



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### **Jambhala**

10<sup>th</sup> century CE

Nalanda, Patna

Bronze

H:26.5 cm, W:11.5 cm

Acc. No. 47.46





Jambhala, also known as Kubera in the Brahmanical tradition is a tutelary deity (*yidam*) in Buddhism associated with eight cardinal directions. He is worshipped as a defender of the faith (*dharmapala*) protecting the sacred realm. The bronze sculpture depicts a two-armed pot-bellied deity seated in *lalitasana* with the right leg pendant on an elaborate pedestal (*pitha*). He holds a myrobalan in his right hand and a manuscript (*pustaka*) in his left hand. The god is elaborately decorated with many ornaments. The physiognomy is short and heavy with full and round body and limbs. The deity is shown seated on a high projected throne with leographs, vegetal scrolls on both sides, and a circular halo with multiple bands, topped by a stylized lotus bud. The sculpture is inscribed in the third regnal year of Devapala, and dedicated to Nalanda. The inscription refers to Vishakha, the wife of the destroyer of the Kalachuri dynasty (*Kalachuri antaka*).





## Spread of Buddhism across Asia

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Buddhism played a vital role in culturally and materially strengthening the global trade network through exchange of goods, and religious and philosophical traditions across Asia. Fostering cross-cultural discourses, the translation, and copying of Buddhist sutras and other texts were instrumental in the proliferation of Buddhist architectural monuments, paintings, sculptures created by the monks and artists. Buddhism in Central Asia, Far East and Southeast Asia traces significant thematic and stylistic commonalities that had been strongly influenced by the flourishing trade routes and a wide network of monastic and temple building with the patronage of Kings, nobles, and wealthy merchants.







*Yamaka-pratiharya* or twin miracles are the most widely seen events associated with Shakyamuni Buddha's life. Shravasti, in present-day Uttar Pradesh, was the place where this miracle was performed seven years after Buddha attained enlightenment (*sambodhi*). Mentioned in various biographical texts, Buddha confounded the six heretical priests led by Purana Kashyap by performing these miracles. The embroidered silk textile fragment from Dunhuang represents the miraculous display of thousand buddhas filling the sky and the earth. In the textile fragment, the depiction of multiple Buddha figures is achieved with embroidered patches sewn together. Seated on lotus pedestals in meditation (*dhyana mudra*), the alternating shades of maroon and ochre embroidered Buddha figures add a harmonising rhythm to the overall placement of Buddhas. On the right side of the fragment are depictions of lay worshippers or donor figures in orange and turquoise robes.



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**Monk holding a scroll**

7<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup> century CE

Dunhuang

Polychrome Stucco

H: 27 cm., D: 17 cm., W: 2.6 cm.

Acc. No. Ch.024, 99/7/19





The Museum has some of the noted polychrome stucco figures of Buddhist monks from the Dunhuang caves were seated in European fashion (*bhadrāsana*). The writing and copying of manuscripts were extensively promoted to gain merit. The stucco monk is wearing triple robes (*trichivara*), the outer one, in ochre, covering both shoulders. The manuscript is laid out on his knees as he reads through it. The facial features are rendered in a meditative trance as if chanting from the text, as the eyes are half-closed. Of the various *sutras* commenting on the ritual merit for reciting the holy texts, the *Sadharmapundarika sutra* mentions reading, reciting, and copying the *sutra* for a blessed life, and to gain merit. An interesting aspect of the stucco figure is the niche under which the monks are placed, perhaps pointing at the cavernous opening of the *chaityas* in which the monks stayed in isolation and practiced meditation.



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**Nalanda Copperplate Grant**

9th century CE

Nalanda, Bihar

Copper

H: 76.3, D: 42.8 cm.

Acc. No. 47.51





The copper plate inscription in Devanagari script was discovered at Nalanda in 1921, containing forty-two lines on the obverse and twenty-four on the reverse. The inscription runs in prose and verse. The seal bears the name of the reigning Pala King, '*Shri Devapaladevasya*' or 'the illustrious Devapala,' inscribed below the wheel of law (*dharmachakra*) motif. The seal symbolises Buddha's act of unfolding the law and disseminating knowledge to the people. The back to back deer recalls the first sermon at Sarnath, where the wheel of law was set in motion by Buddha. The inscription celebrates the request of King Balaputradeva, the ruler of Suvarnavipa, who made a generous donation through his ambassador by granting five villages, four of which lay in Rajagriha, Bihar. The inscription exalts of bringing merit and fortune to the King's parents, for worshipping Buddha, for paying respect to the monks, and for the upkeep of the monastery at Nalanda. The document ends with the date of the endowment, 21<sup>st</sup> day of Kartika of the (regnal) year 29.



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**Votive Plaque showing Buddha's  
great demise (*mahaparinirvana*)**

18th century CE

Thailand

Terracotta and Gold

H:7 cm., W: 4.5 cm.

Acc. No. 67.179





A pan-Asian iconography for worshipping Buddha during his final moments, the *mahaparinirvana* representations focus on Buddha's final moments of resting. The *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* propagates worship of sacred places associated with the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, first sermon, and demise. According to the text, after Buddha's demise, his body was worshipped for six consecutive days by the Mallas of Kushinagara and was cremated on the seventh day. In Buddhist art, from early Indian art onwards, in the *mahaparinirvana* scenes, Buddha is represented lying on a couch between twin *Shala* trees, with his head to the proper right, surrounded by grieving monks and celestial beings. In this votive statuette from Thailand, Buddha's golden form is seen resting in spiritual tranquillity, reaching the final stages of transcendence.



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**Ten-armed Lokeshvara**

12th Century CE

Cambodia

Bronze

H: 20, W: 12.3 cm.

Acc. No. 74.498





In Southeast Asia, Avalokiteshvara is also worshipped as Lokeshvara or protector of the world. The bronze figurine of the bodhisattva is stylistically attributed to the Khmer sculptures of 12<sup>th</sup> century CE. Lokeshvara's ten arms bear various attributes. Along with the multiple-arms, in Khmer art, we also see the eleven-headed (*ekadashamukha*) variant. The stylistic features are highlighted with pointed conical crowns, large drooping earrings, a short lower garment (*dhoti*) with a folded sash around the waist. Each level of three heads indicates that the eleven-headed Lokeshvara is looking at three worlds, the world of desire (*kamadhatu*), the world of living forms (*rupadhatu*), and the world without form (*arupadhatu*); overlooked by Amitabha Buddha himself. This figurine, however, is endowed with seven-heads in three tiers while looking back to the eleven-headed forms of Lokeshvara prominently seen in Khmer art.



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**Thangka of Chakrasamvara and  
Vajravarahi**

17<sup>th</sup> century CE

Nepal

Paper

H: 72, W: 48 cm.

Acc. No. 82.522





This Newari thangka from early 17th century CE is one of the finest examples of the *yab-yum* forms of seventeen-headed and seventy-four armed Chakrasamvara and his consort, Vajravarahi, engaged in a union. Chakrasamvara is shown standing in a warrior pose (*alidhasana*), treading on Bhairava and Kalaratri on a large lotus pedestal (*vishvapadma*). He embraces Vajravarahi while making *vajrahumkara mudra* and holding a thunderbolt (*vajra*) and a bell (*ghanta*). The remaining hands hold a large array of ritual weapons. In this rapturous embrace, the goddess, red in colour, shares similar iconography as that of her consort. The deities are encircled by an effulgent halo, painted in bright red, and the background painted in dull green is conceived as the eight great cremation grounds, which plays an important role in esoteric ritual practices.



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**Manjushri attended by female deities**

14<sup>th</sup> century CE

Nepal

Bronze Casted, Gilded  
Ht. 38.2 cm.; D:42 cm.

Acc. No. 64-4



In Buddhist textual tradition, Manjushri is worshipped as the great bodhisattva of wisdom. Manjushri's mandala is often depicted with subsidiary deities – Kasini and Upakesini, Jaliniprabha and Candraprabha. This exquisite bronze piece represents a balanced composition of a four-armed Manjushri, flanked by two four-armed female figures, similar in appearance. Seated cross-legged on a lotus pedestal, the four-armed deity exhibits different hand gestures and attributes, such as the teaching gesture (*vitarka mudra*), a flaming sword, and a pair of bow and arrow. As personifications of Prajnaparamita, the female deities are seated in royal ease (*lalitasana*) on separate pedestals. They also hold the *Prajnaparamita sutra* in the upper left hands. The decorated vegetal aureole surrounding the deities brings out the confluence of local stylistic tradition as well.

# Ritual Implements and Praxis

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The sacred space in Buddhist painting and sculpture are often rendered with ritual implements and offerings. These objects carry visual and symbolic meanings, which are related to the object's ritual value. The devotional purpose and its merit are heightened by the ritual implements which are an essential part of any Buddhist religious practice. Along with incantations (*mantras*), hand-gestures (*mudras*), the concept of action (*kriya*) based rituals are equally stressed in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. Objects such as the prayer wheel, votive chortens, manuscripts, figurines of deities, ritual vases, miniature shrines, ceremonial crowns, among others, all these points at the devotion of a practitioner towards the performance of a ritual or a prayer.







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**Manuscript Cover of  
Bhaishajyaguru Buddha**

20<sup>th</sup> Century

Tibet

Wood, carved

H:2.3 cm., W:7.5 cm.

Acc. No. 87.898



The tradition of Buddhist manuscripts in India proliferated from the Pala period onwards, reaching further across Asia. In this wooden manuscript cover, the front face bears three seated images. of Bhaishajyaguru Buddha or the Medicine Buddha in the earth-touching gesture (*bhumisparsa mudra*). He holds a bowl in his lap instead of the myrobalan herb (*triphala*), associated with healing and life-giving aspects in Indian ayurvedic practices. On the wooden cover, interspersed by *makara* motifs, the other two deities are Avalokiteshvara on the right, and White Tara on the left, as Avalokiteshvara's consort. The rear face of the manuscript cover is painted with a triad of Bhaishajyaguru attended by two *arhat* figures, probably Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. On the far right is a white-bodied Vajrasattava in his celestial form (*sambhogakaya*) holding a vajra and a bell (*ghanta*) in his right and left arms.



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**Heruka**

19<sup>th</sup> century

Ladakh

Terracotta

H: 10.8 cm., W: 7 cm.

Acc. No 80.659





Recognized as a wrathful deity of the Anuttara Yoga Tantra, Heruka is known for bestowing Buddhahood and protecting the world from the evil spirit. This unique votive tablet from Ladakh depicts Heruka's dancing figure with the right foot raised (*ardhaparyankasana*) and the left foot trampling a male corpse. He wields the thunderbolt (*vajra*) in the right hand and carries the skull-cup (*kapala*) in his left hand. His body is bare, except for the beaded looped girdle, decorated with carved bones, demonstrating his connection with esoteric rituals. He wears a long necklace of severed heads (*mundamala*). His brown hair rises upwards, adorned with a diadem with a leaf-shaped motif, replacing the traditional skull diadem. His face is slightly distorted with bare fangs and wide-open eyes.



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**Ritual staff**

20<sup>th</sup> Century

Tibet

Metal

L: 20.8 cm.

Acc. No. 90.875



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**Bell**

20<sup>th</sup> Century

Tibet

Metal

H: 18.5 cm.

Acc No: 96.560



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**Thunder-bolt/ Vajra**

20th century

Tibet

Metal, Casted

L. 18.6 cm.

Acc.No.90.779



A set of three important Buddhist ritual implements - a staff (*khatavanga*), bell (*ghanta*), and a thunderbolt (*vajra*), signifying the metaphorical concepts of wisdom (*prajna*), compassion (*upaya*), and emptiness (*shunyata*). The ritual objects are invariably featured as major iconographic attributes of esoteric deities, like Vajrasattva, Trailokyavijaya, Heruka, Chakrasamvara, and Vajrayogini, among others. The first ritual implement is a staff (*khatavanga*) carried by a tantric deity or a tantric practitioner. The staff has a trident on top signifying wisdom, with three heads below it, followed by a double *vajra*, a vase of ambrosia, and a scarf. In ritual practices, the bell is paired with the *vajra*, representing the feminine and masculine principles. The bell represents the Buddha's speech in the teaching of dharma, generating the sound of emptiness, connoting the sixth perfection - the perfection of wisdom (*prajna*).



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**Ritual Vase (*bumpa*)**

20th century

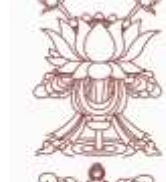
Ladakh

W: 155 cm; H: 195 cm

Silver and Semi-Precious Stones

Chasing and Inlay

Acc. No. 94.115/1-2





A unique *bumpa* or ritual vessel with a detachable lid and two handles on either side, meant to store holy water during the ritual ceremonies and prayers in chapels and monasteries. The vessel is cast in silver and exhibits intricate motifs. The main body of the vessel displays eight auspicious Buddhist symbols (*ashtamangalas*). The vessel's most striking detail is its inlay of semi-precious stones like turquoise, lapis lazuli, and coral in concentric bands. The inlaid handles curl in a zoomorphic shape adding a rhythm to its design. In esoteric Buddhist practices, treasure vases or *bumpas*, are specially used for initiation and purification rituals. Additionally, the vase embodies inexhaustible treasures symbolic of wealth, prosperity, health, and longevity. When consecrated or placed in the living space, these vases bring material gain and prosperity to the family.





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**The Lord of Soil (*sa bdag*)**

19<sup>th</sup> century CE

Ladakh, India

W: 92 cm.; H: 43 cm.

Metal, Casting, Chasing

Acc.No. 91.139





The ritual object, locally termed as *sa bdag* or 'the possessor of the soil', is a mystic representation of the local guardian deity, originating from the infusion of Buddhist tradition with the indigenous practices of Ladakh. *Sa bdag* is worshipped to guard the soil, and the mountainous landscape along with its people. As a deity residing in the ground, *sa bdag* is directly linked with geomancy, agronomy, and cultural life of Ladakh. *Sa bdag* icons are usually placed on the roof-tops of monasteries or on the top of their entrances to ward off evil spirits and demons. This mystical image comprises a large gold-burnished skull with a detachable trident of iron covered with blazing flames. The trident is made of iron and fixed on top of the skull with a spiral symbol in the middle.



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**Diadem of Transcendental Buddhas  
(*pachathagatas*)**

20<sup>th</sup> century

Embroidered textile, paper

Nepal/ Tibet

L: 40.5 cm.; W: 44.5 cm., H: 17.5 cm.

Acc. No. 64.27/A, B, C





This ritual diadem serves a prominent role in esoteric ceremonies of the Himalayan Buddhist communities. Particularly used in the initiation (*abhisheka*) ceremony, it is worn by a disciple being initiated into a particular deity. Such initiation crowns represent iconic forms of the Transcendental Buddhas (*pancha-tathagatas*), identifiable by their characteristic symbols, colours, and attributes. This crown is embellished with mystic syllables embroidered on the crown. Amitabha Buddha is represented by '*hri*,' Akshobhya Buddha by '*hum*,' Vairochana Buddha by '*om*,' Ratnasambhava by '*tram*,' and Amoghasiddhi by '*ah*'. These syllables are embroidered separately on five panels within torana-shaped segments. These multi-lobed panels are intricately embroidered with auspicious motifs in golden threads and pink and green hues. The diadem is held by straps and is worn along with a large ceremonial wig with a high topknot.



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**Votive Stupa/Chorten**

20th Century

Ladakh

H:16 cm., D: 7.5 cm.

Brass

Acc. No. 66. 115





A stupa or chorten in the Himalayan Buddhist tradition is one of the most venerable elements of Buddhist art. In a ritual context, a stupa also houses offerings and precious relics. Stupas are classified into three forms- (1) a preserved body or part of a body (*sharirika stupa*); (2) an article used by a spiritual person (*paribhogika stupa*); and (3) lastly, a special *mantra* mentioning names of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (*uddeshika stupa*). Following the general stupa structure, this brass stupa has a circular base with a double row of lotus petals, a dome surmounted by graduated steps to enlightenment. The neck of the stupa consists of twelve decreasing concentric circles, forming the protective parasol (*chattravali*) with a lotus bud at the apex, denoting the idea of the void (*shunyata*). The miniature chorten looks back to the worship of Buddha's relics as well as the ritual aspect of Buddhist traditions practiced worldwide.



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