TIBETAN THANGKAS
Buddhist Paintings from the 11th to the 18th Century

Anna Maria Rossi
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Preface

Tibetan painting, with its glorious colours and intriguing subject matter, is a source of fascination not only to those who follow the Buddhist faith but to people around the world who are less familiar with Tibetan culture. The works presented in this publication illustrate the breathtaking range of iconography - from that of enthroned noble spirits engaged in subtle dialogue (no. 1) to a menstruating dakini straddling a sea of blood (no. 13).

Tibetans embraced and developed an exceptionally wide range of iconographic forms to communicate their understanding of the divine, drawing first from Indian, Nepalese, Chinese and Central Asian traditions and then using their own visionary experiences as the inspiration for new iconographic forms. As this brief survey of eleventh to eighteenth century paintings also shows, talented artists of the various periods interpreted the received Buddhist iconographic and stylistic canons through their own eyes.

This exhibition and catalogue is held to coincide with the fourth Asian Art in London when dealers, auctioneers, museums and other institutions will collaborate to present an exciting programme of events, reinforcing London's distinctive and unrivalled role as the centre for both the market and the study of Asian art. In this spirit, we hope that this catalogue and the accompanying exhibition will contribute to a greater appreciation of Tibetan Buddhist painting.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Jane Casey Singer, who has written the informative catalogue entries, Sir Robert Bruce-Gardner, who masterfully conserved the paintings, and Prudence Cuming Associates for the photography. Silvia Gaspardo Moni has designed and co-ordinated the production of the catalogue while both Olivia Chancellor and Caroline Turner have been invaluable in their contributions to this publication and the exhibition.

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November 2001
Although worn, passages of this magnificent work recall its earlier splendour. Particularly the postures and faces of the two main figures impart a nobility of spirit common to all great religious works of art. The painting depicts the enthroned figures of great bodhisattvas (mahasattva) Manjushri and Maitreya engaged in debate. Behind is a canopy of trees and ghosts of figures, representing a host of divine attendants, two of whom are positioned just behind Maitreya's left elbow. Between them is a table with offerings and a stupa, emblem of Buddhist teachings. In the bottom register are Indian dancers and divine or royal figures. It is clear that a rich, deep gold once played a significant role in the appearance of the painting, for there are still traces of gold and gem-encrusted gold jewellery adorning the central figures and their attendants. Animals of several species frolic in the foliage beneath Maitreya's lotus seat, supported by serpent deities.

Buddhist literature is often cast in the guise of discourse between spiritually advanced beings. Indeed, formal debates are described in the biographies of early Indian mediaeval luminaries such as Atisha (980-1054), once abbot at Vikramashila monastery. Atisha was a celebrated debater whose victories were marked, as was apparently the custom, by the awarding of umbrellas and canopies. "At Bodh Gaya there was an Extremist (non-Buddhist; mus.stegs.pa) who was very learned in grammar and logic. His thirteen umbrellas (gestugs) and one canopy (phub.pa) became in the following year seven umbrellas and one canopy because Atisha subdued (btul) him without difficulty. The following year, his umbrellas became five, his canopy one." The debate between Atisha and the unnamed Extremist gradually became so subtle that no one else could follow it. "Whereupon the Extremist asked Atisha the meaning (don) of a grammatical passage, which was not immediately clear. [Atisha] prayed to Tara and the meaning became clear. He gave the answer, thus vanquishing the Extremist in the debate. The opponent's five umbrellas were awarded to Atisha, and the Extremist placed his head at Atisha's feet, subsequently becoming a Buddhist himself."  

With respect to the iconography depicted in this painting, it is interesting to note that while in Tibet and near the end of his life, Atisha is said to have experienced a mystical vision of Manjushri and Maitreya discussing the dharma. One day, an attendant who brought his food discovered Atisha gazing at the sky and calling out Maitreya's name. Although his disciples could see nothing, Atisha reported that between the afternoon meal and dawn, Maitreya and Manjushri would appear before him, discussing Mahayana doctrine, and that "Yajrapani kept away any obstacles." Atisha sent a message to Vikramashila, saying that he had had a vision and wanted to commission a painting of it. "From the eastern region of India, pandits and scholars (mikhas.pa) were summoned. The work was painted (bus) and sent [to Tibet]." The author of this treatise, Pao Tsuklak Trinagwa (1504-66) writes that the painting (and two others commissioned by Atisha at the same time) were said to be at Nyetang monastery, where Atisha died in 1054.  

Visionary experiences of great Buddhist teachers did indeed inspire new iconographic forms, and it is possible that Atisha's vision was the inspiration behind this work. Indeed, Pratapaatiya Pal has postulated that this painting may be the very one commissioned by Atisha at Vikramashila.  

While this assertion requires further investigation, the painting must certainly be ascribed to a small but significant group of works that may be rare surviving examples of early Indian mediaeval painting on cloth. Particularly Maitreya's face conveys an extraordinarily accomplished hand, one that imparts a beatific, inward presence; the deity's compassion and transcendence are still evident in the eyes and mouth. When compared with the closest Tibetan example of this style and iconography—in the murals of Dratang monastery in Central Tibet (founded 1081)—this work appears to be a more subtle rendition of the same idiom.

Provenance: European private collection
This late thirteenth or fourteenth century painting of Amoghasiddhi, a Buddha associated with worthy accomplishment and infallible success, is an unusual and highly decorative interpretation of a classical 13th century Central Tibetan painting style. The painting’s composition—an enthroned central figure surrounded by attendant bodhisattvas, with a row of Buddhas at the top and related deities forming a bottom register—is typical of the period. However, the painting is remarkable for its particularly vivid palette, its bold play of colour, and its idiosyncratic hand. Amoghasiddhi’s deep green torso is enlivened by thick raised gold jewellery embedded with coloured gems. He wears a lower garment consisting of three layers of rosette-patterned cloth: the upper red skirt ends around mid-thigh, the blue layer ends above the knees, the yellow, just above the ankles. Each layer of cloth falls in crisp folds that end in a white border. The fabric of the throne cushion behind Amoghasiddhi boldly juxtaposes a deep blue background with vibrant red scrollwork. At the upper throneback, pink crocodilian figures (makara) spit gems and emit blue scrollwork from their tails. Amoghasiddhi’s two standing attendants, Vishvapani on his right and Vajrapani on his left, face the viewer (unlike their usual posture in which they turn towards the central deity), feet turned heel-to-heel, their fingers splayed in gestures of teaching. The artist’s fascination with colour can be seen in his treatment of Vishvapani: although iconographic conventions describe him as green, the artist presents him as a riot of colour. His head and neck are white, but he is blue at the upper torso and along the upper arms, red along the lower arms and lower torso. His hands and feet are white. His lower garment consists of a multi-coloured, striped garment secured below the waist with a gold belt. A diaphanous red cloth adorned with delicate rosettes falls to the ankles. Beneath, the bodhisattva’s thighs are yellow and his knees and calves are green to the ankles. Similar flourishes can be seen throughout the painting. In short, the artist interprets traditional thirteenth century Tibetan iconography and compositional norms with an innovative, idiosyncratic flair.

Provenance: Swiss private collection
This painting belongs to the same school, and perhaps to the same workshop, as two well-known c. fourteenth century paintings from Western Tibet.\textsuperscript{11} Vajradhara, celestial exponent of Kagyu order teachings, appears as the main figure in the upper left quadrant. To his left is a dark-skinned yogin with a mesmeric stare.\textsuperscript{12} He holds the implements of a Tantric practitioner: a diamond sceptre (vajra) and skullcup (kapala), adorned in white bone ornaments and a white lower garment that gathers loosely around his upper thighs. Below are two enthroned Tibetan monks whose high foreheads, long eyes and sweeping brows resemble those in figures of Tibetan teachers at Achi monastery.\textsuperscript{13}

Indeed, evidence that paintings such as this were produced in the western Tibetan cultural sphere can be found in the murals of Alchi’s Lhakhang Soma (\textit{Iha.khang so.ma}, New Temple) and Lotsawa Lhakhang (\textit{lo.tsa.ba Iha.khang}, Translator’s Chapel).\textsuperscript{14} As its name suggests, the Lhakhang Soma is later than other buildings at Alchi whose murals may be dated to c. 1200. A c. fourteenth century date is often ascribed to these later murals at Alchi and to thangka paintings in a related style.\textsuperscript{15} The Lhakhang Soma murals show figures in a style and in compositions much like that in the work under discussion, as may be seen clearly in a wide angle photograph.\textsuperscript{16} Attention to textiles and to patterns of cloth are also a characteristic of murals at Alchi, as has been demonstrated by Roger Goepper and Jaroslav Poncar.\textsuperscript{17} The textile behind the throne cushion in the bottom right quadrant clearly mimics tie-resist dyeing, as does that of Vajradhara in the upper left.\textsuperscript{18} And the throne textiles of each of the main four figures are in distinctive and imaginative patterns.

Humourous flourishes can be found in the throne sidebars in the painting’s lower left quadrant. The animals in this ancient Indic throne structure are familiar to anyone acquainted with Himalayan art, but here the artist has turned the elephant on his back, his trunk and foreleg upward-stretched to support a leogriff who usually stands upright on its hind legs, but here pushes against the elephant with its forelegs, its hind legs supporting the \textit{makara} and upper throne above. The winged bird above the halo of the hierarch on the right peers at the viewer, his eyes literally resting on top of the outer ring of the hierarch’s golden halo. And the male and female human-birds (\textit{kinnara/kinnari}) in the latter’s throne sidebars, typically unassuming creatures in Himalayan art, here proudly reveal their genders.
This remarkable painting portrays Maitreya as "Regent of the Conquerors [Buddhas]" (rgyal.tshab), who illuminates and uplifts the entire Buddhist universe. "The Venerable Maitreya was empowered as Regent of the Buddhas of the ten directions. Thus, surrounded by countless bodhisattvas from the ninth level (sa.dgu) downwards, he resides in a sublime manner, resembling a blazing, resplendent jewel." Gold inscriptions in the borders describe how light rays emanating from his body support and uplift sentient beings. Rays of light emanating from his hair ringlets subdue malevolent forces of the ten directions and are absorbed into the bodies of the bodhisattvas. Rays of light emanating from his face illuminate the bodhisattvas from the ninth level downwards, thus enabling them to attain skillful means (upaya). Rays of light emanating from the eyebrows of the Venerable One illuminate the Pratyekabuddhas who thus reach the threshold of the meditative stability of quiescence (zhis.bal.ting.nge.tib). Light rays from his shoulders illuminate the pious attendants (shrayakas) who thus nearly attain the appearance of dharma (chos.nrang.bal.sgo). Rays of light emanating from the palms of his hands relieve the sufferings of the demigods (asuras). Rays of light from his navel soothe the sufferings of those in the animal world. Rays of light from his knees soothe the sufferings of tormented beings (pretas) in the ten directions; rays of light from the soles of his feet pacify the sufferings of all the denizens of hells. Rays of light from the ribs of the body of the Venerable One pacify all sufferings of the hungry ghosts. Facing Maitreya and positioned below his feet is a kneeling supplicant who may represent the person who commissioned the painting.

A c. fifteenth century date may be ascribed to this work based on comparisons with dated or reliably dated fifteenth century works. Maitreya's gem-encrusted five-leaf crown resembles that worn by the two major attendant bodhisattvas in a c. mid-fifteenth century painting of Bhaisajyaguru in the Rubin Collections. The dress and gold-bordered red circular halos of subsidiary figures find parallels in a painting of Vajradhara, also in the Rubin Collections and datable to c. late fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. The palette and composition call to mind a c. second quarter of the fifteenth century painting of Amitayus in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
Nairatma Mandala
Central Tibet, c. 15th century
Dilatenepr on cloth
59.5 x 53.3 cm.

This c. fifteenth century mandala of the Esoteric Buddhist divinity Nairatma was commissioned for the Gelukpa order, whose distinctive yellow-peaked cap is worn by monks in the painting's top and bottom registers. Nairatma, "Without Ego," colour of the sky, brandishes the ritual chopper (to cut off "ego-centred thoughts"), the skullcup, the diamond sceptre and the khatvanga staff. She dances in a tigerskin skirt. Following traditional iconographic norms, the artist presents this visual metaphor for enlightenment within a mandala palace, a structure whose sanctity is itself suggested by the deities positioned within its walls at the cardinal and intermediate points of the compass. The first fourteen are yoginis whose appearance mirrors that of Nairatma. There are four celestial musicians. And the gates to the palace are guarded by semi-human figures with animal heads (Hayasya, Shukarasya, Shwanasya, Simhasya), their bodies bi-coloured to indicate the meeting of the two quadrants of the mandala. Nairatma's fierce and wild appearance can be understood as an intimation of the untameable qualities of freedom and clarity of the enlightened state she represents.26

While the structure of the mandala palace follows traditional norms, the artist has rendered many of its elements with a free hand. For example, the foliate scrollwork which enlivens the courtyard of the mandala palace observes asymmetrical shapes, allowing delightful idiosyncratic flourishes of the brush not seen, for example, in the great works produced for the Sakya order at this time.27 The area outside of the mandala circle is depicted as a flower-strewn sky, a treatment seen in thirteenth and fourteenth century paintings.28
Ushnishavijaya Mandala
Sakya Order, Central Tibet, c. 1500
Distemper on cloth
50.8 x 45 cm.

Ushnishavijaya, a goddess associated with aspirations for long-life, presides at the centre of a mandala palace. She is accompanied in this work by associated deities including Amitayus, a Buddha also connected with long-life aspirations, who is seen throughout the painting holding a vase of immortal elixir. This mandala would have been made for an unnamed aspirant connected to the Sakya order, as is evident from the red-capped hierarch at the centre of the upper register of figures. A very similar work, also associated with the Sakya order and now in the McCormick Collection, may be dated to c. 1500 by virtue of inscriptive evidence. Both the McCormick mandala and this one are drawn in an idiosyncratic hand that interprets the classical vocabulary of the great Sakya mandalas of the fifteenth century in individual ways.

Provenance: European private collection
SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA
Tibet, c. 16th century
Distemper on cloth
70.2 x 50 cm.

A teaching Shakyamuni Buddha is supported by a lotus seat that emerges from the navel of a serpent god (naga). Along a craggy coast in the foreground, an enthroned Tibetan teacher holds a vase near an altar laden with offerings. Nearby are a bodhisattva and a protector deity and two Tibetans in meditation caves. The uneven coast gives way to water, the domain of serpent gods who surround and support the lotus seat of the enlightened master. Accompanying Shakyamuni on his lotus support are bodhisattvas, beautifully clad and bejeweled. Beyond the water and along the horizon are enlightened exponents of the dharma dressed in Indian robes, perhaps the sixteen original disciples of the Buddha who also attained enlightenment (arhats). Amidst blue and green mountains in the background are Indian monks in monastic settings, their golden roofs embraced by clouds. A trompe-l'oeil red canopy adorns the upper edge of the painting.

A c. sixteenth century date may be ascribed to this work on the strength of similarities between its style and that in c. late fifteenth century murals in the Gongkhar Dorjeden (rdo.rje.idan; Skt. Vajrasana) south of Jhasa in the Khokha district of U (dbus), and in two paintings that may be dated to the end of the sixteenth century. The gold floral pattern on Shakyamuni's robe can be seen in a somewhat earlier form at Gongkhar.31 And the bodhisattva attendants in this work wear golden crowns secured like a cover for their coiffures, much like that seen elsewhere in the Gongkhar murals.32 A painting of Yamantaka that can be ascribed a date of c. 1600 on the strength of inscriptive evidence bears a red border decorated with gold floral tendrils, similar to that on the work under consideration, although stiffer in design and thus almost certainly later. A painting of Shakyamuni Buddha in the British Museum, dated to the reign of the Chinese Emperor Wanli (r. 1573-1620), is almost certainly later33 than this work but may be compared with it in several respects. The robe of the Buddha follows similar design, secured in front of the left shoulder by a cord and clasp to reveal the underside of the garment in both instances.34 The folds of the robes observe similar flourishes in both paintings. Moreover, the central figures are haloed by a large, deep blue circle adorned with golden rays of light, a malachite green halo for their heads.

Provenance: Swiss private collection
Like the earlier example in this publication (no. 5), this painting represents the mandala of Nairatma, the embodiment of emptiness, shunyata. Adorned only in bone ornaments and a garland of skulls, she dances at the centre of a lotus in the company of fourteen dakinis. Positioned at the cardinal and intermediate points of the compass and at the zenith and nadir of a three-dimensional mandala, their presence sanctifies the mandala palace. This work was probably commissioned for the Sakya order, whose lineage is represented in the top and bottom registers and in the four figures positioned just outside the mandala circle. It compares closely with another c. sixteenth century Sakya order commission that depicts Kapaladharā Hevajra, now in the Rubin Collections.35 As in this work, the artist of the Rubin Kapaladharā Hevajra favours rich, regular floral scrolls, their frothy volutes rendered in clear contrast to the darker ground. The size of the voluted scrolls decreases as one moves towards the centre. Although this work does not have the sophistication or the supreme technical skill exhibited in the great fifteenth century Sakya mandalas such as those illustrating the Vajravali series, it is nevertheless clearly a later interpretation of this tradition.36
In this elegant interpretation of an iconography of spectacular boldness and power, the long-limbed Hevajra and Nairatma embrace in an ecstatic dance. This particular manifestation of Hevajra is known as Kapaladhara, "who holds the skullcup". With a dancer's grace, he holds aloft skullcups in his sixteen hands. Those on the right contain animals: an elephant, a horse, a donkey, an ox, a camel, a man, a sarabha (a lion or a mythological animal), and a cat. Those on the left cradle deities: Prithvi, the earth; Varuna, water; Vayu, air; Tejas, fire or passion; Chandra, the moon; Aditya or Arka, the sun; Yama or Antaka, death; Dhanada, wealth. The dancing pair trample the four Maras, hindrances to enlightenment. Hevajra and Nairatma are accompanied by eight yoginis dancing with wild abandon. The group is traditionally associated with points of the compass: Gauri (E), Cauri (S), Vetali (W), Ghasmari (N), Pukkasi (NE), Sabari (SE), Candali (SW), Dombi (NW). Another superb rendition of Nairatma appears at centre foreground. Above are human figures who were associated with the transmission of Hevajra teachings. Judging by their red caps, they are members of the Sakya order. In gold medallions are representations of Buddhas Vajrasattva and Vajradhatvishvar; and Shadakshari Lokeshvara, patron saint of Tibet.

Hevajra is a prominent deity of the Anuttarayoga tantras (The Unsurpassed Yoga Tantras), a group of texts which arose in eastern Indian mediaeval Buddhist circles after the eighth century, exemplified by literary works such as the Hevajra Tantra. The latter explains the significance of Hevajra's name: "He preaches great compassion; vajra indicates wisdom. Thus understand this tantra, the essence of wisdom, a soothing elixir, that I am about to describe." Indeed, Hevajra's iconography developed in association with yogis and yoginis who eschewed Buddhist monastic establishments and sought enlightenment through yoga practices that sometimes transpired in cremation grounds. Rob Linrothe has noted that Heruka, a closely related deity, is "more or less a deified hypostasis of the yogin himself."

The use of barely opaque blues, reds and oranges and the creation of apparently three-dimen-sional forms by a highly accomplished fine gold line against the atmospheric black of the ground call to mind the illuminated manuscript created to record the visionary experiences of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682). This painting can also be compared with a slightly later interpretation of this iconography, now in the Rubin Collections; and with a painting of Palden Lhamo dated before 1642, formerly in the Ford Collection.

Provenance: American private collection
EIGHT GREAT ADEPTS (MAHASIDDHA) OF INDIA
Tibet, c. 12th century
Distemper on cloth
25 x 17.6 cm.

This superb drawing depicts eight great adepts (mahasiddha) of mediaeval India, master yogis and yoginis whose liberating experiences inspired generation after generation of Tibetan Buddhists. At the centre of the painting is Saraha (*The Archer*, act. c. second half, eighth century), a former abbot at Nalanda monastery, who left the community when he became captivated by an arrow-making yogini of exceptional qualities. The latter became his teacher and consort, inspiring, cajoling and encouraging him to discover a reality beyond that of his discursive mind. Under her wise tutelage, Saraha pursued a livelihood in making arrows while dispensing wisdom to disciples who, in turn, sought his company. Here, he is shown seated on a rocky outcrop while holding an arrow, attended by two women, one holding offerings in a skullcup, the other with bow and arrow.

In the upper right corner is Nagarjuna, a ninth-century disciple of Saraha and a gifted exponent of Guhyasamaja teachings. He is seated on a lotus supported by a cloud, his halo draped in naga snakes. His companion is dressed in a grass skirt and a leaf shawl. Ghantapa appears below, dancing with his consort, the enlightened daughter of a courtesan with whom he formed a lifelong partnership. Their sky dance suggests the ecstatic nature of their experiences. Dombipa, a ruler of Assam and disciple of Vrupa, relinquished his rule in order to pursue Tantric practices with an advanced yogini known as Dombiyogini. Here, they ride on the back of a tiger while brandishing a snake, exhibiting an exhilarating freedom after many years of practice. In the bottom right corner of the painting is Indrabhuti, enthroned and appearing as royalty. Inspired by the example of his sister Lakshmikara who renounced a royal marriage in order to devote herself to yogic meditation, Indrabhuti also chose to renounce his life of privilege, abdicating the throne to his son and devoting himself entirely to his quest for spiritual liberation. Luipa, eater of fish guts, "received his decisive [spiritual] lesson in the form of an insult from a woman." Considering himself beyond reproach, he was served mouldy leftovers by a tavern-owner yogini who saw an opportunity to burst his pride. Legend has it that he threw the bowl into the street demanding "How dare you serve garbage to a yogi?" She retorted, "And how could a gourmet attain enlightenment?" He subsequently took up residence on a riverbank and ate fish guts until he attained a sublime state in which they tasted of ambrosia. The identities of the last two figures are uncertain. The figure in the top left corner is probably Kurkkuripa, another mahasiddha whom Marpa described when he encountered him in south India thus: "...under a tree was a human figure covered with the feathers of a bird." Perhaps this is who the artist intended by the figure wearing a feather-like cloak in this vignette.

A c. seventeenth century date may be ascribed to this fine drawing, whose masterful line recalls works done for the court of Tashilungpo by artist Choqing Gyatso (chos.dbyings rgya.mtsho; act. mid-17th century). The artist of this work exhibits superb mastery of an exceptionally fine brush, and uses landscape techniques originally developed by Chinese painters (note the smudged ink in the rocks of Kurkkuripa and below Luipa and consort). Two related works in Tibet House, New Delhi, also depicting mahasiddhas, are likewise drawn in a fine line against relatively plain background.

Provenance: English private collection
TIBETAN HIERARCH
Tibet, c. late 17th or early 18th centuries
Distemper on cloth
90 x 61 cm.

This superb work features the enthroned figure of a red-capped teacher dressed in Tibetan monastic garb. His face is held in a highly expressive glance, the eyebrows raised, eyes crossed, and lips parted as the mouth is drawn into a wary smile. His left hand holds a Tibetan text; a spoon and water bottle are secured in the sash at his waist. A water jar, a standard bearing a stupa, and a ritual waterpot (kalasha) surround the figure. His monastic attendants express awe (see figure near his outstretched left hand) and respect in his presence (see the two figures with offerings near the altar in front of his throne). The many narrative scenes surrounding the protagonist describe pilgrimage, meditation retreats in glacial mountain settings, and monastic scenes. Above the central figure is the figure of Shadakshari Lokeshvara, patron saint of Tibet.

The painting is similar in style and composition to a series of paintings that illustrate the previous incarnations of the Panchen Lamas, whose seat was at Tashilungpo monastery southwest of Lhasa. This work is also very similar to one that may be dated to the last quarter of the 17th century, now in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Rendered in a style that flourished under the great Fifth Dalai Lama, the Los Angeles painting depicts rich foliage behind the throne that serves as a sylvan canopy for the figure, the leaves outlined in gold, with large peony blossoms, much as one finds in this work. And a seventeenth century painting in the Musée Guimet depicting the Fifth Dalai Lama exhibits similar treatment of foliage near the top of the painting and similar monastic figures crowded near the throne and altar.
This painting depicts Terdak Lingpa Gyurme Dorje (‘gyur.med.rdo.rje. gter.bdag.gling, 1646-1714), founder of Mindrolling monastery. Located in the Dranang region of south central Tibet south of the Tsangpo, Mindrolling monastery was founded in 1670 by Gyurme Dorje and his brother Lochen Dharmashri, under the patronage of the Fifth Dalai Lama. This, the largest Nyingma establishment in Tibet (over 100,000 square meters), was destroyed by Dzungar armies in 1718, but was subsequently rebuilt by Jetsun Mingyur Peldron, daughter of the founder. The centre spawned 113 secondary monasteries, including a branch monastery in Dehra Dun, where the current throneholder resides.

The enthroned central figure depicts Terdak Lingpa Gyurme Dorje, identified by an inscription along the altar in front of his seat. Above are images of two Buddhas and that of Padmasambhava, Indian Buddhist teacher who was a great inspiration to the Nyingma order. The enthroned figure at the bottom left is Pema Gyurme Gyatso (padma.‘gyur.med.rgya.mtsho, 1686-1717), son of Gyurme Dorje who succeeded his father to become Minling Trichen II, second throneholder of the monastery. On the right is Gyurme Dorje’s younger brother, Lochen Dharmashri (chos.dpal.rgya.mtsho), with whom he founded Mindrolling. The style of the painting recalls one that flourished under the Fifth Dalai Lama in and around Lhasa, exemplified by paintings such as that of Kunga Tashi in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, which can be dated to about the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Like the Los Angeles painting, this work presents an enthroned figure amidst landscape, large peonies blossoming behind his throne, its gold-tipped leaves acting as a sylvan canopy for the hierarch. The blossoms, foliage, and throne settings are quite similar and the monks are similarly attired. This painting is later than the Los Angeles example, but was clearly inspired by developments in painting under the patronage of the Fifth Dalai Lama, also a colleague and patron of the subject of this work.

Provenance: French private collection
Dakini, "Sky Walker," or "Sky Dancer," is a term used to identify a woman who is accomplished in Tantric Buddhist practices, as well as a whole range of Tantric goddesses, including the remarkable woman who appears at the centre of this painting. Her unusual iconography captures something of the significance of the term, which is meant to convey "the flights of spiritual insight, ecstasy, and freedom" experienced by one who has realised the Buddhist state shunyata, emptiness. The iconography features a naked, dancing dakini engulfed by flames, whose outstretched hands hold the sun (in her proper left) and moon (in her proper right). She straddles a sea of blood fed from distant mountain streams and into which flows her own menses. The sea of blood is agitated, carrying corpses and a skeleton, and is about to inundate even the mountain tops. Carried by golden rays emerging from her vulva are spiders, scorpions, other insects and birds, as if to suggest that she is the source of all of creation. An inscription in the halo of the figure near the top of the painting identifies the painting's iconography as that of Vajradakini, and includes an aspirational prayer and the name of the commissioner, although the latter is partly illegible.

Provenance: English private collection
Shakya muni Buddha is flanked by Maitreya and Manjushri and by a host of enlightened beings, including sixteen arhats (above his right shoulder), Buddhas in a celestial palace (above his left shoulder), and beautifully clad bodhisattvas (surrounding the central figure), all attentive to the teachings of the Enlightened One. Cloud-born vīdya dhātas hold aloft a canopy above Shakya muni's head. Serpent deities (nagas) surround and support the lotus stalk that provides a seat for the Buddha. Tara and a wrathful deity protect the foreground. In a cave on the lower right, a Tibetan master retreats from the world. The iconography presented is precisely that which appears in the c. 16th century Shakya muni painting in this publication (no. 7) and it could be that the composition was meant to depict an episode from Buddhist literature. In the Saddhanapundarika (The Lotus sutra), for example, Shakya muni is described as appearing before a host of arhats and bodhisattvas as he begins to describe the nature of the Buddhist path.

Red ground paintings such as this are known in Tibet as mshad thang. They and the related black (dag thang) and gold (gsers thang) ground paintings became a celebrated genre in Tibet. It is remarkable that the composition as a whole and individual figures in particular appear to have a three-dimensional quality, an effect achieved purely by a skillful line. Moreover, there is a wonderful sense of movement in the painting, particularly in the sixteen bodhisattvas, whose postures, gestures and garments suggest the flutter of a crowd. A somewhat earlier red ground painting in the Ford Collection depicts a Nyingma Lama.x

Provenance: formerly in the Kemper collection, Germany
NOTES

1 chos "byung mkhas, pat'i dga' snon ("Scholar's Feast of Religious History"), ed. Lokesh Chandra (New Delhi, 1962), part 2: de-pa, p. 282.
2 ibid.
3 ibid., p. 314.
4 ibid.
7 See Roberto Vitali, Early Temples of Central Tibet (London, 1990), pls. 29, 31; Michael Henss, "The Eleventh Century Murals of Drathang Gonpa" in Singer and Denwood, Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style (London, 1997), figs. 180, 182, 183; Amy Heller, Tibetan Art (Milan, 1999), pls. 45, 46. A radiocarbon analysis of textile samples from the painting were conducted at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich. The report, dated 23 February 2000, gave results A.D. 975 - 1164 that are consistent with the date proffered in this publication.
10 Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, The Indian Buddhist Iconography (Calcutta, 1968), p. 73.
12 Compare the c. 14th century painted figure of Padampa in Amy Heller, Tibetan Art, pl. 66.
13 Published in Pratapaditya Pal, A Buddhist Paradise: The Murals of Alchi Western Himalayas (Basel, 1982), ll. 2.
14 For the most lucid and exhaustive discussion on the date of Alchi, see Roger Goeppe, "Clues for a Dating of the Three-storeyed Temple (Sumteks) in Alchi, Ladakh," Asiatische Studien (Etudes Asiatiques) XLIV, 2, pp. 159-69; and "The 'Great Stupa' at Alchi," Artibus Asiae 53, 1/2, pp. 111-43.
15 See references cited in notes 10-12 above.
16 See Pal, A Buddhist Paradise, LS. 1.
18 Compare painted ceiling textiles in Goeppe and Poncar, Alchi, p. 225 and panels 7, 19, 37.
19 In the Prajnaparamita literature, including the Suramahamadhatu sutra and the Mahavastu, are descriptions of the ten stages (bhumis) through which a bodhisattva progresses in his or her career, the last stage being the tenth bhumis. The distinction between a tenth level (bhumis) bodhisattva and a Buddha is slight. Tenth bhumis bodhisattvas have already perfected the paramitas (virtues such as patience and generosity), and have mastered the ten powers of the Buddhas. According to the literature, they are tied to the phenomenal world only by their great compassion for sentient beings. See Etienne Lamotte, "Manjusri" in T'oung Pao 48: 1-96, pp. 10-26.
20. rJe.btsun.byams.pa.la.phyogs.bcui'.sangs.rgyas.mams.kyils.rgyal.tshab.du.dbang.skur.bo'i. tshal.ni.dang.pas.dgu.ba.man.chad.kyi.byang.sems.grangs.mong.po'i.'khor.gyi.dbus.su.rang.nyid. rin.po.chel.bar.ma.la.sku.luhan.po.lhar.'phags.bar.bzhugs.pas'o/1
26. Shaw, Passionate Enlightenment, p. 84.
27. See for example, Leidy and Thurman, Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment (New York, 1997), pp. 94-95.
29. Leidy and Thurman, Mandala, pp. 92-93.
30. Compare with works from the Vajravali series, for example, in Leidy and Thurman, Mandala, pp. 88, 90-91.
33. Jackson, Tibetan Painting, p. 187. Also compare the costume and manner of the bodhisattva on an elephant in the Yamantaka painting with that of the main bodhisattva attendant to the Buddha's left in this work. And compare treatment of the wrathful figure at the bottom centre of the Yamantaka painting with that in the bottom right of this.
34. Rhie and Thurman, Wisdom and Compassion, pp. 59-94; see also similar treatment in the murals of Gongkar In Jackson, Tibetan Painting, p. 152.
35. Published in Rhie and Thurman, Worlds of Transformation, pp. 435-37.
37. See Mallmann, Introduction à l'iconographie du taoïsme Bouddhique, pp. 48-49, 184-86.
38. See Corun, Dictionnaire Encyclopédique du Bouddhisme, p. 234.
41. Published in Rhie and Thurman, Worlds of Transformation, pp. 301-02; and Rhie and Thurman, Wisdom and Compassion, pp. 300-01.
43. See Shaw, Passionate Enlightenment, pp. 131-3.
44. See Shaw, Passionate Enlightenment, pp. 63-68.
45. See Shaw, Passionate Enlightenment, pp. 56-57 on Luipa and the yogini tavern owner.
47. Jackson, Tibetan Painting, pl. 45.
48. See Pal, Art of Tibet (New York, 1969), nos. 16, 17. Unlike the present example, the New Delhi works use colour.
50. Published in Pal, Art of Tibet (1983), pp. 356-57; and in Rhie and Thurman, Wisdom and Compassion, pp. 208-09.
53. Published in Rhie and Thurman, Wisdom and Compassion, pp. 208-09.
54. Shaw, Passionate Enlightenment, p. 38.
55. Shaw, Passionate Enlightenment, p. 38.
56. rig.tshun.X.X.dbang.byug.pa.dma.bX.X.dco.rje.m[kho'.]
SELECTED READING


_____. Art of Tibet. Los Angeles, 1983.


