

India, Southeast Asia, and Himalayas

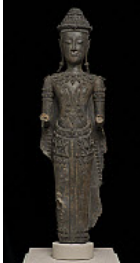


Individual Sculpture Labels

I Southeast Asia: Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia

II South Asia: India, Pakistan

III Himalayas: Tibet, Nepal

I Southeast Asia: Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia

	<p>Adorned Buddha Thailand, Ayuthya period, 17th-18th century Bronze Gift of Mrs. Ina T. Campbell 1946.2</p> <p>Lavishly decorated with jewels, this Buddha became popular in Thailand during the 16th century. This figure emphasized the concept of Buddha as the Universal King and symbolically referenced the secular kings who patronized Buddhism. In Southeast Asia, Theravada ("Word of the Elders") Buddhism became the dominant religion, based on the exemplary life of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. Most Buddhist images in the region depict the historical Buddha, rather than the vast pantheon of buddhas, bodhisattvas and deities in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist texts from other Asian cultures.</p>
	<p>Standing Buddha Cambodia, late 18th century Wood with black lacquer and traces of pigments Gift of Wright S. Ludington in memory of Charles Henry Ludington 1983.27.3</p>
	<p>Garuda, the Man-Bird as a Guardian King Indonesia, Central Java, 9th-10th century Andesite (volcanic rock) Museum Purchase with funds provided by an Anonymous Donor 2013.18</p> <p>Garuda is the mythical Lord of Birds in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. He is primarily known as the solar vehicle for the Hindu god Vishnu, preserver of the universe, whom Garuda transports with great speed to resolve calamities in the world. Originally placed in or outside a shrine, this magnificent sculpture attests to a period in Central Java that</p>

witnessed the flourishing of hundreds of Buddhist and Hindu temples with ambitious sculptural programs, including the temple complexes at Borobudur and Loro Jonggrang.

Garuda's missing arms may have once held a serpent (*naga*), the staple of his diet. His finely chiseled features and the curving lines of his robust body convey a ferocious yet meditative presence.



Back: Garuda's dense, tightly curled hair is characteristic of a powerful demon-king and guardian. His wings (now damaged) fan out across his back over the tail feathers.



Heads of Buddha on one pedestal in 2015

Buddhist Heads





Head of Buddha

Thailand, 16th century


Sandstone


Gift of Wright S. Ludington in memory of Charles Henry Ludington



1983.27.63




	<p>Head of Lokeshvara Cambodia, 13th century Sandstone Gift of Wright S. Ludington in memory of Charles Henry Ludington 1983.27.1</p>
	<p>Head of Buddha Thailand, 16th century Sandstone Gift of Mrs. Otto Jeidels 1948.1.1</p>





II South Asia: India, Pakistan

	<p>Standing Buddha Pakistan, Ancient Gandhara, 2nd-3rd century Grey schist Gift of the Joseph and Barbara Krene Family Trust 2003.22.1</p> <p>Buddha's enlightened serenity is characteristically expressed through his introspective composure and the halo behind his head. This figure exemplifies the distinct blend of Buddhist iconography and Hellenistic-influenced facial features and drapery in the region of ancient Gandhara (modern-day Pakistan and Afghanistan). Once the crossroads of Asia and the Middle East, Gandhara was also one of the first regions in India where figural representations of the Buddha emerged.</p>
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	<p>Fragment of a Frieze Depicting the Birth of Buddha India, Andhra Pradesh, Nagarjunakonda, 2nd-3rd century Green-gray limestone Museum purchase, Peggy and John Maximus Fund 2011.9</p> <p>This relief fragment and the next reveal the sophistication of the stonework in the Amravati and Nagarjunakonda region in southeast India, one of the richest Buddhist monastic centers in ancient India. Both are likely remnants of decorative programs that surrounded a large stupa, or Buddhist burial mound.</p> <p>The upper register shows the feet of the future Buddha bearing emblems—the Wheel of the Law and the Three Jewels. The goose</p>
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	<p>carrying the auspicious lotus in the middle register represents the sky. The head in the lower register is likely that of Maya, Buddha's mother, her branch-like arm raised during the birth of Buddha from her side—a posture associated with the Hindu tree spirits of fertility, <i>yakshi</i>.</p>
	<p>Fragment of a Stupa Depicting “Three Jewels” of Buddhism and <i>Makaras</i> India, Andhra Pradesh, Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century Limestone Anonymous Gift 2018.26.1</p> <p>Haloed by stylized lotus petals are enthroned three circles symbolically representing the “three jewels” (<i>triratna</i>) of Buddhism—the Buddha, the <i>dharma</i> (teachings), and the <i>sangha</i> (community). Auspicious symbols are above and below—the lotus, signifying purity, and the <i>makara</i>, a mythical aquatic creature and a symbol of water, the source of all existence.</p>
	<p>Gajalakshmi, Lustration of Lakshmi by Elephants India, Madhya Pradesh, 8th–9th century Sandstone Gift of Ramesh and Urmil Kapoor 2011.50.1</p> <p>Lakshmi, the goddess of abundance and prosperity, is bathed by two elephants, signifying the earth (mother) being fertilized by the rain (elephants). In this manifestation she is known as <i>Gajalakshmi</i>. The act of ceremonial washing (<i>abhisheka</i>) has been traced by scholars to Vedic texts (c. 1500-1200 BCE) that describe royal consecration rites and coronation ceremonies. The sprinkling of fluid was a transformative act of re-birth, bestowing kingship and power, while the elephant serves as a symbol of royalty and the bringer of life force (<i>prana</i>).</p>

	<p>Female Bust North India, Panna district, Madhya Pradesh, Gupta period, 5th-6th century Sandstone Gift of Mark and Iuliana Phillips 2002.85.6</p> <p>This youthful beauty, with her rounded features and ample bosom, is associated with fertility, recalling the <i>yakshi</i> (nature spirits) who once adorned railing posts and gateway brackets at Buddhist burial mounds (<i>stupas</i>). Her distinctive hairstyle, with its layers of coiled strands, enlivens her gentle appearance, and her downcast eyes are typical of Gupta-period sculpture. Though lacking in definitive attributes, the figure could be a representation of Parvati, consort of Shiva and Mother of the Universe.</p>
	<p>Dancing Krishna South India, Tamil Nadu, late Chola period, 13th century Bronze Museum purchase 1970.9</p> <p>This child-god Krishna is a devotional icon worshipped in processional parades, reflecting the importance of dance, music and singing that characterize Hindu festivals. With the joyful exuberance of a child and the poise of a trained dancer, Krishna portrays movements described in the <i>Natyashastra</i>, a 2nd-century manual on dance. This sculpture, when on parade would have been lavishly adorned with jewelry, silk, perfume and flower garlands, serving as the deity's living presence.</p>
	<p>Chandesvara, a Shiva Saint South India, Tamil Nadu, late Chola period, 13th century Bronze Gift of Lewis Bloom 1981.24</p> <p>Chandesvara, one of the sixty-three devotees of Shiva, was worshipped for his unequivocal devotion to his god. Like Shiva, this saint is crowned with matted locks and bears a battle-axe (now missing) in the crook of the arm. He stands on a base of lotus petals, his hands joined in a gesture of adoration. The small flower garland pressed between his hands represents a gift given to him by Shiva and Parvati after he heroically chastised his father for kicking a sand <i>linga</i> (symbol of Shiva). Chandesvara is regarded as the guardian of Shiva temples throughout southern India. Bronze statues like this one still have a special enshrined place today within temple grounds as well as being worshipped in processional parades.</p>

	<p>Dancing Ganesha, Remover of Obstacles India, Uttar Pradesh, 11th century Sandstone Gift of Deanne Gilette Violich in memory of her mother Anne Witter 2019.28</p> <p>This pot-bellied, elephant-headed Hindu god, Ganesha, is known by many names, such as the Remover of Obstacles, Bringer of Good Fortune and Success, and the Lord of Beginnings. Offerings are made to Ganesha before any important task is begun. He usually occupies a place near the door in temples and homes. His comical attributes, adorable physique, fondness for sweets and the power to bring goodness make him one of the most popular deities worshipped by all faiths in India.</p> <p>Ganesha means "lord (<i>isha</i>) of the <i>Ganas</i>," who are Shiva's mountain-dwelling, mischievous attendants. Ganesha is the son of Shiva, the god of destruction (and renewal) and his consort, Parvati. Here, Ganesha mimics Shiva's dance, swaying his chubby body while holding in each of his four hands an axe, a radish, a lotus and a bowl of sweets. He wears two intertwined snakes, his sacred thread, above the waistline of his transparent skirt.</p>
	<p>Head of Ganesha, Remover of Obstacles Central India, c. 12th century Sandstone Gift of Alka and Suneet Kapoor 2007.75.1</p>
	<p>Musician Playing Veena with Female Companion Central India, c. 12th century Sandstone Gift of Alka and Suneet Kapoor 2007.75.2</p>
	<p>Shiva as the <i>Mrityunjaya</i> "Victor over Death" Holding a Rosary and Pot of Elixir India, Madhya Pradesh, 9th century Mottled red sandstone Gift of Ramesh and Urmil Kapoor 2011.50.2</p> <p>In this rare and early depiction of Shiva, the god of destruction and renewal is portrayed as the "Victor over Death" (<i>Mrityunjaya</i>), based on a hymn (<i>mantra</i>) from the <i>Rig Veda</i> (c. 1500 BCE), India's earliest sacred</p>

text. The hymn speaks of a fierce and destructive storm God, Rudra who later became known as Shiva. With his crown of matted locks (*jatamukuta*) and a profoundly peaceful demeanor, Shiva is holding a pitcher of the elixir of immortality (*amrita-kalasha*) in his left hand and a rosary (*akshamala*) in his right. With downcast eyes, he is silently repeating the *mantra* of the “Victory over Death.” Seated on either side of him, yogis perform *asanas* (yoga postures) related to freedom from disease.



Shiva as the Supreme Teacher Dakshinamurti

India, Tamil Nadu, Chola period, 12th century

Green stone

Gift of Dr. Robert and Dr. Ann Walzer

2011.41

Shiva, the Hindu deity of destruction and creation, is shown here as a youthful yogi teaching his disciples. Seated under a banyan tree, Shiva's matted hair (sign of an ascetic) connects with the spreading branches, forming a divine nimbus. This form of Shiva personifies the central concept of the religious text *Dakshinamurti Upanishad*—only through Shiva's infinite wisdom and grace can one attain supreme self-knowledge and be saved from the bondage of the ephemeral world. The text is especially influential for Shiva worship in southern India. By the 10th century, statues of Dakshinamurti became customary on the outer walls of Shiva temples in Tamil Nadu.

Snake and drum
(power and continuity)

Teaching gesture
(*vitarka mudra*)




Crouching dwarf
symbolizes ignorance



Banyan tree
forming a nimbus with Shiva's hair

Flaming torch and book
(knowledge and destruction)

Shiva's followers

	<p>Buddha as the Ninth Avatar of Vishnu, Supreme Preserver of the Universe Northern India, Madhya Pradesh, 11th century Sandstone Gift of K.W. Tremaine 1968.2</p> <p>The monastic robe and the remnant hand gesture of teaching identify this figure as Vishnu's ninth avatar, the Buddha. Together with the adjacent sculpture of Balarama, they form part of a group of ten avatars that once decorated a temple to Vishnu. In contrast to the typical symmetrical and self-absorbed representations of Buddha, this figure projects a lively dynamism through its pronounced "triple-bend" pose (<i>tribhanga</i>), characteristic of the portrayal of Hindu deities.</p> <p>This assimilation of Buddha as a Vishnu avatar led to the ultimate triumph of Hinduism as the principal religion in India around the 10th century, while Buddhism all but disappeared until recent years. This merging of iconography demonstrates how Hinduism spread via progressive absorption of other belief systems and their followers.</p>
	<p>Balarama as the Eighth Avatar of Vishnu, Supreme Preserver of the Universe Northern India, Madhya Pradesh, 11th century Sandstone Gift of Wright S. Ludington 1968.3</p> <p>In order to maintain the balance between good and evil in the world, Vishnu, the Preserver of the Universe, assumes many forms, or avatars. This robust yet sensuous figure wears intricately detailed jewelry and a rhomboid-shaped mark of divinity (<i>shrivatsa</i>) related to Vishnu. He is one of the ten commonly accepted avatars of Vishnu and is celebrated for possessing great physical strength. Fragmentary remains at his shoulders suggest a once multi-armed form that may have held a hand plow, pointing to Balarama's origin as an agrarian deity. The goblet in his right hand references his predilection for wine.</p>
	<p>Temple Stele of the Sun God Surya India, Bihar, 11th century Chlorite Gift of Ramesh and Urmil Kapoor 2007.76</p> <p>Surya, like Vishnu, is presented as a king in a frontal standing posture, royally adorned with a tall crown, jewelry and a beaded cord. His tunic, boots and sheathed dagger indicate his persona as a horseman riding a chariot through the cosmos. He holds a fully bloomed lotus in each hand and is accompanied by two male attendants: on his right, the potbellied</p>

and bearded scribe, Pingala, holds a pen and inkpot; and on his left, the youthful measurer, Dandi, carries a rod. A kneeling devotee or donor is carved in profile on the lotus pedestal below, while flying celestials bearing garlands frame Surya in the upper corners. The sculpture was likely set into a wall niche of a temple.



Façade of a Jain Household Shrine

India, Gujarat, late 18th - early 19th century

Wood with traces of pigment

Gift of Mrs. Lockwood de Forest

1976.12.1

Domestic shrines, with their elaborate wood façades, were likely commissioned to protect Jain families' household images. Modeled after Jain stone temple architecture, this densely ornamented doorway represents the transition between the human and divine realms. The double doors are carved with a rhythmic pattern of lotus medallions, while divine figures— *yaksha* and *yakshi* (nature spirits) and guardians— inhabit the lower jambs. Carved in the lintel above the doors are the "fourteen auspicious dreams" of a Jina's mother. This shrine attests to the high skill of its carvers and to the wealth and personal piety of the Jain laity at this time, many of whom belonged to mercantile communities.



Temple Stele with Jina Parshvanatha on a Lion Throne

India, Karnataka, 13th century

Gray stone

Gift of the Joseph and Barbara Krene Family Trust

2003.22.2

Parshvanatha is one of the 24 *Jina* (spiritual conquerors) in the Jain religion who are liberated from the cycle of rebirth and have attained a state of transcendent bliss through self-discipline. Images of these perfected beings serve as role models to guide the faithful and are the most significant devotional focus in Jainism. Like many *Jina* images, Parshvanatha is shown seated serenely in meditation as a "departed" being, contrasting sharply with the restless figures and animals surrounding him. Parshvanatha is identified by the protective cobra hood of the serpent-king Dharanendra which illustrates his triumph over the sky-demon Samvara, who sent a great storm (the drummer above flanked by elephant-clouds) to disturb his meditation. Flywhisk bearers stand in attendance, while celestial figures with garlands hover beneath the rain clouds. Directly beneath Parshvanatha are two seated lions flanking two small deer facing the "wheel of law," symbolizing the *Jina's* teaching, all of which are surrounded by the protective nature spirits of *Yaksha* and *Yakshi*.

III Himalayas: Tibet, Nepal



Prayer Wheel

Western Tibet, 18th-19th century

Pigments on wood, interior wheel with printed paper prayers

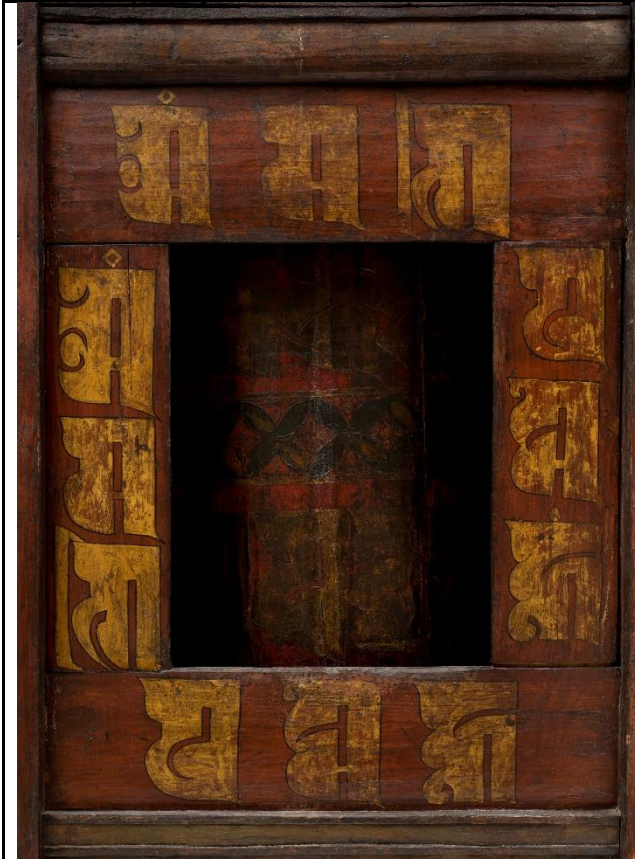
Museum Purchase with funds provided by Pamela Melone and Natalia and Michael Howe in Honor of F. Bailey Vanderhoef, Jr, the Peggy and John Maximus Fund and Yangki Ackerman

2011.42

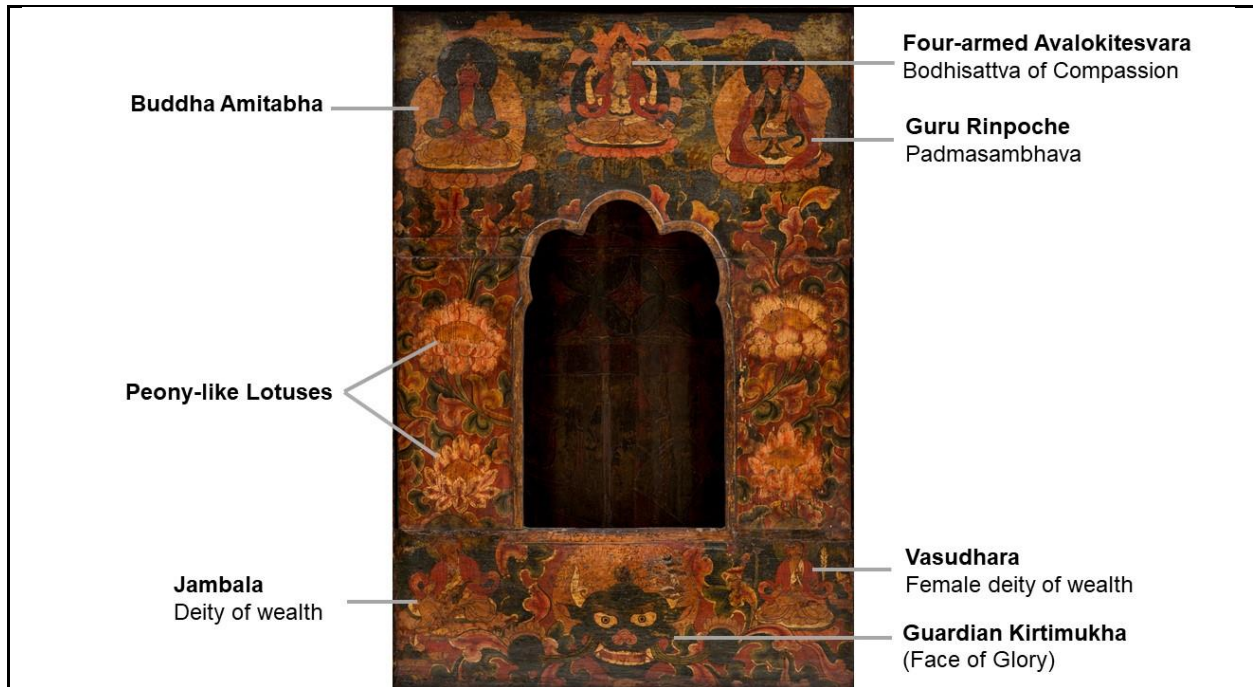
Prayer wheels are the physical manifestations of the phrase “turning the wheel of *dharma* (Buddhist law),” or Buddha’s teachings. They are common sights in Tibet, ranging from large, stationary wheels in and around Buddhist temples to small, hand-held wheels. Turned clockwise to accelerate the recitation of the many prayers or *mantras* written inside, each revolution is considered equivalent to reciting the prayer aloud. It is believed that the more prayers that are recited, the more they will enhance wisdom and good karma towards enlightenment.



Seated by a large, golden prayer wheel, a woman recites *mantras* and twirls a hand-held prayer wheel. Photograph by Yangki Ackerman, Ja Lhakhan temple in Lhokha, Tibet (2006).



Written in the decorative Lantsa script on each side of the stand and on the wheel body is the six-syllabled Sanskrit *mantra* "Om Mani Padme Hum." Literally "the Jewel is in the Lotus," *Om Mani Padme Hum*, is the most ubiquitous *mantra* and most popular form of Tibetan Buddhist practice, performed by lay believers and monks alike. It is particularly associated with the four-armed Avalokitesvara, Bodhisattva of Compassion, whose image is represented at the top-center on the front of the stand.



Ritual Apron

Tibet, 18th-19th century

Bone, leather and brass bells

Gift of Mrs. Wilbur L. Cummings, Sr. in memory of her son, Wilbur L. Cummings

1954.15.2

Carved bone ornaments laced together, such as these, are worn by fierce-looking deities in paintings and sculptures. They are also part of the costume worn by ritual dancers to invoke guardian spirits to protect a monastery and worshippers. The bones of deceased animals and humans are repurposed as reminders of the transience of life and inevitability of death.

The carved images on the top row include male and female guardian deities and a seated Buddha. The main netting consists of the Buddhist Eight Auspicious Emblems mixed with celestial figures and other vegetal designs. Ten demon-faced guardians, *Kirtimukha*, protect the bottom edge and two top sides.



Tantric Buddhist masters wearing bone aprons for a *cham* “guardian spirit” ritual dance, Thimphu, Bhutan (1989). Photograph by Dr. Dieter Metzler, professor at Institut fur Didaktik der Geschichte, Munster, Germany.



Vajrabhairava “Unyielding Anger” Embracing Consort

Tibet, late 17th century

Gilded bronze with traces of paint

Museum purchase, Peggy and John Maximus Fund

2007.73

This fearsome and intricately crafted embracing figures exemplifies the brilliant artistry of Tibetan craftsmen in creating a wrathful deity who is both aesthetically impressive and symbolically instructive to Buddhist practitioners. Vajrabhairava, or “Unyielding Anger,” is the wrathful manifestation of Manjusri, Bodhisattva of Wisdom, whose unbridled wrath conquers death (symbolic enlightenment). With nine heads, thirty-two arms which once held implements and sixteen legs, he thereby instructs practitioners to harness the combative demonic energies within oneself—ignorance, greed, lust, anger, fear and attachment to ego—and channel them towards acquiring the knowledge to conquer death, thus reaching enlightenment (*nirvana*), a cessation of death and rebirth cycles. The embracing couple, with their merging blood from skull cups, further serve as a metaphor for enlightenment which can only be achieved when the female (wisdom) is united with the male (compassion).



Ritual Staff (*Khatvanga*)

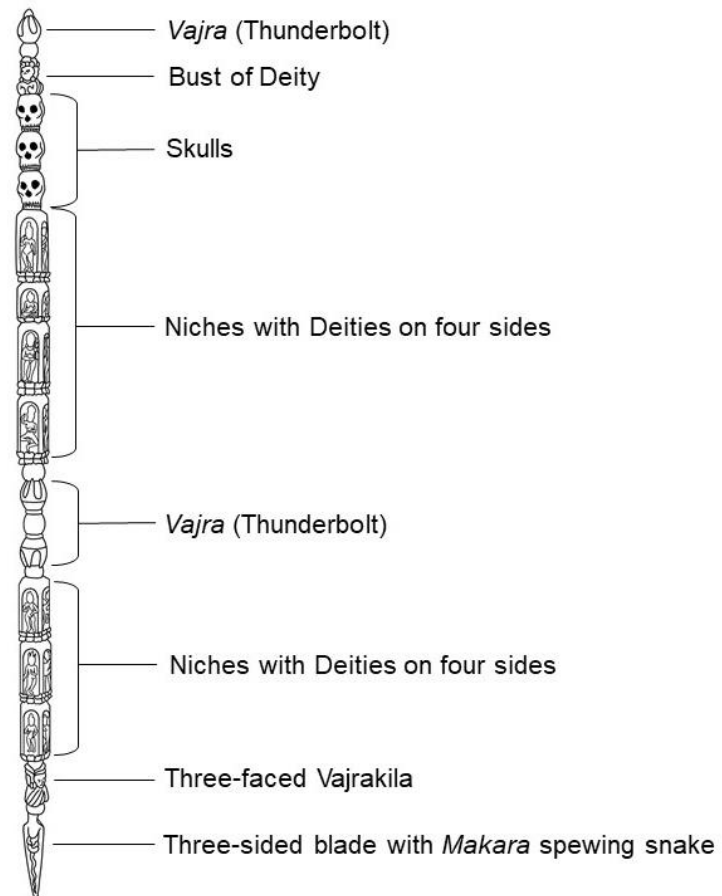
Nepal, 10th-13th century




Painted wood

Anonymous gift

2019.36.4

Encrusted in orange residue and heavily rubbed from years of ritual use in Nepal, this rarely preserved ancient ritual staff is carved with an array of complex images indicative of its function, such as stacked skulls, niches of benign and wrathful deities and erotic couples, multipronged *vajra* (thunderbolts) and a three-sided blade. These images, like all Tantric Buddhist symbols also seen in paintings and sculpture, serve as tools to overcome illusions such as ignorance, hate, and desire. Originally walking sticks for monks, staves such as this evolved to be a weapon to help the faithful advance towards enlightenment.



	<p>Ritual Dagger Tibet, 18th century Bronze and iron Gift of Mrs. Wilbur L. Cummings, Sr. in memory of her son, Wilbur L. Cummings Jr. 1954.15.10ab</p> <p>This powerful instrument is used to philosophically subjugate demons or obstructions to enlightenment. The iron triple blade symbolizes cutting through the three root poisons of ignorance, desire and hatred.</p>
	<p>Ritual Curved Knife with Vajra Handle Tibet, early 19th century Bronze Gift of Pratapaditya and Chitra Pal 2008.47.80.1-.2</p> <p>The curved knife is one of the most prominent weapons used by Tantric Buddhist wrathful deities in paintings and sculptures to symbolically cut away layers of illusions inherent to human existence. As a ritual tool, it helps the faithful clear away obstacles on their path towards enlightenment. It is modeled after a traditional Indian butcher knife for flaying animal skin, with a sharp hook to begin the incision. Its handle is a multipronged <i>vajra</i>, or thunderbolt, the powerful quintessential symbol of Tantric Buddhism.</p>
	<p>Table with Mythical Bird Tibet, 12th-15th century Wood with polychrome Anonymous gift 2013.48.1</p> <p>This rare table may be one of the oldest surviving examples of Tibetan furniture known today. Its size and decoration suggest that it was originally used as an altar for religious objects. The mythical bird, derived from the Hindu <i>hamsa</i> (goose), is said to have the ability to extract milk from a mixture of milk and water, metaphorically good from evil. It holds in its beak a lotus bud, the Buddhist symbol of purity. Its elaborate scrolling tail suggests the divine essence of its wandering nature: being able to walk on land, swim in water and fly in the sky.</p>



Storage Box with Auspicious Design of Treasure Vase and a Crossed Vajra

Tibet, 15th–17th century
Wood, pigments and metal
Anonymous gift
2019.36.6

This box is decorated with an inexhaustible treasure vase modeled after a traditional Indian water pot, a symbol of abundance and immortality, sprouting floral scrolls. Below is a crossed *vajra* (thunderbolts or *vishvavajra*) signifying the four elements: earth, water, fire and air.

End