THE ANCIENT AMULETS OF TIBET

THOKCHA

A PRIVATE COLLECTION OF

108 MINATURE MASTERPIECES

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THE PIECES ILLUSTRATED IN THIS BOOK ARE FROM THE MAX MAXWELL COLLECTION

AN INTRODUCTION TO THOKCHA

BY TONY ANNINOS

Past studies on thokchas have commented on their perceived relationships to the ancient art of the Central Asian steppes as well as the possibility that some pieces are actually talismans of the pre-Buddhist Bon religion of Tibet. Nevertheless, most thokchas which have been published are inconographically Buddhist. Such is the case of the majority of those in this collection, providing evidence of a structured endeavour to produce quantities of talismanic objects for a people predisposed to carry such things, and thus to encourage a unifying religocultural framework.

The term "thokcha" is a phonetic equipment most commonly presumed to be derived from the combination of the Tibetan thog, "sky" or "thunder", and lcag, "iron" (or sometimes merely "metal"), and lcag, "iron" (or sometimes merely "metal"). Several slightly different origins are simultaneously implied, all pertaining to the belief voiced by Tibetans that these objects fell from the sky, and are somehow connected with thunder and lightning. This derivation is more understandable when applied to objects of unrecogniseable design which may be imagined as eons old. Nevertheless, the term has been extended to include the large number of extant amulets which are obviously Buddhist and perceived as such by Tibetans. The dating of these objects is thus considered to be no earlier than the 7th century CE, when the Tibetan king Songtsengompo is credited with promoting Buddhism in the initial phase of what is conventionally termed the "First Diffusion". At this time an alphabet was also introduced

so marking the beginning of written records. This phase lasted until the breakdown of the kingly imperial period and the eclipse of Buddhism in the mid-9th century. Little art is agreed upon as dating from the First Diffusion; rather what we see is art strongly influenced by the styles known from India during the 11th century, when the "Second Diffusion" of Buddhism traditionally took hold in Tibet.

Research into the earliest Tibetan religious texts and interviews with learned Tibetan religious figures have provided evidence of various underlying strata of ancient beliefs in Tibet. Such were the traditions maintaining that "Spirits" on some divine essences were ubiquitous: in the mountains, in trees in rocks, in the soil, in the tent pole, in the hearth, the list goes on. Peoples' behavior had to be modified to avoid disturbing these easily offended spirits, else illness, drought, and unfortunate accidents were the results. Buddhism, in order to be accepted by the masses in Tibet, had to compromise with this belief. Hence the widespread production and carrying of amulets, particularly protector deities. The Buddhism eventually adopted in Tibet involved both Mahayana (in which enlightenment: was aided by teachers and accessible divine beings known as bodhisattvas) and Vajrayana (which maintained that rapid enlightenment was attainable by more esoteric practices and insights). Thus the amulets could assume one of the forms of the bodhisattvas: those whose compassion could be entreated (such as Avalokiteshvara), those who had protective abilities (Achala) or those who symbolized the Tibetan form of tantric Buddhism (Vajrapani). Others were symbols in themselves: the vajra (Tibetan: dorje), the conch shell (dungkhar), the triple gem. Also instrumental in tantric enlightenment were mantras, utterances with magical power. Thus, this category of Buddhist amulet thokchas would have been originally manufactured to serve as talismans for the average herdsman or farmer, illiterate and superstitious, providing reinforcement during the conversion of Tibetans to Buddhism during the Second Diffusion.

At least with regards to this collection, the issues of origins somehow connected with meteors or lightning belts may be put aside. Although compositional analysis has not been conducted, there seems to be no reason to think that the metals involved here are anything but man-made alloys of copper. Technically, the most widely used alloy of these pieces should be termed brass, a combination of copper and zinc in which the proportion of the latter is usually about 20% - 30% (although even 1:1 relationships are not unknown). Zinc made copper harder and imparted a more golden color. The general Tibetan term for copper alloy is li: thus, li-dmar, red li, is basically unalloyed copper, while li-dkar, "bright" li, has about 25% or more zinc. In the English speaking world, "bronze" has become the general term for copper alloy, although bronze technically refers to the alloy of copper and tin (usually 5%-15%). Both copper and zinc were widely available in both Tibet and Nepal, whereas tin would have had to be imported from Southeast Asia (Yunnan, Burma, Malaysia). Thus most of the thokchas, as well as the great majority of images of divinities cast in Tibet, are really brass. However, tin was essential for the metal correctly used to cast bells and cymbals, a proportion of 22% tin with copper being the classic bell metal. Since they are small, and thus would not use up too much of a relatively expensive imported substance, a number of thokchas were apparently cast in this alloy. They are distinguished by their whitish appearance and ringing sound when dropped, the last quality often referred to by Tibetans as an essential criterion for authenticity.

Thokchas are usually thought of as being stray finds; objects lost at some point in the past and then found later, perhaps hundreds of years later, on the ground. For many objects this is no doubt the case, since a great number of thokchas exhibit little sign of contemporary handling (i.e., a wearing away of the greenish or reddish oxidation engendered by exposure to the elements or burial), and may have been discovered only recently. On the other hand, some of the Buddhist pieces may have always been in

someone's possession. Many types are known in multiple examples (even in differently colored alloys), not unexpected since production could easily be achieved on a large scale by means of moulds. One simple manufacturing process is the following lost wax method described by von Schroeder in "Indo Tibetan Bronzes:" a negative mould was formed by impressing into hard wax a metal object cast from an original hand-crafted wax model. Positive moulds could then be formed from pressing soft wax into the negative mould. These positive moulds would then have been used to make a lost-wax casting. Meanwhile, the "master" negative mould could last for many years, explaining the large numbers of identical copies of many thockchas, especially the flat, single-mould types. It would also explain why some copies are less clear in details (other than a matter of being worn away) and have excess metal around the silhouette : the master wax mould was slowly wearing away. It is not hard to speculate why so many copies were produced. Some may have been part of horse gear (cheek pièces, bridle fittings, etc) for situations which required large numbers of standardized equipment. Others may have been deposited in Buddhist memorial monuments (Sanskrit: Stupa, Tibetan: chöten), as were the small clay impressions known as tsa-tsa, since mass production of Buddihst images was regarded as meritorious. Some objects now known as thokchas even formerly served as moulds for tsa-tsa. Others may have simply been fabricated as lucky tokens to be sold to religious pilgrims. The ease of manufacturing flat types of thokchas encourages a modern industry supplying reproductions cast from moulds of authentic pieces.

If one were to try to determine, however, which thokchas might actually pertain to the structured pre-Buddhist religion known as Bon, one must first determine what is known of Bon imagery. The earliest, 8th/9th century, Tibetan textual fragments (from Dunhuang) indicate that many of the complex rites and legendary narratives of Bon had already assimilated Buddhist concepts and symbols (and vice versa). It may also be assumed

that Bon previously had absorbed certain indigenous folk beliefs and rituals that may not have constituted a forma: religion, but which traditions could not be abandoned.

Nevertheless, there is a significant icon associated with Bon in the earliest texts : the Khyung. This figure is one of the most common, yet one of the most valued, types of tokchas. The basic form of the Khyung is a horned, eagle-like bird with human arms using the hands and beak to hold a snake. Most of the Khyung tokches were originally intended either to be strung on a cord or sewn on to something, indicated by the loops or pierced lugs on the reverse.

The notion of antagonism between a bird and a serpent was not simply adopted by Tibet in its entirety from India, but is an ancient and widespread concept. That snakes may be innately feared and respected due to their many peculiar qualities seems clear. Less obvious, but nonetheless prevalent, was the association of snakes with rain. On the other hand, the eagle, soaring in the sky, emblematic of the sun, is the natural enemy of snakes and is one of the few creatures which, due to its ability of flight and its powerful beak and claws, can overcome even poisonous snakes. In India, the predominance of deified snakes in art and literature imply that they were given precedence over Garuda and propitiated because of their essential potency: whereas in Tibet, the Khyung's significance as the protector came to be more highly regarded.

The conflict as described in Tibet literature has been interpreted by some scholars as symbolic of a dualistic struggle between the powers of light and darkness, trace evidence of ancient zoroastrian concepts underpinning Bon. While this may be so, it seems that a powerful creature's role of tamer of chthonic forces would be more immediately meaningful to society concerned with the unpredictable power of easily offended spirits.

In the religious texts of the Nakhis (traditionally descended from Bonist Tibetans who, having refused to accept Buddhism, were thus exiled in the 8th century to the Yunnan borderlands) the Khyung is prominently cited as the divine mediator who forced the underground serpent deities, the Lu,to acknowledge the rights of humans to a proportionate share of the wealth of the natural world. This was symbolized by a struggle in which the serpent king yielding a gem to the victorious Khyung.

The great majority of the Khyung thokchas bear on the heads the representation of the triratna (the "triple gem" : an early symbol of Buddhism signifying Buddha, his disciples and the law). Tibetan texts do relate how the primal Khyung put into his crown the gem recovered from the king of the Lu. But this single gem is more likely to originally have signified the cintamani, the gem that grants all wishes, whereas the triple gem is otherwise considered to have a Buddhist interpretation even in the earliest period in Tibet. Evidence for considering this to be also emblematic of Bon is lacking. It seems likely that most, if not all, of the Khyung tokchas are from the Buddhist period. Possibly the earliest examples were visual commemoratives of the subordination of Bon by the appropriation of one of its most potent icons. However, most of the amulets which are today's thokchas may be considered 11th-14th century. The possibility that these objects are Bon talismans, but of the Buddhist period, cannot be disregarded.

The lion is the most prevalent animal on thokchas, yet is nearly as mythical in Tibet as the Khyung. As a symbol of both Buddhism and supreme sovereignty, the lion would be considered appropriate to the Dharma kings of the Tibetan Empire, the time of Buddhism's First Diffusion. Buddhism had made a strong impression on the early Tibetan kings, yet not until the latter 8th century was it declared the state religion by Songtsengampo's grandson Trisongdetsen. Motivated not only by piety, no doubt he also

desired to underline his imperial authority by assuming the aura of the *chakravartin*, the universal Buddhist king. Perhaps this would have been considered helpful in unifying ethnic groups inhabiting the plateau beyond central Tibet and, subsequently, in controlling trade routes to India and Iran in the Tarim Basin. Of course, lions continued to be used in later Tibetan art, often at the base of the lotus throne referring to the trans-earthly power of Lord Buddha.

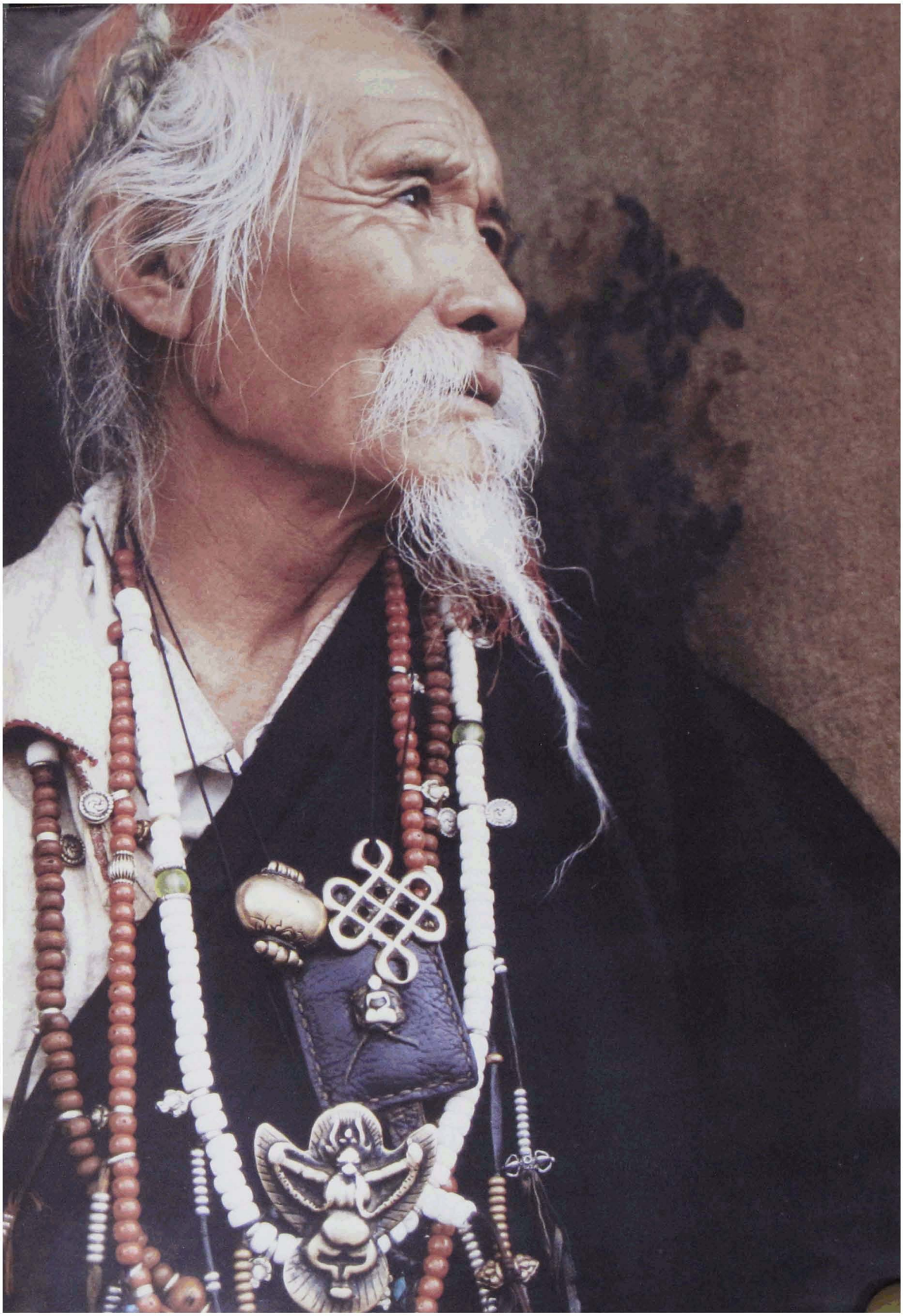
A pendant with a peacock is also evidence of the importation of Indian motifs associated with Buddhism. Thokchas of peacocks, many reportedly found in Ladakh, are looped on the back, indicating they were once sewn onto clothing or accessories. In the western Himalayas and southern Tibet peacocks are still a popular ornamental motif.

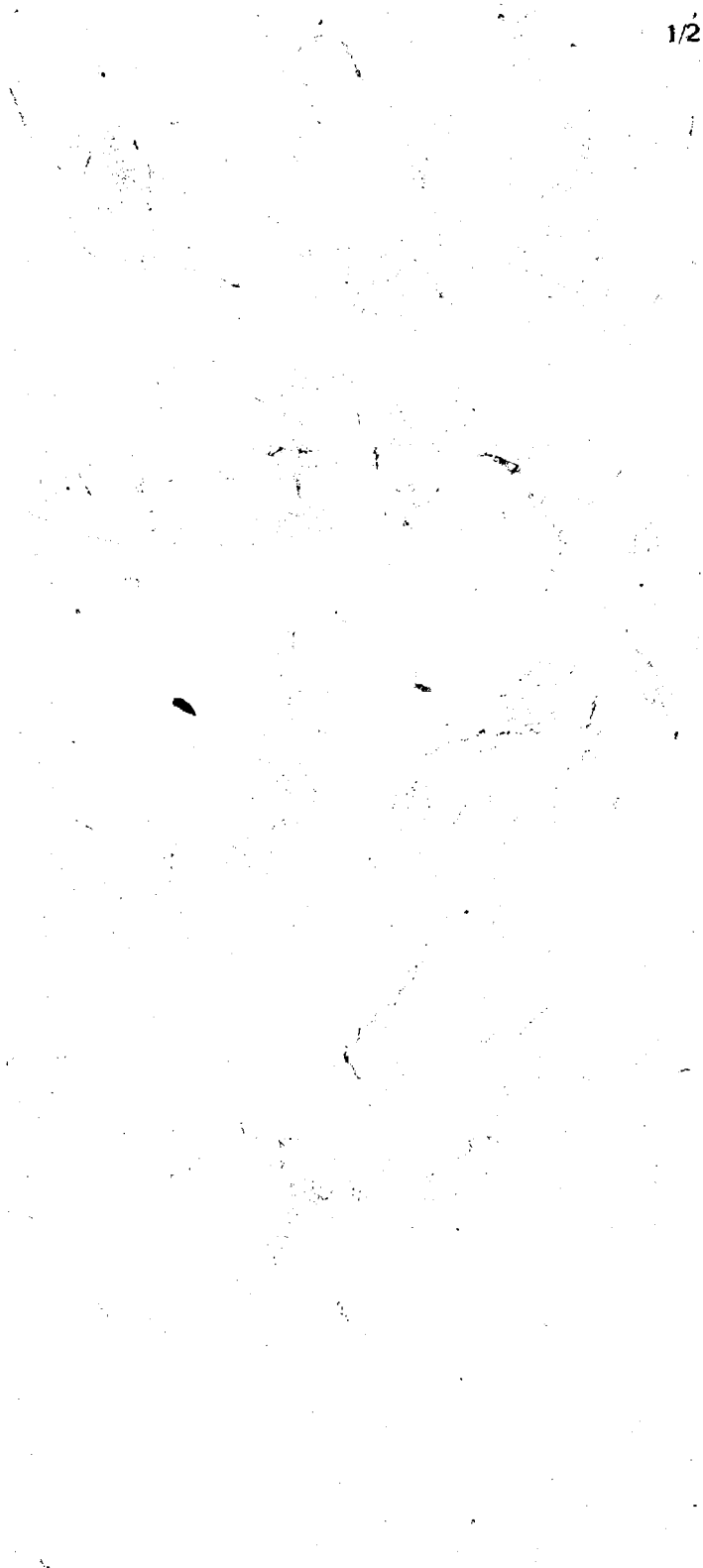
Other birds are often seen on the thokchas that were once fibulas, a brooch-like device used to secure clothing. The basic form is shaped like an upside-down omega or horseshoe, often surrounded by one or more ornamented concentric rings bridged by radiating spokes. One end of an iron pin (nearly always rusted away) was once looped around one side of the omega shape while the other end lodged at the opposite side, thus fastening the ends of the cloth. Many examples show grooves or breaks where the iron has worn against the softer bronze. A very few retain vestiges of iron hooks on the reverse side: an aid in attachment though not a requirement, since it was also possible to simply stitch the fibula onto the garment.

The use of fibulas may have been adopted by Tibetans from non-Tibetan inhabitants of the plateau or its borderlands. On the other hand, the original wearers of this type of fibula may have been a tribe or people ancestral, in part, to modern Tibetans. Yet, regarding those fibulas which have survived as thokchas, the fact that so many of the same elements appear in both the

"archaic-looking" pieces and the clearly Buddhist example makes it difficult to postulate a considerable time interval between them. The symbology may have changed over time also, diluting what previously may have had more cosmological significance. Such elements as animals "guarding" the entrance to a specially enclosed area may be subject to reinterpretation if the animals are Buddhist-derived imagery of lions and peacocks. Similarly, the concept of birds on a ring, well-known from ancient Iranian antecedents, had probably lost much of its emblematic quality by this time. Nevertheless, the thokcha fibulas may be regarded as important survivals of an archaic form, the older examples of which may well predate Buddhism in Tibet.

But what difference is there between carrying an object such as a fibula, or a thousand-year old button, or even some amorphous unidentifiable fragment, and carrying a miniature dorje or pendant statuette of an eagle deity or a bodhisattva? The broad chronological range and outstanding imagery which make this collection noteworthy enable those so inclined to explore many different historical and iconographical levels of belief systems in Tibet, and learn something about the human response to the challenging mysteries of existence.





1/2 Shadakshari : In the lotus position on a double lotus petal base, this four-armed manifestation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara holds his customary attributes in his right rear hand a string of prayer beads (mala) used to enumerate the number of times a mantra is spoken, in his left rear hand a lotus (symbolising purity), and in his two front hands the magic wishing jewel (chintamani). In the standard Indian iconography, the two front hands would have been merely clasped together, but in Tibet there was an emphasis on the symbolism of gems. Although these two examples were probably cast from the same mold, one has been carried for a longer period and the continued rubbing, both deliberate (from devotion), and circumstantial (simply the result of carrying it) has resulted in one piece becoming smoother. Ther also would have been small differences after the casting as the result of molten metal seeping around the outline of the figure in the mould.
In the pala style of India; 12th –13th century.

PIECES PHOTOGRAPHED ACTUAL SIZE. CATALOGUE BY TONY ANNINOS .

3 Vajrapani : This bodhisattva brandishes the vajra, Sanskrit for thunderbolt. The Tibetan word for this object "dorje" (rdo-rje), means something closer to "diamond", thus conveying the adamantine nature of Vajrayana ("Diamond Path"): its the indestructible truth and the steadfastness of its devotees. In this example the left hand is held in front of the body in the warning gesture, tarjanimudra, as befits one of the terrifying defenders of the faith. The high coiffure and swirling scarves suggest a date of 12th/13th century.

4 Vajrapani : This well-modelled example is unusual in two respects: it is cast in the round and in an especially yellowish alloy. Here the tiger skin loincloth customarily worn by this deity and the snakes tied diagonally across his body are clearly visible. The outstretched left hand appears to balance the purposeful stride of the figure, an exaggerated pratyalidhasana. Circa 12th century.

5 Vajrapani : This is an unusual form of Vajrapani who not only holds the *vajra* (symbolising compassion in one of its many meanings) as customarily in his right hand, but also the bell (sanskrit: *ghanta*), representing wisdom, in his left. These implements complement each other in Tibetan tantric Buddhism and are ritual necessities. This figure may date from an early period, perhaps 11th century or before, based on the elongated proportions and high bulbous coiffure.

6 Vajrapani : Here a much-bejewelled version surrounded by an aureole with the left hand at the side of the body. Note the heavier proportions here. Worn away vertical loop behind 12th/13th century.

7 Vajrapani : An unusual variation of the bodhisattva, perhaps Shri Ucharya Vajrapani, whose attributes include a Garuda/Khyung over his head (as here), and a snare in his left hand (here the attribute is indistinct). Note the bulging round eyes and bared fangs intensifying the fierceness. Worn away vertical loop behind. Though in a folkish style, there are strong resemblances to figures dated circa 12th century.

8 Vajrapani : Here positioned beside a crowned bird. This example is part of a group of stylistically linked thokchas; see also no. 90. Two vertical loops behind, Circa 12th century.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9 Double Mantra Plaque: The mantra of vajrasttva "OM VAJRASATTVA HUM" is here repeated twice. In the Tibetan version of Buddhism, repetition of sacred syllables, mantras, were thought to evoke an almost magical power, capable of enabling a higher level of existence. 12th century or later.

10 Miniature Vajra : A charm of the most important ritual implement of the tantric Vajrayana Buddhism. The vajra (Tibetan: dorje) has several layers of meaning. It generally symbolizes a thunderbolt and a diamond scepter, but represents in Vajrayana the male principle compassion as well as the adamantine ("diamond-hard") essence of this path towards enlightenment. 15th/16th century.

11 Mantras Plaque with Deities: An unusual piece in two sections. The upper section, topped by a crescent moon, features, above Avalaokiteshvara Shadakshari, and, below, Vajrapani (to our right) and Manjushri flaking a sun symbol. The lower section has three lines of mantras. Topmost is OM MANI PADME HUM, the mantra of Avalokiteshvara; just below is OM VAJRAPANI HUM , for Vajrapani: bottom mantra is OM WAKISHVARI HUM for Manjushri. 12th-14th century

12 Mantra plaque with Vajra: The importance and potency attributed by Tibetans to the vajra is underlined by its association here with the power of the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM ("The jewel is in the Lotus") appropriate to Avalokiteshavara. Worn away vertical loop behind. 12th-16th century.

13 Mantra Plaque with stupas: The stupa (Tibetan : choten) is a Buddhist symbolic reliquary monument Note here that the four larger stupas have different bases. Below the stupas is the mantra of Avalokiteshvara : OM MANI PADME HUM. Five original holes for attachment. 12th-16th century.

14 Mantra Plaque: Below a stepped motif suggestive of a stupa is the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, OM MANI PADME HUM followed by the seed syllable of this bodhisattva, HRIH. The seed syllable is what should be first visualized in the meditation for a certain deity or concept, out of which the full visualization grows. Two loops for hanging. 12th-16th century.

15 Fibula : Although a recent secondary use was a hair ornament, this object originally served as a clothing fastener, perhaps for an article of clothing no longer worn in recent times, such as a cloaks or shawl of some sort. The iron pin that secured the closure has now rusted away. The prominently placed stupa form argues for a date within the Buddhist era of Tibet, traditionally initiated in the mid-7th century by king Songtsangompo. Nevertheless, the iconography of birds on a ring, the emphasis on the spirals, and even the omega-shape are all decorative elements of now-lost symbology that may well predate Buddhism. Considering also the function of this object, which long ago became obsolete, it quite possibly dates from the so-called "First Diffusion" of Buddhism during the 7th-9th centuries.

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16 Stupa : Originating in India and intended as a receptacle for venerated remains of the Buddha, the stupa (Tibetan : chöten) is a primary symbol of Buddhism everywhere. Often in Tibetan thokchas the dome and spire components are reduced in relation to the stepped pedestal. This example is topped by Sun-and-moon, symbolic of the union of opposites. Vertical loop behind. 12th-16th century.

17 Conjoined Stupa Triad : Symbolic of the triad of Avalokitehsvara, Manjushri, and Vajrapani. 12th-16th century.

18 Stupa : an unusual piece with dimension, almost like a miniature model of a stupa. 12th-16th century.

19 Stupa Plaque : Here with three conjoined stupas atop a single stepped pedestal. Vertical loop for attachment on reverse. 12th-16th century.

20 Three Conjoined Stupas: Topped by flame-like projections. 12th-16th century.

21 Three Conjoined Stypas: Again with flame-like projections, but, unusually, here with what appears to be a winged figure, perhaps the Khyung, or its Buddhist counterpart Garuda, hovering over the middle stupa. 12th-16th century.

22 Khyung: A Plaque depicting the Tibetan eagle deity gripping the snake held in his beak. Triple gem between the horns. Vertical loop behind. 13th-14th century.

23 Khyung: The Khyung is an ancient Tibetan eagle deity which had evolved into a primary icon of Bon, a primary pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet. early texts reveal that Bon, while chiefly concerned with divination and burial rites, evidently had also absorbed many shamanism and traditional beliefs. The epic myth concerning the Khyung relates its conquest of the separatine spirits of the underground waters, the Lu. In this example, the khyung triumphantly clutches the defeated snake deities in his beak and outstretched anthropomorphic arms. Note that the Khyung also has horns, unlike the Indian sun-bird Garuda, with which the Khyung became fused subsequent to the adoption of Buddhism in Tibet. Two horizontal loops behind. 12th-14th century.

24 Khyung : A more provincial rendition, apparently with a stupa between the horns instead of the much more common triple gem. Buddhist period.

25 Khyung : The wishing jewel Chintamani, which the defeated king of Lu bestowed upon the victorious Khyung, is clearly visible on the head of this version. Two horizontal loops behind. Buddhist period.

26 Peacock : Vehicle and symbol of Amitabha Buddha, the peacock is another animal that entered Tibet with the Buddhist incographic repertoire. Vertical loop added later on reverse. 12th century or after.

27 Khyung : As in most tokchas, the Chintamain, granted to the Khyung after the struggle with the Lu, is here represented as the *triratna*, the triple gem. denoting the Buddha, his followers, and his law. Vertical loop behind. Buddhist period.

28 Khyung : Though somewhat effaced, this pieces conveys a certain majesty with its massive wings. As a result of Nepalese influence, the domination over the Lu is emphasized by the addition (below) of two anthropomorphised snake deities (*nagas*) originally of Indian origin. Two horizontal loops behind. 13th/14th century.

29 Khyung : Standing figure shown pulling the serpent straight down. Of a group associated with northeast Tibet ; see also no. 103. Loop behind, normally absent in this version. 12th/13th century.


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30 Khyung : Worn smooth from continued handling, the talismanic appeal of this piece is evident. Vertical loop behind. Buddhist Period.

31 Khyung : An unusual variant within a pearl roundel. 12th century or after.

32 Khyung : The human-like body and arms of the Khyung are especially evident here in modelled example squatting on a base. The snake is barely visible in relief on the wings. 12th-14th century.

33 Khyung : Here with the moon on the right wing and the sun on the left. Buddhist Period.

34 Khyung-Vajra : In this strange combination of symbols the central vajra appears to have been given the horns and tail of the khyung. See also nos. 50-52. 13th-15th century.

35 Khyung : In this example, though the wings are much reduced, the enlarged claws lend power. Two holes for attachment at the wingtips. Buddhist Period.

36 Khyung : A large squirming snake distinguishes this piece. Two horizontal loops behind. Buddhist Period.

37 Khyung Phurba : Here the body of the khyung has been grafted onto the form of a phurba, the tripartite peg or dagger-like implement used in esoteric Tibetan ritual to symbolically pin down demons. Note (just beneath the khyung) the long-snouted *makara* head from which issues the phurba blade. Vertical loop behind. 14th-16th century.

38 Head of Ram: Sheep and their horns have long had an important place among relations of pastoral peoples of the Himalayas. Due to the ancient reverence in which these animals were held, it is not unusual even today to see rams' horns adorning the entrances of Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim homes and places of worship. Tibet was no different in this regard, and both the ancient Bon religion and Buddhism adopted the ram's skull to some degree in their iconography. Although much worn, this piece can be identified as one of a known type with a stupa between the horns. Vertical loop behind. Buddhist Period.

39 Head of wild Sheep : Unlike the domesticated sheep on no. 38, this example may be identified as the wild blue sheep (Ovis ammon), much rarer in thokchas, by the pronounced coiled horns. pre-Buddhist Period.

40 Tortoise : An exceptionally large example, this thokcha has two bar across the back, as if this piece would have been strung on a strap. Note the odd way in which the head seems to be part of the skylised carapace. The tortoise is associated in many parts of eastern Asia with cosmological ideas of the earth. In Tibet, this includes references in ancient Bon texts of the tortoise as the support of the world. These ideas pre-dating the adoption of Buddhism in Tibet make this type a difficult one to which to assign a date. A pre-11th century designation is not unlikely.

41 Head of Yak or Bull : Just as the bull was once revered in many cattle-breeding culture for its virility, symbolised by the horns, so was the yak in Tibet. Though long ago domesticated by the inhabitants of the Tibetan Plateau, wild yaks still exist there and are known for their tremendous strength. Yaks are mentioned in Bon myths of creation, and yak skulls and horns have continued through the Buddhist period to project and image of potency. Date unknown.

42 Dragon : A rare animal in thokcha form, and a difficult image to evaluate. Possibly pre-Buddhist.

43 Head of Sheep : Here with a vajra-like device atop the head. One of a group ; see also nos. 90, 99. Circa 12th century.

44 Monkey : A traditional belief among Tibetans was that they were descendant from the union or a monkey and a female rock demon. The Buddhist interpretation claimed that the monkey was a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara. Monkey figures such as this one conventionally depict the animal holding an offering fruit or a gem. Typically, as here the figures are cast in a yellowish alloy and a loop for wear as a pendant is on the back. This type illustrated by Tucci in Transhimalaya, figs. 17 and 18. Post-15th century.

45 Monkey : Another example of the flat-faced stylised monkey pendant in the yellowish alloy. Probably post-15th century.

46 Monkey : A unique, animated example, rendered much more naturalistically and not cast in the yellowish alloy typical for this animal., 12th century.

47 Tortoise : Showing the over-sized feet typical of the tortoise tokches. Horizontal bar behind. Date unknown.

48 Monkey on Horseback : Although this animal combination may be interpreted as a Chinese rebus (mashang fenghou: "may you immediately be elevated to the rank of marquis"), the find spots of this figural type (Gansu-Tibet borderlands, Ningxia, Inner Monglia) suggest that there was another meaning for Tibetans and related peoples, perhaps linked with the Tibetan conception of the monkey ancestor. This was a standard type of amulet, but wide variations in patina and details of casting pointing to different moulds suggest an extended period of production.

49 Crouching Feline : In the style of the art of the steppes. Large horizontal 50/51/52. loop behind. 5th-3rd century BCE.


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50/51/52. Three variations related to no. 33 incorporating vajras into conglomerate bird-like forms. All three pieces here have broad tails below.

50 Here the "body" is a circumscribed pair of crossed vajras with flaming triple gem above.

51 Two vajras seperated by rings above, triple gem within the body, "wings" on either side.

52 As in the previous , two vajras and rings but with a symbol otherwise known to the Chinese as a "cash" symbol for the body. Also with wings.

53 Cross : Possibly to be interpreted as crossed vajras. 12th – 16th century.

54 Ring : Very unusual type with two opposing vajras instead of one. 13th-16th century.

55 Shadakshari : Note the fluttering ribbons from the high headdress of this bejewelled bodhisattva. Two knob-like projections behind, possibly for insertion into a travelling shrine. 12th/ 13th century.

56 Amulet : Stitched up leather pouch containing probably prayers written on carefully folded paper bound with multicolored string. Metal figure of Buddha Shakyamuni attached to the front by a leather strip across the chest. 12th-14th century (Buddha figure).

57 Shadakshari : This piece is almost like a small statuette, but with a vertical loop behind for suspension. Circa 14th century.

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58 Padmapani : More like a statuette, this well-rubbed but appealing figure has a lotus peaking from behind either shoulder. The tight dhoti has a floral design. Worn vertical loop behind. Perhaps 11th century.

59 Dakini : The attributes which might have specifically identified this figure are not apparent, but the dance-like position *chapastana*, the body naked save for crown and jewels, and the fierce expression indicate that this figurine is a terrifying form of a female counterpart of a bodhisattva, or dakini. Circa 14th century.

60 Buddha : This iconographic form of Buddha is known as Amogasiddhi, his right hand in the gesture of reassurance, *abhayamudra*. Circa 14th century.

61 Shadakshari : In flat plaque form, surrounded by conforming aureole. Two vertical loops behind. Circa 13th century.

62 Padnapani : This crowned bodhisattva characteristically holds a lotus in his left hand, his right hand in a gesture of beneficence. 11th/12th century.

63 Avalokitishvara : In this version, the bodhisattva stands on a small lotus base, holding a lotus with his left hand and a malla in front of his body with his right hand. The crown ribbons suggest a 13th/14th century date.

64 Skull : The skull symbolised the transient nature of life. This piece, with concave back and two pierced holes on either side, was probably intended as a necklace element. 16th-18th century.

65 Khyung : Unique example in relief on upper portion of reliquary or necklace element. Buddhist Period.

66 Gahu : Solid piece intended as a charm in itself. Two setting for stones now lost. Buddhist Period.

67 Gahu : Concentric petaloid motifs. Setting for stone in centre. Another example of a type that was normally in silver. Buddhist Period.

68 Skull : Bead . 16th-18th century.

69 Head from *Khatvanga:* A *khatvanga* is a wand-shaped ritual implement carried as an attribute by tantric yogins and deities. The most noteworthy of these is Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche as he is known to the Tibetans, who was summoned by king Trisongdetsen in the 8th century to pacify the indigenous demons. The upper portion of the *khatvanga* is composed of three heads: one freshly severed, one decomposing, and one dry (i.e., skull). The tubular indentation on the back of this solid skull indicates where it would have fit onto the shaft of the implement. Circa 18th century.

70 Gahu : Top portion of gahu cast in imitation of silver filigree. Central setting for stone, now lost. Buddhist Period.


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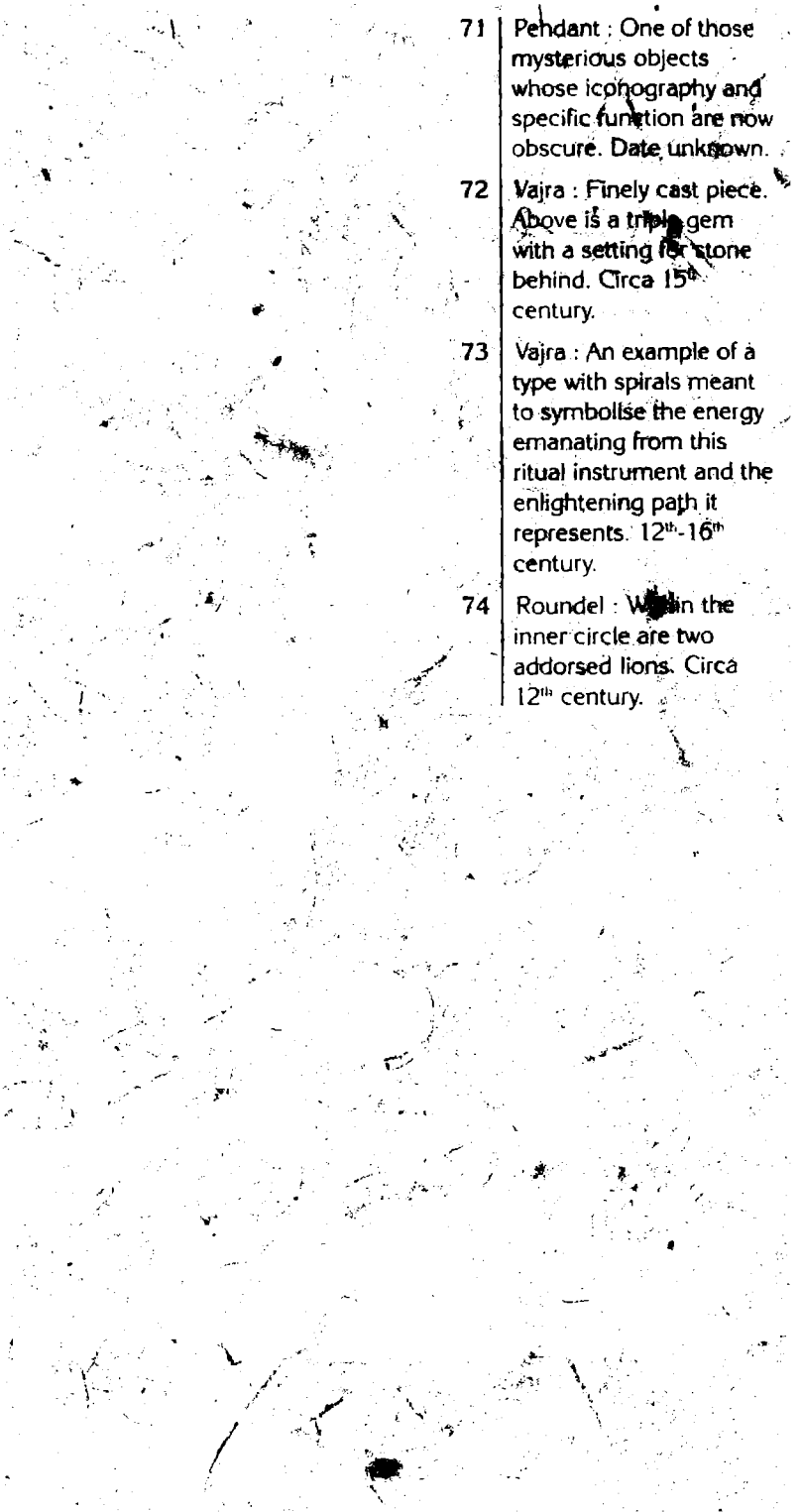

71 Pendant : One of those mysterious objects whose iconography and specific function are now obscure. Date unknown.

72 Vajra : Finely cast piece. Above is a triple gem with a setting for stone behind. Circa 15th century.

73 Vajra : An example of a type with spirals meant to symbolise the energy emanating from this ritual instrument and the enlightening path it represents. 12th-16th century.

74 Roundel : Within the inner circle are two addorsed lions. Circa 12th century.

75 Mould : Interior shows a lama, identified by his pointed cap. Although these moulds were ordinarily intended for making small clay impressions (*tsa-tsa*) for devotional purposes , this particular example is said to have been dipped in a river to produce countless " images" upon the running water. Vertical loop behind. 15th century or after.

76 Mould : For the manufacture of clay offerings (*tsa –tsa*) . Many Buddhists believe that the production of images gains merit ; the more images, the more merit. This example impresses a cluster of stupas from the conical cavities surrounding the following seed syllables (in reverse, of course) : OM (seed syllable of Vairocana) HUM (Akshobya) TRAM (Ratnasambhava).

77 Pendant : Triple gem with beaded outline. Buddhist Period.

78 Triple gem : According to Tibetan Buddhist belief, "taking refuge" in the concept of the triple gem (referring to the Buddha, the Teaching, and the Community) started one on the path of enlightenment. Vertical loop behind. Buddhist Period.

79 Triple gem : Two horizontal loops behind. Buddhist Period.

80 Endless knot " One of the eight auspicious symbols of Tibetan Buddhism, although the origin of this sign is much more ancient. Buddhist Period.

81 Stamp : (clockwise from top) : triple gem, swastika, endless knot, conch; (centre) : sun-and-moon. This type of stamp is claimed to have been used in healing rituals. Vertical loop behind. Buddhist Period.

82 Flaming Triple Gem : Another piece of avian or khyung form with triple gem body, smaller triple gem head (with "horns") , and broad "tail" . Buddhist Period.

83 Conch : Another of the eight auspicious emblems of Tibetan Buddhism, also with an ancient history of symbolism, The conch had ritual uses as a container on the altar and as a trumpet. Horizontal loop behind. 13th century.


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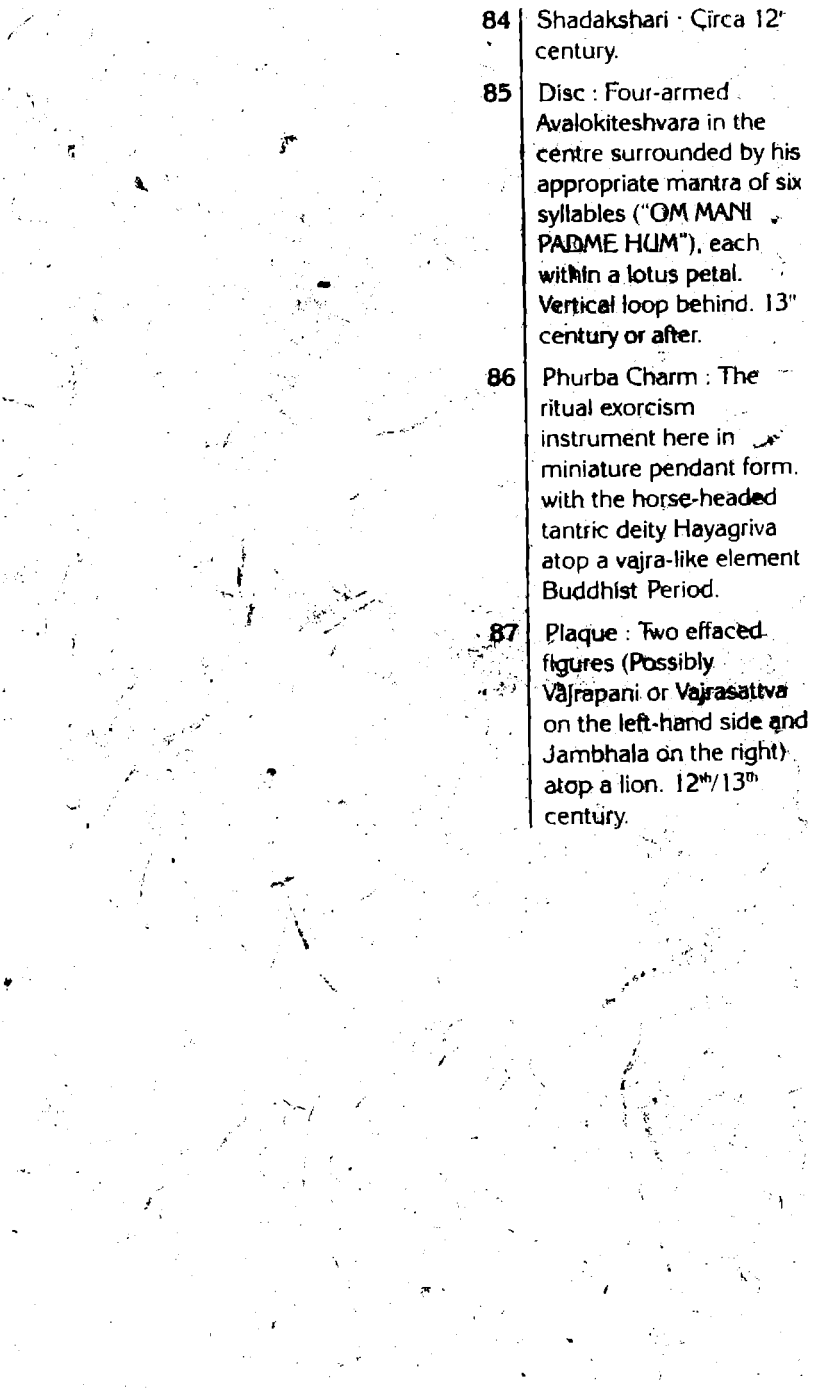

84 Shadakshari · Circa 12th century.

85 Disc : Four-armed Avalokiteshvara in the centre surrounded by his appropriate mantra of six syllables ("OM MANI PADME HUM"), each within a lotus petal. Vertical loop behind. 13th century or after.

86 Phurba Charm : The ritual exorcism instrument here in miniature pendant form, with the horse-headed tantric deity Hayagriva atop a vajra-like element Buddhist Period.

87 Plaque : Two effaced figures (Possibly Vajrapani or Vajrasattva on the left-hand side and Jambhala on the right) atop a lion. 12th/13th century.

88 Animal Plaque : To the right, horned animal atop feline ; to the left, bird atop a coiled snake. 1st-6th century CE.

89 Animal Plaque : A horned animal, which appears to have the hump of a yak, atop a feline, which appears to have the stripes of a tiger, atop a circle enclosing a frog , More clearly than the preceding example, this piece suggests a religion or belief system of some sort. Probably pre-Buddhist ; 1st-6th century CE.

90 Plaque : Two confronted crowned birds or cocks stand on a vajra-like device resting on three circles resembling Chinese cash symbols. Of the same group as nos. 43 and 99. Circa 12th century.

91 Lion Figure : As did the Chinese , the Tibetans became acquainted with the lion as the result of the iconographic complex connected with Buddhism. This small, animated, running figure was probably once attached to clothing or leather. Worn vertical loop behind. Buddhist Period.

92 Lion Figure : Standing with one paw raised , this example probably once had a mirror image opposite, attached to some type of miniature altar. Vertical loop behind, Buddhist Period.


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Buckles: 93/94/95
Each with a monstrous Leonine face emitting streaming jewels or flowers. They are probably early versions of the zeeba (earth spirit often depicted in Tibetan arts) before the iconography became standardised. Later than these examples, the zeeba came to be customarily depicted with prominent horns and a sun-and-moon symbol atop the head, emitting a single jewel and wreathes of foliage held by two human-like hands.

93/94 Essentially the same vaguely pig-like face though positioned differently on their respective buckles. Between the eyes on each is a setting for a stone, now missing, which would have indicated the jewel-like third eye. 11th-13th century.

95 More lion-like than the preceding two examples, this face, with its distinctive brow ridges, bears more of a resemblance to the *kirttimukha* , the apotropaic leonine face of Indian tradition. Note the triple gem atop the head however which is a uniquely Tibetan element. 11th-13th century.

96 Lion : Distinctively styled Tibetan type : Frontally faced, with flame-like mane and tail curling upwards. Two vertical loops behind. Buddhist Period.

97/98 Reclining Lions : Two versions of a genre of extremely stylized leonine talisman in " sphinx-like" pose. In these mysterious objects the facial features of the lions have been deliberately omitted. Hole at either end for attachment. Early Buddhist Period or just before.

99 Plaque : Horseman between two diamond-shaped symbols for wealth and prosperity topped by a vajra-like device. Some Tibetans consider the horseman on this type and similar thokchas to be the epic hero Gesar of Ling. Of the same group as nos. 43, 90. Circa 12th century.

100 Pendant Roundel: Encloses a long-snouted dragon. Smooth green patina. 12th/13th century.

101 Plaque : Within an arched aureole is possibly represented the terrifying goddess palden Lhamo , patron deity of Lhasa and especially dear to the Gelukpa sect. The goddess customarily rides a mule in a sea of blood, holding a vajra-topped club in her right hand and a bowl made from the skull of a child born of incest in the left. 15th/16th century.

102 Roundel : Encloses a lion with a ball, a Buddhist motif particularly favoured by the northern nomads, the Jin and the Mongols. 12th/13th century.

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103 Achala : The iconography of this terrifying deity is shown in the belligerantly striding pose *pratyalidhasana*, with the right hand brandishing a sword, the left in the warning gesture *tarmanimudra*. In this example, on a stepped pedestral, the long ends of fluttering scarves are especially prominent. 13th/14th century.

104 Achala : Even in this smaller , well-worn version the characteristics of this protective deity are still visible. 12th-14th century.

105 Achala : In this lively example the bulging eyes and scowling expression of the deity are particularly observed, Further emphasising his terrifying nature are the snakes across his left shoulder and right hip and the flayed human skin cloak (note that arms tied at the wrists and the dangling hands) knotted at the neck of the deity . 12th/13th century.

106 Vajrapani : Quite worn , but notable in the still-visible details in the scarf and well-modelled proportions of the body and limbs, evidence of the Indian Pala style. Vertical loop behind. 12th/ 13th century.

107 Vighnantaka : Similar to Achala, this figure wields a sword, gestures a warning, and strides in *pratyalidhasana*; the difference being that his stance is performed atop the prostrate body of the elephant-headed Ganesh, the diety regarded by Hindus as the overcomer of obstacles. Vighnantaka literally means "destroyer of obstacles, a reference to the tantric Buddhist conviction that Ganesh himself was one of the problems to be overcome. Circa 13th century.

Three examples of reverse sides showing evidence of single-mold casting and methods of attachment.

Shadakshari : (See no. 55) showing lugs for possible attachment within gahu.

Avalokiteshvara : (See no. 63) showing bars for possible attachment onto strap.

Khyung : (See no. 24) showing on the back of each wing the syllable "A", seed syllable of the speech of the Buddha indicating that which is primordial or unproduced with two horizontal loops for attaching a cord

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108 Ritual Mirror (melong) : Shown here, the decorated side (the other side is smooth), depicting three streams of jewels descending from each of four leonine faces evenly spaced just inside the beaded periphery. Interspersed are four knobbed arcs. The quadripartite theme, appropriate to mirrors as a reflection of the four cardinal points of the cosmos is also seen in the centre. This object would have been used by a tantric magician, oracle, or shaman; someone in touch with the spirit world. Lion heads, used to decorate Buddhist monuments in Gandhara as early as the first few centuries CE, imply a date after the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet. This configuration of leonine heads and streaming elements is also found on the cupolas of bells. Possibly pre-11th century.

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