

### **Himalayan Art: Journeys of Discovery**

Depending on the host institutions choices, visitors to the Rubin Museum's traveling exhibition *Himalayan Art: Journeys of Discovery* will have the opportunity to experience from 30 to 80 objects of Himalayan art on multiple levels and through various interpretive frameworks.

By viewing objects and exhibition material and engaging with integrated components of the larger three-part project, students and the public will be able to place Himalayan art into a broader humanities context and learn about its place within Asia historically and today.

The floor plan of the exhibition shows a pathway through thematic sections modeled on the Rubin Museum's *Gateway to Himalayan Art*. Past experiences of Rubin visitors and input from our academic advisors informed the optimal way to gradually progress and explore the art and culture of the Himalayan regions. Beyond the introductory/orientation area, visitors move from fundamental information about symbolism found in the artworks and objects (Symbols and Meanings module) to their production (Materials and Technologies) and finally to their use in traditional ritual and cultural practices that are still a part of Tibetan Buddhist communities worldwide (Living Practices and Wellbeing). A final display adjacent to the introductory area invites guests to fill out a response/engagement card about a work in the exhibition and hang it on the wall adjacent to the object.

To clarify the walkthrough text below and the layout of the exhibition, we have provided:

- A color-coded floor plan of the exhibition that defines each area and its distinct components, including placement of a looking guide brochure.
- Illustrations accompanying the floor plan that give the look and feel of the space. Illustration 200 suggests a study or reading area where host museums can make available copies of *Himalayan Art in 108 Objects*.
- Two installation views and object examples within the walkthrough text
- Examples of graphics and interpretive texts that specify the means for presenting information. Many contain icons that identify additional content of the audio guide, digital resources, and companion educator's guide. Wall labels include object titles in English, Tibetan, and Sanskrit (depending on the object's cultural region).

We will present all video material with closed captions and provide audio guide transcripts and select verbal audio description. We will collaborate with design teams to ensure all materials produced at the venue are high-contrast and accessible to readers.

### **Introductory Space**

Upon entering the exhibition, the visitors will encounter an **interactive map of Asia on a touch screen**, which will orient them to the breadth of the cultural sphere of Himalayan art. Audiences can explore six distinct cultural areas that often overlapped over the course of time, including Tibetan and Mongolian regions, Nepal, Bhutan, parts of Northern India, Pakistan, and Western China. The map will invite the audience to explore the art of each of these regions, **connecting** them to the **digital platform** and through it to the rich contents of the entire Project Himalayan Art program, expanding their experiences beyond the exhibition.

Visitors will read a concise **introductory text panel** to take in the main goals and organization of the exhibition and understand their options of **engaging with the objects** on view: a headphones sign indicates audio guide content, QR code links to diverse digital content accessible on personal mobiles

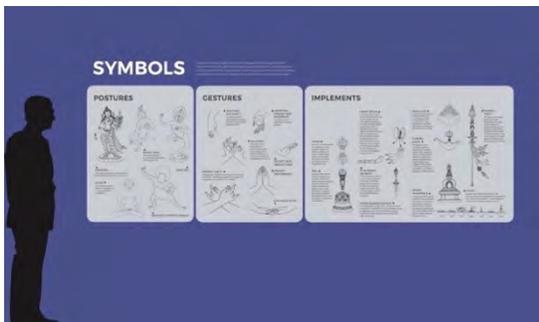
devices or remotely online, and branching tree icons refer to humanities subject studies connections. Visitors can pick up the **publication** *Himalayan Art in 108 Objects* and activate the digital platform on their personal devices to discover **multiple paths of inquiry** into the regions' cultural connections provided by these two resources of the larger project. Guests may return here to explore more and expand their knowledge and gain a broader context through the materials provided by the publication and the exhibition.

### 1. Symbols and Meanings

This section begins the exhibition's **thematic areas of focus** presented as **modules**. Here the visitors will **see** a concise but comprehensive presentation of the main types of figures and symbols found in Himalayan **hanging scroll (thangka) paintings and sculptures**. They will discover Himalayan Art's **symbolic language** expressed through its visual rules, or **iconography**.

A **graphic panel** with a traditional Tibetan **line drawing** and an **explanatory text** introduces each of the primary figural types: Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Tantric Deities, Female Deities, and Wrathful Deities. Each of the section topic panels with simple drawings of figural forms are near representative artworks that embody these iconographic forms. Here visitors will learn the meaning of the fundamental concepts inherent in buddhas (awakened beings), bodhisattvas, (beings who strive to achieve enlightenment for the sake of others), wrathful deities (protectors who seem terrifying but whose wrath is directed to overcoming obstacles), and so forth. Regardless of previous knowledge, the audience will gain a clear understanding of the essential elements of Himalayan figural types by reading the explanation of its meaning and viewing the painted and sculpted examples. These figural forms are **essential elements** necessary for the understanding of the larger and deeper **ideas represented in Himalayan art**.

The guests will also **see** how this visual language is applied in **portraits**: legendary masters and practitioners (mahasiddhas), arhats (the monastics believed to be the first disciples of the Buddha), and teachers (Indian and Tibetan teachers who gathered and passed down their knowledge through generations).



Symbols graphic panel, after *Gateway to Himalayan Art*, Rubin Museum of Art

By studying the Symbols didactic panel, visitors will learn the symbolic meaning of the typical postures, hand gestures, and implements present in artworks, thus expanding their **visual vocabulary** to recognize and further absorb the ideas that objects represent. By understanding this visual language, audiences will feel more confident looking at and engaging with the Himalayan works of art.

They can also pick up a printed copy or download the **Looking Guide booklet** that combines the key graphic components of the exhibition. Visitors can choose to

**listen** to an **audio guide**, accessible on personal mobile devices, and hear the **voices from the Himalayan community** who bring their personal perspectives from the **living tradition** into the exhibition's space. This will add another dimension to guests' engagement with these objects and extend the exhibition beyond the walls of the gallery.



Buddha Shakyamuni  
Tibet; 19th century  
Pigments on cloth  
Rubin Museum of Art, Gift of  
Shelley and Donald Rubin  
Foundation  
F1996.27.5 (HAR 501)

Students and visitors will be able to further explore these broad categories and concepts for their lesson assignments or personal learning. Using QR codes on object labels they can access relevant essays from the publication *Himalayan Art in 108 Objects* on the digital resources platform and much more, either on their own devices during the visit, at home, or in classrooms.

For example, for a deeper thematic exploration of the figure of the Buddha (checklist no. 1.1, 1.2) they can use **an audio guide** entry, multiple examples on the **digital platform**, and essays from the **publication** (publication no. 6, 10, 15, 17, 22, 27, 31, 59, 68, 93, 108). These reveal that the gesture of the Buddha touching the ground captures a moment just before his full awakening, or enlightenment.

Even though the image is static, this gesture alone tells a story of the Buddha's struggle with Mara, a demon representing the illusion and all afflictive emotions that prevent a mind from grasping the true nature of reality. This specific instance of breaking through the illusion as the result of a long meditative process and mental concentration is the goal of all Buddhist practices and mind trainings, as well as contemporary secular **contemplative practices** inspired by them, such as the insight meditation. The Buddha images in the exhibition can become focal

points of discussion in classes on **mindfulness, Buddhism, and philosophy**. Students and educators can connect to a companion **educators' guide** directed by the branching tree icons located on object labels. This experience can be customized for host venues and universities.

In proximity to the Buddha images the visitors will also **see** both **sculptural** and **painted examples** of bodhisattvas who are portrayed adorned with crowns, jeweled ornaments, and wearing garments of ancient Indian royalty (checklist no. 1.3, 1.4).

With the help of the graphic panel depicting a simple traditional **iconographic line drawing, explanatory text, and an audio guide**, visitors will learn what the bodhisattva's appearance signifies in relation to images of the buddha. Bodhisattvas can be male or female persons who aspire to attain enlightenment and help others to achieve it. They delay their own awakening to **work in the world for the benefit of others** using their specific abilities revealed in their appearances or attributes they hold. Students and the public can **hear** from the Buddhist practitioners who have taken a bodhisattva vow and listen to joys and challenges they have faced in their practice.

Audiences will also be able to unpack related and rich content using the **digital platform** and the **publication**, discovering how distinctive representations found in Himalayan art fit into the larger picture of Buddhist visual culture. For instance, accessing the publication's content using a QR code on the label, they will realize that the ideal of a bodhisattva played a role in **political and social contexts**. From an essay



Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha  
Tibet; 17th century  
Gilt copper alloy  
Rubin Museum of Art, Gift  
of Shelley and Donald  
Rubin Foundation  
F1997.12.4 (HAR 700040)

about the seat of the Tibetan government, the Potala Palace they will learn that it was constructed as the physical abode of the bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteshvara, to reinforce the right to rule by the Dalai Lamas, who are considered the embodiments of this deity (publication object no. 69). From an entry about a painted portrait of the Qianlong Emperor (1736–1795) of China, who was inspired by Tibetan Buddhism, they will understand that he assumed the guise of the bodhisattva of Wisdom, Manjushri, to empower his rule over his conquered multiethnic empire (publication object no. 83).

2. In the following section, **Materials and Technologies**, audiences will **see** a very different presentation, one that focuses their attention on the **material aspects** of the Himalayan art forms. They will encounter objects that demonstrate **technologies of art production** and learn about the main **mediums** and **processes** in which Himalayan art is created.



Installation view of The Stages of Lost Wax Metal Casting, Ruben Museum of Art, *Gateway to Himalayan Art*.

For example, in a special installation they will discover how the metal sculpture is created in a method called lost wax casting (checklist no. 2.15). While looking at **six distinct pieces** that represent the stages of this process and **photographs** that connect the stages, students and visitors can consult the **graphics** illustrating the **explanatory text** and engage their preferred methods of learning either by reading the text and **looking** at graphics, or examining the photographs and physical objects on view, or both. They will also be able to **view** and **listen** to a **Nepalese artist's explanation** of this artistic practice, which will be available on an **adjacent screen and online** via a QR code that links to the digital resources platform.

If students wish to expand their exploration of **sculpture making** technologies further in **historical and cross-cultural contexts**, they can access the essay in the **publication** *Himalayan Art in 108 Objects* that focuses on artworks in Nepal (publication object no. 46) created using the lost-wax casting method in past centuries. They can also access essays that describe known sites in Tibet and Mongolian regions where statues were made using the repoussé technique (publication objects no. 9; 60; 84). In these examples of historic objects and sites the visitors learn that **artists** and their **technological skills** also **travelled** with them.

Students and other guests will discover another **technology for making sculpture** that utilizes clay as the main medium by **viewing** clay objects in the exhibition. They will learn that clay used to be the medium for creating tree-dimensional images in Himalayan regions from the ancient to the present times. Visitors and students can access relevant essays in the publication that present historical and contemporary examples of this **living artistic practice** (publication essays no. 63; 76). Nowadays a distinct artistic tradition of clay sculpture flourishes in Bhutan (publication essay no. 102). QR codes will direct audience members to the **digital resources** platform, where they can **read** these entries and **watch videos** of Bhutanese artists working in clay.

When visitors move to the adjacent installation demonstrating the stages of Tibetan **thangka painting** (checklist no. 2.13), they will appreciate that this is a complex process, concisely explained through **commissioned objects** and **explanatory text**. They will learn that artists first study iconometry, or the

rules of proportions, and train to draw within a grid each the figural types that visitors have learned about in the Symbols and Meanings section of the exhibition.



Installation view of The Stages of Tibetan Thangka Painting, Rubin Museum of Art, *Gateway to Himalayan Art*.

A case displaying artists' tools, minerals used for making pigments, sticks of animal glue, and a primed cotton canvas will give the visitors a **view** of authentic **tools and materials** used in creating thangka paintings. Visitors will be able to move through each stage of the process while **reading** explanatory texts that accompany the successive examples illustrating the method: from iconometric drawing, to filling-in base colors, shading and outlining, painting the central figure, face, and eyes, and concluding with the framing of the painting in a traditional textile mount. They will get a glimpse into the **working artistic practice** of Tibetan painters by

**watching** an accompanying video of an artist creating a painting at the Norbulingka Art Institute in the Tibetan community in India.

To expand their understanding of iconometry in its historical context, visitors can use a QR code to access an essay in the **publication** about a seventeenth-century book of iconometric drawings (publication object no. 70) created during the time of codification and control of knowledge by the government of the Dalai Lamas. Through this example, they will learn how visual rules helped strengthen political rule.

**Art students** will especially appreciate this installation. For their classes, they can use the QR codes and branching tree icons to access a **time lapse video of the process** and **listen to an interview** of a thangka painter from the Himalayan community about the process, which brings the theory to life in a relatable contemporary framework on the **digital platform**.

**3.** In the concluding section, **Living Practices and Wellbeing**, visitors will learn **why** Himalayan art and ritual objects are created and discover their various **uses** in living cultural practices for secular and religious wellbeing. In this section **in-depth interpretive texts** and the **first-person perspectives** of practitioners and people from Himalayan communities will allow students and visitors to engage with the **current cultural practices** and **community celebrations** and learn how the traditional values function in **contemporary times**, contributing to **mental and physical wellbeing**.



Handheld Prayer Wheel  
Central Tibet; Early 20th Century  
Silver, wood  
Rubin Museum of Art  
Gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin  
SC2012.7.2

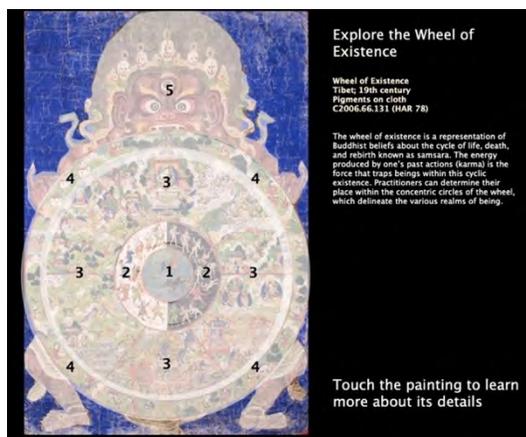
In addition to **thangka paintings** and **sculptures**, they will see **ritual implements** used in Buddhist practices and further understand the **ritual and social context** of many of these objects, including an iconic Buddhist object of a stupa (checklist no. 3.1, 3.2, 3.10). They will learn that not only monastics, but **lay people** use ritual items, such as prayer wheels (checklist no. 3.9), which are believed to release prayers contained within

with each turning of the wheel. This action is intended to **benefit all**, including the person who turns the wheel. Using QR codes to engage the **digital platform**, visitors will **see** and **hear** people reciting mantras, walking around stupas while spinning the prayer wheels and how they **work collectively** to turn very large prayer wheels to accumulate **merit**, one of the fundamental Buddhist notions.

As the visitors look at the painted image of the goddess White Tara, the deity associated with long life, read the accompanying **label text**, and **listen** on the **audio guide to a personal story** of commissioning a similar Tara painting from an artist, they will appreciate that most of Himalayan art is created through commissions for **specific purposes**.

In this case, the White Tara painting's inscription (checklist no. 3.13) states that it was made to extend the longevity of a patron or a person for whose sake the painting was solicited. Likewise, from the first person's contemporary account the visitors will **hear** that a patron has conferred with their religious teacher, arranged for the performance of rituals and relevant prayers at a monastery, and consulted with a doctor and astrologer to ensure the best positive results. Such **holistic approaches to wellbeing** are traditional in Himalayan culture and would be of interest to students and visitors who are attracted to holistic **life practices, natural methods of healing, and astrology**.

The audiences will also be able to further delve into these subjects by accessing relevant publication essays using the **digital platform** via QR codes. For instance, an essay about an illuminated manuscript on astrological divination, "The White Beryl" (publication object no. 82), illustrates and prescribes what to do for any of life's eventuality depending on an individual's birth information. Students interested in **wellness** will find an essay on Tibetan medical paintings (publication object no. 71) especially illuminating. They will find out that in Himalayan cultures food, environment, and lifestyle were always **integral to healing**. They will also learn that Tibetan medicines include herbal, mineral, and other organic compounds. Tibetan medical pharmacology developed over centuries, incorporating ancient, regional, and **ongoing practical knowledge**.



Screen capture of the digital interactive "The Wheel of Existence"

Any contemporary audience will find the notion that **everything is interdependent** particularly relevant today. Students and visitors will become acquainted with this fundamental concept of **Buddhist philosophy** and practice when they **see** the thangka painting depicting the Wheel of Existence (checklist no. 3.29). This painting, often located at the entrances to temples, serves as a **codified didactic tool** for instruction about the interdependence in the context of worldly existence.

By studying this **painted diagram** with the help of a **digital interactive** accessible via QR code, visitors will learn how mental poisons—afflictive emotions of anger, attachment, and ignorance—continually propel beings to live in the environments of existential suffering. The painting also explains the Buddha's breakthrough

realization of this cycle's **causality**, or **karma**, depicting the links of dependent origination that pave the path to liberation. A QR code will also guide the visitors to additional materials on resources platform, including a related publication essay (publication no. 99) and **personal stories of interdependence**.

In a similar manner, the audiences will be able to **see** the objects and using their own mobile devices via QR codes and the digital platform, **hear** the voices of the Himalayan community. They will **learn through interaction** about narrative thangka paintings that illustrate important aspects of religious **ethics**, **meditative practices** that use images to focus the mind, appreciate special aspects of **ritual**, **worship**, and artistic **patronage**.

Students and the public can experience these objects as they would be displayed in a **traditional cultural setting** by entering a **Shrine Room** installation. In this **immersive** space, defined by a wall color different from that of the main gallery, visitors will **see** the sculptures of the Buddha, bodhisattvas, and deities in a Shrine cabinet, with symbolic offerings in front. A textile banner depicting other traditional offerings and auspicious symbols adorns the space, making it suitable for daily practices, contemplation, and rituals. They will **hear** the recording of Tibetan mantras being chanted, **smell** (unlit) incense, and conclude their journey through Himalayan art.

If the hosting institution does not choose this installation to be part of the exhibition, the visitors can access a streamed video of the Rubin Museum’s Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room and its interactive, which will bring this experience to them via digital means.

With the help of the **key resource**, **the digital platform**, students and the public will be able to enrich their engagement with the exhibition by accessing relevant information on their personal devices. The structure of this platform will take advantage of the digital information formats to allow access through familiar means, using QR codes and hyperlinks, interactives, animations, videos, and audio/podcasts. With the access to the digital platform, visitors will expand the exhibition’s context through geographic range, historical depth, and thematic variety of the publication’s 108 select objects.

With these tools, general audiences and students can revisit the exhibition’s experiences from home or the classroom, and meaningfully incorporate their learning into their lives.

### Response Station

Before leaving the exhibition, the visitors can choose to **identify their favorite objects** in the exhibition by filling out response cards provided at this station and hanging these next to an object they liked in the gallery. They can also do this via their mobile devices or from a classroom or home on their computers by “liking” it and writing a comment. They can write what they thought, what they’ve learned, and how the artwork affected them. Documenting and sharing their responses will allow students and visitors to **participate**, **feel more connected**, and take away their shared personal experiences. This will also allow the museum to gather qualitative evaluations on the most effective parts of the exhibition.



Screen capture of the digital interactive “Narrative Paintings”



The Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room installation detail, Rubin Museum of Art, 2019.

Rubin Museum of Art  
Attachment 5: Walkthrough  
Interpretive Text Examples

**Introduction**

*Himalayan Art: Journeys of Discovery* provides an entry point into the art and culture of the Himalayan Mountain range, including Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan, as well as the interrelated traditions of India, Mongolia, and China. Himalayan art is overwhelmingly religious, and images play a prominent role in cultural practices. *Journeys of Discovery* introduces the fundamental visual language of Himalayan art, including the types of figures, gestures, and symbols and their meanings; the materials and technologies used in creating works of art; and the living practices and intentions for commissioning these works in the context of secular and sacred well-being. This exhibition provides essential tools for approaching Himalayan art and opportunities to continue finding richer meanings and connections to our own everyday lives.

To fully engage with the exhibition and find additional information, use QR codes to access digital resources on your mobile device, audio icons to listen to an audio guide, and branching out tree icons to connect objects to additional topics.

**Symbols and Meanings module**

***Buddha (section topic text, includes an audio guide and branching tree icons)***

The Buddha, meaning awakened person, was known as Shakyamuni, and he lived and taught sometime between the sixth and fourth century BCE in northcentral India. Over time Buddhist ideas and practices expanded the concept of the buddha and awakening. In addition to the original Buddha, there are buddhas of the past and future, as well as buddhas who can simultaneously manifest in different forms and directions.

Buddhas are usually depicted with the marks of a great being: a cranial protuberance (*ushnisha*), a tuft of hair between the eyebrows (*urna*), and long earlobes. They often wear monk's robes and display symbolic gestures (*mudra*) with their hands. The Buddha is commonly represented sitting cross-legged, with one hand touching the ground or with both hands in a teaching gesture. Standing buddhas typically display the gesture for granting blessings or indicating do not fear.

**Materials and Technologies module**

**Lost Wax Technique of Hollow Metal Casting**

***(Text for the installation of the art-making process, aided by photographs, graphics, and a video of the process)***

The lost wax technique of hollow metal casting, perfected by Newar craftsmen of Kathmandu Valley, has remained a thriving practice from ancient times to the present day.

Stage 1: Artisans start by creating a wax model. They melt a combination of bee's wax, vegetable oil, and tree resin into sheets from which parts of the whole figure are molded. These pieces are put together to make a wax version of the figure that would be cast.

Rubin Museum of Art  
Attachment 5: Walkthrough  
Interpretive Text Examples

Stage 2: Next, they make the clay mold by coating the inside and outside of the wax figure with several layers of fine and course clay. The first layer, mixed with cow dung, is the most important for ensuring the best casting. This is the longest stage, as each layer must dry before the next one can be applied. The course clay is mixed with rice husks and applied in layers. When the clay mold has dried, the artisan makes an opening at the base so the melted wax can be poured out and molten metal poured in.

Stage 3: The actual casting process begins by melting the wax figure and draining it out of the mold. Once drained of wax, the clay mold is baked, making it hard and ready to receive the molten metal.

Stage 4: Hot metal is poured into the mold. Once it cools, the craftsmen break the mold to reveal the metal sculpture inside.

Stage 5: They weld the rough metal statue to fix any casting imperfections, chisel it to reveal details, then buff and gild the surface. Each task requires specialized skills and is performed by several craftsmen.

Stage 6: At the final stage, artists paint and decorate the sculpture with semi-precious stones, and the statue is ready for consecration.

**Living Practices and Well-Being module**

***Merit (section topic text, includes an audio guide sign)***

In Himalayan cultures merit is an overarching reason for creating, commissioning, dedicating, and using religious works of art. Tied closely to the concept of karma, merit is an investment in the future that can bring about results in this lifetime or future ones. The creation of religious objects is a meritorious activity dedicated to the benefit of all. Sometimes paintings are commissioned and dedicated to ensure a fortunate rebirth for deceased loved ones, or to increase the potential of a living person leading a long life free of sickness and obstacles. Merit is also accumulated just by looking at sacred objects and praying to the deity or buddha represented.

**Living Practices and Well-Being module**

***Object label text related to section topic of Merit, includes a QR code for access to digital content:***

**Merit**

***Sitatapatra***

Tibet; dated 1864

Pigments on cloth

Rubin Museum of Art

F1996.18.1 (HAR 468)

Sitatapatra, a female Buddhist deity associated with protection and the deterrence of obstacles in everyday life, is equipped with ten million eyes that watch over those in need. She carries a white

Rubin Museum of Art  
Attachment 5: Walkthrough  
Interpretive Text Examples

parasol symbolizing benevolent protection, and the various implements in her thousand hands each signify a specific benefit. She tramples personifications of overcome obstacles under her feet.

An inscription in Ranjana script at the bottom of the painting records that it was commissioned in 1864 in Tibet by a loving husband—likely a Newar of the Kathmandu Valley—on behalf of and in honor of his late wife, Lakshmi. This commission was intended to increase merit for the deceased and remove obstacles to ensure a better rebirth in her next life.

***Object label text related to section topic of Narration, includes a branching out sign:***

**Narration**

***Buddha Shakyamuni and Teaching Stories (Avadana)***

Central Tibet; 19th century

Pigments on cloth

Rubin Museum of Art

F1996.27.1 (HAR 494)

Tales of Buddha Shakyamuni's past lives are well-known in Himalayan culture. They are often presented in series of paintings, with each painting illustrating several of the 108 stories.

Buddha Shakyamuni is seated on a lotus, holding a begging bowl in his left hand, and making the gesture of giving with his right hand. Landscape elements separate the narrative scenes arranged around the central image. The scenes illustrate his teaching stories about principles of causality (karma) and depict episodes from his previous lives and his last human life in which he became the Buddha. Narratives begin at the lower right and move in clockwise direction and offer an explanation of cause and effect regarding building stupas, an account of King Punyabala's generosity, and the story of the trials of Kunala, King Ashoka's son. They correspond to tales fifty-seven through fifty-nine.