

OBJECT GUIDE



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EMBODYING THE HOLY

ICONS IN EASTERN
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY
AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM



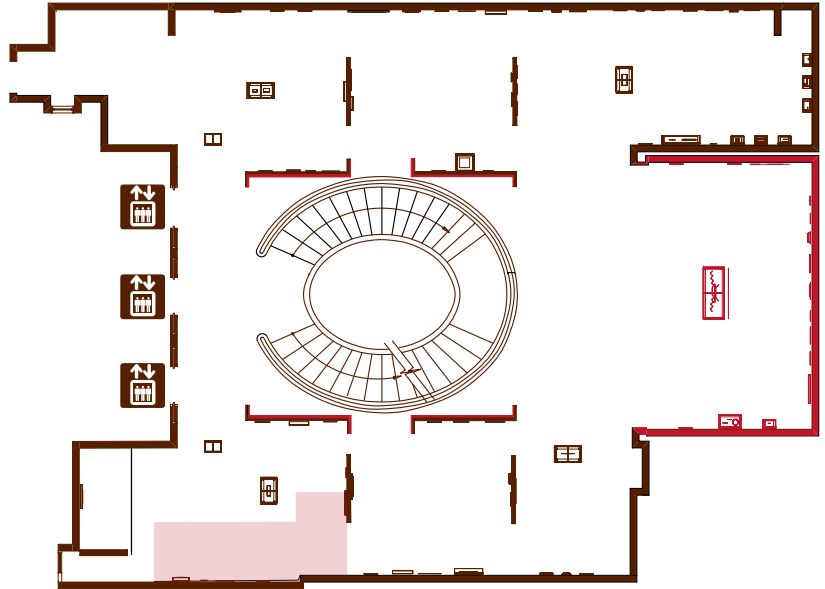
EMBODYING THE HOLY

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This booklet is a guide to the individual works on view in this exhibition. Each object has been assigned a number that appears beside it in the gallery. Those numbers correspond to the entries in this booklet. Throughout the text there are references to other objects to provide additional details and draw connections between works of art on opposite sides of the gallery.

THE TRIADS

Nos 1-4



1 The Old Testament Trinity

Byzantium; 14th century

Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel

Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Also known as the Hospitality of Abraham, this icon depicts the Old Testament Trinity, with the Christian forefather Abraham and his wife, Sarah, partaking in a common meal with the Holy Trinity, who appear to them as three youths. This meal is viewed by the Orthodox Church as the antecedent to the Holy Eucharist, which represents the very essence of the Christian liturgy.

2 The New Testament Trinity

Crete, Greece; early 16th century

Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel

Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

This work serves as a visual representation of the Christian doctrine of God existing as three separate “persons” but having a singular essence or nature. God the Father, represented as an old man, and Christ the Son, holding the Gospel, are seated on a throne, while the Holy Spirit hovers above them in the form of a dove.

3 The New Testament Trinity with the Mother of God (Triptych)

Greek Asia Minor; 18th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

This icon shows the Virgin Mary, or Mother of God, as the support of the Holy Trinity. Christ the Son and God the Father are holding the orb of the cosmos. Above them the Holy Spirit is depicted as a dove. Below, the Virgin is shown with her hands gesturing in the attitude of prayer. This triptych is completed with images of saints on the two flanking panels.

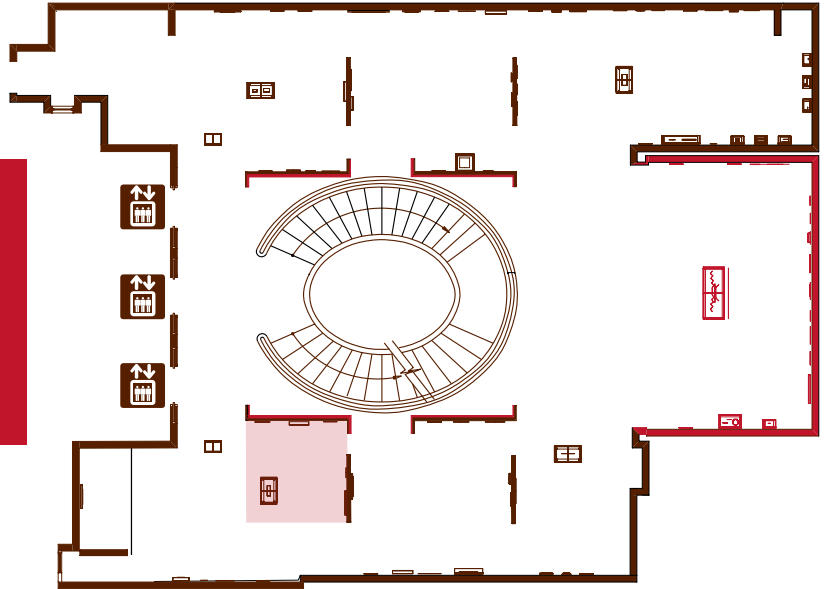
4 Padmasambhava

Tibet; 19th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
FI997.12.1 (HAR 188)

The three small images at the top of this painting, together with the central image of the great teacher Padmasambhava, illustrate the concepts of the primordial buddha (*adibuddha*) and the three divine bodies (*trikaya*), characteristic of both Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism. An *adibuddha* is a self-originating buddha of whom all other buddhas and divine beings are emanations. The three divine bodies represent the three aspects of buddhahood. At the top center is Samantabhadra, the *adibuddha* of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism. To his right is Buddha Amitabha, who represents the first of the three divine bodies, the Body of Absolute Reality. To his left is the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, a manifestation of Amitabha, symbolizing the Body of Glory. Padmasambhava, as an embodiment of Avalokiteshvara, personifies in this case the Body of Manifestation. ✨

SUPERNATURAL POWERS

Nos 4-9



4 Padmasambhava

Tibet; 19th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
F1997.12.1 (HAR 188)

Padmasambhava is the historical patriarch of Tantric Buddhism in Tibet, having brought the tradition to the region in the eighth century. He was attributed with having supernatural powers, which he used specifically to defeat the forces opposing the establishment of the faith. In this painting he bears the attributes of his canonical image and is flanked by his tantric consorts. The lotus flower is a symbol of immaculateness as well as a reminder of Padmasambhava's birth from a lotus. The rainbow represents the "rainbow body" attained by this guru.

5 Prophet Elias

Russia; late 16th or early 17th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

In this work the Prophet Elias (Elijah) is depicted wearing the clothes of an ascetic. Christian orthodoxy distinguishes him as the supreme example that God's nature is revealed through the wondrous lives and deeds of his saints and prophets. Elias is associated with natural phenomena like fire, thunder, and lightning.

6 Saint Spyridon the Thaumaturge

Ionian Islands, Greece
Late 17th or early 18th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Saint Spyridon (3rd–4th century), a bishop in Cyprus, was instrumental in defeating the false heresy of Aryanism, which questioned the divinity of Jesus, at the First Council of Nicaea. He is thus considered one of the founding fathers of the Orthodox Church. After his death his remains were proven to be miraculous, performing wondrous cures and alleviating human suffering.

7 Saint Nicholas

Russia; ca. 1880
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel; silver
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

Saint Nicholas (270-346), the Miracle Worker, is associated with special powers of protection and many miracles are attributed to his intercession. He is the patron saint of Russia and of travelers and sailors. In this icon he wears a bishop's stole. His right hand is raised in blessing and in his left he holds the Gospel.

8 Mahasiddha Ghantapa

Tibet; 18th century
Pigments on cloth
Collection of Shelley and Donald Rubin
PI995.18.1 (HAR 173)

Ghantapa, one of eighty-four great adepts (*mahasiddhas*) of Indian Tantric Buddhism, sits facing an elaborate banquet prepared by his consort. He wears bone ornaments and holds in his hands a *vajra*, or ritual scepter; its corresponding bell, and a double-sided hand drum. He is surrounded by other tantric adepts.

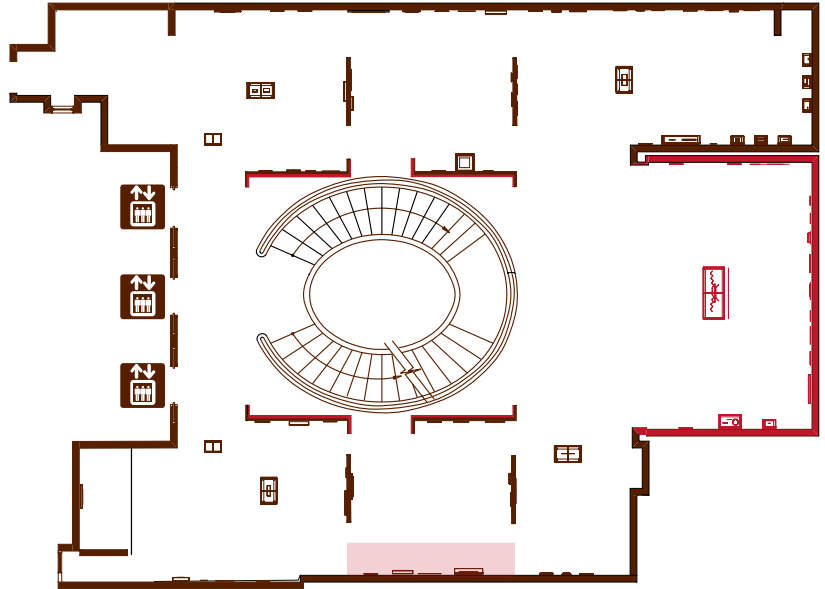
9 Saint Nicholas (Triptych)

Russia; later 17th or early 18th century
Tempera on wood panel with
silver and iron; leather
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

Saint Nicholas (No. 7) is depicted in the middle panel of this icon wearing the vestment of an Orthodox bishop. He displays the gesture of conferring a blessing and holds an open book of the Gospel. Above him, in the crown of the triptych, the New Testament Trinity (No. 2) is shown. The lateral panels illustrate scenes from the saint's life. ✨

DIVINE WISDOM

Nos 10–12



10 Saint Sophia, “The Wisdom of God”

Russia; ca. 1625

Tempera on wood panel

Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

Saint Sophia, who is personified as a female winged figure bearing a scepter, represents God’s Holy Wisdom. At her sides are the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. At the upper center, Christ the Pantokrator, or Almighty, extends his hands in a blessing while two angels (top) unroll a band depicting the altar of the Apocalypse.

11 Buddha Shakyamuni and Prajnaparamita

Tibet; 13th century

Pigments and ink on paper

Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, MD

Gift of John and Berthe Ford
(HAR 73811)

This manuscript page is the opening of the *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra*, or *Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Verses*, illuminated with Buddha Shakyamuni (left) and Prajnaparamita (right), a personification of the text or an embodiment of its teaching. Prajnaparamita was one of the earliest female deities to enter Mahayana Buddhism, in which she is called the Mother of All Buddhas.

12 Manjushri

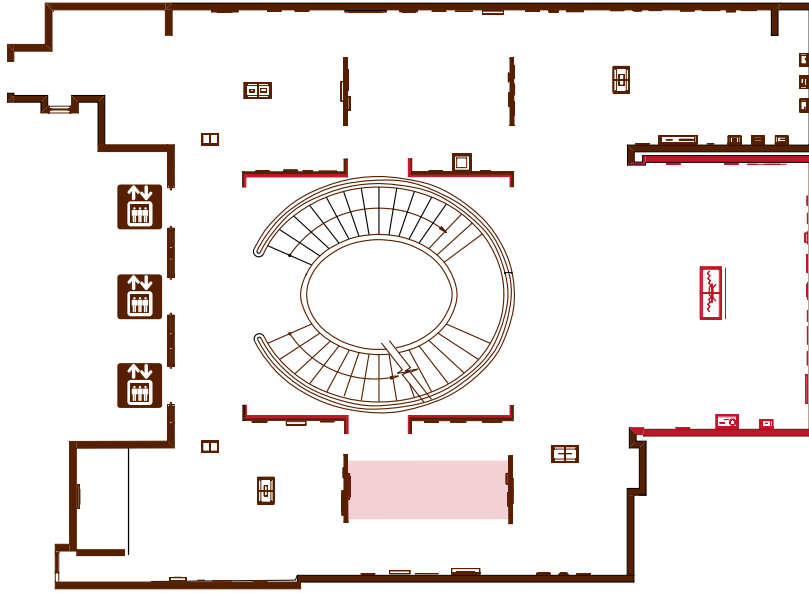
Tibet; 19th century

Pigments on cloth

Rubin Museum of Art

C2006.66.464 (HAR 925)

Manjushri is the Bodhisattva of Divine Wisdom, representing the infinite and eternal wisdom of the buddhas. He holds in his right hand the sword that tears the veil of spiritual ignorance, while above his left shoulder appears the book of the perfection of wisdom (*prajnaparamita*) that, together with universal compassion, is one of the agents conducive to realizing nirvana. ✨



THE FOUNDERS

Nos 13-14

13 Pantokrator of Smolensk

Russia; ca. 1670

Tempera on wood panel

Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

This depiction of Jesus in full length is often called the Pantokrator, or Almighty, of Smolensk. His right hand is blessing the believers in front of him while in his left he presents the Gospel with the words: "Stop judging by appearances, but judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Above him two angels hold the instruments of his suffering and death, often referred to as his Passion. Below are Saint Cyril of the White Lake and Saint Cyril of the New Lake.

14 Buddha Shakyamuni Returning from Tushita Paradise

Mongolia; 18th century

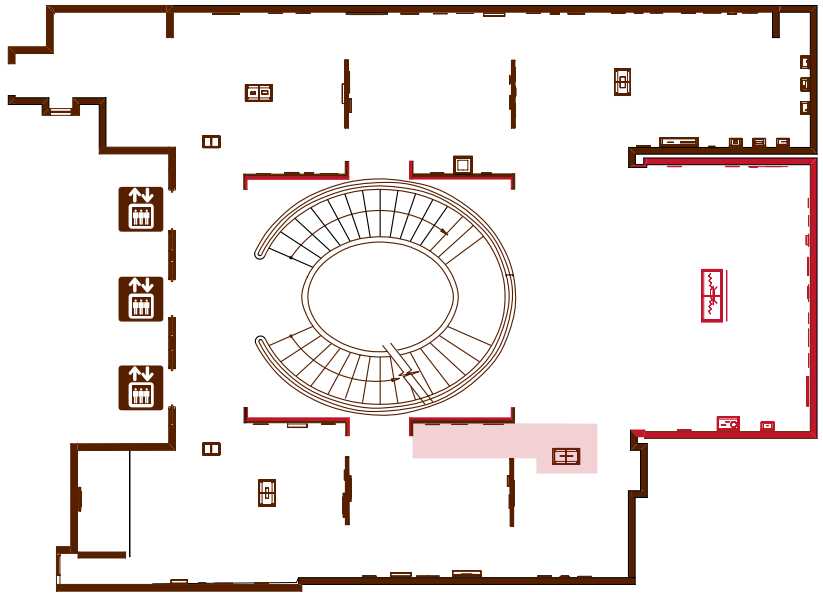
Pigments on cloth

Collection of Robert and Lois Baylis
(HAR 90317)

This *thangka* depicts the descent to earth of Buddha Shakyamuni on his return from the Tushita Paradise, or, according to some sources, the Trayastrimsha Paradise. He traveled there to preach his doctrine to the heavenly beings, including his mother (No. 27) who passed away seven days after his birth. His return to earth marks one of the four major festivals of Tibetan Buddhism. ✨

LOVE AND COMPASSION

Nos 15-17



15 Four-armed Avalokiteshvara

Tibet; 14th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
C2002.8.1 (HAR 65080)

This painting depicts the “Four-armed Lord Who Looks Down,” one of the forms of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. His six-syllable mantra is the most popular in the Tibetan Buddhist world. He can be seen holding the wish-fulfilling jewel in his folded hands, a symbol of the realization of buddhahood. The surrounding vignettes show buddhas, deities, teachers, and other figures related to the central image.


16 The Virgin with the Infant Christ Close to Her Heart

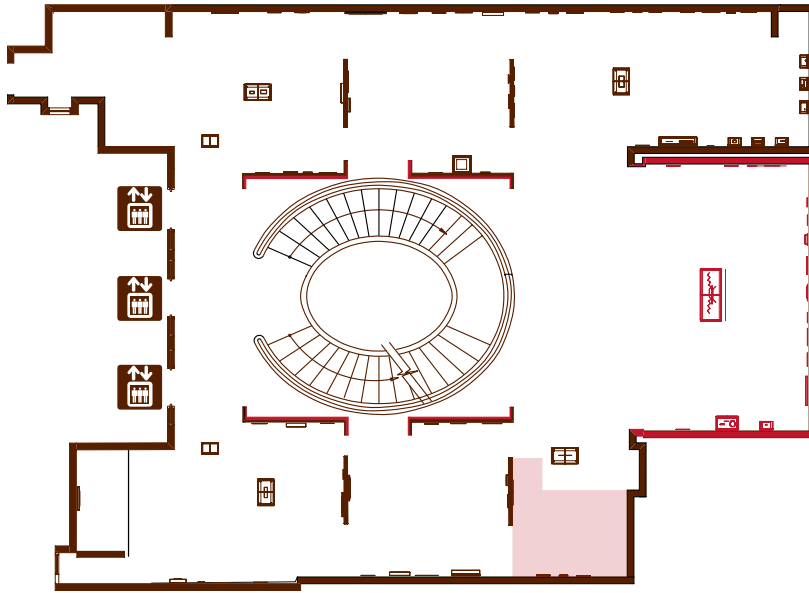
Crete, Greece; late 15th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

This iconography of the Virgin Mary is called Kardiotissa, or She Who Holds Her Son Close to Her Heart, as reads the Greek inscription at the left. Her hands encompass her son's body as to form a shield to protect him. The lower register bears images of (from left to right) the saints Mark, Matthew, John, and Constantine.

17 The Virgin of the Sign and Two Saints

Russia; 18th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

This object is a processional icon used for liturgical celebrations. The main side shows Mary as the Virgin of the Sign in the iconographic model known as Panagia, with her hands in the gesture of praying and Christ Emmanuel on her chest. The Christ Child is shown in an oval circle that could represent a sort of schematic womb. Two angels hover about the Virgin. Saint John Kushchniki and Saint Abbotess Alexandra appear on the reverse. 



THE DIVINE FEMININE

Nos 18-21

18 The Mother of God of Kursk with Prophets

Russia; mid-18th century
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

The original representation of the Mother of God of Kursk goes back to 1295, when a hunter stumbled upon an icon lying face down on the roots of a tree. Soon the icon, which attracted a stream of pilgrims, began to work various miracles. Usually half-length, the Mother of God is shown at center with the infant Christ in a circle on her breast. They are surrounded by prophets and saints.

19 The Annunciation

Byzantium; early 15th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

This painting portrays the archangel Gabriel bringing the news to the Virgin Mary that she has been selected by the grace of God the Father to become the vehicle for the Incarnation of his beloved Son, hence serving as the door to the salvation of humanity. This is a seminal event in the theology of Christianity.

20 The Virgin Tenderly Nestling Her Son

Crete, Greece

Late 16th or early 17th century

Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel

Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

One of the most poignant iconographic models of Byzantine art is the Virgin tenderly nestling her Son, which is considered both a portrayal of her love for him and a painful premonition of his eventual suffering and death. The infant Christ holds an unfurled scroll inscribed with the prophecy foretelling his death.

21 Tara

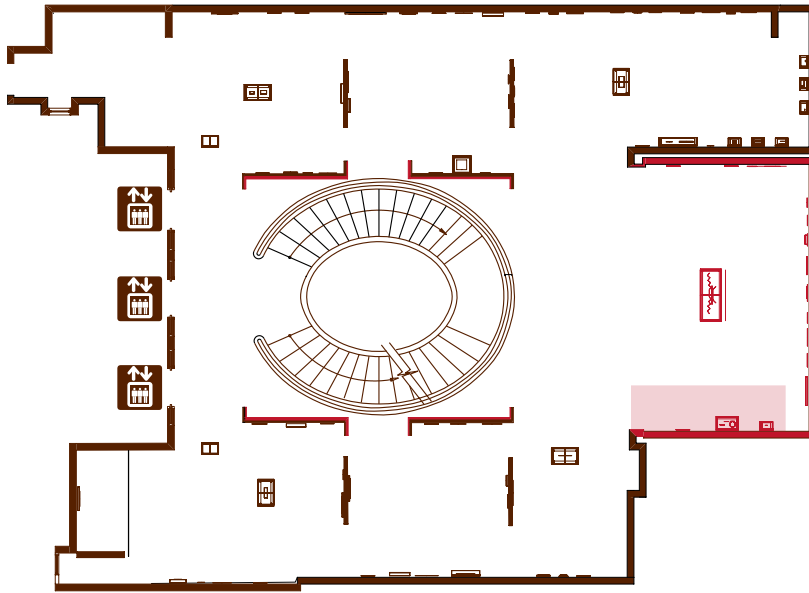
Tibet; 18th century

Pigments on cloth

Rubin Museum of Art

C2006.66.19 (HAR 672)

Tara, or Drolma, is the most popular female deity among Tibetan Buddhists, who resort to her for long life, healing, and protection. Here a form of the deity known as Green Tara—although she appears richly depicted in gold—is surrounded by her twenty-one forms, each one of which has specific activities and functions. At the top center sit Manjushri (the Bodhisattva of Wisdom), Avalokiteshvara (the Bodhisattva of Compassion), and Vajrapani (the Bodhisattva of Power). ✨



UNIVERSAL SYMBOLS

Nos 22-25

22 Crucifix

Russia; late 18th or early 19th century
Tempera on brass and enamel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

The crucifix is an image of Jesus on the cross. This Russian Orthodox crucifix, a variation still used today by the Old Believers, has three horizontal bars that are crowned by the Holy Mandylion (No. 64). The top bar represents the plaque that was hung over Christ's head. The middle bar is the beam on which Christ's palms were nailed. The slanted bottom bar is the footrest, with Christ's feet shown nailed apart.

23 Chorten

Tibet; 13th or 14th century
Copper alloy
Rubin Museum of Art
C2003.21.1 (HAR 65233)

Chorten (*stupas* in Sanskrit) originated in India as mounds made to hold sacred remains, like those of the historical Buddha. They respond to a complex symbolism but basically represent the mind of a buddha. Through the ages *chorten* have come to assume various shapes and sizes. The Kadampa Chorten, an example of which is shown here, was introduced to Tibet by the monk and scholar Atisha (No. 82).

24 Vajra

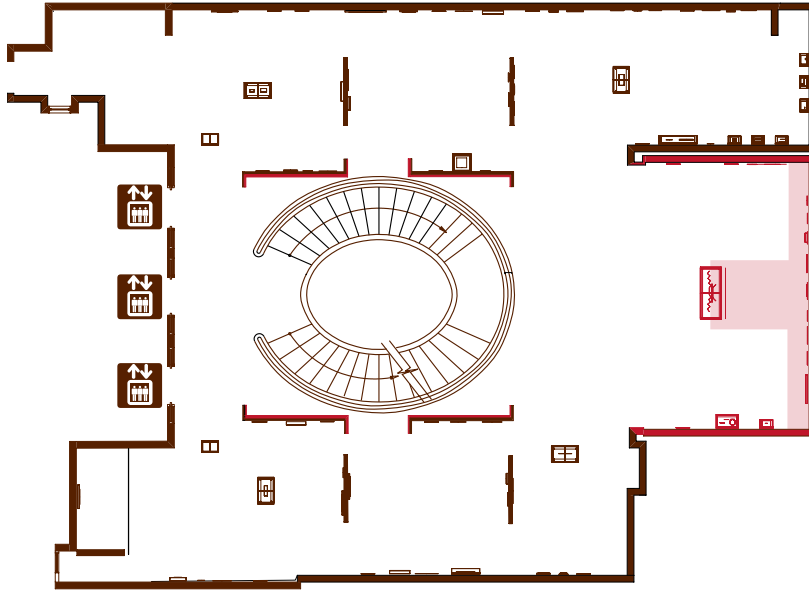
Tibet or Himalayan region; 18th century
Metal
Rubin Museum of Art
C2008.23 (HAR 57006)

The two symmetrical parts of this *vajra* unfold from the sphere of “emptiness,” which according to Buddhism represents the ultimate nature of all things. Emerging from the sphere are two lotus flowers, each with five prongs that convey an elaborate system of correspondences. One presents the relative world of *samsara*—the cycle of life, death, and rebirth—and the other the transcendence of nirvana.

25 Blessing Cross

Mount Athos, Greece; 17th century
Carved box wood
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

One side of this cross shows the baptism of Christ, the other, his crucifixion and the writers of the canonical Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—also known as the Four Evangelists. Carved wood crosses became popular in late-Byzantine times and continued to be produced in monastic communities, where they were used as blessing crosses. In Greece most of them were produced in the monastic community of Mount Athos. ✠



THE DEEDS OF THE FOUNDERS Nos 26-36

26 Christ's Passion and Resurrection

Russia; mid-18th century
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

At the center of this icon Christ is shown emerging from his tomb, and in the scene directly below he is shown trampling the gates of hell and raising Adam. Behind them the righteous are being led to heaven by John the Baptist while the archangels Michael and Gabriel destroy the devil. The surrounding scenes depict Christ's Passion, starting at the upper left.

27 The Birth of the Buddha

Tibet; 19th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
C2002.30.3 (HAR 65196)

The central scene of this painting depicts the birth of the Buddha, who emerges from the right side of his mother standing under a blossoming tree. At his birth the historical Buddha, or Siddhartha Gautama, took seven steps in each of the four directions (lower left), and lotus blooms formed in his footprints. Royal attendants and celestial beings can be seen witnessing this miraculous event.

28 The Nativity of Christ

Crete, Greece; 17th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

A star shines on the infant Christ lying in the manger while his mother watches over him and animals keep him warm. The Three Kings appear from the left and an angel brings glad tidings to the shepherds. Joseph (lower left) converses with one of them while a maiden washes the infant.

29 The Transfiguration of Christ

Russia; late 18th century
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

Jesus Christ appears in radiant glory before the prophets Elias and Moses, speaking to him at his left and right, and his awestruck disciples Peter, James, and John below. Above him God the Father presides over the display, a presentation of his own radiance through his incarnate Son. This event corresponds to one of the twelve major feast days of the Christian Orthodox calendar.

30 The Descent from the Cross and the Entombment of Christ

Ionian Islands, Greece; late 17th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

The dead body of Christ is evocative of his Passion for the sins of the whole world. In the small vignette on the right side of the painting the Virgin Mary and some acolytes tend to the needs of Christ's body before his entombment, washing and anointing it with aromatic balsam. This icon is influenced by Italian iconography established during the Renaissance.

31 Buddha Shakyamuni and Scenes from His Life

Tibet; 19th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
C2006.66.164 (HAR 157)

In this painting Buddha Shakyamuni's right arm is outstretched in the gesture of calling the earth to witness the moment of his victory over passions and his realization of supreme awakening. His left hand is reposed in meditation while clasping a begging bowl. Seated in front, various celestial figures proffer him symbolic offerings. The surrounding scenes portray the twelve major deeds of Shakyamuni's life, ending at the top left with his passing away in the "lion posture."

32 The Resurrection of Humanity

Russia; mid-17th century
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

This icon, probably from a triptych, depicts Jesus standing above the broken gates of the abode of the dead and raising up (*anastasis*) Adam out of his sarcophagus. Behind and opposite Adam are a number of figures of the Old Testament. At the top of the painting Mary the Mother of God is shown surrounded by prophets. This work also signals Christ's giving mankind absolution from original sin.

33 The Resurrection of Christ

Greek Asia Minor; 18th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

In the presence of two angels Christ rises from an open tomb—the lid of which forms the sign of the Cross—holding a flag like a victorious general after battle. Through his defeat of death Christ bestows hope to all humans for eternal life. The red color of Christ's cloak denotes his divinity.

34 The Ascension of Christ

Mount Athos, Greece; 16th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

In this icon, from the School of Theophanes the Cretan, Christ is shown ascending to the heavens after his Resurrection. The Virgin Mary—who in this case symbolizes the Christian Church—together with the Twelve Apostles, in the company of consoling angels, stand by as witnesses to this seminal event in the life of Christ.

35 Christ in Glory

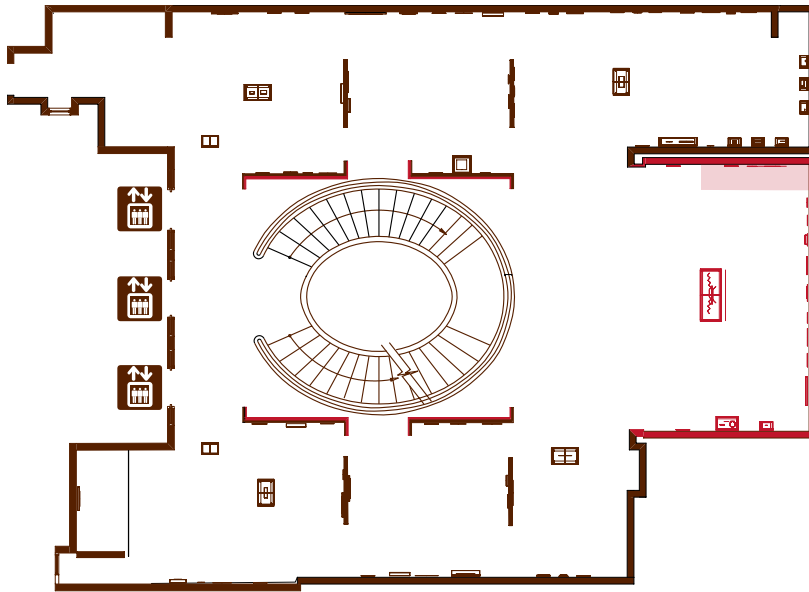
Crete, Greece; 17th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Christ sits on the firmament of the cosmos, his "throne," supported by seraphim, angels of the highest order. He blesses with both hands in all directions with the Gospel laid out in front of him. In this iconographic treatment he is referred to as the Lord of All, the Master of Heaven and Earth, and the Lord of the Universe.

36 Crucifixion (Triptych)

Russia; late 16th or early 17th century
Tempera on wood panel; silver
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

The middle panel of this portable icon portrays Christ on the cross with the buildings of Jerusalem below. At the upper center of the cross is the Mandylion (No. 64), and in the onion-shaped crown the Old Testament Trinity is depicted (No. 1). The upper tier of the side panels depicts the Annunciation (No. 18), Gabriel at left and Mary at right, while the scenes below correspond to other seminal events in the Christian Orthodox liturgy. ✚



HOLY ASSEMBLY

Nos 37-39

37 All Saints or the End of Days

Greece; late 17th century
 Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
 Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

This painting presents a cosmic view of the eternal future of the righteous. Inside the great circle Christ is surrounded by angels. Below him is the adoration of the Holy Spirit, depicted as a dove, with Adam and Eve and an assembly of saints, prophets, apostles, and other figures. The upper and lower parts of the icon bear images of Old Testament prophets.


38 The Tree of Jesse

Crete, Greece; late 17th century
 Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
 Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

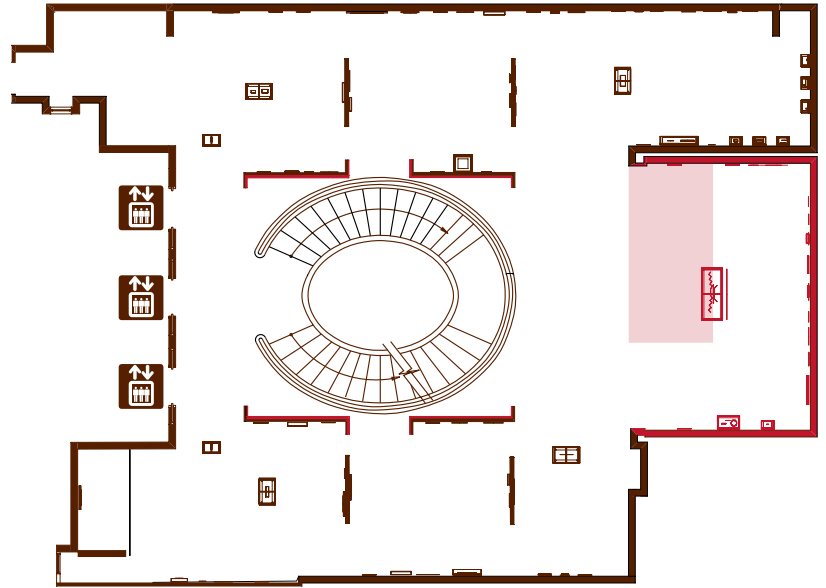
This icon presents the genealogy of Christ, showing him to be a direct descendant of Jesse, the father of King David, through the Virgin Mary. A vine sprouts from the prophet upward, where the Virgin sits with the Christ Child, and on both sides, where it forms vignettes with the prophets of the Old Testament who foretold the Incarnation of Christ through the Virgin.

39 Assembly Field

Tibet; 18th century
 Pigments on cloth
 Rubin Museum of Art
 FI997.41.7 (HAR 571)

Appearing in a hierarchical structure on a thriving tree emerging from life-giving waters, this assembly field features teachers and deities of the Gelug monastic order extending out to the universe. The order's founder, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), presides over the assemblage at the center. He bears a buddha image on his chest, which, in turn, also bears a figure of the *adibuddha* of this tradition, a reference to the concept of the three bodies (No. 4). 

THE DISCIPLES Nos 40-41



40 Buddha Shakyamuni with the Sixteen Arhats

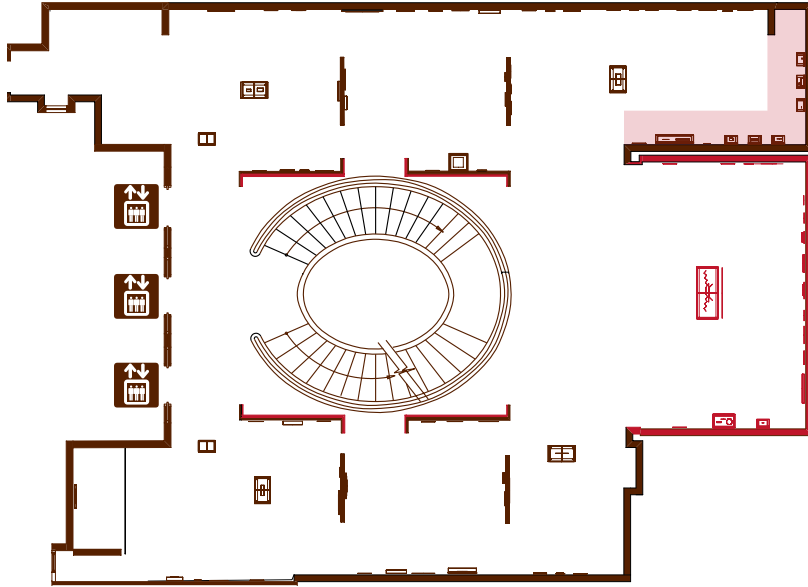
Tibet; 18th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
C2006.66.294 (HAR 684)

Seated on a throne at center, Buddha Shakyamuni is flanked by his two foremost disciples, Shariputra (left) and Maudgalyayana (right). Surrounding them is the canonical group of sixteen arhats, the venerable elders representing the earliest followers of the Buddha. The painting is completed with the arhats' attendant, patron, and other figures. The Guardians of the Four Directions fill the lower register.

41 Jesus and the Twelve Apostles (Iconostasis)

Russia; ca. 1780
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

An iconostasis is a screen with doors and icons set in tiers that divides the sanctuary from the nave in Eastern Orthodox churches. The Deisis, or Intercession (No. 73), is depicted at the center of this folding iconostasis with Mary at Christ's left and John the Baptist at his right. Other icons depict the Christian feast days, the apostles, important prophets, and other subjects. ✨



RELIQUARIES, SHRINES, AND EMBLEMS

Nos 42-54

42 The All Holy (Diptych)

Northern Greece
Late 16th or early 17th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

This type of vessel illustrating the All Holy (Panagia), one of the titles of Mary, is used for the placement of a triangular piece of sanctified bread during and after the liturgy of the Eucharist. While the sanctified bread is considered to be the actual body of Christ, the triangular piece represents the Holy Trinity, which is depicted on the other half of the diptych.

43 Deisis (Triptych)

Russia; mid-17th century
Tempera on wood panel; brass; enamel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

The central panel of this triptych shows Christ seated on a sumptuous throne. On the left wing, the Mother of God appears in supplication attended by the archangel Michael. On the right, Saint John, also shown in prayer, is accompanied by the archangel Gabriel. The rendering of these figures is highlighted by the gold details and the enamel in the haloes.

44 The Miraculous Remains of Saint Spyridon

Ionian Islands, Greece
Late 17th or early 18th century
Tempera and gold leaf
on wood panel; wood frame
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

The earthly remains of a saint are often an object of veneration as they are believed to cure sickness and grant wishes to the pious. This is an example of a belief that transcends the Orthodox-Catholic division.

45 The Miraculous Remains of Saint Spyridon

Ionian Islands, Greece
Late 17th or early 18th century
Carved wood with pigments
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

The remains of Saint Spyridon have been venerated since the fourth century. His relics are said to emanate a pleasant scent, perform miracles, and bestow protection. This effigy of the saint was made for Catholic believers, who accept both sculpted images and paintings for veneration.

46 Lama Zanabazar

Urga (Ulan Bator), Mongolia
Late 18th or early 19th century
Clay with pigments; wooden frame
Private Collection

This unusual Buddhist icon was made with a clay plaque, or *tsatsa*. Sitting at the center of the image under a canopy is Zanabazar (1635-1723), the head lama of Mongolia and its most important religious sculptor. He is surrounded by teachers of his religious lineage. Mongolian icons of this type show the influence of Russian Orthodox culture.

47 Crucifixion and the Apostles (Triptych)

Byzantium; late 13th or early 14th century
Carved fine-grained fruitwood
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

The Virgin and Saint John stand on either side of the cross accompanied by the small figures of Saint Constantine and Saint Helen. The sun and the moon at the top allude to the fact that these celestial bodies are subservient to Christ, who is the Master of the Heavens. The busts of the apostles appear on the side wings.

48 Crucifixion and Saints (Triptych)

Possibly Greece; 19th century or earlier
Ivory; brass hinges
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Portable icons are carried for prayer and devotion. The central part of this triptych shows Christ's suffering on the cross, being tortured and humiliated by two Roman soldiers. The figures on either side and at the top watch in disconsolate astonishment. The side wings illustrate different saints.

49 The Holy Cross (Amulet)

Epirus, Greece; 18th century
Cast silver with niello inlay,
chased and engraved
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

The cross is the ultimate protective talisman of Christianity. Its power goes back to early Christian times and was first proven in battle by Emperor Constantine. Constantine saw in the sky the sign of the cross with the motto: "By this sign you shall be victorious." The cross is also a symbol of affirmation of the Christian faith.

50 Saint Constantine and Saint Helen (Amulet)

Epirus, Greece; 18th century
Cast silver, chased and engraved
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Saint Constantine and Saint Helen made the Christian Cross their symbol and by extension became dispensers of its grace and protective powers. The person who wore this decorative amulet may have been named Constantine or Helen, both of which are very common names in Greece.

51 Reliquary (Gau)

Tibet or Himalayan region
Early 20th century
Copper alloy; cloth and brass
Private Collection

Metal receptacles made to carry relics, amulets, and small statues or paintings are very common in the world of Tibetan Buddhism. They are made to be worn on the body and can also be used as portable shrines. Typically shaped like a lotus petal, reliquaries can be richly decorated or very simple, like the one shown here.

52 Reliquary (Gau)

Himalayan region; 19th century
Gilt silver
Rubin Museum of Art
C2008.21 (HAR 57003)

This lavishly adorned portable reliquary presents images of teachers and deities of the Gelug order of Tibetan Buddhism placed amid botanic designs. The founder of this school, the grand Tsongkhapa, sits at the top center.

53 Saint George (Amulet)

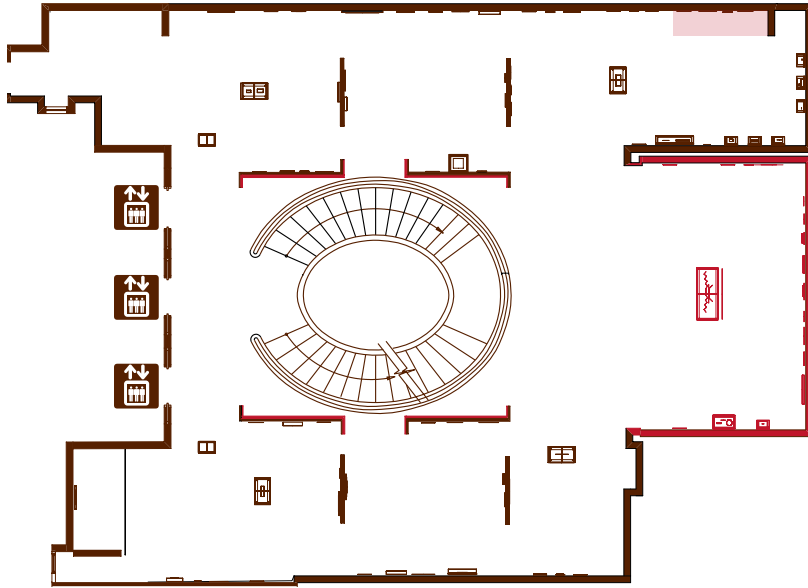
Epirus, Greece; 18th century
Cast silver, chased and engraved
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Saint George, known as the Great Martyr Saint, is beloved as a protective figure, and his help was petitioned by the Byzantine armies in prayers before battles. Similarly his image is considered to possess powerful protective properties.

54 Saint Demetrios (Amulet)

Epirus, Greece; 18th century
Cast silver, chased and engraved
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Amulets and talismans have a protective function and are intended to ward off evil. They may contain a relic, such as a fragment from a sanctified object. While some amulets were worn below the garments, others acquired a decorative aspect and became costume accessories. Silver amulets carried the images of saints well known for their protective powers, just as this object bears the image of Saint Demetrios (4th century). ✎



NIRVANA AND HEAVEN VS. SAMSARA AND HELL

Nos 55-58

55 A Visual Compendium of the Tibetan Book of the Dead (*Bardo Thodrol*)

Tibet; 18th or 19th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
Purchased from the collection
of Navin Kumar, New York
C2005.35.3 (HAR 65860)

This work is a painting of the doctrine and mythology of the *Bardo Thodrol*, a guide to the afterlife for the deceased commonly known in the West as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The judgment of individuals in the presence of the Lord of Death (lower left) determines either descending into rebirth in *samsara* or ascending to a pure buddha-field under a teacher's guidance. The lowest register depicts the dead being subjected to all sorts of tortures in the hell regions.

56 Saint John Climacus of the Ladder

Russia; mid-18th century
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

Saint John Climacus (b. 579) was a hermit recognized for his humility, obedience, and wisdom. He authored *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, a guide for religious life in which the ladder is a metaphor for ascent into heaven by renouncing the world. The titles of the thirty chapters of this text are inscribed on the steps shown in this icon.

57 The Last Judgment

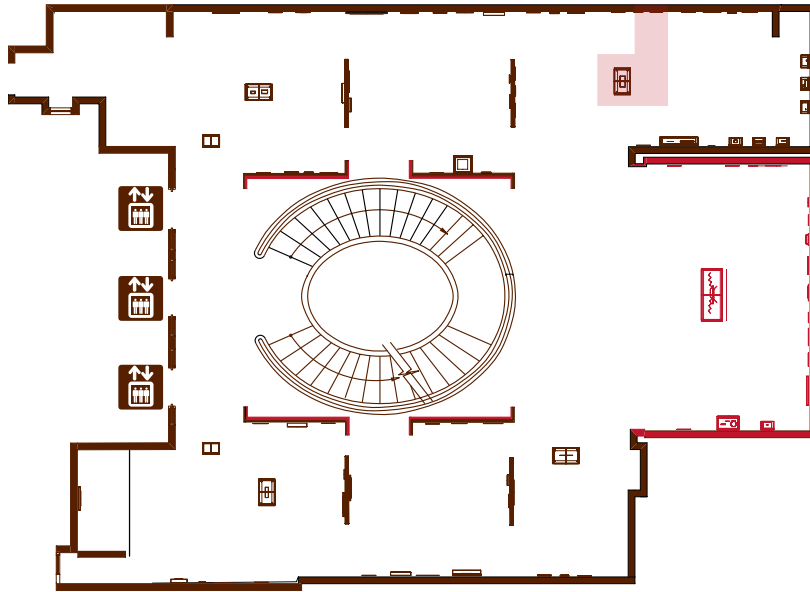
Russia; late 17th or early 18th century
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

Christ, as judge, is shown at the center of this icon, flanked by the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist (No. 73). Above them the New Testament Trinity is depicted and below them are Adam and Eve. At the left the righteous are shown being guided by Saint Peter to the gate of paradise. At the right can be seen sinners with their faults written on a large snake, and below them the damned being punished into hell. The lateral text is taken from the Christian liturgy.

58 Archangel Michael, Protector of Souls

Greece; late 18th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

The archangel Michael extracts the souls of humans as they die and delivers justice. He protects righteous souls by holding them from the devil but lets the wicked ones be taken away. The inscription in Greek at the bottom of this work reads, "Tonight your soul will be demanded of you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (Luke 12:20). ✠



SUPRESSING THE EVIL

Nos 59–62

59 Saint Demetrius Slaying the Infidel King

Greece; late 17th or early 18th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel;
engraved gilt ground
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Saint Demetrius of Thessalonica (b. 270) was a decorated soldier who died as a martyr at the orders of the Western Roman Emperor Maximian. This icon depicts the saint spearing the infidel king—the opposite of what actually happened—for it was Demetrius who, through his faith in Christ, was the real victor.

60 The Synaxis of the Archangels

Greece; 18th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

The Synaxis or Convocation of the Body of Angels, headed by the archangels Michael and Gabriel, upholds a shield with the image of Christ Emmanuel as their supreme general while they trample Satan, the source of all evil, in victory. The Holy Trinity appears as a triangle above.

61 Saint George and the Dragon

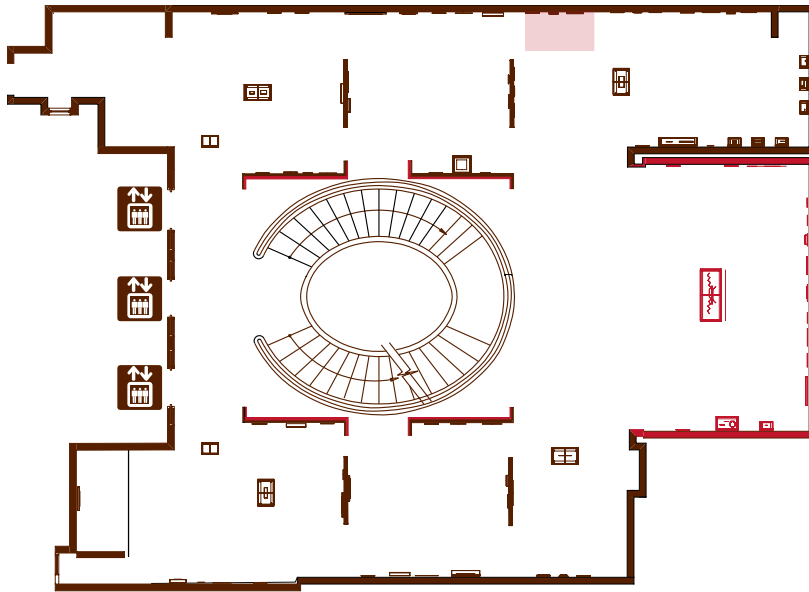
Ionian Islands or Crete, Greece,
Late 17th or early 18th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

A protector of the weak and a martyr for his faith, Saint George is shown here fearlessly slaying a dragon, an allusion to his defense of his faith against the pagan Roman Emperor Diocletian (3rd and 4th centuries). The hand of God blesses him while an angel offers him the crown of glory and the palm of martyrdom.

62 Six-armed Mahakala

Mongolia; 18th century
Gilt copper alloy with semiprecious stones
Rubin Museum of Art
C2006.70.1 (HAR 65729)

Mahakala, or the Great Black One, is a protector of Buddhism. He wears a crown of five skulls, representing the transmutation of negative afflictions into supreme wisdom, and holds instruments characteristic of Tantric Buddhist wrathful deities. He takes a martial, striding pose atop an elephant-headed figure that embodies the strength of the unenlightened mind. ✨



MIRACLES

Nos 63-65

63 The Raising of Lazarus

Crete, Greece; 17th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

This icon, from the School of Theophanes the Cretan, depicts the miracle of Jesus commanding Lazarus to rise from his tomb and restoring him to life, a seminal event in the life of Christ that forms the prelude to his Passion. As Lazarus was resurrected, Christ promises and assures resurrection to all of humanity.

64 Image of Christ “Not Made by Hand”

East European Plain (Russia); ca. 1525
Tempera on wood panel; silver
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

Different stories are known about the origin of this image of Christ, considered to have been miraculously left by him on a cloth. The Orthodox tradition calls it the holy Mandylion. In Russia, where it is known as “Not Made by Hand,” it is one of the most venerated icons.

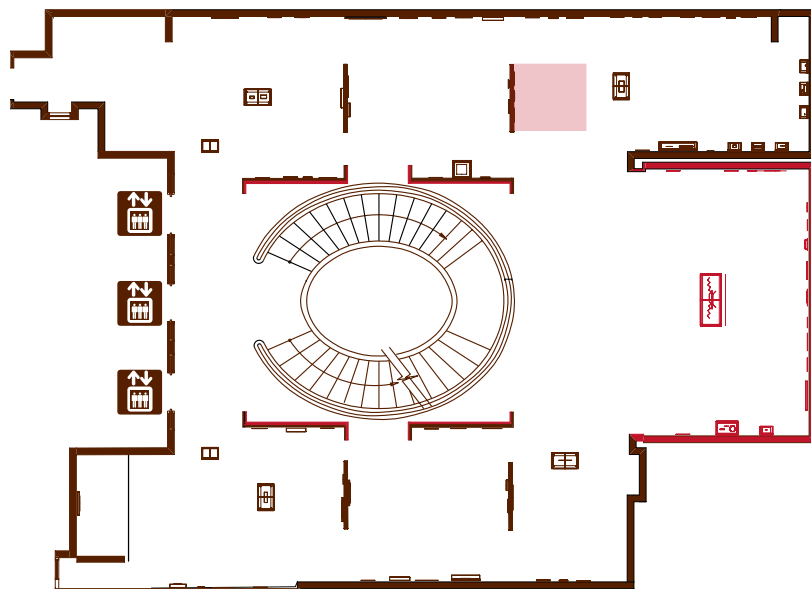
65 Buddha Shakyamuni and Scenes from His Life

Tibet; 18th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
C2004.7.1

One of the most notorious miracles attributed to Buddha Shakyamuni was his taming of a fierce elephant that his jealous cousin Devadatta had set loose to kill him (lower scenes). In its mad race, the elephant was about to trample a child when the Buddha touched the animal, immediately calming it and causing the elephant to kneel before him. ✎

VISIONS

Nos 66–68



66 The Virgin of the Passion

Crete, Greece; late 16th or early 17th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

In this painting the Virgin Mary gently lifts her Son, who clutches tightly onto her right hand while turning his head and staring at the archangel Gabriel, who appears holding a cross. The divine child is startled by this vision of his preordained Passion. The archangel Michael (upper left) carries a lance and a vinegar-soaked sponge, two other instruments of Christ's Passion.

67 The Vision of Saint Eustace

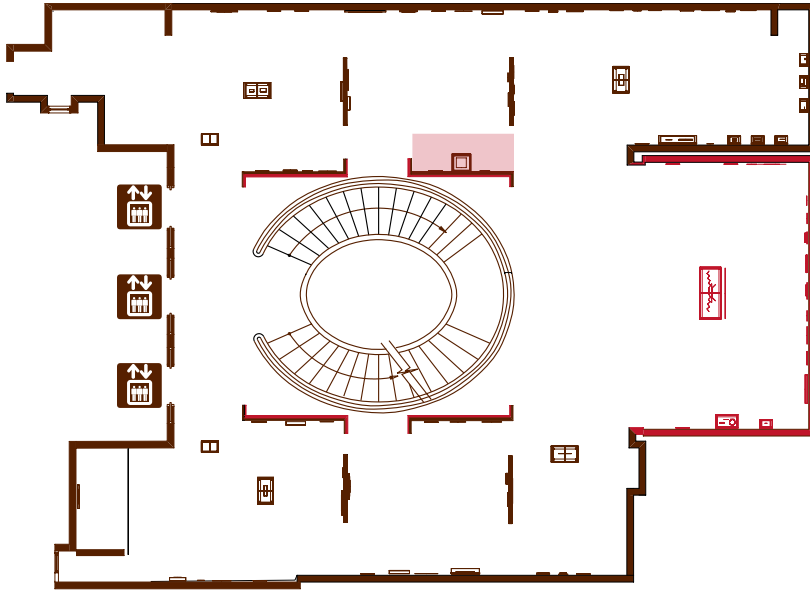
Crete, Greece; 17th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Saint Eustace (2nd century) was a pagan Roman soldier until one day he had a vision of a stag with Christ on the cross between its antlers. The apparition caused him to reexamine his life and convert to Christianity, which brought him a series of severe trials that ended with his martyrdom.

68 Khedrub Geleg Pal Zangpo's Vision

Tibet; 18th century
Pigments on cloth
Collection of Shelley and Donald Rubin
PI994.8.4 (HAR 56)

Lama Khedrub Geleg Pal Zangpo (1385–1438) looks skyward in this work at the vision of his teacher, Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelug tradition, and offers him a mandala. The same lama is also shown pondering the teachings of his teacher (middle left) and reading about them (lower right). 𑀧𑁆𑀭



MANDALAS AND GEOMETRIC FORMS

Nos 69–71

69 Mandala of Vajrayogini

Tibet; 18th century
Pigments on wood
Rubin Museum of Art
C2006.66.283 (HAR 654)

Vajrayogini is a semiwrathful female deity of Tantric Buddhism. She appears atop two merged tetrahedrons, a symbol representing the realization of buddhalike energies. The two outer rings of this mandala show scenes of the “eight charnel grounds” and flames symbolizing the radiance of pristine awareness. This kind of mandala plate is used in initiation rituals.

70 God the Father with Christ the Word

Russia; early 19th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Alice S. Kandell

Surrounded by seraphim, God the Father, Savaoth (the Hebrew title for the God of the Old Testament), bears Christ Emmanuel in front of him. This iconographic representation refers to Christ as the eternal, preexisting Son of God, hence before his Incarnation, as well as the Word, or Logos, that explains the nature of God.

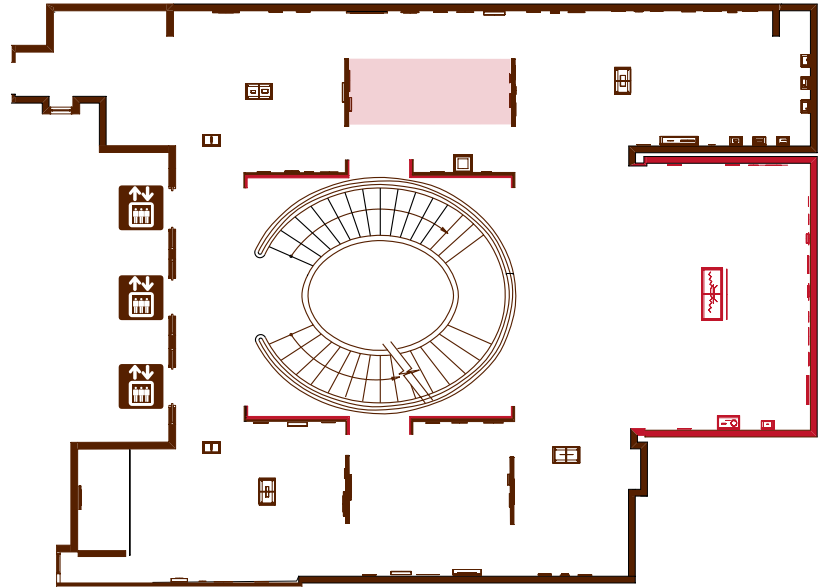
71 The Mother of God of the Burning Bush

Russia; ca. 1870
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

The Mother of God and the infant Jesus are shown at the center of two crossing stars adorned with the emblematic representations of the writers of the Gospels, known as the Four Evangelists, and angels bearing Old Testament symbols. The depictions in the corners are scenes from the Old Testament depicted according to New Testament iconography. ✨

THE BODY

Nos 72-75



72 The Deisis or Intercession

Byzantium; 15th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Christ, enthroned in full majesty, is flanked by the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, who are pleading with Christ on behalf of humankind, hence the event's title of Intercession. Christ gestures a blessing with his right hand while he holds the Gospel with his left.

73 Christ Pantokrator

Mount Athos, Greece
Late 15th or early 16th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Christ is shown with his right hand making a gesture of blessing while holding the Gospel with his left. The red portions of his halo form a cross, a symbol of his Passion, and hold three Greek letters that spell the expression "He Who Is," a reference to God's unique independent existence. The yellow background is an allusion to eternal existence.

74 The Christ of the Fierce Eye

Russia; later 17th or early 18th century
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

The grim expression of this particular form of Jesus, or the Almighty (Pantokrator), depicts him not as a fatherly figure but as the fierce judge of the world, calling all to account for their sins. A characteristic feature of this type of icon is the depiction of Christ's hair, which is shown flowing behind his head and falling on his shoulder. The halo is painted last and makes the work a finished icon.

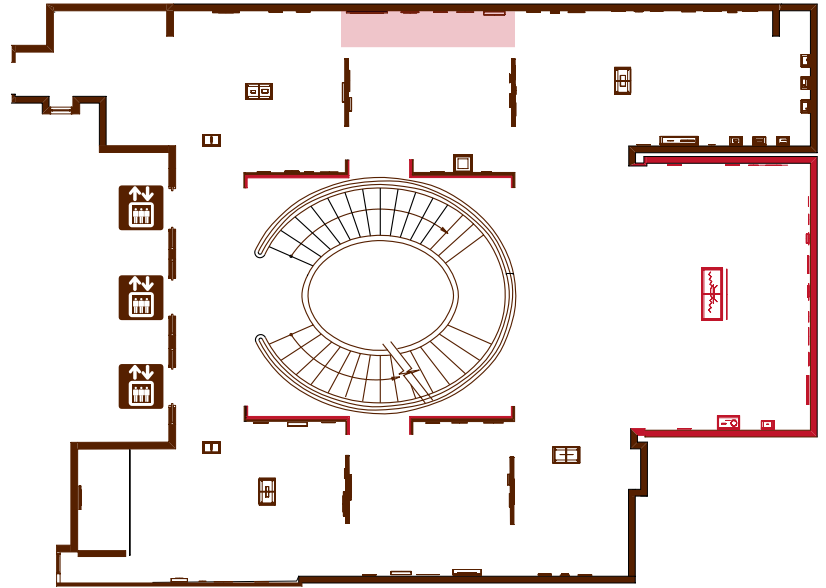
75 Buddha Shakyamuni

Tibet; 19th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
FI998.3.3 (HAR 605)

Buddha Shakyamuni sits with his right hand touching the ground in the gesture of calling the earth to witness his enlightenment and his left in the gesture of meditation. At the top and sides, alternating in rows, are small forms of Shakyamuni and Amitabha, the Buddha of Boundless Light. The three lower rows show forms of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. ✨

MEDIA AND COMPOSITION

Nos 76–79



76 Saint Alexis of Rome

Russia; mid-17th century
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

This icon depicts sixteen scenes from the life of Saint Alexis (5th century). The first vignette, at the upper left, shows his birth and is followed by a scene of his baptism. The last two scenes at the lower right illustrate the saint's death and burial. A prophecy existed that a "Man of God" would live in Rome. Alexis, who lived in the city as a pious beggar, was proclaimed by the Church as the fulfillment of that prophecy.

77 The Prophet Elias and Scenes from His Life

Crete, Greece; 16th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

The Prophet Elias is one of the Old Testament prophets to be accorded a personal icon. He lived an exemplary ascetic life in the desert, performed miracles, and did not die a mortal death, instead ascending to the heavens in a chariot of fire. The central scene of this icon shows the old prophet being fed in the desert by ravens.

78 “The Prophets Foretold Thy Coming”

Byzantium; 14th century

Tempera and gold leaf

on carved wooden panel

Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

At the center of this work Saint Anne, Mother of the Theotokos, holds the Virgin Mary who holds the Christ Child. They are surrounded by Old Testament prophets, each one with a symbol of his prophecy regarding the Virgin and how she will be the instrument of God's coming to earth as a man. The Annunciation (No. 18), seen at the top, represents the divine announcement of Mary's conception.

79 Jetsun Milarepa

Tibet; 17th century

Pigments on cloth

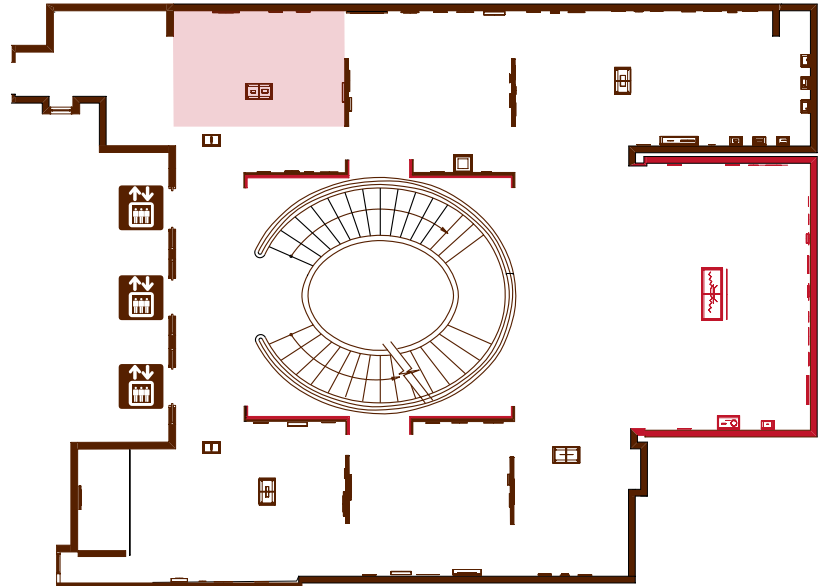
Rubin Museum of Art

C2002.24.4 (HAR 65120)

Surrounded by scenes from his life, the Venerable Milarepa (1040-1123), one of Tibet's greatest yogis and mystical poets, sits in his characteristic pose, with his right hand cupped to his ear. He and his disciples wear the white cotton garment indicative of their mastery of “body heat” yoga, or *tummo*. These cloths are the source of their titles as *repas*, or cotton-clad ones. ✨

ICONOGRAPHY

Nos 80-85



80 Saint Catherine of Alexandria

Crete, Greece; early 17th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Saint Catherine (4th century) converted many philosophers and government officials in Alexandria to Christianity. Her main symbol is the broken wheel, for stories of her life indicate that a wheel broke while she was tortured. The globe represents her learning and the palm leaf her martyrdom for her faith. She is the patron of philosophy and the arts and a protector of young women.

81 Saint Charalambos and Scenes from His Life

Greek Asia Minor or Constantinople
18th century
Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

Saint Charalambos (2nd century) was a common priest and the supreme example of endurance. In this painting Christ appears radiant with light above the saint, who is surrounded by scenes from his life, including the extreme tortures he suffered. Charalambos died at age 113 just as he was about to be beheaded.

82 Pandita Atisha

Tibet; 18th century
Pigments on cloth
Rubin Museum of Art
C2006.66.505 (HAR 973)

Atisha (ca. 982-1054) was a famed abbot and scholar from India who helped revive Buddhism in Tibet in the eleventh century. He was instrumental in establishing and popularizing the cult of the female deity Tara. At the center of this painting he is shown surrounded by twenty-eight canonical tantric adepts (*mahasiddhas*) and other figures.

83 Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius

Russia; mid-18th century
Tempera on wood panel
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

Saint Cyril and his brother Saint Methodius (9th century) were educated at the imperial court in Constantinople before they were sent north to Christianize the Slavs. To assist in their mission, they developed a new alphabet based on the sounds of a Slavic dialect, which in turn allowed them to codify Old Church Slavonic, the first written Slavic language. Because of their work they are venerated as equals to the apostles.

84 Saint Nil of Stolbensk

Russia; ca. 19th century
Wood with pigments
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

Saint Nil (ca. 1433-1508) lived a life devoted to prayer and asceticism. After spending ten years at a monastery in northern Russia he moved to a small cave, his only possession being an icon of the Mother of God. He slept upright, supported by two crutches, to continue praying at night.

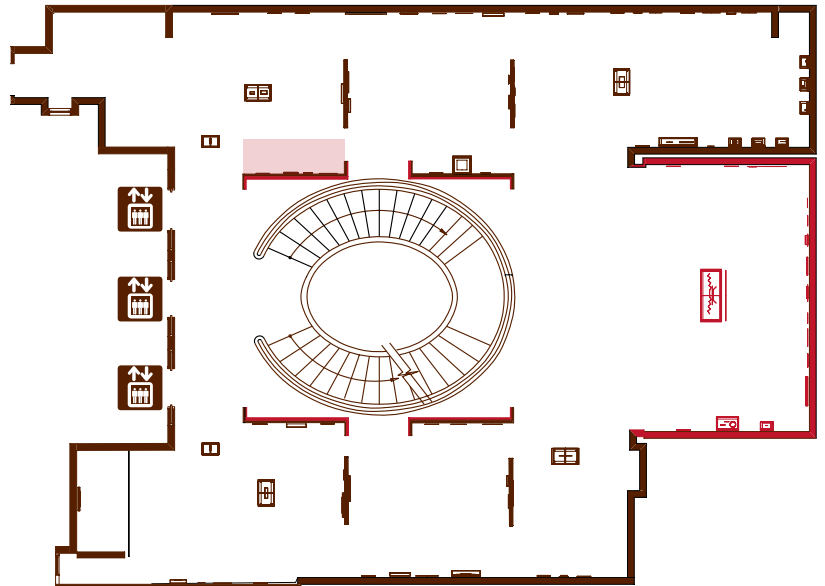
85 Mahasiddha Virupa

Tibet; 17th century
Copper alloy
Rubin Museum of Art
C2003.13.5 (HAR 65219)

Virupa (7th century) was abbot of one of India's greatest Buddhist monasteries. However, at the age of 70 he became a wandering yogi with unconventional behavior. It is said that Virupa once stopped the sun for three days so that he could drink wine without interruption. His distinctive images represent him pointing to the sun and halting its motion. ✨

EMBELLISHMENT

Nos 86–89



86 The Holy Week

Russia; ca. 1860

Tempera on wood panel with silver
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

This work is a pictorial representation of the Orthodox Christian calendar. Sunday represents the Descent into Hell; Monday, the Assembly of Archangels; Tuesday, the Beheading of John the Baptist; Wednesday, the Annunciation; Thursday, the Last Supper; Friday, the Crucifixion; and Saturday, the Gathering of Saints. Christ in Majesty is at the center, symbolizing his Second Coming and Last Judgment.

87 The Mother of God of Kazan

Russia; 17th century

Tempera on wood panel with silver,
semiprecious stones, and river pearls
Collection of Emmanuel and Argie Tiliakos

The Mother of God of Kazan (Kazanskaya) is a Russian creation and one of the most honored images of this iconographic model in Russian Orthodoxy. It dates back to 1579, when it appeared to a young girl who later unearthed an icon with the image. The luxurious covering of this painting reveals the honor and esteem in which it is held.

88 The Mother of God of Vladimir

Russia; mid-19th century
Tempera on wood panel with silver,
glass jewels, and beads
Museum of Russian Icons, Clinton, MA

This icon depicts Mary the Mother of God (Theotokos) and her Son in a tender and affectionate mood. The oldest iconographic model of the Mother of God is credited to Saint Luke the Evangelist, who would have painted it first. The image came to the principality of Vladimir in 1155, later becoming a national treasure in Russia for its protective powers.

89 Magzor Gyalmo

Mongolia; 18th century
Textile; appliqué and embroidery with pearls
Rubin Museum of Art
FI996.19.1 (HAR 472)

Magzor Gyalmo, literally “The Queen Who Repels Armies,” belongs to a class of powerful protector deities and is considered the wrathful emanation of the goddess of learning, music, and poetry, Sarasvati. She is also invoked for divination rituals. In this painting she is accompanied by two fearsome attendants seen in the bottom register. ✨

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