

[Back to Exhibition Index](#)

***Palden Lhamo Entourage Figure*** ([Image](#))

Metal, sculpture

Copper with fire gilding

7.0 inches

Tibet or China

Ca. 18th century

Museum #: 97.075

By Cathleen Cummings

3 June, 1998

This small sculpture is similar to Palden Lhamo in many respects but is depicted without many of Lhamo's characteristic attributes and is most likely one of the deities of her retinue. It may originally have formed part of a large Palden Lhamo mandala.

Palden Lhamo (*dPal ldan lha mo*; *Skt: Sri Devi*) is considered the chief guardian-goddess of the Tibetan pantheon, and is the only female among the eight *Dharmapala*, the Guardians of the Dharma. She appears as an acolyte or protector figure in the galaxy of most Tibetan Buddhist sects, but it was under the Gelugpa that her liturgy took its final form, and it is among the Gelugpa that she is given particular prominence, as a protectress of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, and the principal guardian goddess of Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. She is also venerated by followers of the Gelugpa in Mongolia and China.

Palden Lhamo is terrifying in aspect in order that she may better fight evil or negative forces, and enemies of the Buddhist teachings. She rides a wild, white mule across the sea of blood; the flayed skin of her son, an enemy of Buddhism, serves as her saddle blanket. The single eye on the rump of the mule was formed when Lhamo removed the arrow that her husband, the cannibal king of Sri Lanka and an enemy of the Buddhist doctrine, shot at her as she escaped him. The trappings of the mule are made of snakes and from them hang many of Palden Lhamo's tools: a pair of dice for divination, a stack of red tablets, a ball of magic thread, and a skin bag full of diseases with which she destroys enemies of the faith. In her right hand she brandishes a club topped with a half-*dorje* (*vajra* in Sanskrit), a symbolic ritual implement) which is used to crush those who have broken their promises. In her left hand is a *kapala* (skull cup) filled with blood; here, it is specifically the skull of a child born of an incestuous union. Many of her other accouterments such as the moon disc in her hair and the sun disc at her navel, are gifts from the gods. Her myriad destructive powers aid Lhamo in her quest to conquer the destructive forces of egotism.

Palden Lhamo frequently appears in the entourage of wrathful deities, especially Yama, Dharmaraja, and Mahakala. She herself also has a number of important forms and emanations, as well as an extensive retinue of minor goddesses and gods. Her origins seem to be a combination of the Indic Sri Devi -- the black goddess and Great Mother -- and pre-Buddhist Bon goddesses. Once incorporated into the pantheon of Buddhist protector figures Palden Lhamo replaced these earlier pre-Buddhist

goddesses, though a particular set of twelve such deities remain in her mandala, which is extremely complex as a result of her composite nature.

References:

Patricia Berger and Terese Tse Bartholomew, eds. *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*. 1995: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

Nebesky-Wojkowitz, René de. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet: The Cult and Iconography of the Tibetan Protective Deities*. Mouton: 's-Gravenhage, 1956. .

Marylin M. Rhie and Robert A. F. Thurman. *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet*. 1991: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco and Tibet House of New York in associaton with Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York.

Tucci, Giuseppe. *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*. Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 1949.

---

This WWW server is provided by **The Huntington Archive of Buddhist and Related Art** (<http://kaladarshan.arts.ohio-state.edu/>), College of the Arts, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA.

Updated November 2004

URL [http://kaladarshan.arts.ohio-state.edu/exhib/sama/\\*Essays/AM95.006PadmPar.html](http://kaladarshan.arts.ohio-state.edu/exhib/sama/*Essays/AM95.006PadmPar.html)

© All images on this site are copyrighted. Unauthorized use or electronic dissemination is prohibited by applicable law.

© Text copyright as noted

© Front graphic copyright Andrew LaMoreaux

This Web page may be linked to any other Web pages; permission is not required. The contents, however, may not be altered. Unauthorized use or electronic dissemination is prohibited by applicable laws. Please contact the maintainer for permission to re-publish any material.