EXHIBITION OF
TIBETAN PAINTINGS, SCULPTURE
and ART OBJECTS

Collected by the
ROERICH CENTRAL ASIAN EXPEDITION

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INTRODUCTION

BEHIND lofty mountain barriers, unsurpassed in majesty and natural beauty, lies the hidden country of Tibet, the land of snows and blizzards, the land of large town-monasteries, which created an unique culture, inspired by a fervent religious striving.

A land of vast upland pastures, and deeply cut mountain valleys, Tibet had produced two distinctive spheres of artistic expression. One is the nomad art of the numerous primitive wandering tribes of the Tibetan North, which is distinguished by decorative motives, composed of animal figures, which are used in ornamental compositions and belong to that highly conventionalized art of nomad Central Asia; the other is the sacred art of Tibet, an expression of its theocratic culture, moulded from the rich heritage of cultural achievements, inherited from China and India.

Heretofore, little has been known of the various domains of Tibetan art and artcrafts. It is only during the past fifteen years that Western eyes have suddenly perceived and understood the stirring rhythm and sublime serenity of Tibetan works of art.

We learned to appreciate the decorative possibilities of Tibetan artistic compositions and their rich and striking color schemes.

The art of this hermit country, which for centuries has been the treasure vault of Asia, has a long evolution behind it. Like everything in Tibet, it is of a highly composite nature and is inspired solely from religion. Since the date of the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet (VIIth Century A.D.) the Legend and Word of Buddha have furnished a never-failing source of themes for devout artist monks, who in the solitude of their cells, created masterpieces worthy of the great Masters of the Early Italian Renaissance.

Each gesture of Buddha’s hands is fraught with meaning, and the vast treasury of Buddhist symbolism supplies them with a whole epos of material, unfolds to them a new universe, around which they weave their colorful web, illuminated by an intense religious aspiration.

The present collection of Tibetan art, which was gathered by the Roerich Expedition during its five years’ stay in Tibet and Central Asia,
comprises numerous examples of Tibetan pictorial art, sculpture, and art-
crafts. In view of the recent reintroduction of a policy of isolation in 
Tibet, making Tibet inaccessible for scientific and artistic research, this 
collection assumes special significance.

From an early date, Tibet came into close contact with its southern 
neighbor, Nepal. The Nepalese pictorial art steadily influenced the 
Tibetan conception of beauty. It was through this art that the Tibetan 
artists acquainted themselves with the traditions of the Ajanta frescoes 
of India. In the XIIIth and XIVth centuries A. D. this influence of 
Nepalese art reached its height and even penetrated to the Imperial Court 
of China. Nepalese artists were highly reputed for their skill and were 
frequently summoned to the great lamaseries of Tibet. Some of the Tibe-
tan bronzes can be traced back to the art schools that flourished in Magadha 
and Eastern Bengal during the Indian Middle Ages, preceding the Moham-
dean conquest of the Xth century A. D.

Besides this Indo-Nepalese influence from the south, other influences 
were at work in Tibet. Tibet was always in active relation with the region 
of Khotan in Chinese Turkestan, and there can be no doubt that the 
Khotanese local artistic productions found their way into Tibet and had 
a distinct influence on its art. These artistic productions were of a very com-
posite nature, still bearing traces of an Indian Past. They belong to this 
complex world that has been created in Central Asia through the con-
tact of a number of nations. The types of the sixteen great arhats, of 
different religious protectors with their warlike following of devas and 
yakṣas, all clad in armor, can be considered as importations from the North.

The Chinese influence becomes more prominent during the XVII-
XVIIIth centuries A. D. and coincides with the spread of the political 
power of China in Tibet. Its strong influence is noticeable in the Eastern 
districts of Tibet.

We are able to distinguish two areas or spheres of artistic activity 
in Tibet; the South-Western and the Eastern. The first has as its center 
the great monastery of Tashi-lhunpo and is tributary to the Indo-Nep-
alese art. The Eastern School or Kham School is undoubtedly the best 
artistic province of Tibet, which produces by far the best works of art, 
be it painting or sculpture. From Kham come the most reputed artists 
of Tibet. Most of the frescoes in the great lamaseries of Central Tibet 
are said to be the work of Kham artists, who were specially invited to 
execute the paintings. Great is the fame of a Kham-pa artist and many of

the artists of Central Tibet purposely call themselves Kham-pas, or pride 
themselves on having studied under a noted artist, taught in Kham. In 
the richness of details, the delicacy of design and the exquisite coloring, 
the Kham paintings are unsurpassed by the best examples of Central 
Tibetan art, for behind the art school of Kham lie centuries of artistic 
tradition.

One of the best artistic provinces of modern Tibet is undoubtedly the 
Derge district of north-eastern Tibet. Derge is considered to be the best 
metal-working district of Tibet, and the metal wares produced in its 
art-workshops are highly prized throughout Tibet and Mongolia. The pres-
cent Collection has several fine examples of silver charm boxes, made by 
Derge artists.

The eradication and art of Derge is said to date back to the emigra-
tion of Buddhist monks under King Langdarma’s persecution in the IXth 
century A. D. These fugitives took with them valuable traditions of 
aventure and art, and is said to have preserved much of the old Sanskrit culture of India, and the artistic tra-
ditions of the early Buddhist epoch in Tibet. It is gratifying to know 
that a new movement for the preservation of the ancient literature and 
art objects has been inaugurated in Derge, and will probably help in pre-
serving much of the old Tibetan culture, many of the monuments of which 
have been lost forever during the Sino-Tibetan wars of the past twenty 
years.

The mansions of the old landed aristocracy of Tibet and Tibetan 
temples are real museums of antiques. The temples are sometimes very 
fittingly described by the Tibetans themselves as “tsuk-lak khang” (gtshug-
lag khang) or the “House of Objects produced by the Human Mind and 
Hands.” In them we find priceless Chinese porcelain and enamels, pres-
ents of the Chinese Emperors to the ruling families of Tibet, fine images 
of gilded bronze and carved wood, masterpieces of Indian, Tibetan and 
Chinese art, beautiful examples of pictorial art of Tibet, painted banners 
of immense sizes.

After a brief spell of modernizing efforts, Tibet has again dropped 
the curtain of isolation and the dust of centuries still veils the hidden 
treasures of art.
No. 11. The Birth of Buddha. Nepalese Bronze.

No. 51. Altar, Sikhim.
### I. Bronze Images.

2. Çakyamuni, the Buddha. The right hand making the sign of attestation (bhumisparśa-mudra.) Bronze. Shigatse. Central Tibet.
3. Çakyamuni, the Buddha, represented in meditative posture, the right hand making the sign of attestation. Shigatse. Central Tibet.
4. Two painted clay images of Vaiṣraṇava (Kuvera). Central Tibet.

### II. Charm Boxes (ga-u).

17. Silver charm box, inlaid with turquoise. Central Tibet.

### III. Tibetan Coffers.

IV. Tibetan Tea Pots.

V. Ceremonial Objects.
29. Two hand drums (damara). Central Tibet.
31. Holy-water vase. Central Tibet.
32. Libation jug with chalice. Central Tibet.
33. Pair of cymbals. Central Tibet.
34. Conch-shell trumpet (dung). Central Tibet.
35. Pair of copper flageolets with silver ornaments. Central Tibet.
38a. Pair of bells. Central Tibet.
38b. Bell and dorje.
39. Astrological tablets.
40. Ru-rgyan, apron used in Tantric ceremonies and made of human bones.

VI. Lama Hats.
40, 41, 42. Travelling hats for abbots and reincarnated lamas (thang-shva). Central Tibet.
43. The Yellow hat of the Yellow sect (dge-lugs pa).
44. Karma-pa lama hat (skar-ma za-shva). Central Tibet.
45. Travelling hat for a rtse-drung or clerical official (rta-shva).

VII. Lama Masks, Used in Religious Dances.
46, 47, 48, 49. Masks. Central Tibet.

VIII. Altars.
51. Wooden altar with brass ornaments. Sikhim.
52. Wooden altar with brass ornaments. Sikhim.
IX. Tibetan Painted Banners (Thangkas). — Continued

102. King of Shambhala.
111. Life of Tsong-Kha-pa. Central Tibetan School.
112. Life of Tsong-Kha-pa. Central Tibetan School.
113. Life of Tsong-Kha-pa. Central Tibetan School.
114. Life of Tsong-Kha-pa. Central Tibetan School.
118. Brom-ston (XI th Century art.)
119. Gyal-ebang blo-bzang skal-bzang rgya-msho, the VII-th Dalai Lama (ascended the throne in 1717).
120. Lama 'Dol-dzin rdo-rje seng-ge.
121. Life of the third Tashi-Lama (1740-1780).
122. Lama Dol-dzin Grags-pa rgyal-msho.
123. Lama (bSod-nam phyogs-glang).
124. Ascetic Shavari.
125. Ascetic Javaripa.
126. Ascetic Kukuripa.
127. Mandala. "Protector of the four quarters of the world".
129. Bön-po.
X. Miscellaneous Objects.

130 Lama water flask.
131 Binding boards used to cover books.
132 Tibetan carved wood tea table.
1. Painted Tibetan tea table.
2. Brass Tea Table, used by the present Dalai Lama during his stay at Darjeeling, in 1911. Loaned by Mr. L. Horch.
133 Wood blocks for printing.
1. Five snuff boxes.
2. Yak horn with hammered brass ornaments used as snuff bottle.
134 Lady head-dress from Lhasa.
135 Three wooden bowls.
136 Tibetan lavaliere inlaid with semi-precious stones.
137 Tibetan brooches.
138 Jewel boxes.
1. Hammered brass box.
2. Brass inlaid with semi-precious stones.
139 Prayer wheels.

XI. Nepal Objects.

140 Pair of brass door handles representing dragons.
141 Nepalese brass hand hammered plate.
142 Brass Ikon representing the life of Buddha.
143 Large Nepalese Ikon inlaid with semi-precious stones.
144 Door handles.
145 Five branched offering lamp.
146 One brass Nepalese oil lamp.
147 Three Nepalese vases for carrying drinking water.
148 Brass head of dragon for temple fountain.
149 Brass incense burner.
150 Two brass figures—dogs.
151 Nepalese necklace inlaid with semi-precious stones.
154 Nepalese Ikon, representing Krishna.