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Buddhism from India to Sri Lanka and the Himalayas

Death and Rebirth

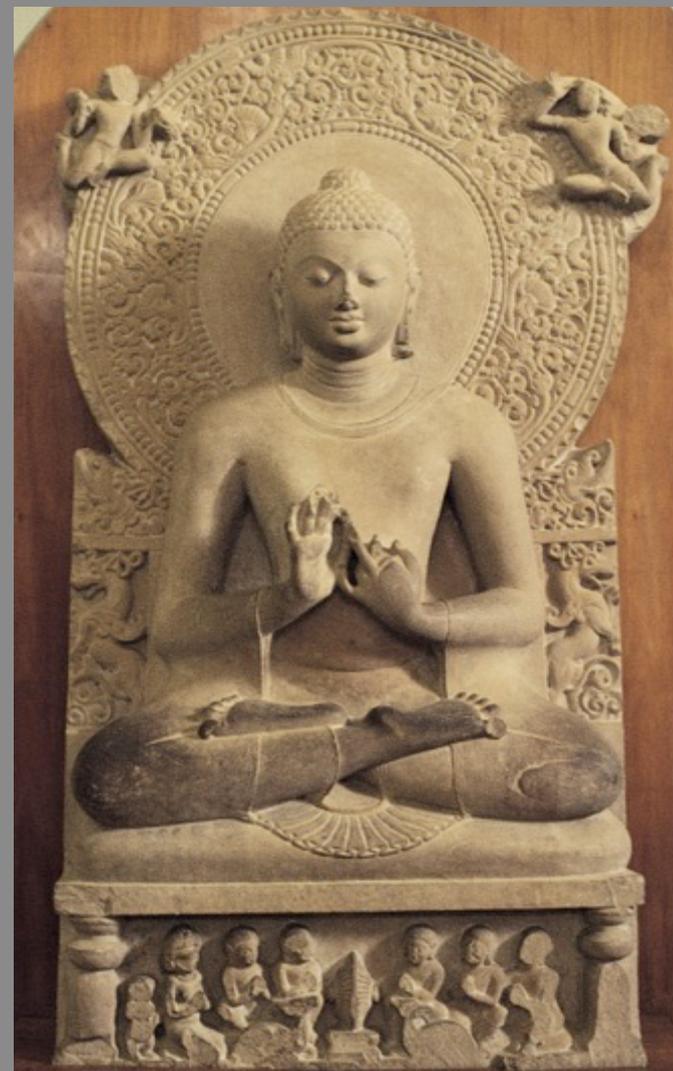
*“Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the
future, concentrate the mind on the present
moment.”*



The Kushan Buddha
Humble, meditative,
transcendent
--gesture of assurance.
Lion throne, bodhisattvas
and heavenly beings



The Gandharan Buddha
Humble, meditative,
transcendent
Mixture of Greek and
Indian styles. Teaching
mudra.



The Gupta Buddha—
abstracted and simplified

Spiritual being— transcendent

By the Gupta times (4th to 7th century) a shift to the more transcendent Buddha image resulted in the lower part of the stupa given over to this image...**merging the Buddha and the stupa** into one unified vision.



The Gupta Dynasty collapsed partly as a result of the infamous Attila the Hun.

Hinduism became the main religion of India supported by Royal patrons.

Buddhism was soon weakened more by Islam.

Even though religious influence was diminishing, medieval Buddhist art continued in enclaves following the traditions of the Gupta.

Many of the images of the Buddha from this time were accompanied by pairs of bodhisattvas (enlightened beings), most of who later became the focus of their own cults.

Maitreya---future Buddha—a stupa in his crown.

Vajrapani—held a thunderbolt

Avalokiteshvara—a seated Buddha in his crown and held a lotus...
compassion of all Buddhas



Altarpiece Sirpur—The
transcendental Buddha, Amitabha,
flanked by two bodisattvas...

Vajrapani (thunderbolt) and

Avalokiteshvara (lotus)...instead
of the Buddha as the central figure,
here we have a female deity.

Could be Tara but more likely
Chunda, goddess of wisdom, holds
a citron (tara usually has a lotus).
Donor appears at the bottom.





Altarpiece Sirpur—The transcendental Buddha, Amitabha, flanked by two bodisattvas...

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Avalokiteshvara (lotus)...instead of the Buddha as the central figure, here we have a female deity.

Medieval Buddhist art was dominated by the later phase of Mahayan, known as Vajrayana, which formed part of the broader Tantric movement that gave the art its distinct character.

Tantism had mysterious incantations, rituals, and language that leads the artwork into a complex and other-worldly direction.

The shift from earthly teacher to heavenly deity was the prelude for the works we see in the medieval period.

Brass image of the **Buddha Vairochana**, from Kashmir—
Buddha surrounded by familiar symbols...but with great richness and elaboration....elaborate crown and garment with silver inlay.

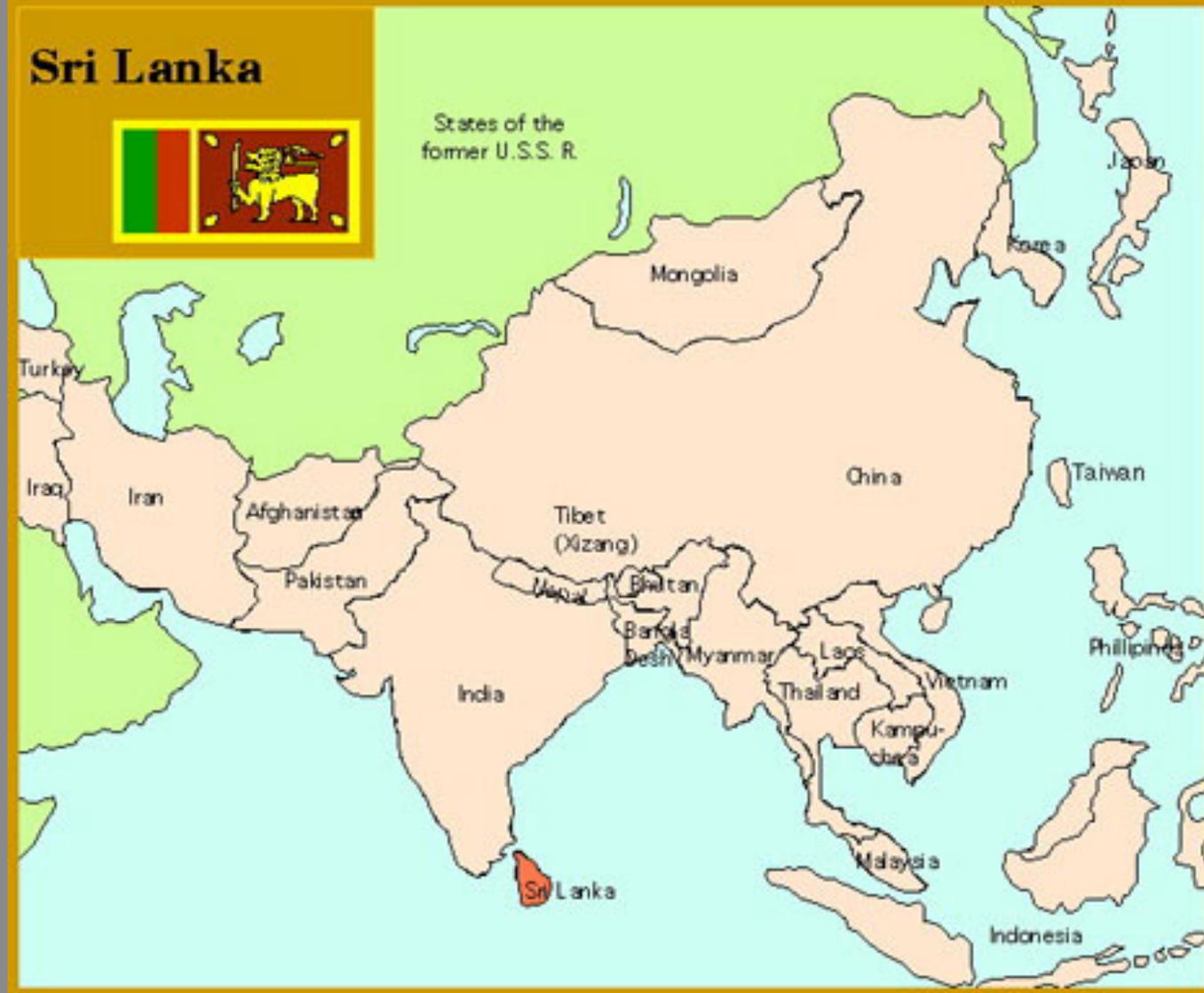
Complete cosmology-- earthly realm at the bottom, giant lotus stalks emerge from the Naga kings from the ocean of the middle realm. Buddha in the center with stupas as Asokan pillars.

Five points of the crown = five levels of knowledge, three levels of the statue= three levels of existence.



We have already seen how Buddhism was dying out in India.

In about the year 1200 a series of Muslim invasions destroyed the major monasteries in North India and effectively brought the history of Indian Buddhism to an end.



At about the time Buddhism was declining in India, it was developing in other areas.

In East Asian cultures, civil unrest and dynastic patronage played major roles in the initial acceptance of the faith.

In Sri Lanka, Nepal and Tibet, all culturally similar to the Indian model, Buddhism was able to evolve from within-- in fact to shape the emerging culture.

Rather than providing an alternative during times of civil and political strife, Buddhism shaped the cultures with political support.

During the reign of the Buddhist king Asoka (c. 268-239 BCE) the first Buddhist missionaries left India for Sri Lanka. From this effort grew the Theravada (tradition of the Elders) that now dominates all the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia except Vietnam.

Along with Asoka's missionaries came the Buddhist concept of a 'righteous king', exemplified by Asoka himself.

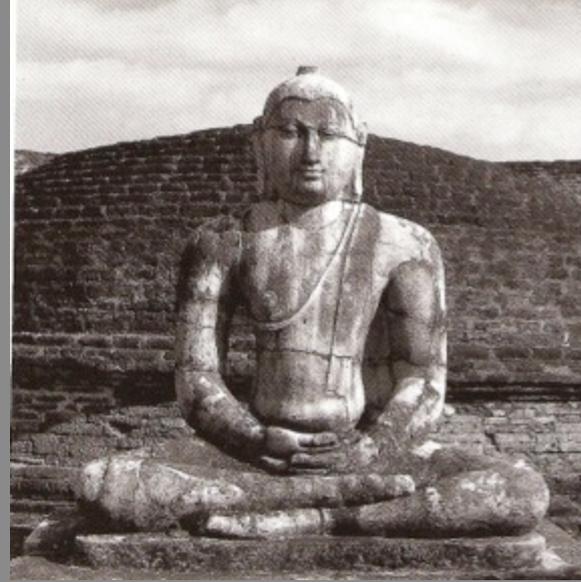
Throughout the history of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia, there has been a close relationship between the Buddhist Samgha (or community) and the Buddhist political leaders.

Sri Lanka has been a Buddhist country for more than two thousand years. Rather than adopting the Mahayana direction, Sri Lanka maintained Theravada emphasis on the solitary, individual path to enlightenment.

Legends tell of the Shakyamuni making 3 visits to the island. Ashoka's son converted the king and a bodhi tree at Anuradhapura (the ancient capital) was believed to have originated from a cutting delivered during one of these visits.



All monastic buildings had a special shrine, dedicated to the bodhi tree...the bodhi-ghara.



It is a shrine erected by four seated images of the Buddha but instead of making the usual gesture of enlightenment, they are shown in meditation.

The actual tree was replaced by abstractions and Buddha is portrayed in poses of meditation: calm, inward-turning and serene.





Another image of a bodhighara shrine.

Several Sri Lankan kings supported Buddhism and while Buddhism was diminishing in India, Sri Lanka became the major center of Theravada belief.





The most distinctive Sri Lankan monument was the stupa like the one at Anuradhapura.

The basic shape is similar to Sanchi however, the Sri Lankan stupa has the taller harmika or spire. Melding the two symbols of the pillar of the world and the heights of Mt Meru.

Anuradhapura

Another difference between the Sri Lankan and Indian are the decorations.

Indian stupas had many decorations, the Sri Lankan are more plain.

Neither the toranas nor carved railings are part of the stupa.

In Sri Lanka it is the relics that have the greatest veneration...things like the tooth of the Buddha become subjects rather than images of the Buddha.



Ruwanweliseya, or the "Great Stupa", is regarded as the most important of the stupas at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.

Standing at 300 feet, the stupa, is decorated by coral brought from the Mediterranean by an envoy of the Sri Lankan king who had an audience with the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus.

The stupa built by King Duttugamunu, is surrounded by an elephant wall.



Ruwanweliseya, or the "Great Stupa", is regarded as the most important of the stupas at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.



The stupa built by King Duttugamunu, is surrounded by an elephant wall originally thought to be dusted with gold.

Anuradhapura, before and after restoration





Instead of decorations, small shrines or relic chambers were often attached directly to the anda at the cardinal points.

Also free-standing pillared shrines or relic halls were also placed away from the structures at the edge of the base.

Votive Stupa, Angkor, Cambodia



Another favorite architectural motif was the moonstone. These semi-circular stones were placed at the foot of the steps leading into a variety of buildings.

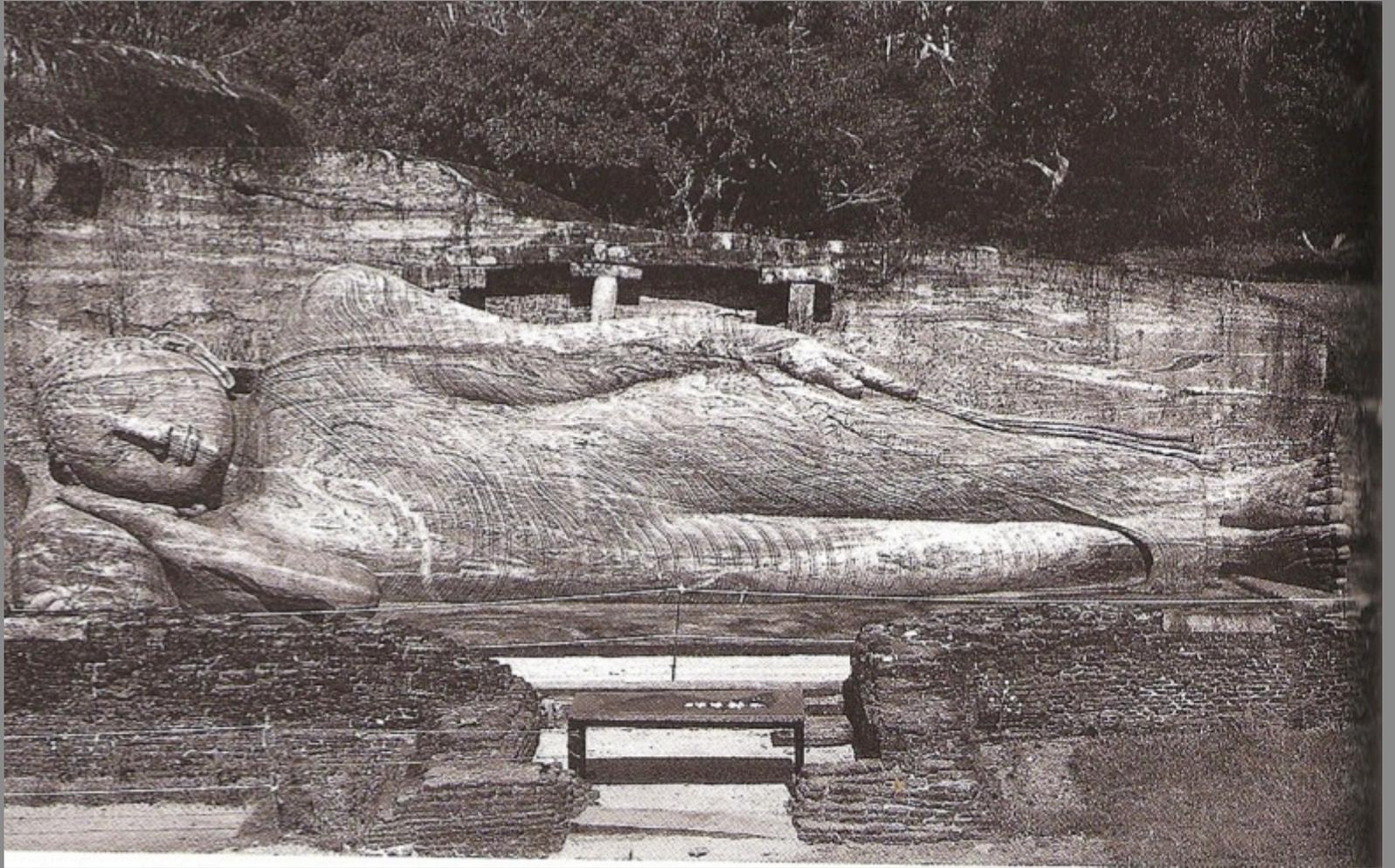
The subjects include cows, elephants, lions, geese and vine scrolls, lotus petals and flowers.

The limited subject matter of the Theravada tradition caused artists to seek new vehicles of expression.





Seated Buddha, 12th
Century, Polonnaruwa, Sri
Lanka



Colossal Parinirvana, Sri Lanka



Nepal--Nepal is a large region border by the Himalayan mountains yet most of the artistic works are within the Kathmandu valley.

The culture is derived from India, though the native population is mostly Mongoloid, with origins similar to those of Tibet.

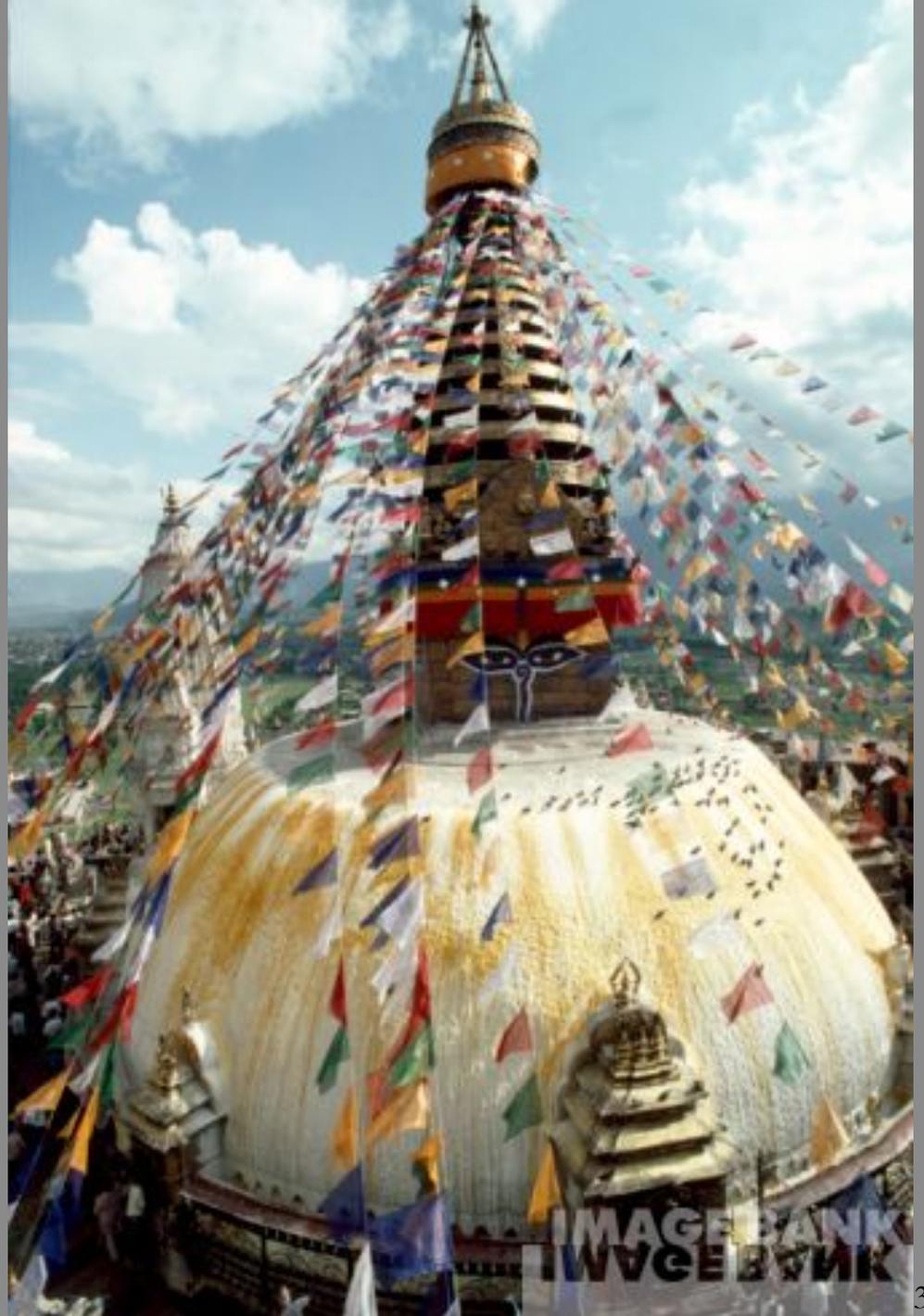
As in the legendary tradition of other Indian cultures, it is Ashoka who is attributed to have brought Buddhism to Nepal in the third century BCE.

Buddhism and Hinduism coexist in Nepal. Buddhism had it's height in the eighth and thirteenth centuries.

Esoteric Buddhism was widespread, resulting in benign and angry forms of the same deity, with multiple heads and arms and numerous attributes, such as the lotus and the weapons appropriate to a being with a cosmic nature.

The design of the stupa was faithful to India models with inclusion of small chapels surmounted by a series of 13 steps or diminishing circles... symbols of the 13 heavens.

Swayambanath stupa, Kathmandu, Nepal. Originally built in the 5th century, it has been rebuilt several times.





The most distinctive part of the Nepalese stupa is the addition of the face painted on the harmika.

The eyes are partly closed as if following the pilgrims circumambulating the monument.

The face also represents the eyes of the four protective lokapalas (guardians), residing inside or the all seeing gaze of the Buddha.





Swayambhunath Stupa, Kathmandu, Nepal



The major achievement of the Nepalese is the brick and wood construction, including the extended wooden eaves, similar to those of the East Asian pagoda. The Nepalese favored brightly painted and carved wooden struts to support the overhanging eaves.



Lights show the mandala pattern surrounding the stupa.

Buddhist sculpture in Nepal embraced the full range of deities, from traditional images, such as a Buddha's birth to the complex schemes demanded by esoteric practices including images of the goddess Tara, the female counterpart of Avalokiteshvara.



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Tara's attributes matched those of Avalokiteshvara, as did her function as protector from dangers.

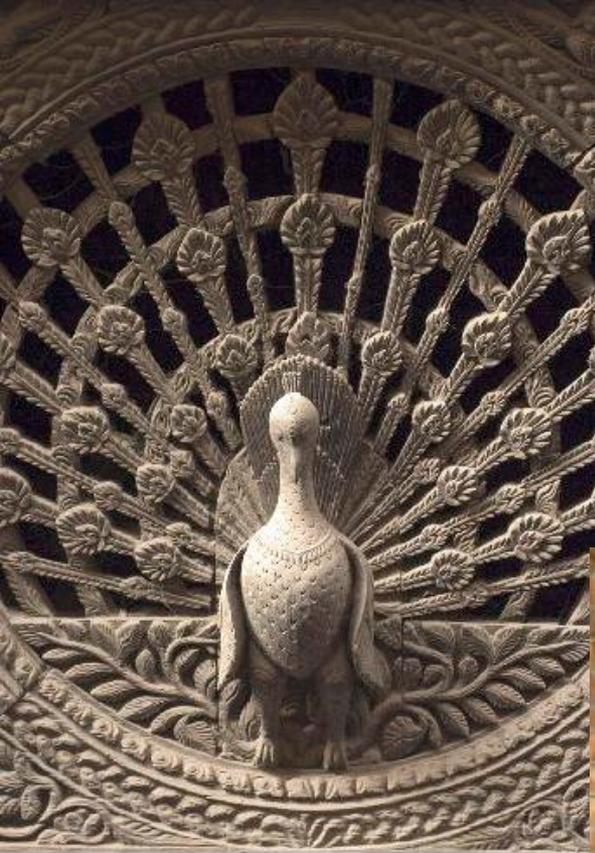
The most popular female deity in Nepal was Vasudhara, goddess of abundance.

She is the Buddhist counterpart of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi.





More images of Vasudhara



Napalese architecture is noted for its rich and varied ornamentation especially it's windows and trusts.

Where else do we see the peacock?





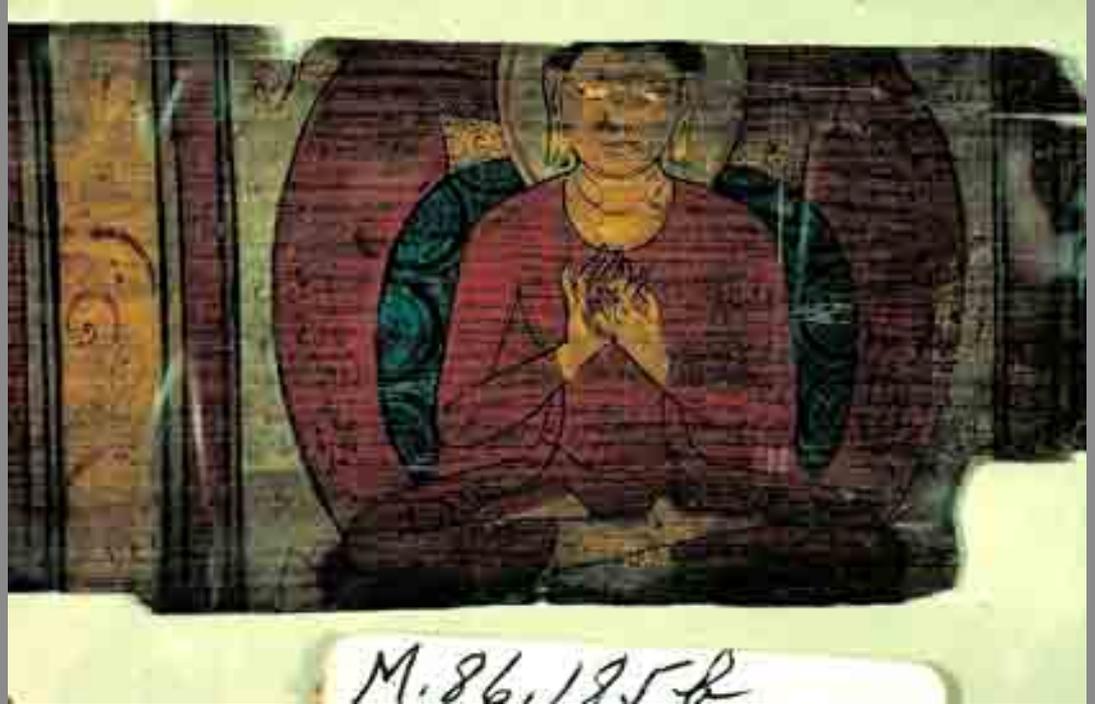
Little painting remains in south Asia with the exception of the Ajanta murals from before 1000 C.E.. Among the earliest examples and smallest are the illuminated manuscripts of Nepal.

These manuscripts were made from pressed palm leaves, cut into long narrow strips.

Both sides were written on, decorated and tied together with cords.



The need for scriptures and scenes of the life of the Buddha show illustrations that are small yet feel monumental.



These paintings belong to a tradition seen throughout Buddhist cultures. They owe their format to the shape of the palm leaf but their importance as religious art is seen in China and Tibet.





Rows of manuscripts at the Monastery in Gyantse, Tibet.