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KALACHAKRA

Tibet, Tsang Province, Shigatse, 16th century. Height: 12¾ in.

|ट्र्याक्र्यंत्र-अपवयानाक्ष्यात्य्यंत्रस्थात्यः द्वात्यः प्राचनवया। य्वात्यः क्र्याः हृत्यः स्ववयः द्वाः प्राच अःम्रःज्ञनः तहवाः द्वयः त्राव्यः स्थाः द्वाः प्रवाः प्राचनवया। य्वाः त्वावः क्र्यः हृत्येः स्ववयः देः प्राचना

Ye Vam! This image of Kalachakra and consort in blissful union, illuminating the world like its essence, is an emanation body able to teach an abundance through the guru, the wondrous tutelary deity of the lord of Drakar. Virtue!

Kalachakra, arising out of the *Kalachakra Tantra*, is the most visually complex tantric deity of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon, with four faces and twenty-four arms holding every tantric implement there is. The Kalachakra Mandala, likewise, includes a retinue of seven hundred twenty-two deities (Buddhist and Hindu). The *tantra* describes external, internal, and alternative cycles of time, the last placing the meditational deity Kalachakra in the center of meditative deity yoga practices aimed at transcending both external and internal systems.

Here, Kalachakra embraces four-faced, eight-armed Vishvamata with his primary two arms. Together they trample the Hindu deities Kamadeva and Rudra, seen here on the left and right respectively, while Rati and Uma gesture as if providing support to the deities' feet. Ralachakra wears a chain of *vajras*, unlike any other meditational deity, which is more exposed on the elaborate back side of this large sculpture than the front along with his finely-cast and incised tiger skin.

The size and quality of this most-complex gilt-bronze image is telling of its importance. Such a sculpture is not made to be portable as it is a monastic commission, an educated guess reinforced by the Tibetan (Uchen script) inscription surrounding the lower rim of the double-lotus base. While there is hardly enough information to make a firm connection, Taranatha (b.1575–d.1634) describes in his autobiography a Kalachakra initiation before a "Lord of Drakar" which took place at a Sakya monastery known as Serdokchen (in Shigatse). A connection between a "Lord of Drakar" and a Kalachakra initiation seems significant and is certainly in line with the dating of this large and important sculpture.⁸⁷ However, a lack of other biographical resources on this obscure figure makes it difficult to elaborate on the more particular context for which this sculpture was commissioned. Nonetheless, its exceptional size and quality suggests that the commissioner behind this artwork had great resources to invest in this commission, which exhibits the hallmarks of the Sonam Gyaltsen style of sculpture.



⁸⁶ See cat. 37 for an explanation of why we see Hindu deities in these contexts.

⁸⁷ The passage does refer to a "rten" being consecrated, but it is unclear what kind of support that is (mkhen chen 'jam mgon lhun grub khyis rten bzhengs mdzad pa'i thub pa jo thad ma de la/ dus 'khor gyi cho ga'i steng nas rab gnas kyang byas/ brag dkar chos rje drung dang yang de dus thog mar 'phrad pa yin/).

