

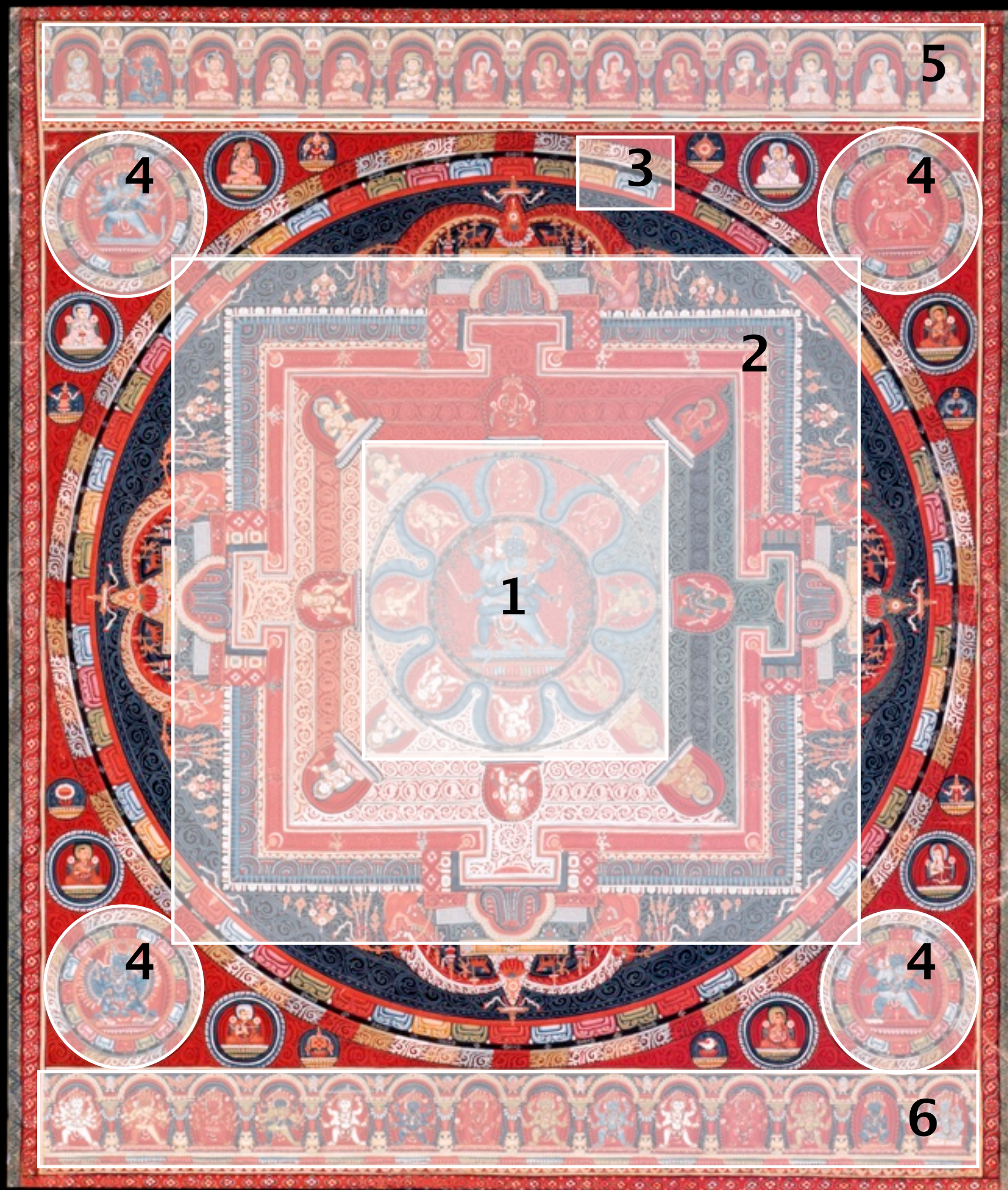


Explore Mandalas

Twenty-one Deity Mandala of Heruka
Southern Tibet; 15th century
Pigments on cloth
C2005.16.41 (HAR 65464)

In the Buddhist tradition mandalas are a two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional palace that houses a central deity or deities. They can be painted on cloth or as large wall murals; fashioned from metal, wood or stone; or created with colored threads or sand. In addition some temples are designed as three-dimensional mandalas.

Touch the painting to learn more about its details



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Touch a detail to
explore it further



Central Assembly of Deities

The mandala is determined by the central deity or deities and represents a palace that is their abode. The name “mandala,” which means “circle around a center,” refers to this inner circle of the structure. Usually depicted as a lotus or wheel, this is the seat of the central assembly of deities.

The deity in the center of this mandala is Krishna Yamari, a wrathful form of Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom. Yamari has six faces and six hands. The two faces on the right are white and the two faces on the left are red. His first two hands hold a vajra and bell crossed at the heart, representing the union of wisdom (knowledge of reality) and method (compassionate action). The middle two hold a skull cup and lasso. The last two hold a sword and staff. He is shown in a cosmic embrace with his female consort, again representing the unity of wisdom and method.



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Mandala Palace

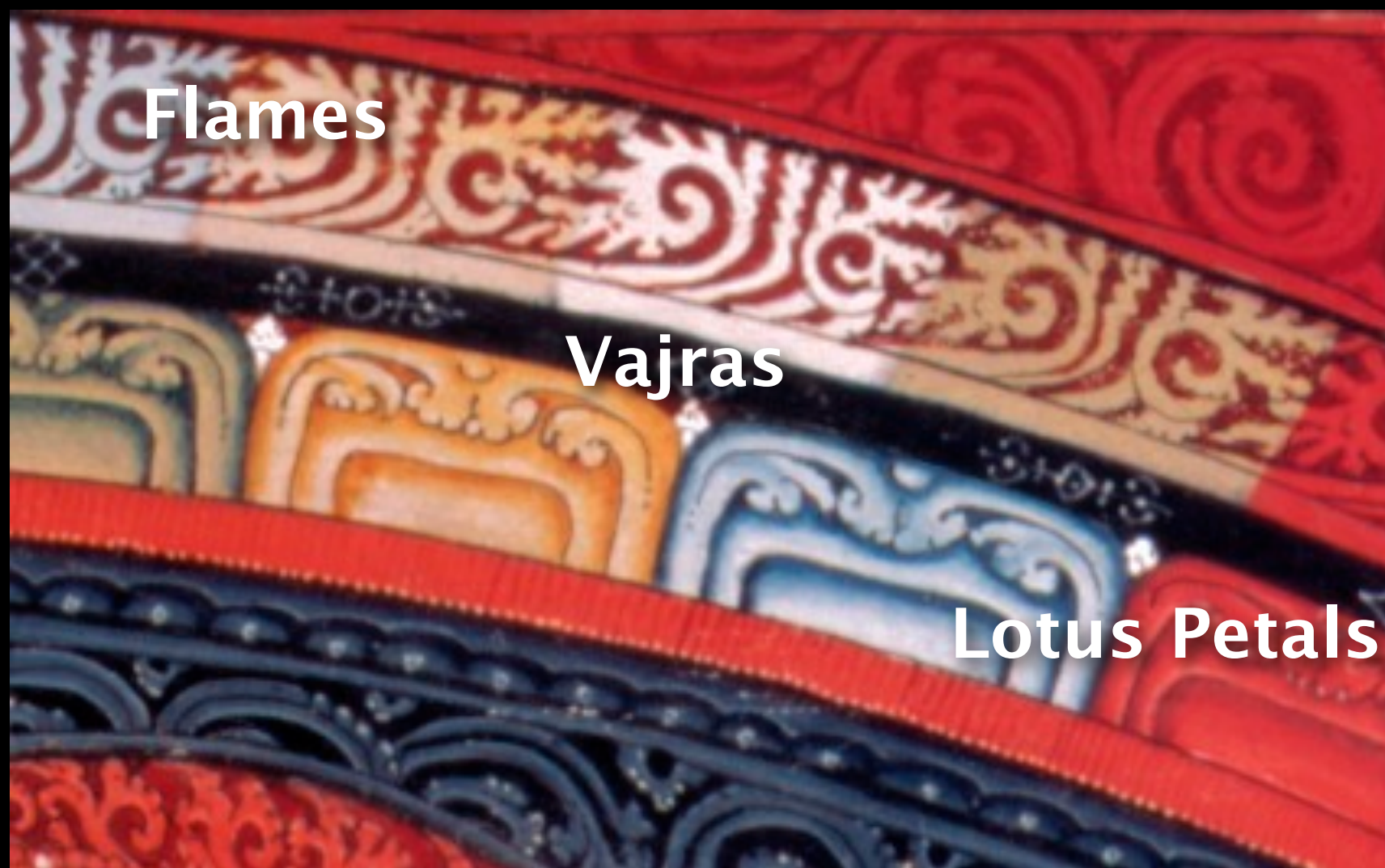
This square structure represents the mandala palace, within which the central figure and his retinue reside. The four colors of the mandala symbolize the directions east, west, north, and south. The T-shaped structures, placed on each of the four sides of the mandala palace, represent entrance doors, allowing meditators to enter the inner sacred areas of the mandala. Each quadrant has its own gatekeeper or protector deity.



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Outer Circles

The outer part of the mandala consists of a number of concentric circles. The outermost of these circles is usually a ring of flames that protects the realm from negative forces.

The second concentric circle is a ring of small vajras—ritual scepters whose hardness and strength are likened to diamonds—and represents the next protective barrier, a great wall surmounted by a tent-like structure made out of diamonds.

The third concentric circle is one of lotus petals, symbolizing purity, transcendence, wisdom, and rebirth at a higher level.



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Meditational Deities

The ground surrounding the mandala is not part of the mandala palace and can be created according to the wishes of the painting's patron or by the design of the artist.

These four figures are personal meditational deities, or yidams. They are visualized in accordance with the character and disposition of the individual Buddhist practitioner, who meditates on their characteristics until they achieve union with them. Yidams come in different forms, including wrathful, semi-wrathful, and peaceful.

The wrathful deities here are wearing five-skull crowns that represent the overcoming of five hindrances: anger, pride, passion, jealousy, and ignorance. They are shown in an embrace with their female counterpart, known as yab-yum, or "father-mother," which denotes the union of wisdom and method.



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Lineage Figures

At the top of the painting is a line of figures outside of the mandala. These are Buddhist lineage figures that begin with a deity and then move to Indian and Tibetan Buddhist teachers and lamas. This lineage begins on the left with the deity Vajradhara.



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Protector Deities

At the bottom of the mandala is a row of wrathful or semi-wrathful protector deities, including Mahakala and Shri Devi at the right. These deities, or guardians of the teaching called dharmapalas, exist to protect the Buddhist teaching and their lineage.



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