

3. FOUR-ARMED MANJUSHRI

Mercury gilt copper alloy with glass inlays
Nepalo-Chinese
Yuan, Imperial, ca. last quarter of the 13th century
Height: 22.4 cm (8.82 in.)

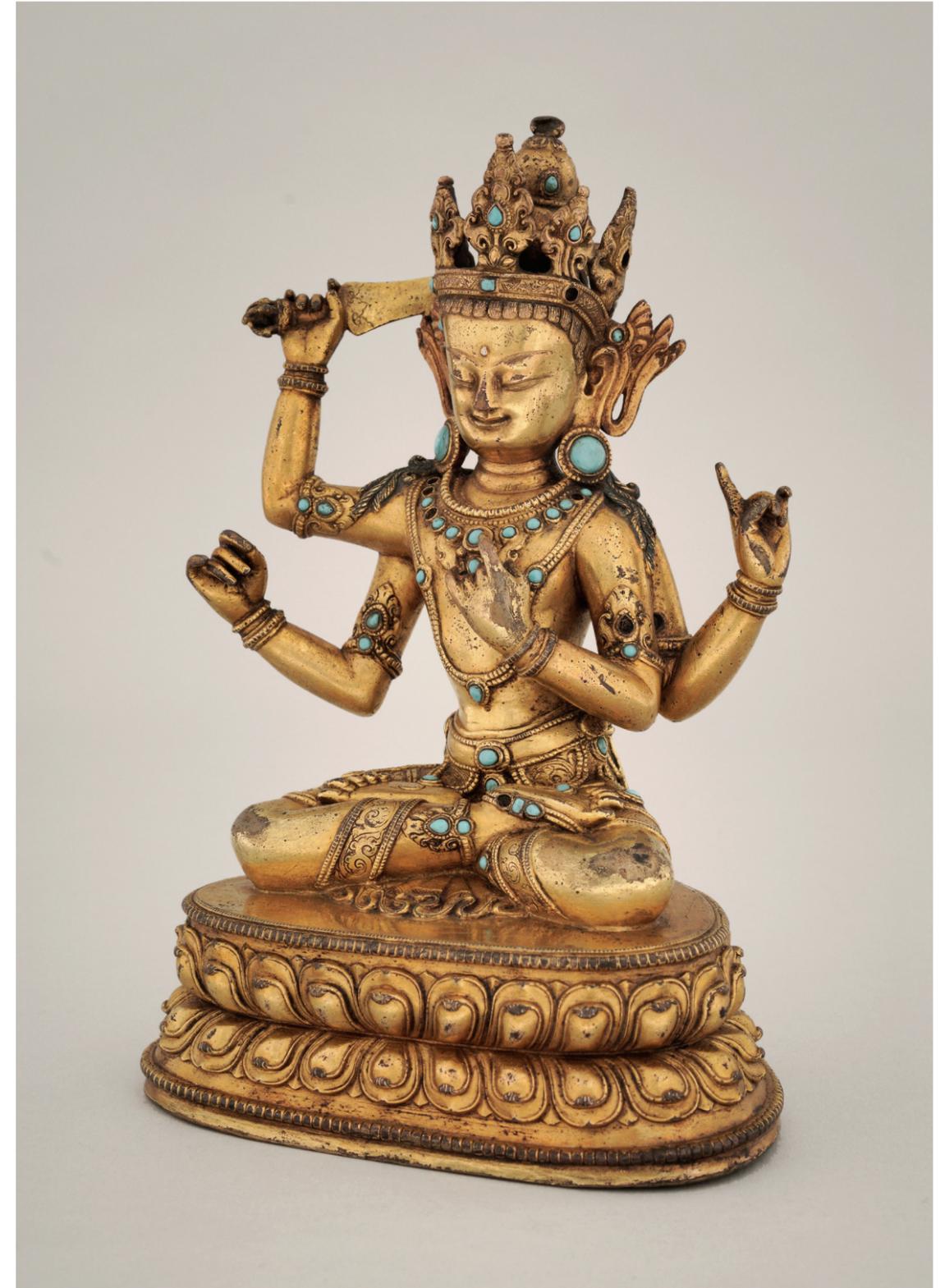


This splendid figure portrays Manjushri in a four-armed (Skt. *chaturbhujā*) manifestation, instantly identifiable by the sword held in the raised right hand. The position and gesture of the other hands suggest that they originally also held various attributes, which are now lost.¹ The lower right hand probably once held an arrow and the lower left hand the book of the “Perfection of Wisdom” (Skt. *Prajñāparamita*) Sutra. The upper left hand with the raised index finger would have held a bow.

Although rarer than the two-armed images of the Manjushri performing the *dharmacakṛa mudra*, this specific form of Manjushri is well documented² and seems to have continued to be quite popular during the early Ming period as at least ten other examples of this subject are recorded, all bearing a Yongle reign mark.³

The iconography identifies the present image as Tikshna-Manjushri (Tib. *Jam dpal rnon po*; Chin. *Minjie Wenshu*), a manifestation that refers to the Bodhisattva’s quick wit, his capacity to defeat egotism and his ability to confound ignorance.⁴ Seated in *pariyāṅkasana* on a double lotus pedestal with beaded borders, the Bodhisattva wears a tight-fitting *dhoti* decorated with a finely engraved scroll motif. He is depicted in princely attire and adorned with elaborate jewelry, consisting of anklets, bracelets, armlets and two necklaces with rows of gems and a pectoral in between them. The complex design of the central elements seen on the anklets and armlets – each inset with a glass stone – resembles the one used for the five leaves of the crown. The benevolent face of the Bodhisattva has a serene expression. He wears large round and flat beaded earrings, elegant ribbons blow upwards and fan-shaped ornaments are above the ears. A double-tiered conical “helmet” surmounted by a gem atop a small lotus base is visible behind the diadem and wavy strands of hair fall onto his shoulders. This headdress resembles an elaborate ritual crown worn by the *Vajracarya* priests, the highest rank in the Nepalese Buddhist community and unique to Newari Buddhism.⁵

While the iconographic identification is clear, both the stylistic attribution and the dating of this figure are challenging. It belongs to a small group of other stylistically related metal icons that have been discussed in recent publications and have been attributed to the imperial ateliers of the Mongol Yuan court during the last quarter of the 13th century.⁶

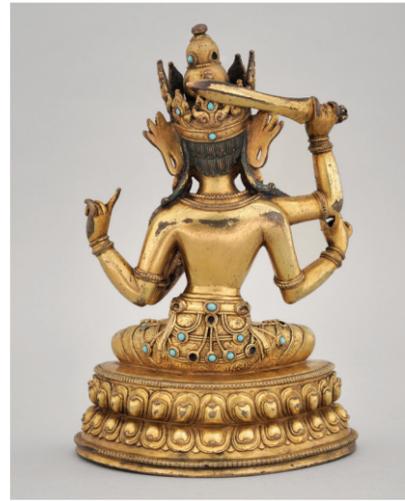


In contrast to the well documented Ming Buddhist images that were created between 1403 and 1435 by imperial command and which can be securely dated by the six-character reign mark they almost all bear, much less is known about their stylistic predecessors. Only a handful of Yuan metal images that can be accurately dated by inscriptions, have been published. They were all made as private commissions and are of varying quality.⁷ No example has surfaced so far, which bears an imperial mark or inscription, that would confirm its production under imperial patronage raising the question of whether devotional images made for the Mongol court had any identifying marks. In this context it is important to note that none of the Yuan blue and white porcelain produced in the imperial kilns bears reign marks, and even the famous large *kesi* silk tapestry *mandala* in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York, depicting Yamantaka-Vajrabhairava and the royal portraits of the donors, lacks an imperial inscription.⁸

A dated (1305) gilt Manjushri with *dharmacakra mudra* preserved at the Palace Museum in Beijing has some stylistic similarities to the four-armed figure under review, for example the shape of the petals on the lotus base, certain elements of the jewelry and the large round earrings. However, there are also significant differences: the proportions and treatment of the body, facial features, form of the crown and depiction of the headdress, etc. The dated Manjushri from the Palace Museum is more static, while the treatment of the body of the present figure is very plastic, and the statue as a whole clearly shows a strong Newari influence, mixed with Pala and Tibetan idioms, such as the shape of the armlets and the narrow ornamented band from which the leaves of the crown emerge.⁹ A *thangka* depicting Ratnasambhava in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, one of three surviving from an original set of five¹⁰, that was produced for Sakya patrons using a Nepalese based style in ca. the mid-13th century¹¹, offers a good comparison. The proportions of the figure and the shape of the face immediately indicate a close relationship between the central figure in the painting and the Tikshna-Manjushri under review. Additional stylistic features that are shared are the form of the lotus petals found on the bases, the tight-fitting *dhoti* with the symmetrical arrangement of the pleated fold in front of the crossed legs and the type of belt that is decorated with short sashes and oval jewels. Further parallels are found in the subtle rendering of the jewelry and the similar tiered headdress resembling the ritual crown worn by Nepalese *Vajracarya* priests. A specific detail that is different can be found on the elaborate decoration used for the *dhoti* worn by the Ratnasambhava: it consists of circular motifs within squares, while that worn by the figure of the Tikshna-Manjushri is made up of several ornamented bands, three of which display a delicately engraved scroll pattern. This very specific articulation of the scroll motif appears to have been extremely popular from the early 13th to the late 14th century and can be found on a variety of different media, such as textiles, gold artifacts and on porcelain¹²; it is an important idiomatic element that can be used as a “marker” for dating.¹³

In quality and style, the present four-armed Manjushri figure is closely related to a recently published copper alloy statue of Buddha Shakyamuni, displaying the same scrollwork and almost identical facial features.¹⁴ This superbly cast Buddha image shows a Nepalese influence and appears to be an example of the initial phase of a subtle blending and combining of idioms into a new Yuan style that emerged in the later part of the 13th century.¹⁵





In conclusion, this gilt figure of Tikshna-Manjushri is a rare and important example of the official 'court style' created by the Chinese imperial workshops under the supervision of the great Newari artist Anige (Chin. *Aniḱo*; 1245-1306).¹⁶ The Ratnsambhava painting produced for a Sakya patron during the mid-13th century represents the pictorial style which Anige and his atelier drew upon when he and his fellow craftsmen were summoned to the Yuan capital around 1261/62. We can imagine that portable *thangkas* such as this one would have played an influential role as artistic inspiration for the new images whether cast, carved or painted, required for the promotion of Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism.

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NOTES:

1. On the symbolism of the sword see Lau 2010, p.15.
2. For an early example of the four-armed manifestation of Manjushri see a partly gilt stone figure attributed to the late Pala style (11th/12th century) and preserved in the Potala, Lhasa. In: von Schroeder 2001, vol.1, p.378, 379, pl.120, nos.120B and 120C. For examples of the two-armed manifestation with the *dharmacakra mudra* and datable to the Yuan period see Bigler 2015, p.74-83, nos.17 and 18, p.103, no.23 and p.108-111, no.25.
3. For examples see Bigler 2013, p.78, 79, no.29; Leidy/Strahan 2010, pp.148, no.37; Uhlig 1985, p.117, no.67.
4. On the iconography of Tikshna-Manjushri see Watt/Leidy 2005, p.71; Schumann 2001, p.146 and Clark 1999, vol.2, p.264.
5. On the *Vajracarya* priest crowns see Pal 1985, p.107, no.S27. The earliest known example bearing images of the Tathagata Buddhas is dated to 1145 AD and is held in the Musée Guimet, Paris. An early Malla Period (13th – early 14th century) example has recently been acquired by the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Gift of Barbara and David Kipper, 2016. Inv.-no.2016.408).
6. See Adams 2014, p.72-100 and Bigler 2015, p.74-91, nos.17-20.
7. For examples see Watt/Leidy 2010, p.110-115, fig.145 and 148. A bronze figure of a seated Guanyin dated by inscription to 1339 AD is preserved in the British Museum, London (inv.-no. OA 1991.7-19.1).
8. For a detailed discussion of the *kesi* Yamantaka *mandala* see Kuhn (ed.) 2012, p.350, 351, fig.7.21a-c.
9. This ornament, consisting of alternating triangles and incised dots, is frequently found on Tibetan metal icons of the 13th and 14th centuries. For examples see von Schroeder 2001, vol.2, p.1176, 1177, pl.315, nos.315B-E and van Alphen (ed.) 2005, p.162, 163, no.49.
10. The other two surviving *thangkas*, depicting the Tathagatas Amitabha and Amoghasiddhi, are held in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and in the Philadelphia Museum of Art; for all three paintings see Kossak 2010, pp.95, no.63 and 65.
11. The dating of this painting has been controversial with attributions ranging from the first quarter of the 12th century to the mid-13th century; for a detailed discussion see Casey 2014, footnote 17 (fig.13). We follow the dating proposed by Jane Casey.



12. While occasionally appearing on artworks associated with the Tangut Xixia-Dynasty (1038-1227), this specific scroll pattern becomes omnipresent in the art of the Mongol Yuan period. Compare with the lower and upper borders of the silk *kesi* from Kharakhoto depicting the Green Tara, dated prior to 1227; see Piotrovsky (ed.) 1993, p.126, no.23; for a Xixia gold cup and another single-lugged Mongol gold cup of the 13th/14 centuries, both recovered during excavations in Inner Mongolia, see Kessler 1993, 126, 127, fig.83 and p.157, 160 and p.157, 160, fig.103; for the scroll pattern on Chinese blue and white Porcelain of the Yuan period see Carswell 2000, p.28, no.23, p.29, nos.25-27; Li Zhongmou 2012, p.105, fig.4, p.106, fig.6a.
13. A similar form of the scroll pattern also appears on the stone balustrade panels of the Duanhong or "Rainbow" Bridge in the Forbidden City, datable to the Yuan period, see Mei/Tao (compilers in chief) 1999, p.173, nos.148, 149 and on two Mongolian gilt silver saddle ornaments, held in the State Hermitage, St. Petersburg (inv.-nos. CM-1199, CM-1200), published in: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn/Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde München (ed.) 2005, p.229, no.252 a,b.
14. See Bigler 2013, pp.38, no.13.
15. Bigler, op. cit., p.40.
16. For discussions of the 'Aniko style' see Henss 2009, p.203-210 and Weldon 2010.