



Stories of the Previous Lives of the Buddha (Jataka)

Date

Late 17th-18th century

Medium

Pigments on cloth

Description

Tales of Buddha Shakyamuni's past lives (jataka) are some of the most well-known narratives in Himalayan culture and are often presented in a series of paintings, with each painting depicting a part of the collection of stories. Presented as small vignettes, these narrative scenes are usually arranged around a central image of the Buddha and visually separated by landscape elements. The traditional set of 34 tales, which was later expanded to 108, includes the stories of the Buddha's previous lives

as a bodhisattva, king, merchant, and animal. For example, the scenes in the upper-right corner of this painting depict the story of when the Buddha, in his life as an elephant, saved a group of starving wanderers in the forest by sacrificing his body, hurling himself over a ledge for their sustenance.

Dimensions

37 × 26 in. (estimated)