



Indian Master Shantarakshita (active 8th century) and Scenes from his Life

Date

19th century

Medium

Pigments on cloth

Description

The Indian scholar Shantarakshita was an important figure in establishing Tibetan Buddhist monastic and scholastic traditions in the eighth century. In this painting, which shows him surrounded by scenes from his life, his spiritual development is illustrated in the first three scenes, beginning just over his left shoulder, including his ordination as a monk, his receiving of the Gradual Path to enlightenment, and his own spiritual training leading to his realization of true knowledge. These episodes are the prologue to the story of Buddhism's arrival in Tibet, which

begins in the bottom-right corner where Shatarakshita is shown traveling to Tibet, laden with bags full of books. As we continue to follow the narrative, at bottom center we see him greeted by King Trisong Detsen (reigned 755–797) upon his arrival in Tibet. Later we see Trisong Detsen receiving teachings from Shantarakshita at Lungtsubchen Palace. At the lower left Shantarakshita performs a consecration ceremony at Samye, Tibet's first monastery, and ordains the first Tibetan monks. The final vignette, at top left, shows Shantarakshita establishing Buddhist doctrine in Tibet. On the back of the painting an aspirational dedication wishes that the essence of the Gradual Path to enlightenment, which Shantarakshita embodies, is permanently preserved in this painting.

Dimensions

72 x 41 1/2 x 1 7/8 in. (182.9 x 105.4 x 4.8 cm)