



# **YURTS AND MONASTERIES**

MONGOLIAN TREASURES  
AT THE FERENC HOPP  
MUSEUM OF ASIATIC ARTS

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OF ASIATIC ARTS

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Edited by  
Györgyi Fajcsák and Tímea Windhoffer

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KRISZTINA TELEKI

# Depictions and Sacred Texts of the Buddhist Goddess and Dharma Protectress Śrīdevī

IN THE MONGOLIAN COLLECTION OF  
THE FERENC HOPP MUSEUM OF ASIATIC ARTS

This article gives an account of the representations and sacred texts of Śrīdevī,<sup>1</sup> the Glorious Goddess, Military Sorceress Queen or Rematī,<sup>2</sup> housed in the Mongolian Collection of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts. The figure of Śrīdevī came to the Mahāyāna pantheon from Indian faith. Her reverence started in the 11th century; afterwards, the Second Dalai Lama (1475–1542), the Fourth Panchen Lama (1570–1662), and the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) extended her cult which then also appeared in territories under Mongolian cultural influence. Śrīdevī is the protectress of the Dalai Lama and Lhasa, the protective deity of a number of Tibetan and Mongolian monasteries,<sup>3</sup> one of the eight Tibetan and ten Mongolian Dharma protectors, and the only female among them.

Her first text (*Guidance of the Red Master of Oḍḍiyāna, Ācārya Dmar po, on the Goddess' Practices*), dating back to the 11th century, is included in the *Tanjur*, whilst Śrīdevī's invocation (Sanskrit: *sādhana*) was written by the Second Dalai Lama.<sup>4</sup> Afterwards, all Tantric Buddhist ceremonial texts were prepared in her honour: *pūjā* offering, offering sacrificial cakes (Sanskrit: *bali*; Tibetan: *gtorma*), golden libation, mandala offering, thanksgiving offering, supplications, and eulogies. Śrīdevī has four manifestations (pacifying, increasing, conquering, wrathfully destroying). She plays a role in the Lunar New Year's ceremony, and has, as a related practice, dice divination with various relevant texts.

Śrīdevī's function is to protect the Dharma and Buddhist practitioners: she leads her army to war to fight back internal or external evil forces, using her magical weapons. She also grants longevity and prosperity for practitioners.<sup>5</sup> Her seed syllable is BHYO (pronounced as JO). Originally, she is accompanied by two frightening *dākinīs*: the red-bodied, lion-faced *Siṃhavaktra* and the blue-bodied, crocodile-faced *Makaravaktra*, along with the four queens of the seasons.<sup>6</sup> (fig. 1) The five sisters of long-life and twelve local female spirits were added to her retinue later. She is usually represented in the company of her close or full entourage, or of other Buddhist deities.<sup>7</sup>

The Mongolian Collection of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts preserves several artefacts related to Śrīdevī: three statuettes,<sup>8</sup> a group of sculptures,<sup>9</sup> seven scroll paintings,<sup>10</sup> a small painting<sup>11</sup> and three Tibetan ceremonial texts written in Tibetan<sup>12</sup> (used by Mongolian monks until today).

Śrīdevī is an enlightened being. In the Tibeto-Mongolian pantheon, she is the wrathful manifestation of *Sarasvatī*, the peaceful goddess of knowledge, music, art, and learning. Therefore, *Sarasvatī*'s figure often appears in Śrīdevī's depictions. (fig. 2)





**1**  
**Śrīdevī, scroll painting without border**  
 Mongolia 19th century<sup>15</sup>

Śrīdevī's mule riding over a 'sea of blood' surrounded by mountains is led by Makaravaktra and accompanied by Siṃhavaktra. Above, there is Sarasvatī. The figures of the four queens of the seasons are arranged in a circle. In front of Śrīdevī, there are offerings of the five senses made to wrathful deities. 'Gold' paint was used.



**2**  
**Śrīdevī, scroll painting with blue border, without wooden slat and rod**  
 Mongolia, early 20th century

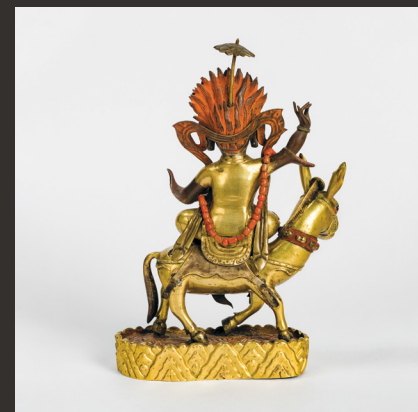
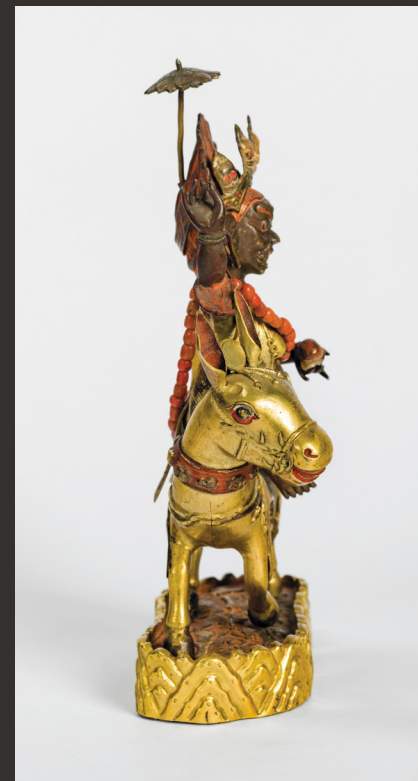
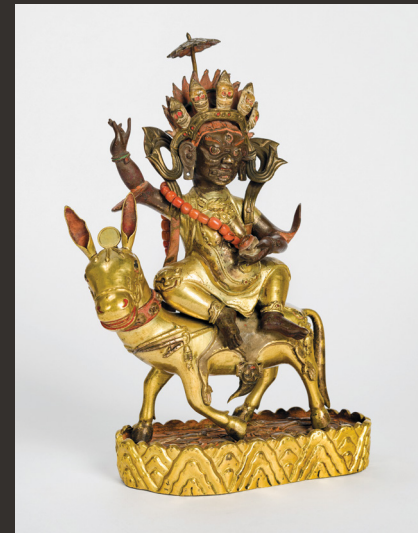
The central figure is Śrīdevī equipped with her attributes. Her mule riding over a 'sea of blood' surrounded by mountains is led by Makaravaktra and accompanied by Siṃhavaktra. Above, there is Sarasvatī. The four queens of the seasons are around. In front of Śrīdevī, there is an offering cake. The OM ĀH HŪM mantra on the back of the scroll painting shows that the painting was consecrated.<sup>16</sup>





**3**  
**Śrīdevī, Siṃhavaktra, and Makaravaktra, statuettes**  
Mongolia, 2nd half of 19th century

The figures are located in the middle of a 'sea of blood' and human body parts. In contrast to her common representations, Śrīdevī holds, beside her attributes, a parasol in her left hand. A garland of coral and lapis lazuli was hung on the body. A viśvavajra closes the bottom of the statue, which indicates that the statue had been consecrated, although, most probably, the sacred objects were removed from inside at some point.<sup>17</sup>



**4**  
**Śrīdevī, statuette**  
Dolonnuur workshop, 19th century

The parasol of peacock feathers above Śrīdevī's head dominates the composition; her earrings and the club (normally held in her right hand) are missing. She wears a garland of skulls. The technique is characteristic of the Dolonnuur workshop: the fire-gilded body was produced with a mixed technique, and then thin hammered plates were riveted to it. The statue is consecrated; its cover is made of a mixture of silk and paper.<sup>18</sup>





**5**  
**Śrīdevī, statuette**

Mongolia, 2nd half of 19th century

The attributes of the sculpture, made with the lost-wax technique, are crafted in meticulous detail, but the *vajra*-ended club is missing from Śrīdevī's right hand. The cover is decorated with a *viśvavajra*; signs suggest subsequent removal of the sacred substances.<sup>19</sup>



**6** Śrīdevī, tsakli  
Mongolia, turn of the 19th  
and 20th centuries

The small print (coloured  
subsequently) shows the goddess  
Śrīdevī, with her Tibetan name,  
Dpal ldan lha mo, at the bottom.

There are several legends that relate Śrīdevī's origin.<sup>13</sup> One holds that Śrīdevī was the wife of the demon king of Sri Lanka and vowed to convert her husband to the Buddhist faith or exterminate his lineage. She failed to convince her husband, so she skinned her son and left Sri Lanka riding a mule. Her husband shot an arrow after her which hit her mule's back; the wound turned into an all-seeing eye. Śrīdevī resides in a black whirlwind palace in the middle of the mythical Muleding Lake ('sea of blood') (fig. 3), surrounded by mountains. Her body is black (or blue) hued, she has one face and two arms; she has a third eye in her forehead. She is showing her fangs; behind a five-pronged skull crown, her red hair stands on end. As a rule, she is represented with a parasol of peacock feathers above her head. (fig. 4) She swings a vajra-headed club in her right hand, and in front of her heart, she holds a skull cup full of blood and brains in her left hand. Her body is adorned with bone jewels, ashes from the cemetery and snakes; her upper body is covered with a black goatskin and her lower body with a tiger skin. She wears the moon in her hair and the glowing sun in her navel. She has received her attributes from various deities: the divination dice from Hevajra, the sun and the moon from Viṣṇu, and the earrings from Kuvera and Nandā. She has five 'weapons': on the pommel, the bag of diseases; on the cantle, a bundle of thread; black and white dices and a red wooden plate hanging from the martingale; and a demon tally-stick tucked into her girdle. (fig. 5) She is mounted on a mule. The mule is covered with the hide of a skinned *yakṣa* demon and wears the sun between his ears. Its straps are made of venomous snakes.<sup>14</sup> (fig. 6)

To sum up, the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts has a very rich collection of items related to Śrīdevī. Their fine elaboration, along with the iconographic and iconometric requirements, give a true account of Mongolian art at the turn of the 20th century and the significant role Śrīdevī plays in the Buddhist pantheon.



NOTES

- 1 Tibetan: Dpal ldan lha mo; Mongolian: Čoy-tu ökin tngri; Khalkha: Cogt oxin tener.
- 2 Tibetan: Dmag zor rgyal mo, Dmag zor ma, Lha mo Dmag zor; Mongolian: Čerig-i kiryačči; Khalkha: Cergig xyar-gagč. Tibetan: *dmag zor* a defensive charm or magic to turn the enemy back. Her other epithets: the Queen of the Desire Realm, the Only Mother.
- 3 The research done between 2018 and 2019 was funded by the research grant of the Tempus Public Foundation. This article is one of the outputs. I would like to thank Györgyi Fajcsák, Director of the Ferenc Hopp Museum of Asiatic Arts, who offered me the opportunity to study the museum's collection (2019), and Tímea Windhoffer, Curator of the Mongolian Collection, who provided me with all the information I needed for writing this article.
- 4 For details, see Teleki 2002.
- 5 According to some data, she is also protector of the purity of mountains and waters. Vinkovics 2003d, 83.
- 6 The red-bodied summer goddess riding a water buffalo; the golden-bodied autumn goddess riding a deer; the blue-bodied spring goddess riding a mule; the black (or blue) bodied winter goddess riding a camel. In their left, they hold a skull cup full of blood, and with right they brandish weapons. The representations are arranged starting from the bottom left (spring, summer, autumn, winter).
- 7 For details of the reverence of the goddess, also see Majer – Teleki 2010, 37–60; Róna-Tas 1957; Teleki 2002; Uray-Kóhalmi 1992.
- 8 Śrīdevī statuette. Mongolia, 2nd half of 19th century. Gilded bronze, red, blue and black paint. Height: 18 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_91.8.1–2; Śrīdevī statuette.

- Dolonnuur workshop, 19th century. Gilded bronze, red paint. 21.5x13x15 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_81.11.1; Śrīdevī statuette. blue and red paint, Mongolia, 1st half of 19th century. Gilded bronze, blue and red paint. Height: 25 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_76.42.1.
- 9 Śrīdevī, Simhavaktra and Makaravaktra statuettes. Mongolia, 2nd half of 19th century. Gilded bronze, blue and red paint. 7x18.4x16.8 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_81.9.1.1–4.
- 10 Tibetan: *thang ka*, a Buddhist painting on cotton or silk appliqué, usually unframed, stored rolled up or displayed in shrines. Śrīdevī, scroll painting without border. Mongolia, early 20th century. Canvas, paint. 21x35 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_73.35.1; Śrīdevī, scroll painting with blue border, without wooden support. Mongolia, early 20th century. Canvas, paint. 66.6x124 cm, 40x60 cm. From the collection of Dr Tibor Horváth (1910–1972). Inv. no. HFM\_75.2.1; Śrīdevī, scroll painting without border. Mongolia, 19th century. Canvas, paint. 61.5x42.5 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_81.36.1; Śrīdevī, scroll painting without border. Mongolia, 19th century. Canvas, paint. 39x54 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_98.3.1; Śrīdevī, scroll painting with burgundy border and two wooden supports, with blue silk cover. Mongolia, 19th century. Canvas, paint. 28x46 cm, 23x18 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_2000.38.1; Śrīdevī, scroll painting without border. Mongolia, 19th century. Canvas, paint. 35x50 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_75.30.1; Śrīdevī, scroll painting with blue border. Mongolia, turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Canvas, paint. 31x49 cm, 21.5x28 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_80.12.1.
- 11 Śrīdevī, tsakli. Mongolia, turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Canvas, paint. 4.9x6.4 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_69.33.1.

- 12 *Dpal ldan lha mo'i tshogs mchod kyi cho ga Dmag zor rol pa'i dga' ston zhes bya ba* [The Feast of the Military Sorceress – Śrīdevī's *Gaṇapūjā* Offering]. Tibetan manuscript, complete, 4 folios (1'–4'). Yellowish white paper, black ink. Mongolia, 19th–20th century. 30x10.7 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_2012.10.1; *Ma cig 'Dod khams dbang phyug Dpal ldan lha mo'i gtor chog 'phrin las rnam bzhi'i lhun grub zhes bya'o* [Offering Sacrificial Cakes to the Only Mother, Lady of the Desire Realm, Śrīdevī; the Accomplishment of Her Four Actions]. Tibetan manuscript, complete, 18 folios (1'–35'). European paper of white base colour, black ink, edges marked with red lines. Mongolia, 19th century. 8.2x21.4 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_93.51.16. *Dpal ldan lha mo'i maṇḍala bzhi pa'i zhes bya ba bzhugs so* [Śrīdevī's Fourfold Mandala Offering]. Tibetan manuscript, complete, 3 folios (1'–3'). Yellowish white paper, black ink. Mongolia, 19th century. 21.7x8.9 cm. Inv. no. HFM\_93.51.3. As for the texts, the basic ones on Śrīdevī's gladdening are those of the *gaṇapūjā* and the sacrificial cake offering. The text on the mandala offering is less widely used by Mongolian monks today.
- 13 Kelényi – Vinkovics 1990, 32–36.
- 14 Also see Kelényi – Vinkovics 1990, 32–33.
- 15 Fehér 1984, cat. 88; Kelényi – Vinkovics: 1995, cat. 165; Kelényi (ed.) 2003, 87/68; Vinkovics 2020, 196–197.
- 16 Kelényi – Vinkovics 1995, cat. 166.
- 17 Kelényi – Vinkovics 1990, 32–33, cat. 106.
- 18 Kelényi – Vinkovics 1990, cat. 105; Vinkovics 2020, 208.
- 19 Kelényi – Vinkovics 1995, cat. 167; Kelényi (ed.) 2003, cat. 233.





