



The Nyingma Icons

Keith Dowman

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The Nyingma Icons The sacred art of Tibet is best known through its painted scrolls, or tankas. Each tanka describes a contemplative vision arisen in meditation containing images of lamas, buddha-deities, dakinis and protectors. The ninety-four line-drawings that comprise The Nyingma Icons delineate the graphic basis of these tankas, incorporating the principal images of the Nyingma pantheon. This collection of buddhas in The Nyingma Icons was chosen by His Holiness the late Dudjom Rinpoche to illustrate his encyclopedic work The History of the Nyingma Dharma (Dudjom Rinpoche, The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History, two volumes, translated by Gyurme Dorje and Matthew Kapstein, Boston, MA, Wisdom, 1991). Dudjom Rinpoche (see illustration no. 64) was a great yogin and master of Dzogchen and a scholar steeped in the theoretical learning of his school. As he writes in his brief introduction to The Nyingma Icons, the buddhas and deities belong primarily to the lineage of his Khandro Tuktik. The structure of the book follows the metaphysical pattern employed in his History. After the first eight drawings, which represent the principals of Indian Mahayana Buddhism, the buddhas are divided into three classes, called the three roots, lamas, buddha-deities and dakinis, and ending with a fourth class – dharma protectors and guardians. Brief descriptions of these various classes are to be found at the beginning of each section below. The three roots are the lineal roots of the Dzogchen teaching that bestow blessings, the spiritual roots of yogins that bestow power, and the female roots of the mind that remove obstacles. The Nyingma Icons was first published in the interdisciplinary magazine Kailash in Kathmandu in February 1975. It has been available in various editions ever since, its line-drawings reproduced and published all over the world. During this period Dudjom Rinpoche's principle cycle of practice, the Dudjom Tersar, has become widely practiced by Nyingma yogins and yoginis. For this presentation edition, Au Leshe's line-drawings have been digitally re-processed providing higher resolution, and the greater space on the page sets off this ancient art form. The prose has been cosmetically edited. For these reasons this edition qualifies as a unique Presentation Edition. Any noncommercial reproduction of individual icons is welcome.

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