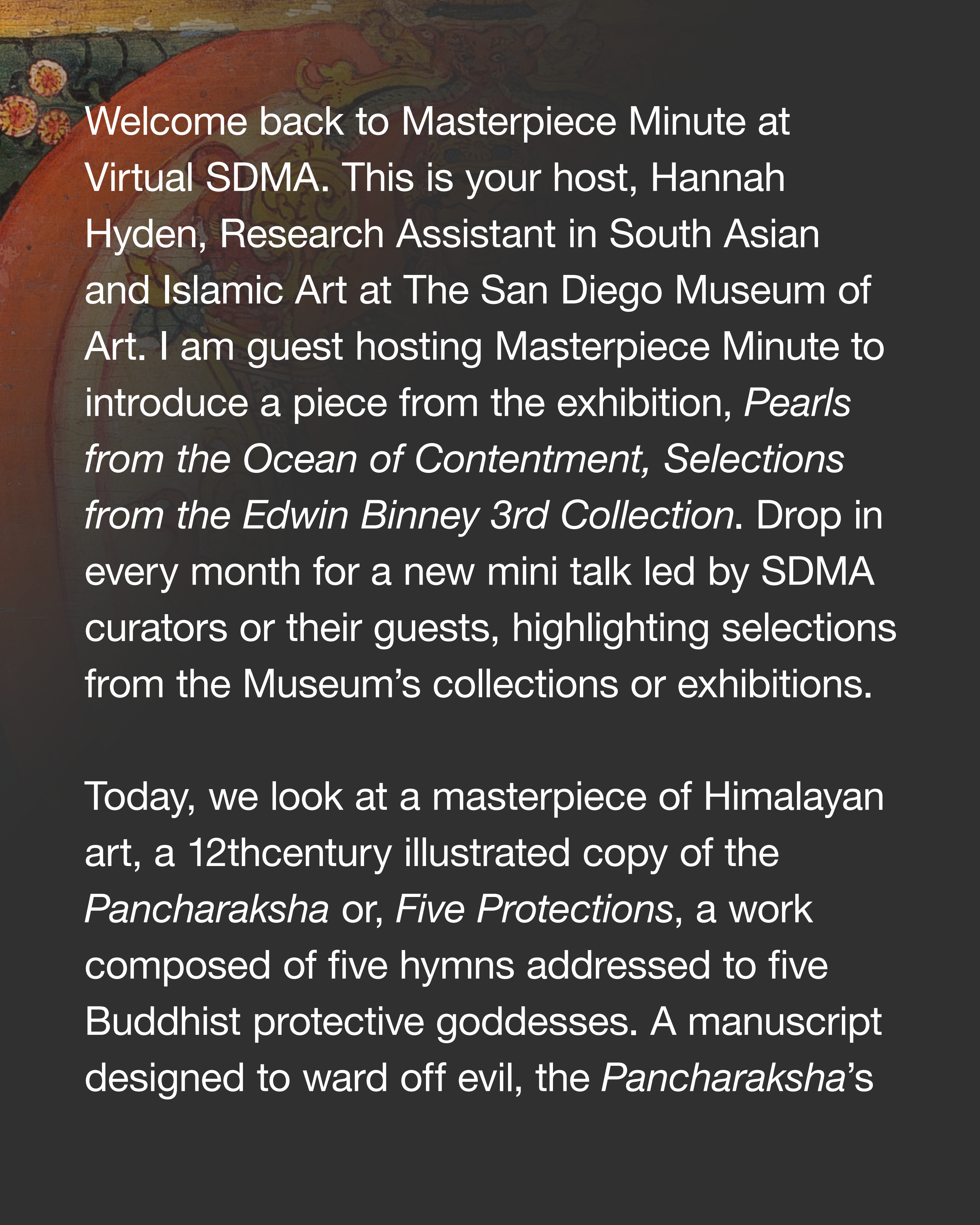



MASTERPIECE
MINUTE





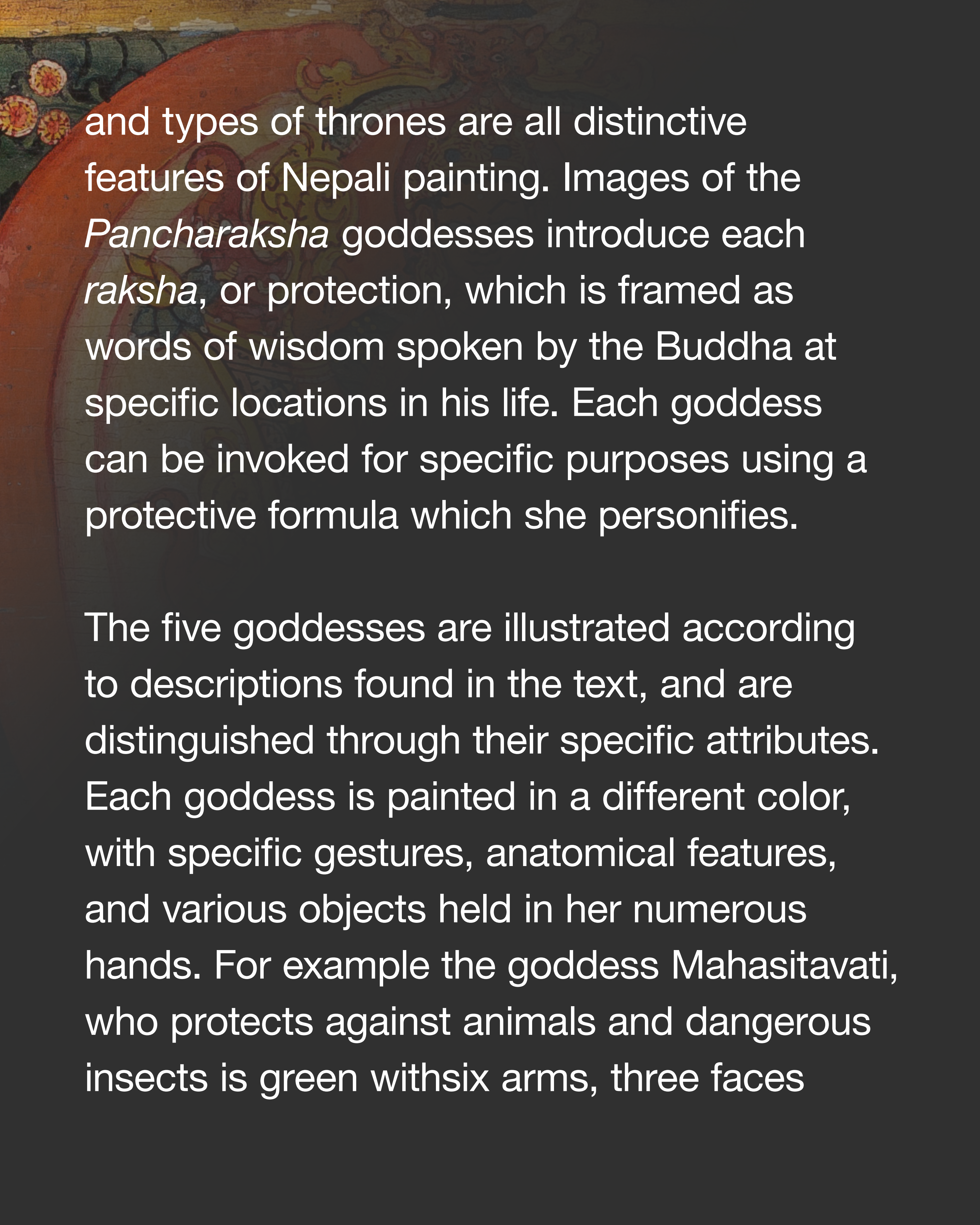
Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute at Virtual SDMA. This is your host, Hannah Hyden, Research Assistant in South Asian and Islamic Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. I am guest hosting Masterpiece Minute to introduce a piece from the exhibition, *Pearls from the Ocean of Contentment, Selections from the Edwin Binney 3rd Collection*. Drop in every month for a new mini talk led by SDMA curators or their guests, highlighting selections from the Museum's collections or exhibitions.

Today, we look at a masterpiece of Himalayan art, a 12th century illustrated copy of the *Pancharaksha* or, *Five Protections*, a work composed of five hymns addressed to five Buddhist protective goddesses. A manuscript designed to ward off evil, the *Pancharaksha's*



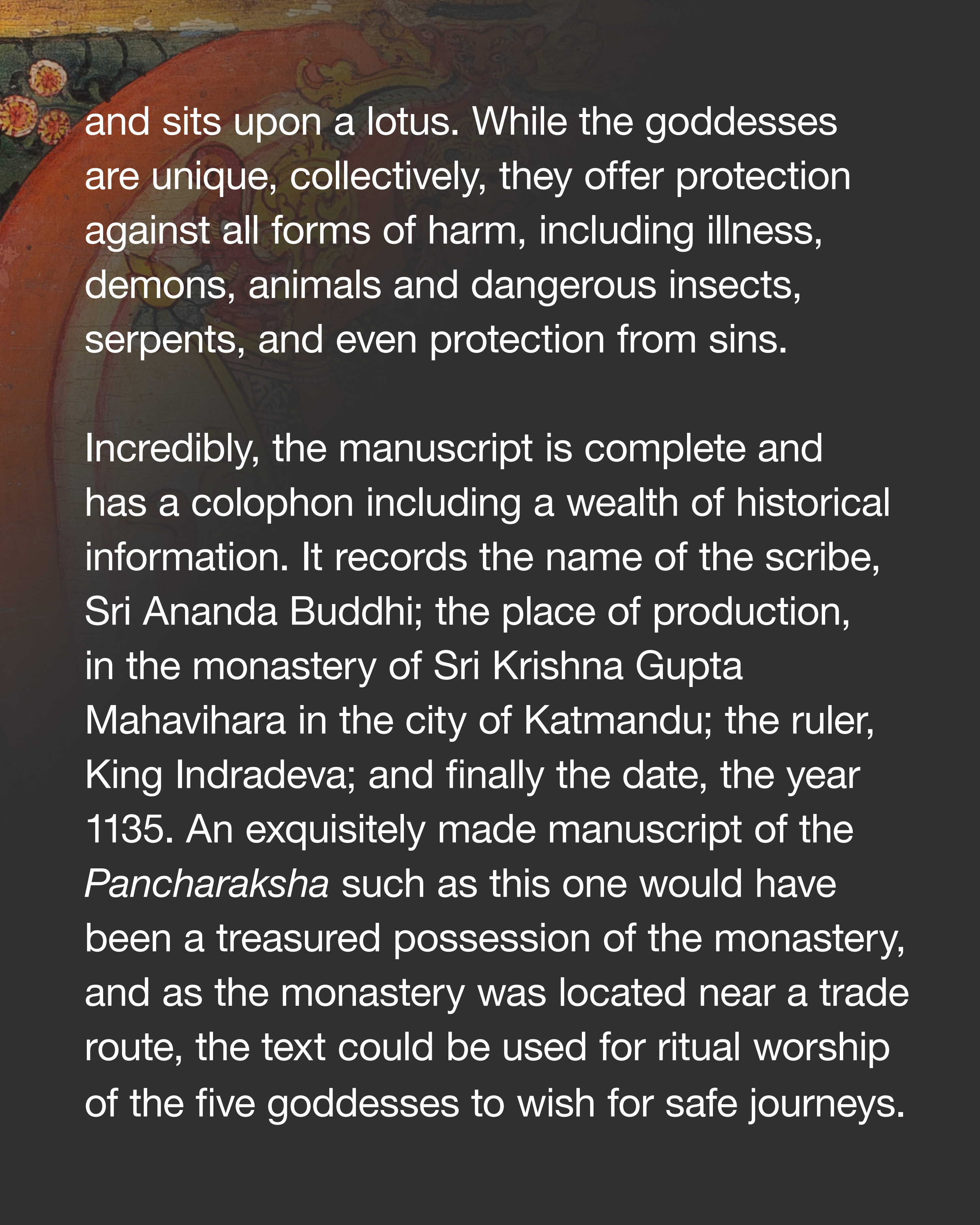
powerful protective properties explain its long-lasting popularity in the Himalayan country of Nepal. To this day, the text can be found in virtually every Buddhist household in Nepal. Its popularity was so ubiquitous that it was even used in courts of law to swear in Buddhists up through the nineteenth century.

This *Pancharaksha* manuscript comprises over a hundred palm-leaf pages set between wooden book covers. One cover includes Buddhas of the five directions, flanked by bodhisattvas; the other illustrates the seven goddesses of wisdom. The wood covers are painted on the inside with figures of monks and donors at both ends, who pay homage to the Buddhas and goddesses. The rich colors, delicate outlines, gentle expressions,



and types of thrones are all distinctive features of Nepali painting. Images of the *Pancharaksha* goddesses introduce each *raksha*, or protection, which is framed as words of wisdom spoken by the Buddha at specific locations in his life. Each goddess can be invoked for specific purposes using a protective formula which she personifies.

The five goddesses are illustrated according to descriptions found in the text, and are distinguished through their specific attributes. Each goddess is painted in a different color, with specific gestures, anatomical features, and various objects held in her numerous hands. For example the goddess Mahasitavati, who protects against animals and dangerous insects is green with six arms, three faces



and sits upon a lotus. While the goddesses are unique, collectively, they offer protection against all forms of harm, including illness, demons, animals and dangerous insects, serpents, and even protection from sins.

Incredibly, the manuscript is complete and has a colophon including a wealth of historical information. It records the name of the scribe, Sri Ananda Buddhi; the place of production, in the monastery of Sri Krishna Gupta Mahavihara in the city of Katmandu; the ruler, King Indradeva; and finally the date, the year 1135. An exquisitely made manuscript of the *Pancharaksha* such as this one would have been a treasured possession of the monastery, and as the monastery was located near a trade route, the text could be used for ritual worship of the five goddesses to wish for safe journeys.

While a manuscript is an object, scholars of Nepali Buddhist manuscripts have demonstrated that they were not merely objects for their owners. Signs of ritual use such as sandalwood paste smeared on their covers and consecrated seals invoking the presence of the goddesses into the book, indicate that worshippers understood these books as objects containing the living divine. As such the books themselves were sacred spaces, a mobile shrine of the five protective goddesses who reside within.

Thank you for listening. This has been Hannah Hyden on Masterpiece Minute at Virtual SDMA!

