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Painted wooden offering cabinet
84 cm x 114 cm x 51 cm circa 18th century

This offering cabinet is illustrated with remarkable paintings that depict symbolic offerings to a fierce deity. The two doors of the cabinet are painted with distinct but related scenes: the left-hand door presents a glowing red palace constructed of skeletal parts, while the right-hand door contains three triangular-shaped offerings in skullcap bowls. Although this latter is a standard form for an offering to a protector deity, there are some unusual features here: orange flames lick upwards from the offerings and

above them rides a skeleton carrying yet another offering of sense organs (facing following page). The skeleton is balanced on a triangular fire hearth, a type of ritual hearth used for making offerings via the fire god Agni. The shape represents the mouth of Agni, which consumes the offerings and carries them to a wrathful protector deity. Tibetan Buddhists sometimes made hearths with this triangular shape for presenting physical offerings, and they were also visualized as part of meditational practices.

